

**Political Protest and Dissent in the Khrushchev Era**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis addresses the subject of political dissent during the Khrushchev era. It examines the kinds of protest behaviours that individuals and groups engaged in and the way that the Soviet authorities responded to them. The findings show that dissenting activity was more frequent and more diverse during the Khrushchev period than has previously been supposed and that there were a number of significant continuities in the forms of dissent, and the authorities' responses to these acts, across the eras of Stalin, Khrushchev and Brezhnev. In the early Khrushchev years a large proportion of the political protest and criticism that took place remained essentially loyal to the regime and Marxist-Leninist in outlook, though this declined in later years as communist utopianism and respect for the ruling authorities seem to have significantly diminished. In place of mass terror, the authorities increasingly moved toward more rationalised and targeted practices of social control, seeking to 'manage' dissent rather than to eradicate it either by persuasion or by force. All of this was reflective of the fact that the relationship between state and society was undergoing a vital transitional stage during the Khrushchev years, as both parties began to establish for themselves what had and had not changed since Stalin's death.

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## **TRANSLITERATION**

The British Standard system of transliteration has been used throughout this work, but with some exceptions in regard to place names and people whose names have an ‘accepted’ English spelling. For example, the text refers to Ludmilla Alexeyeva rather than Lyudmilla Alekseeva on the basis that it is the former spelling under which her works have been published in the English language. Where there has been any uncertainty in regard to what is ‘accepted’ I have employed the British Standard system.

## GLOSSARY

**Aktiv** – Communist Party activists

**ASSR** – Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic

**CPSU** – The Communist Party of the Soviet Union (*Kommunisticheskaya partiya Sovetskogo Soyuz*)

**Gorkom** – City Party Committee

**KGB** – The State Security Committee (*Komitet gosudarstvennoi bezopasnosti*)

**Kolkhoz** – A collective farm

**Komsomol** – The Communist Youth League

**Memorial** – a Russian charitable organisation that investigates and publicises abuses of human rights under the Soviet regime and since.

**MVD** – The Ministry of Internal Affairs (*Ministerstvo vnutrennikh del*)

**NKVD** – The People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs (*Narodnyi komissariat vnutrennikh del*)

**Obkom** – Oblast' Party Committee

**Oblast'** – An administrative division used in the USSR and present-day Russia, meaning 'province' or 'region'

**Raion** – An administrative division used in the USSR and present-day Russia, meaning 'area' or 'district'

**RSFSR** – The Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic

**Samizdat** – Self-published literature. Printed and distributed by clandestine means.

**Sovkhoz** – A state farm

**SSR** – Soviet Socialist Republic

**Stilyagi** – Young Soviet citizens who were characterised by a love of Western culture and fashions

## INTRODUCTION

Viewing conflict between authority and society as part of a cycle of events that had existed in Russia since the time of Peter the Great, the historian Marshall Shatz likened the dissent of the post-Stalin era to the major peasant rebellions of Tsarist times.<sup>1</sup> When this analogy is applied to the Khrushchev period we can see that in some respects Shatz was correct: much dissenting activity in those years was ephemeral, uncoordinated and occupied a politically ambiguous position in regard to the ruling regime. In other respects he was wrong, however. Dissenting behaviour under Khrushchev usually involved either lone individuals or very small groups that were quickly neutralised and there were no charismatic or renowned leaders – though numerous dissenters from the period later went on to play a prominent role in the Brezhnev era human rights movement.

Unlike in later years, there was no ‘dissident movement’ that one could speak of, yet thousands of citizens expressed varying gradations of disappointment, anger and opposition to the political authorities. These expressions could take many forms, such as public speeches attacking state policies, leaflets calling for specific leaders to be expelled from the Party or the formation of underground groups that plotted uprisings and called for workers to take mass strike action. That the Khrushchev period was a time of great political change and upheaval has been widely recognised by historians,

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<sup>1</sup> M. Shatz, *Soviet Dissent in Historical Perspective*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980, p. 10. Presumably the peasant rebellions that Shatz had in mind included those led by Ivan Bolotnikov (1606-1607), Stenka Razin (1670-1671) and Emel’yan Puagchev (1773-1774). Each of these uprisings flared violently and enjoyed a degree of popular support but was ultimately defeated by government forces.

yet the extent to which this was a time of considerable social volatility and ideological non-conformism has largely been overlooked.

In addressing the topic of political dissent during the Khrushchev era, this thesis touches upon a number of subjects that are integral to the way in which we view Soviet history, such as popular adherence to communist ideology and the relationship between the state and society, as well as the more general theme of resistance to authority. As distinct from many other studies on Soviet dissent, the present work also examines the policies and practices that were utilised by the Soviet regime in its struggle against protest and criticism. This means that although this is primarily a study of dissent in particular, it is also very much a thesis about the Khrushchev era in general.

There are three broad aims to this thesis. The first is to provide an outline of the most important themes, debates and processes involved in political dissent and the official responses to them. Expanding upon this, the second aim is then to draw out themes of change and continuity across the periods of Stalin, Khrushchev and Brezhnev in regard to the actions of dissenters and the authorities. The third and final aim is to address the question of what all of this tells us about the relationship between state and society during the Khrushchev era.

As a theme that has not yet been subjected to a great deal of rigorous academic scrutiny, the main goal of the present work is to fill this particular gap in the historiography of the Soviet period. In doing so, it firstly demonstrates that political protest and criticism were significantly more prevalent and more diverse during the

Khrushchev period than is widely supposed and sketches an outline of the most important subjects in regard to acts of political protest and criticism.

The thesis then seeks to fill the concomitant 'gap' in regard to how the regime responded to dissenting behaviour in the Khrushchev years – a field that has drawn even less academic attention. It shows that characterisations of the Khrushchev years as a time of 'thaw' and of Khrushchev himself as a relative liberal are not entirely suitable when examined through the medium of the state's responses to dissenting behaviour during his time as Soviet leader. It is also possible to gain some valuable insights into policy formation, evolution and implementation as well centre-periphery relations and the ongoing power struggles at the highest levels of the regime.

In terms of change and continuity across different periods of Soviet history one can see that although there were some major dislocations with the regime's Stalinist past there were also many continuations with it. Punitive policy against dissenters steadily evolved away from Stalinism rather than broke with it entirely after Stalin's death in March 1953 and was still evolving for some time after the XX CPSU Congress in February 1956. Among the most important themes in the latter part of the thesis is the trend of continuity between the Khrushchev and Brezhnev eras in regard to both dissenting behaviour and the authorities' responses. In this one can also see how pragmatism and rationalism rather than ideology (i.e. Khrushchev's much-vaunted 'return to Leninism') or a sense of liberality set the agenda in dealing with the problem of dissent and that although at times its assumptions were based on fundamentally sound reasoning, the regime consistently exaggerated the threat posed to the state by dissenting behaviour and often overreacted to it as a result.

Factors that are highlighted in regard to the changing relationship between state and society include evidence of people's broadening philosophical horizons, declining respect for, and fear of, the authorities along with the gradual emergence of the tacit Brezhnev era social contract between society and the regime (whereby society remained docile as long as the regime fulfilled basic tasks such as providing employment and an acceptable standard of living). One can also see that after the isolation of the Stalin years both the regime and society were increasingly affected by events and powers outside of the USSR.

## **0.1 LITERATURE REVIEW**

Ever since the January 1966 trial of Andrei Sinyavsky and Yuli Daniel brought the Soviet regime's domestic critics to the attention of Western journalists and academics, a reasonably substantial body of work has arisen on the theme of dissent and dissenters.<sup>2</sup> However, very little academic study has addressed the subject of dissent during the preceding Khrushchev era. This is perhaps unsurprising when one considers that very little information reached the outside world, or even wider Soviet society, in regard to dissenting behaviour prior to the mid 1960s. The last few years have witnessed something of an upsurge in academic interest in the Khrushchev period and, to a slightly lesser extent, there has also been a revival of interest in the

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<sup>2</sup> Sinyavsky and Daniel had been arrested and were subsequently jailed after secretly transmitting a series of satirical works to the West, where they were published under the pseudonyms Abram Tertz and Nikolai Arzhak respectively. The trial against the pair, and events surrounding it, are generally acknowledged as marking the first stages of the Soviet human rights movement. As such, practically all works on Soviet dissent go into some detail on the subject. The case against them is raised in more detail toward the end of this thesis.

history of the Soviet dissident movement, yet there has so far been minimal convergence between the two.<sup>3</sup>

In order to illustrate the way in which commentators have previously depicted dissent during the Khrushchev era it is useful to cite three separate authors. In 1972 Cornelia Gerstenmaier wrote that ‘for about a decade, during the mid 50s and early 60s, hostile political currents found expression almost exclusively in literary works’.<sup>4</sup> In 1987 Ludmilla Alexeyeva described dissent in the Khrushchev era as ‘an incubation period when people began to learn to talk about the problems of Soviet life’.<sup>5</sup> Most recently, in 2002, Erik Kulavig pointed out that ‘the opening of archives has shown dissidence to be prevalent far below the intelligentsia level’.<sup>6</sup> Clearly then, the passing years have seen a slightly more developed picture of dissent being established, yet even Kulavig’s remark only hints at just how unexplored this field has so far remained.

It is important to flag up Kulavig’s work, *Dissent in the Years of Khrushchev: Nine Stories about Disobedient Russians*. It is the only volume in the English language which has yet purported to tackle the same subject as this thesis, yet its similarities with the present study are surprisingly limited. Although it presents some useful data and valuable avenues for further exploration, *Dissent in the Khrushchev Era* is a

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<sup>3</sup> Of the recent scholarly literature on the Khrushchev era, three of the most notable works include W. Taubman, *Khrushchev: The Man and His Era*, London: Free Press, 2003; R. Medvedev and Zh. Medvedev, *Nikita Khrushchev: Otets ili otchim sovetskoi ‘ottepeli’*, Moskva: Yauza, 2006; P. Jones ed. *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization: Negotiating Social Change in the Khrushchev Era*, London: Routledge, 2006. Impressive recent works on the Soviet dissident movement have included P. Boobbyer, *Conscience, Dissent and Reform in Soviet Russia*, London: Routledge, 2005; R. Horvath, *The Legacy of Soviet Dissent: Dissidents, Democratisation and Radical Nationalism in Russia*, London: Routledge, 2005.

<sup>4</sup> C. Gerstenmaier, *The Voices of the Silent*, New York: Hart Publishing Company, 1972, p. 32.

<sup>5</sup> L. Alexeyeva, . *Soviet Dissent: Contemporary Movements for National, Religious and Human Rights*, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1987, p. 269.

<sup>6</sup> E. Kulavig, *Dissent in the Years of Khrushchev: Nine Stories About Disobedient Russians*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002, p. 15.

rather limited and unsatisfying study. One reviewer labelled it as ‘frustrating as much as enlightening’ and justifiably argued that several of its chapters have ‘little to do with dissent or disobedience’.<sup>7</sup> This is a judgement from which the present work does not demur.

The most notable work of recent times on this subject is a 2005 Russian-language volume edited by Vladimir Kozlov and Sergei Mironenko entitled *Kramola: Inakomyslie v SSSR pri Khrushcheve i Brezhneve 1953-1982 (Subversion: Non-conformism under Khrushchev and Brezhnev, 1953-1982)*.<sup>8</sup> Using archival sources drawn from the files of the Soviet Procurator, the pair have reproduced a number of anti-Soviet leaflets and letters from the period as well as detailing the activities of numerous underground groups. This will perhaps prove to be a seminal work on dissent, and will apparently be translated into English in the near future, yet its focus does differ somewhat from the present work – most notably in the fact that it draws on a smaller range of sources and looks only at dissenting behaviour and not at official responses. Furthermore, the bulk of Kozlov and Mironenko’s work consists of reproductions of documents rather than commentary and analysis.

In regard to the subject of Soviet dissent in general, Ludmilla Alexeyeva’s 1987 work *Soviet Dissent: Contemporary Movements for National, Religious and Human Rights* undoubtedly remains the touchstone. It presents an authoritative overview of the many different struggles that existed within the USSR, and, where appropriate, shows how these struggles related to each other. However, like most other works on dissent,

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<sup>7</sup> T. Friedgut, ‘Review of *Dissent in the Years of Khrushchev: Nine Stories About Disobedient Russians*’, *Slavic Review*, Vol. 63, No. 2, Summer 2004, pp. 419-420.

<sup>8</sup> V. Kozlov and S. Mironenko eds, *Kramola: Inakomyslie v SSSR pri Khrushcheve i Brezhneve 1953-1982*, Moskva: ‘Materik’, 2005.

its focus lies overwhelmingly upon the events of the Brezhnev era.<sup>9</sup> Covering a subject which is both thematically and chronologically narrower than that tackled by Alexeyeva, the present work seeks to present a more detailed and nuanced picture of a considerably less wide-ranging subject.

Where this thesis ties in with previous works and seeks to build on them is by presenting a more detailed and analytical - as opposed to narrative - account of dissenting behaviour under Khrushchev. It shows that Gerstenmaier was wrong to argue that there was little or no political criticism outside of the literary sphere and that Alexeyeva was correct to see the Khrushchev period as a formative time for the subsequent dissident movement. It demonstrates how and why this was the case as well as showing that there was a considerably greater range of dissenting behaviour in the Khrushchev years than Alexeyeva's remarks acknowledge. Kulavig's assertion that dissent existed below intelligentsia level is supported and significantly enhanced with a sizable volume of evidence. In other words, the present work seeks to expand our understanding of a period that has so far been covered with essentially correct but overly simplistic depictions.

One of the main reasons why many previous works have either provided simplistic depictions of dissent in the Khrushchev era or largely overlooked the period was the context in which they were produced. The vast majority of studies on Soviet dissent were written during the Cold War period. This meant that they were perhaps shaped by the politically charged atmosphere of the time. Importantly, studies on dissent

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<sup>9</sup> Other volumes on Soviet dissent that have largely focussed upon the Brezhnev era include J. Rubenstein, *Soviet Dissidents: Their Struggle for Human Rights*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1980; A. Rothberg, *The Heirs of Stalin: Dissidence and the Soviet Regime 1953-1970*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972.

from the Cold War era were also written without access to the kind of archival sources that inform the present work. While one must be careful not to accept these sources unquestioningly or to present an entirely bureaucratic picture of events by over-reliance on official documents, they undoubtedly do help to build a more detailed picture.

Furthermore, it is also important to acknowledge that this ‘first generation’ of research on Soviet dissent was written almost exclusively by sympathetic parties in the West or by former dissenters who had emigrated or been exiled from the USSR.<sup>10</sup> It must be accepted that this was, and to some extent still is, a particularly emotive subject and one could not suggest that these were entirely impartial chroniclers. The question of whether historians can ever be truly impartial falls beyond the remit of this thesis, though it is surely easier to achieve a degree of objectivity today than it was twenty or thirty years ago. None of this is to suggest that recent research has found earlier accounts to require a thoroughgoing revision but that they can now be expanded upon and, in places, challenged.

Another theme that one encounters in looking at the way in which dissent has often been written about in the West is what Ben Nathans has labelled a ‘person-centric approach to dissent’.<sup>11</sup> This has meant a strong focus on the ideas and works of prominent individuals, most notably Andrei Sakharov and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, or in Nathans’ case Alexander Esenin-Volpin, rather than looking at wider currents

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<sup>10</sup> Examples of the former include Rubenstein, *Soviet Dissidents*; A. Axelbank, *Soviet Dissent: Intellectuals, Jews and Détente*, New York: Franklin Watts Inc., 1975. Examples of the latter include P. Grigorenko, *Memoirs*, New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1982; Yu. Orlov, *Dangerous Thoughts: Memoirs of a Russian Life*, New York: William Morrow and Company, 1991.

<sup>11</sup> B. Nathans, ‘The Dictatorship of Reason: Aleksandr Vol’pin and the Idea of Rights Under “Developed Socialism”’, *Slavic Review*, Vol. 66, No. 4, Winter 2007, p. 631.

across a particular genre of dissent.<sup>12</sup> While this approach undoubtedly has some merit for the Brezhnev period, it is one that does not suit the kinds of dissent witnessed in the Khrushchev period, largely because there were no truly prominent dissenters or ‘figureheads’ at that time and far more limited philosophical divergences between dissenters.

This ‘person-centric approach’ is, of course, an unavoidable presence in the memoirs of former dissenters. In regard to the present study, these memoirs can be categorised into three groups. The first group consists of works by prominent Brezhnev era dissidents such as Andrei Sakharov, Andrei Amalrik and Leonid Plyushch.<sup>13</sup> These occasionally contain useful scraps of information on the Khrushchev period but are of limited use overall. The second group contains memoirs by the likes of Vladimir Bukovsky, Yuri Orlov and Petr Grigorenko, which provide a wealth of detail on specific events from the Khrushchev period yet remain largely focused on the Brezhnev era.<sup>14</sup> Most useful, and least numerous, are the third group of works which were written almost exclusively on the Khrushchev years, by individuals such as Revolt Pimenov, Boris Vail’ and Valery Ronkin – all of whom were active dissenters during the time in question.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> One can find, for example, multiple biographies on Sakharov and Solzhenitsyn as well as volumes dedicated to individuals such as Sergei Kovalev and Anatoly Shcharansky. See R. Lourie, *Sakharov: A Biography*, London: Brandeis University Press, 2002; M. Scammell, *Solzhenitsyn: A Biography*, New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1984; E. Gilligan, *Defending Human Rights in Russia: Sergei Kovalev, Dissident and Human Rights Commissioner, 1969-1996*, London: Routledge, 2004; M. Gilbert, *Shcharansky: Hero Of Our Time*, London: Macmillan, 1986.

<sup>13</sup> See A. Sakharov, *Memoirs*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990; A. Amalrik, *An Involuntary Journey to Siberia*, Newton Abbot: Readers Union, 1971; L. Plyushch, *History’s Carnival: A Dissident’s Autobiography*, London: Harvill Press, 1979.

<sup>14</sup> See V. Bukovsky, *To Build a Castle: My Life as a Dissenter*, London: Andre Deutsch, 1978; Orlov, *Dangerous Thoughts*; Grigorenko, *Memoirs*.

<sup>15</sup> See R. Pimenov, *Vospominaniya*, Moskva: Informatsionno-ekspertnaya gruppa ‘Panorama’, 1996; B. Vail’ *Osobo opasnyi*, London: Overseas Publications Interchange, 1980; V. Ronkin *Na smenu dekabryam prikhodit yanvari...*, Moskva: Obshchestvo ‘Memorial’, 2003.

Russian scholarship on dissent has, of course, experienced a markedly different history to that of Western research.<sup>16</sup> In the Soviet period there was no rigorous academic study of dissent and instead there were a handful of anti-dissident propaganda works masquerading as scholarly volumes, such as Nikolai Yakovlev's *CIA Target: USSR*.<sup>17</sup> Running counter to such works was a stream of *samizdat* material on dissent from the late 1960s. Although their authors were undoubtedly some of the most knowledgeable people on the topic, this was itself a genre that ought not to be accepted without question as offering an accurate or balanced depiction of events solely on the basis that these were works written by 'the good guys'.

As Horvath has shown, *glasnost*' and the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union saw a major upsurge of interest in dissent and dissidents in Russia and elsewhere across the former USSR. This interest was initially met by a glut of sensationalist journalism rather than scholarly research, with the most notable exception being the historians and enthusiasts working at *Memorial*. Since that time, Russian scholarship on the subject has reached particularly high levels of quality and many of the most useful works of the last decade on the themes of dissent, politics and society in the Khrushchev period have been written by Russian historians. Foremost among them are included Vladimir Kozlov, Aleksandr Pyzhikov, Gennadyi Kuzovkin, Elena Zubkova and Boris Firsov.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> It is worth drawing the reader's attention to the fact that numerous dissidents' autobiographies that were released in English language editions in the West during the 1970s and 1980s have recently been published for the first time in the Russian language. These include Yu. Orlov, *Opsanye mysli: Memuary iz russkoi zhizni*, Moskva: Zakharov, 2008; L. Alekseeva and P. Goldberg, *Pokolenie ottepli*, Moskva: Zakharov, 2006; V. Bukovskii, *I vozvrashchaetsya veter...*, Moskva: Zakharov, 2007.

<sup>17</sup> N. Yakovlev, *CIA Target: USSR*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1982. The basic premise of Yakovlev's work was to assert that dissidents such as Andrei Sakharov and Yuri Orlov were actually CIA agents. This was a translation of the mass-market Russian language volume by Yakovlev entitled *TsRU protiv SSSR*, Moskva: Molodaya gvardiya, 1979.

<sup>18</sup> See Kozlov and Mironenko eds, *Kramola*; A. Pyzhikov, *Opyt modernizatsii sovetskogo obshchestva v 1953-1964 godakh: obshchestvenno-politicheskii aspekt*, Moskva: Izdatel'skii dom 'Gamma', 1998;

All of these authors have utilised a strong combination of archival material along with a wealth of other primary and secondary sources to produce works of a very high standard. What these works and others have consistently demonstrated is a willingness to question and cast doubt upon the occasionally exaggerated Western view of the Khrushchev years as a time of liberalisation and of dissenters as opponents of communism – a characterisation that again raises the issue of the Cold War context in which most histories of Soviet dissent were written. This questioning of traditional characterisations of the Khrushchev era and of dissenters' political attitudes are both important themes that run through this thesis.

## **0.2 DEFINITION OF TERMS**

The next task at hand is to provide a definition of exactly what is meant by the term 'political dissent': what behaviours it encompasses and what it does not. In fact, one finds the term 'political dissent' in a number of works, though rarely with any explanation of precisely what it entailed.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, recent Russian sources on this theme have used several terms including: *inakomyslie* (otherwise-thinking), *kramola* (subversion or sedition), *raznomyslie* (different-thinking) and *protivostoyanie* (confrontation).<sup>20</sup> It is clearly the case, therefore, that although the term 'political

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L. Eremina and E. Zhemkova eds, *Korni Travy: Sbornik statei molodykh istorikov*, Moskva: Zven'ya, 1996; E. Zubkova, *Obshchestvo i reformy*, Moskva: Rossiya molodaya, 1993; B. Firsov, *Raznomyslie v SSSR 1940-1960 gody: Istoriya, teoriya i praktika*, Sankt Peterburg: Izdatel'stvo Evropeiskogo universiteta v Sankt Peterburge, 2008.

<sup>19</sup> For example, Fursenko and Naftali refer to a 'hardening of attitudes toward political dissent' in *Khrushchev's Cold War: The Inside Story of an American Adversary*, New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2006, p. 141. The same theme has also been addressed by historians of Nazi Germany such as I. Kershaw, *Popular Opinion and Political Dissent in the Third Reich: Bavaria 1933-1945*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983.

<sup>20</sup> See Kozlov and Mironenko eds, *Kramola*; Firsov, *Raznomyslie v SSSR*, and V. Kozlov, *Neizvestnyi SSSR: protivostoyanie naroda i vlasti 1953-1985*, Moskva: Olma-Press, 2006.

dissent' can be broadly understood, it is worthwhile to explore its dimensions in some depth and to define its parameters.

However, before expanding further on a definition of what is meant by 'political dissent', it is worthwhile briefly to revisit and restate what we understand by the broader notion of 'dissent'. As Robert Cutler has already pointed out, this is a question that has roused considerable and heated debate.<sup>21</sup> In the historiographical context of the Soviet regime the term 'dissent' means something more than simply 'disagreement' or 'dispute' as one would find in a standard dictionary definition or might encounter in political discourse on Western democracies. For example, 'dissent' generally does not refer to any kind of intra-elite factional strife or sanctioned and tolerated debate. Instead it denotes some degree of conflict with the political authorities whereby citizens engaged in any of a number of actions that, although in many instances not actually against the law, nonetheless seriously breached the behavioural norms that the regime demanded of its citizens.

Frederick Barghoorn, one of the leading scholars on the dissident movement of the Brezhnev period, defined dissent as 'the persistent - and from the official point of view - objectionable advocacy of policies differing from or contrary to those which the dominant group in the supreme CPSU control and decision making bodies...adopt'.<sup>22</sup> The only significant point on which this study diverges from Barghoorn's definition is by omitting the term 'persistent'. What this thesis addresses, therefore, are various forms of criticism, protest and abuse aimed at the

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<sup>21</sup> R. Cutler, 'Soviet Dissent Under Khrushchev: An Analytical Study', *Comparative Politics*, Vol.13, No.1, October 1980, pp. 15-35.

<sup>22</sup> F. Barghoorn, 'Soviet Political Doctrine and the Problem of Opposition', *Bucknell Review*, Vol. 12, No.2, May 1964, p. 4.

political authorities and the policies or activities that they undertook, whether occurring on one occasion or many occasions.

Perhaps the most instructive way in which to elucidate dissent as a social phenomenon is with reference to Albert O. Hirschman's model on 'Exit, Voice and Loyalty'.<sup>23</sup> The subject of Hirschman's work, as it relates to this thesis, concerns the way that citizens respond to decline in regimes, in particular ones with the potential to be rejuvenated if sufficient effort and attention are expended on the task.<sup>24</sup> It would, of course, be incorrect to staunchly assert that the Soviet regime was one in definite and comprehensive decline by the Khrushchev period - in fact quite the opposite was true in certain fields. What was undergoing decline, however, was the Stalinist system of rule that had been in place for many years and, with the benefit of hindsight, ultimately proved to be in a state of relatively limited decline. It is important to state, however, that the aim here is not to analyse Soviet dissent in terms of Hirschman's model but to clarify further what is meant by 'dissent' as a social phenomenon.

The crux of Hirschman's model argues that citizens of states in decline are presented with three options: 'exit', 'voice' and 'loyalty'. The 'exit' option is simply to abandon or attempt to abandon the system in its entirety, namely by emigration or by some other means of detaching oneself from the regime in question. The 'voice'

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<sup>23</sup> A. Hirschman, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organisations and States*, London: Harvard University Press, 1970.

<sup>24</sup> As an economist by profession, Hirschman's main preoccupation has been with the manner in which consumers respond to decline in companies. Nonetheless, he asserts that the same principles apply to the relationship between regimes and their citizens. His model has been applied to dissenting behaviour under various regimes including Cuba, Mexico and the former GDR. See J. Colomer, 'Exit, Voice and Hostility in Cuba', *International Migration Review*, Vol. 34, No. 2, Summer 2000, pp. 423-442; J. Langston, 'Breaking Out Is Hard To Do: Exit, Voice and Loyalty in Mexico's One-Party Hegemonic Regime', *Latin American Politics and Society*, Vol. 44, No. 3, Autumn 2002, pp. 61-88; S. Pfaff and H. Kim, 'Exit-Voice Dynamics in Collective Action: An Analysis of Emigration and Protest in the East German Revolution', *The American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 109, No. 2, September 2003, pp. 401-444.

option is predicated on manifesting dissatisfaction by engaging in various activities that do not adhere to established behavioural norms. The final category of 'loyalty' is one where citizens' grievances are endured without recourse to overt complaint yet their loyalty remains conditional upon the state continuing to uphold its end of the social contract on which its relationship with society is based.

It is, therefore, the second, 'voice', option with which the present study is predominantly concerned. As Hirschman states: 'Voice is here defined as any attempt at all to change, rather than to escape from, an objectionable state of affairs whether through individual or collective petition to the management directly in charge...or through various types of actions and protests, including those that are meant to mobilize public opinion'.<sup>25</sup>

All of this provides a useful platform on which to base our approach to the wider phenomenon of Soviet dissent, but it is also vital to elaborate what is meant by 'political dissent'. Perhaps the most useful analogy to draw at this initial stage is with the Brezhnev era dissident movement. Scholars have long acknowledged it as consisting of three quite distinct facets: nationalist, religious and human rights movements.<sup>26</sup> Similarly, in the Khrushchev period one can quite clearly distinguish nationalist and religious dissent but also something else that fits into neither category, though it was not primarily concerned with defending rights either.<sup>27</sup> One can broadly define political dissent as being that 'something else': those acts of dissent

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<sup>25</sup> Hirschman, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty*, p. 30.

<sup>26</sup> The best example of this can be seen in the title of Ludmilla Alexeyeva's 1987 work *Soviet Dissent: Contemporary Movements for National, Religious and Human Rights*.

<sup>27</sup> In fact, the Western tendency to label the Brezhnev era *pravozashchitniki* as human rights activists is in itself somewhat misleading. As Robert Horvath has pointed out, they were primarily interested in the defence of rights and the rule of law as a whole rather than just human rights. Horvath, *The Legacy of Soviet Dissent*, p. 84.

that were neither religious nor nationalist in sentiment but instead were ideological in nature. While many members of the Brezhnev era human rights movement shied away from overtly political protest and criticism, the Khrushchev years witnessed a considerable flourishing of exactly this kind of behaviour.

It is important to emphasise that this thesis does not seek to look at all types of non-conformity in the Khrushchev years. The key point is that these were acts of dissent that reflected or implied political discontent. The apparent rise in hooliganism – such as gang fights among youths or robberies and assaults – that took place during the period is therefore not a major concern of this thesis. Similarly, what could be termed the cultural non-conformism of *stilyagi*, falls beyond the remit of the present work. Although both of the above to some extent demonstrated a rejection of the regime's values, they were also distinct socio-cultural phenomena in their own right.

The behaviours under discussion are ones that either reflected or implied discontent with the contemporary Soviet political environment and did so without reference to what Yitzhak Brudny has labelled a 'terminal community' – meaning an entity such as a state or religion for whose benefit dissenting acts were undertaken.<sup>28</sup> In their place one encounters a profusion of themes and aims based upon criticism or rejection of some aspect of the existing regime such as excessive bureaucracy, foreign policy or elite privilege. Essentially, this meant acts of dissent that can be defined as 'protest and criticism involving language and behaviours that either reflected or implied discontent at the policies, representatives and goals of the contemporary Soviet regime'. For example, this could involve citizens making public outbursts such as

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<sup>28</sup> See Y. Brudny, *Reinventing Russia: Russian Nationalism and the Soviet State 1953-1991*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998.

'long live President Eisenhower!' or 'communists are worse than fascists', writing anonymous letters and leaflets calling for Khrushchev to be branded an 'enemy of the people' or forming underground groups to struggle for workers' interests.

One of the vital criteria of the present work is that it addresses what could be termed 'active dissent' rather than 'passive dissent'. Behaviours such as simply listening to Radio Liberty in the privacy of one's own apartment are generally not a feature of this thesis – unless followed by some more purposive behaviour. In this sense it is useful to think in terms of a spectrum of dissenting behaviour rather than in simple binary terms of 'dissent' or 'not dissent'. Listening to Western radio broadcasts and privately criticising any given policy or individual would occupy the lower end of such a dissenting spectrum whereas activities such as distributing anti-Soviet leaflets and forming underground groups were clearly higher up the scale. It is the higher end of the spectrum with which the present work is primarily concerned. Among the fields that the present study does address are what caused passive discontent to be translated into action and how far the criticisms made by dissenters were in some way reflective of wider public moods.

This focus on active dissent does not imply that passive dissent was somehow unimportant or unworthy of study. Indeed, themes of passive dissent such as workplace drunkenness, theft and feigned compliance are undoubtedly subjects worthy of future research in this context. The point to be emphasised here is that this thesis is primarily concerned with the way that citizens expressed opposition or anger at the authorities, why they did so and what kind of response this generated. Those acts which displayed some kind of public facet not only shed more light on the nature

of interaction between the regime and society but also represented a more immediate and visceral challenge to authority that was fundamentally new for the post-Stalin era.

### **0.3 PARAMETERS OF THE STUDY**

The acts of political dissent that are addressed in this thesis constitute only a part of the dissenting behaviour that took place between 1956 and 1964. The Khrushchev era was also a time of burgeoning nationalist and religious dissent. In the Baltic States, Ukraine, Georgia and Armenia there were numerous instances of citizens undertaking acts of protest on the basis of hurt national sentiment.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, large numbers of Baptists, Jehovah's Witnesses and Pentecostals along with members of many other religious faiths were involved in acts of protest at the Soviet authorities and defiance of the stringent limits placed upon religious observance. While all three genres of dissent – nationalist, religious and political – had a commonality of conflict with the authorities, they also had much that separated them: in their themes, forms and aims religious, nationalist and political dissent differed from each other notably at times. It was actually not until well into the Brezhnev era that there was any significant degree of interaction and co-operation between the three.<sup>30</sup>

Although important and interesting themes of activity, this thesis does not seek to address the issues of nationalist or religious dissent. While there are undoubtedly some advantages to be drawn from looking at all forms of dissenting behaviour

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<sup>29</sup> These might include displaying long-suppressed national flags and emblems on windows and walls or forming underground groups to struggle against perceived Russian domination.

<sup>30</sup> There were exceptions to this trend, such as Petr Grigorenko's long-standing interest in the fate of the Crimean Tatars, but the pattern remains essentially valid. In some cases dissenting groups, most notably the Jewish *Refuseniks*, deliberately avoided the themes and individuals involved in other dissident struggles so as not to bring further persecution upon their own cause.

collectively there are also benefits in studying each individually, especially since this is a field of research that is still in its infancy. Although by no means the only reason for omitting nationalist and religious activity, there are also issues of scope to be considered in a work of this length. One could not hope to say something meaningful about nationalist dissent without looking at how it was manifested differently in the three Baltic States, Ukraine, the Caucasus and Central Asia for example or to discuss religious dissent without looking at Orthodox Believers, Jews, Muslims and many other faiths besides. Attempting to address all of these within one thesis would in fact do a disservice to each and render nuanced discussion all but impossible.

More importantly for the present work, nationalist and religious dissent were generally less likely to be caused by contemporary issues to the same extent as the behaviours addressed herein. For example, the aims of nationalists in the Baltic States or members of Baptist and Adventist religious groups were essentially little different under Khrushchev than they had been under Stalin and would later be under Brezhnev. Political dissent, however, was more likely to be prompted directly by the contemporary political environment. This can be seen in events and themes such as reactions to the Hungarian rising, attitudes to Khrushchev, support for the regime's opponents at any given time or responses to the raft of price increases that occurred in the summer of 1962.

Of course, one could not say that any given act of criticism or protest was apolitical simply because it had nationalist overtones or called for religious freedom, for example. With the USSR being a state where so many aspects of everyday life were heavily politicised and dictated by the communist regime one could perhaps argue

that almost any kind of complaint was, by definition, political dissent. This would, however, be an excessive over-simplification. As this thesis consistently demonstrates, the Soviet Union was not a totalitarian society in the Khrushchev era and one ought not to view every facet of life as being 'political'. Politics continued to be an unavoidable aspect of everyday life but, just as all happiness was not politically-based, neither was all discontent.

There were naturally a few 'grey areas' where nationalist, religious and political dissent overlapped to some extent, though they appear to have been surprisingly few. In the vast majority of instances it is immediately evident from the details held in a particular case file whether an act of protest ought to be classified as 'political', 'nationalist' or 'religious'. With thousands of case files available, those which have been selected and discussed in this thesis are ones in which acts have given no overt reason to suspect any nationalist or religious sentiment.

One occasionally encounters KGB reports providing condensed summaries of dissenting activity around the country that tell of how many anti-Soviet leaflets had been discovered in the preceding weeks and months and how many authors of such leaflets had been uncovered without giving any detail on their locations or motivations. While the more detailed reports show that a significant majority of these materials were indeed dedicated to political themes, rather than nationalist or religious ones, this was not the case in every instance. However, these figures are still presented to the reader in order to help give some idea of the overall scale of dissenting behaviour – a problem that has long dogged those who study the subject and on which some tentative outlines can now be drawn.

It is also worthwhile briefly to speak about the place of ‘thaw era’ literature in this thesis. Unlike dissent, the cultural developments of the era in question have already been addressed in some detail elsewhere. A number of the most important literary works of the Khrushchev years, such as Vladimir Dudintsev’s *Not by Bread Alone* (1956) and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn’s *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* (1962) are discussed herein yet, for the most part, the literary thaw is a peripheral issue in the present work. How far one can consider such works to be acts of dissent is somewhat debatable – they did offer a degree of criticism yet they were officially sanctioned and published, and even encouraged to criticise ‘from on high’ on occasion.<sup>31</sup> Dina Spechler’s use of the term ‘permitted dissent’ is perhaps the most useful way of relating the liberal literature of the Khrushchev era to the present study.<sup>32</sup>

Indeed, when one reads Spechler’s account of the liberal literary journal *Novyi Mir* during the Khrushchev years, it soon becomes apparent that this was a field that did not necessarily reflect public moods and contemporary issues quite as much as it reflected ongoing power struggles within the top leadership and the cultural establishment. As such, officially sanctioned literature is predominantly regarded as an aspect of state policy and of the intra-regime struggle between liberals and conservatives rather than as political dissent.

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<sup>31</sup> Perhaps the most notable example of this was a speech delivered to the XXII CPSU Congress in 1961 by *Novyi Mir* editor Aleksandr Tvardovsky. He called for writers to start sending in more challenging works for publication. This prompted Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn to submit a manuscript that had remained hidden for several years and would become one of the defining points of deStalinisation, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*.

<sup>32</sup> See D. Spechler, *Permitted Dissent in the USSR: Novy Mir and the Soviet Regime*, New York: Praeger, 1982.

## **0.4 SOURCES AND METHODOLOGY**

Aside from the published sources that have already been discussed above, much of this thesis is based upon unpublished primary source research. This material has been drawn from a number of archives, mainly in Moscow but also in New York and Budapest. This has also been supplemented by information drawn from a handful of interviews with former dissenters and leading experts on dissent, carried out in the UK, US and Russia. Although the process remains far from complete, the opening up of former Soviet archives has provided new materials that have undoubtedly advanced our understanding of dissenting behaviour and official responses. With the vast majority of dissenting activity from the period having attracted neither international nor domestic attention, what one finds in these files is an invaluable body of evidence on acts and individuals that are recorded nowhere else and would otherwise have been effectively lost to history.

The most useful of these sources were the files of the Soviet Procurator on individuals who were sentenced for anti-Soviet activity and propaganda, held at GARF (The State Archive of the Russian Federation) in Moscow. These contain relevant communications between the KGB and Procurator's office, investigation protocols and various other forms of evidence relating to cases in which individuals or groups were sentenced for anti-Soviet activity. Varying in size from a handful of sheets to several hundred pages in more complex cases, a typical file might begin with a letter from an *oblast*' Procurator's office to the central Procuracy in Moscow announcing that the KGB had started an investigation against an individual as a result of a particular occurrence. From there it would outline the events and activities being

investigated, any significant evidence that was revealed, a court judgement (sometimes, though not often, with a transcript of the hearing) and any subsequent appeals or offences relating to the person who had been sentenced.

With the archives of the KGB still effectively inaccessible to researchers and access to the Presidential Archive similarly restricted, the holdings of the state Procurator (numbering approximately 6,000 convictions for anti-Soviet activity and propaganda between 1956 and 1964) are a particularly valuable source. They not only provide useful detail on specific cases but, because of the size of the sample, also give some indication of prevailing themes in dissenting behaviour and of the authorities' general attitude toward dissent at any specific point in the period.

The case files that have been used in this study were selected on the basis of an annotated catalogue of individuals who were sentenced under article 58-10 during the post-Stalin era.<sup>33</sup> One of the first criteria was to present a range of cases that accurately reflected all of the major forms of dissenting behaviour such as sending anti-Soviet letters, forming underground groups and engaging in public outbursts against the authorities. Once this had been achieved, the range of sources was then widened to ensure that it represented the evolving demographic and chronological trends that can be witnessed when one looks at the era as a whole.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> See V. Kozlov et al eds, *58-10 Nadzornye proizvodstva prokuratury SSSR po delam ob antisovetskoi agitatsii i propaganda: annotirovannyi katalog Mart 1953 – 1991*, Moskva: Mezhdunarodnyi Fond 'Demokratiya', 1999. Presenting a chronological list of sentences for anti-Soviet activity, the catalogue provides basic biographical data on the individuals who were jailed and a brief description of what they had done. These short descriptions were then used to select the full case files that were ordered at GARF.

<sup>34</sup> One of the ways of drawing out these trends was by producing a chronological database of individuals convicted under article 58-10. With this panoramic view of all political convictions it became possible to draw out the most prevalent trends of the era.

A considerable volume of the materials that were gathered from the Procurator archive have not been included in the thesis because there was simply too much evidence to fit everything into one volume. Most of those cases which have been included are generally ones that reflect wider trends of dissenting behaviour rather than extreme examples. Others have been used because they present telling insights into the activities of dissenters and the authorities. In regard to dissenters this might mean that a given case file included copies of witness statements that had been gathered during an investigation or details of previous and subsequent arrests. Insights into the authorities' activity could include case files which contained court transcripts or details of appeals against sentences.

Also of great use for the present work were the archives of the General Department – a body that can be regarded as the 'engine room' of the Central Committee because it was to here that information flowed in from all directions and where the finer details of policies were worked out. The majority of relevant files in this archive are made up of one or two page communiqués from the KGB to the Central Committee in regard to individual acts of dissent or in the form of summaries of recent dissenting activity, over state holidays or election days, for example. These often include information on many acts that did not reach the Procurator, either because the culprits could not be traced or because repression via legal channels was deemed inappropriate. Again this gives some idea of the scale and trends of dissenting behaviour but also gives further insight into the work of the KGB and of the extent to which the leadership was cognisant of protest and criticism.

Unfortunately, the General Department files do not contain any reciprocal correspondence from the Central Committee to the security organs. Such documents presumably remain inaccessible in the KGB archives. Unlike the files of the Procurator's office, one of the great strengths of the General Department material is that it actually holds reproductions of at least some of the anti-Soviet documents that are discussed (several of which are reproduced in the thesis), though the amount of detail on individual cases is somewhat less than that in the Procurator files.<sup>35</sup> Perhaps the main value of this source therefore was in giving some insight into the activity of the KGB at this time, a subject that still remains rather difficult for the Khrushchev period in many respects.

The records of the Department of Party Organs and of the *Komsomol* secretariat, held at RGANI (The Russian State Archive of Recent History) and RGASPI (The Russian State Archive of Social and Political History) respectively, yielded some useful statistical information about expulsions from both the CPSU and *Komsomol* on the grounds of dissenting behaviour though their scope was generally rather limited. Also at RGANI, *Fond 89* (consisting primarily of evidence used in the 1992 Trial of the Communist Party) held a number of interesting documents relating to specific breaches of human rights and abuses of power by the regime in the Khrushchev period but was far too limited in content to be of much use other than in several specific cases.

In Budapest the archives of Radio Liberty – held as part of the Open Society Archives – were both rewarding in what they held and frustrating in what was absent. The

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<sup>35</sup> One of the main reasons why such examples are not often found in the Procurator files is that a decision was taken in 1959 to restrict access to such 'subversive' documents even among members of the legal establishment. Kozlov and Mironenko eds, *Kramola*, p. 24.

intention had been to look at transcripts of Radio Liberty broadcasts to the USSR, yet these were no longer held in Budapest (they are currently at the Hoover Institute in San Francisco). Instead, the most useful source of information held there were the files of the Radio Liberty press monitoring service that included many highly informative cuttings and analyses drawn from the Soviet print media (both national and local), and a few from foreign media sources, in regard to various manifestations of discontent and the authorities' struggle against dissent. Without looking through countless editions of a great many newspapers it would have been impossible to gain as good an understanding of issues relating to the Soviet media in this context were it not for the holdings of the Open Society Archives.

It is worthwhile at this stage briefly to discuss the nature of the archival sources employed in this work. The bulk of the archival materials cited herein have been drawn from officially generated sources; in particular from KGB investigation protocols or from official communications between the presiding KGB chairman and the Central Committee. This raises two immediate questions: how reliable are the materials contained in the files and how comprehensive are they?

It is important to highlight the fact that the majority of these documents were for strictly internal purposes. They had no directly propagandistic feature and were not intended to misinform or present a distorted image. On the contrary, they were principally a bare factual record, and one that the centre wished to be accurate. Furthermore, although the Soviet legal system remained far from perfect, it did at least dispense with much of the falsification and abuse that had characterised it in the

Stalin era, arrest quotas were no longer issued for the security organs and confessions obtained by violence ceased to be a feature of investigation proceedings.

Of course, none of this is to suggest that such documents can be used unquestioningly but it does mean that they are much more useful for attempting to recreate a reasonably accurate depiction of the past than corresponding documents from the Stalin period, for example.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, this is not a problem confined to officially generated sources. Documents such as Radio Liberty analyses of Soviet activity and some dissident memoirs also occasionally take on a highly politicised colouring that one must be careful not to take at face value. This was, at times, a particularly adversarial situation and, therefore, one that requires the exercise of some considerable caution.

Although highly illuminating, the information held in the archives in regard to dissenting behaviour is by no means comprehensive, and nor could it be. Undoubtedly there were many acts of dissent that never even came to the attention of the authorities and have gone entirely unrecorded. The lack of access to the archives of the KGB and to materials held in the Presidential Archive unfortunately means that this is a theme on which there is a considerable volume of material that will most likely remain unavailable for some time to come, particularly in regard to official activity in the later part of the Khrushchev era. Nonetheless, it is usually possible to piece together information from a variety of other sources where the official files remain closed.

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<sup>36</sup> See, for example, H. Kuromiya, *The Voices of the Dead: Stalin's Terror in the 1930s*, London: Yale University Press, 2007. Kuromiya analyses numerous investigation protocols on individuals sentenced for anti-Soviet activity in the Stalin era. He demonstrates repeated inconsistencies, evidence of forced confessions and omissions of crucial details in case files to show how countless political convictions during the period were based on either incredibly flimsy evidence or no evidence at all.

In addition to the above archival research, a number of interviews and other correspondences were conducted as part of the research for this thesis. Although always intended to be a supplementary source rather than a key facet of the thesis, several of these interviews proved to be particularly illuminating and undoubtedly added a great deal to the study. Typically of oral sources, they were most valuable in the way that they added vital contextual details and anecdotes of the kind that are rarely found in official documents or even memoirs.

These interviews were carried out in Russia, the US and UK, among former dissenters who were exiled or emigrated from the USSR during the Brezhnev period.<sup>37</sup> Owing to the small number of interviewees and the diversity of their individual experiences it was decided that the most profitable approach would be to conduct ‘open’ rather than ‘structured’ interviews. In most cases this meant exploring one specific event in some detail with the interviewee but a few ‘stock’ questions were also asked, such as ‘what was your attitude toward Khrushchev at the time?’ or ‘what was your reaction to the Secret Speech?’

The interviewees who were approached to take part in this study were chosen primarily because each had been involved in one or more of the most important areas of dissenting behaviour raised in this thesis. Andrei Grigorenko, for example, had been a member of an underground group, Yuri Orlov had openly criticised the regime at a Party meeting following the Secret Speech and Aleksandr Esenin-Volpin had been instrumental in persuading dissenters to abandon clandestine acts of protest in favour of legalist forms of struggle. Of course, one is also constrained by the

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<sup>37</sup> See appendix for a full list of interviewees with attached short biographies. Aside from recorded and cited interviews this thesis has also benefited from consultations and advice on the theme of dissent with specialists such as Edward Kline and Joshua Rubinstein.

availability of interviewees. With the Khrushchev period more than four decades in the past, there is by no means an unlimited supply of people with whom it is possible to meet. Furthermore, because interview evidence was always intended to play a supplementary role in this project it was decided that time spent in Moscow ought to be focussed on archival research. The majority of discussions with dissenters, therefore, were conducted with émigrés both in the UK and US where archival evidence was less widely available.

Practically all of those who were interviewed in the course of this research project showed excellent recollection of the period and were both forthcoming and candid on any subject that was raised. In many senses former dissidents make ‘good interviewees’: they are almost universally well educated, have no reason to fear incriminating themselves in some way and for the most part remain both interested and passionate about the issues on which they previously protested and campaigned. The risk of over-dramatising or over-inflating the importance of events in question also seems to have been minimised by virtue of their having lived in the USSR for many years subsequently, meaning that they were to a large extent ‘insulated’ from the impact that their activities had in the West and among the wider Soviet population.

## **0.5 STRUCTURE OF THESIS**

The main body of thesis is divided into two chronological periods, each of which consists of two chapters. The first and second chapters address the subjects of dissenting behaviour and official responses respectively in the period of 1956 to 1958.

The third and fourth chapters then tackle the same subjects for the later period of 1959 to 1964.

This chronological division of the Khrushchev period has been employed largely in order to emphasise the process of evolution that took place in regard to dissent and official responses. Although the periodisation that has been employed does not indicate any sudden change in the dynamics of dissent, neither has it been chosen at random. It is notable, for example, that a 1977 internal history textbook produced by the KGB also employed a periodisation that bisected the Khrushchev era at this same point.<sup>38</sup>

This division largely reflects the fact that it was official policy rather than dissent which changed most notably at this point, yet the two were, to a large extent, inextricably linked. The earlier period was characterised by a sense of great change and uncertainty as the boundaries of the relationship between the regime and society had begun to be redrawn following Stalin's death. The authorities were rarely proactive in tackling their critics at this point and instead relied upon what could be termed a 'fire-fighting' approach to dissent. The later part of the era was characterised by stability and growing cynicism as the outlines of the post-Stalin Soviet regime became more solidly established. One can see a similar theme among dissenters of the period; at first instances of criticism and protest tended to be highly ephemeral and linked to very specific grievances but, by around the turn of the

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<sup>38</sup> See V. Chebrikov et al, *Istoriya sovetskikh organov gosudarstvennoi bezopasnosti: uchebnik*, Moskva: Vysshaya krasnoznamenskaya shkola komiteta gosudarstvennoi bezopasnosti pri sovete ministrov SSSR, 1977. In this case the KGB divided its own history into the following periods: 1953-1958 and 1959-1971. The fact that the later period extends well into the Brezhnev era can be taken as a further reflection of the continuities between the regime's responses to dissent under Khrushchev and Brezhnev.

decade, critics increasingly became better organised and demonstrated a more fundamental sense of disenchantment at the incumbent regime.

This division into what could be termed 'dynamic' and 'stable' periods is reflected in the way that the four chapters have been conceptualised. The first two chapters, which deal with the earlier years of the Khrushchev era, have been written with a particularly strong sense of chronology in order to reflect the way that different processes and events impacted upon each other. Although still predominantly chronological in nature, chapters 3 and 4 do contain a slightly more thematic aspect in order to more fully explore the most salient issues.

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **PROTEST AND DISSENT: 1956-1958**

The first half of the Khrushchev era saw protest and criticism of the authorities on a scale that had not been witnessed for many years, or had, perhaps, never been witnessed since the end of the civil war, in the Soviet Union. Dissenting behaviour was not the preserve of a small section of the Moscow intelligentsia at this time, as it largely came to be in later years, but could be seen at practically all levels of society and in every region of the country. This was, however, a period in which the majority of critics were essentially loyal to the overall communist regime and to the ideology of Marxism-Leninism. Although often quite impassioned and strident in their remarks, genuine desire for revolution was at a minimum among dissenters around this time.

The Stalin era too had featured occasional outbursts of protest and criticism aimed at the authorities, yet it seems clear that the Secret Speech marked the beginning of a new stage in the evolution of dissenting behaviour in the Soviet Union, particularly among the intelligentsia. Public forums such as Communist Party meetings and debates briefly became the setting for quite sharp criticism before official responses ensured that most dissent shifted underground, resulting in a growth of activities such as distributing hostile leaflets and forming clandestine groups.

Importantly, this was a period in which the relationship between state and society was going through a vital transitional stage. The rules of the new era were still being established as people learned what had and had not changed since Stalin's death and,

particularly, since the upheavals of the XX CPSU Congress. Fear of the authorities began to decline and hopes of liberalisation were aroused by the XX Party Congress that would ultimately be dashed. The sense of enthusiasm that the Secret Speech temporarily engendered soon began to decline and loyal criticism increasingly turned to disenchantment and cynicism as the end of the 1950s approached.

One can discern two broad categories of dissenting behaviour that existed during the Khrushchev era. The first category can be classified as ‘worker dissent’: this had practically always existed to some extent and primarily involved spontaneous and crude forms of protest that, although often manifested in political language and imagery, were usually rooted in material discontent. The second category, labelled herein as ‘intelligentsia dissent’, tended to be characterised at this stage by belief in a more liberal form of communism, and was generally manifested in planned and considered acts of dissent that more accurately reflected some genuine degree of dissatisfaction at the prevailing political situation. Geoffrey Hosking has written of the period that ‘...there was no contact whatsoever between workers and intellectuals: they lived in different intellectual and moral universes’.<sup>39</sup> As such, it should come as no great surprise that these two groups had quite distinct grievances and often undertook different forms of protest.

The labels ‘worker dissent’ and ‘intelligentsia dissent’ do not indicate that these behaviours were necessarily exclusive to members of these two bodies; merely that these were the most prevalent social classes involved in each form of dissent

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<sup>39</sup> G. Hosking, *Rulers and Victims: The Russians in the Soviet Union*, Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006, p. 297.

respectively.<sup>40</sup> These are, nonetheless, useful categories by which to view the phenomena of dissent, particularly in regard to demonstrating the way that it evolved throughout the Khrushchev period and beyond.

As with the major peasant rebellions of Tsarist times, worker dissent did not necessarily represent any kind of opposition to the political status quo or defence of those who were downtrodden by the regime.<sup>41</sup> For the most part, these were not idealistic and principled criticisms but expressions of anger at the hardships of life in the USSR. In some ways their themes were universal, such as anger at low living standards or resentment at the privileges enjoyed by elites, but they were also coloured by Soviet conditions and took on a superficially politicised character. Intelligentsia dissent, on the other hand, was more specific to the contemporary political situation and more dynamic in nature. These were usually acts of protest and criticism that were based upon genuine political grievances rather than material stimuli. Less volatile than worker dissent, it was, nonetheless, more enduring and can be seen to have played a major role in the ‘pre-history’ of the subsequent dissident movement.

## **1.1 DISSENT PRIOR TO THE SECRET SPEECH**

Although outside of the main chronological focus of this thesis, it is worthwhile for purposes of context briefly to look at dissenting activity in the years prior to the Secret Speech. Furthermore, since it is one of the main themes of the present work to

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<sup>40</sup> For purposes of clarity it is worthwhile to point out that in the present framework the term ‘intelligentsia’ also encompasses the student body while the term ‘workers’ also refers to the peasantry.

<sup>41</sup> This is a conclusion that was also reached by Marshall Shatz in *Soviet Dissent in Historical Perspective*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980.

establish that dissent was more prevalent under Khrushchev than has been commonly recognised thus far, it is also vital to point out that 1956 did not represent any kind of ‘year zero’ in terms of protest and criticism aimed at the Soviet regime. In fact, some degree of dissent necessarily pervades all regimes; what marks out each case as being different are the causes, practicalities and consequences of such protest activity.

### ***1.1.1 THE STALIN YEARS***

The Stalin years appear to be something of an unknown quantity in regard to dissenting behaviour. The sheer volume of repression under the umbrella of ‘counter-revolutionary activity’ has, perhaps, ensured that most genuine acts of protest and criticism have been buried under a great mass of entirely fabricated cases. This is, however, a field of study that has been gaining some ground in recent years.<sup>42</sup>

Sarah Davies has used NKVD reports from the late 1930s to demonstrate that dissenting behaviour was not quite as rare as one might have supposed, even during the regime’s most repressive years. A diverse range of themes, such as the subscription campaigns to provide material assistance for the Republican effort in the Spanish Civil War, the assassination of Kirov and the 1940 Labour Decree, provoked a flurry of critical and hostile remarks, for example. NKVD reports occasionally also showed election ballots filled out in the name of ‘Trotsky’ or ‘the Tsar’ and mentioned instances of swastikas daubed onto walls in paint.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Works specifically addressing this theme in the last few years include L. Viola ed., *Contending With Stalinism: Soviet Power and Resistance in the 1930s*, London: Cornell University Press, 2002; J. Rossman, *Worker Resistance Under Stalin: Class and Revolution on the Shop Floor*, London: Harvard University Press, 2005.

<sup>43</sup> See S. Davies, *Popular Opinion in Stalin’s Russia: Terror, Propaganda and Dissent 1934-1941*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

Julianne Fürst has written about the youth opposition group ‘The Communist Party of Youth’ that existed in Voronezh in the 1940s, and Veniamin Iofe (former head of the St Petersburg branch of *Memorial*) has listed numerous other groups that existed during the period, such as ‘The Organisation of Young Revolutionaries’ in Saratov, ‘The Union of Revolutionary Struggle’ in Taishet and the ‘Union of Struggle for the Cause of the Revolution’ in Moscow.<sup>44</sup> Additionally, Yuri Orlov recalled that while waiting to be demobilised at the end of the Second World War he had been invited to join a clandestine anti-Stalin group that existed among army officers in his regiment – an invitation he turned down.<sup>45</sup> Evidently, as stifling as the Stalin years were for the expression of discontent, there were still elements of resistance to authority.

Furthermore, looking at the spate of disorders and risings in the *Gulag* network of the 1950s, Kozlov has suggested that what he termed ‘the era of camp rebellions’ can actually be traced back to the late 1940s when the camp population was increasingly composed of hardened war veterans and genuine opponents of the Soviet regime.<sup>46</sup> The country that Stalin left behind at his death, therefore, was one already beset by early signs of discontent, with social tensions beginning to rise closer to the surface.<sup>47</sup>

According to Alex Inkeles, even before Stalin’s death society had begun to

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<sup>44</sup> See J. Fürst, ‘Prisoners of the Soviet Self? : Political Youth Opposition in Late Stalinism’, *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 54, No.3, May 2002, pp. 353-375. Also V. Iofe, *Granitsy smysla: stat’i, vystupleniya, esse*, Sankt-Peterburg: Nauchno-informatsionnyi tsentr ‘Memorial’, 2002. It is also worthwhile to flag up for the reader the fact that Fürst’s article prompted a critical response from Hiroaki Kuromiya: ‘Political Youth Opposition in Late Stalinism’: Evidence and Conjecture’, *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 55, No. 4, June 2003, pp. 631-638. This was in turn followed by a counter-response from Fürst and a further reply from Kuromiya. See J. Fürst, ‘Re-examining Opposition Under Stalin: Evidence and Context: A Reply to Kuromiya’, *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 55, No. 5, July 2003, pp. 789-803 and H. Kuromiya, ‘Re-Examining Opposition Under Stalin: Further Thoughts’, *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 56, No. 2, March 2004, pp. 309-314.

<sup>45</sup> Interview with Yuri Orlov, Ithaca, New York, December 2006.

<sup>46</sup> In particular these included imprisoned nationalist guerrillas from the Ukraine and the Baltic States. See V. Kozlov, *Neizvestnyi SSSR: Protivostoyanie naroda i vlasti 1953-1985*, Moskva: Olma-Press, 2006.

<sup>47</sup> See also E. Zubkova, *Obshchestvo i reformy 1945-1964*, Moskva: Izdatel’skii tsentr ‘Rossiya molodaya’, 1993.

demonstrate that the deprivations of low living standards and state terror would not be so easily accepted again.<sup>48</sup>

### 1.1.2 *THE COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP*

Reviewing the case files of individuals convicted under article 58-10, for ‘anti-Soviet activity and propaganda’, during the years of collective leadership, one can quickly see that nationalist and religious activity made up the considerable bulk of convictions at that time. The former largely represented the conclusion of repressions against citizens of the Ukraine and the Baltic States that had been ongoing since the later stages of the Second World War and the latter was largely a result of the brief but widespread anti-religious campaign of 1954.<sup>49</sup>

In regard to those acts that come under the category of political dissent during the period of collective leadership that followed Stalin’s death, the general tone had changed only a little since the previous era. Typical examples included I.N. Pisarev’s December 1953 conviction after writing ‘Down with the Soviet regime! Long live Truman!’ and drawing swastikas on a wall in Chelyabinsk *oblast*.<sup>50</sup> Similarly, I.N. Rodin, a war invalid, was jailed in June 1955 after cursing members of the Communist Party leadership while on a trolleybus in Moscow.<sup>51</sup> What one can also see, however, is that an increasing number of people were sentenced for ‘obscene’ (*netsenzurnye*) public outbursts against members of the militia and various political

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<sup>48</sup> A. Inkeles, *Social Change in Soviet Russia*, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1968, p. 28.

<sup>49</sup> Some of the best coverage of the authorities’ repression of nationalist resistance in Ukraine and the Baltic States can be found in Yu. Aksyutin, *Khrushchevskaya ‘otpepel’ i obshchestvennye nastroyeniya v SSSR v 1953 – 1964*, Moskva: Rosspen, 2004. In regard to the anti-religious campaign during the years of collective leadership, see J. Delaney-Grossman, ‘Khrushchev’s Anti-Religious Policy and the Campaign of 1954’, *Soviet Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 3, January 1973, pp. 374-386.

<sup>50</sup> GARF, f. 8131, op. 31, d. 77681, ll. 1-3.

<sup>51</sup> GARF, f. 8131, op. 31, d. 67444, l. 1.

figures as well as individuals being jailed after sending letters containing threats or anti-Soviet expressions to newspapers and political figures.

Up until the Secret Speech this kind of crude and often spontaneous worker dissent continued to predominate. Where the relevant documentation is available it seems that those who were arrested and sentenced for such acts were most often poorly educated males from the Slavic republics of the USSR.<sup>52</sup> Quite frequently they were also either intoxicated at the time of the event or were actually serving prisoners. One can see that criticism and frustration were increasingly beginning to appear in the public sphere, though still in very limited numbers and often manifested in quite a crude fashion. These behaviours did not disappear after the Secret Speech, and in fact seem to have become more common for a time (they are addressed again later in the present chapter), but were also supplemented with more planned and cerebral activity that saw Soviet dissent enter a fundamentally new stage in its evolution.

With the field of study still relatively narrow, one must remain circumspect in drawing conclusions about dissent prior to the Secret Speech. However, with the price to be paid for disobedience and non-conformism set prohibitively high in the Stalin years, it should perhaps come as no surprise that one generally does not encounter the kinds of reasoned and persistent criticism that began to occur later under Khrushchev. Instead what one does see from the above evidence is a degree of worker protest and dissent that was predominantly spontaneous and without consideration of the potential consequences. What this perhaps reflected was the extent to which approximately two and a half decades of Stalinism had stifled almost

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<sup>52</sup> Procurator files on individuals sentenced for anti-Soviet activity included a survey of basic biographical data such as age, profession, nationality and place of residence. In many case files education levels were also included, though this was not always the case.

all outward signs of genuine ideological heterodoxy and ensured that the only acts of political protest and dissent that did occur resembled a kind of primal ‘lashing out’ at the regime.

## **1.2 THE XX CONGRESS AND ITS AFTERMATH**

Khrushchev’s five-hour long indictment of Stalin, delivered to a closed session of the XX CPSU Congress on the night of 24 February 1956, was one of the pivotal moments in Soviet history. Furthermore, it was undoubtedly one of the most significant factors underpinning protest and criticism throughout the entire post-Stalin era. Many dissenters of even much later periods have cited the speech as a key turning point in their attitude toward the regime.<sup>53</sup>

With the exception of the riots that flared in Tbilisi on 8 and 9 March 1956, however, the exposure of Stalin’s crimes did not provoke an immediately volatile response. What one can see on reading accounts of individuals’ immediate responses to the Secret Speech is that the general reaction was one of shock and stunned silence rather than anger.<sup>54</sup> Although it is undoubtedly true to assert that the Secret Speech often prompted re-evaluations of the regime that remained at a very personal level, there is also considerable evidence to suggest that, in fact, it sparked a revival of enthusiasm for the communist project, especially among young people and members of the intelligentsia.

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<sup>53</sup> Examples of this include Petr Grigorenko and Leonid Plyushch. See P. Grigorenko, *Memoirs*, New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1982, p.222 and L.Plyushch, *History’s Carnival: A Dissident’s Autobiography*, London: Harvill Press, 1979, p. 12.

<sup>54</sup> See for example L. Lur’e and I. Malyarova eds, *1956 god. Seredina veka*, Sankt-Peterburg: Neva, 2007.

Fedor Burlatsky, for example, described a ‘rush of young blood’ into the Party around this time and a heightened sense of idealism among young people in particular.<sup>55</sup> Burlatsky himself was no ‘ordinary’ chronicler of this surge of idealistic youth but, as a high-ranking representative of what could be termed the Communist Party’s liberal wing, he was directly involved in it. Nonetheless, other recollections from the time support his assertion. Revolt Pimenov, for example, wrote in his memoirs that, upon hearing of Khrushchev’s speech in March 1956, he began to consider joining the Communist Party.<sup>56</sup> Raisa Orlova described the atmosphere of the post-congress period as ‘echoing the mass-meeting type of democracy’ that had followed October 1917.<sup>57</sup> It is worth pointing out, however, that Orlova was not born until 1918, suggesting that her conception of events in 1917 may have been heavily shaped by subsequent state propaganda. Nonetheless, this does not detract from the broad theme of Orlova’s assertion; that the Secret Speech roused great enthusiasm and, as some commentators have argued, a sense of spiritual and moral renewal, particularly among the intelligentsia.<sup>58</sup>

### **1.2.1 DISCUSSIONS OF THE SECRET SPEECH**

This atmosphere of ‘renewal’ or ‘re-awakening’ produced a burgeoning sense of communist utopianism which raised hopes and expectations that subsequently proved incompatible with the regime’s intentions. Often, though not always, emerging within

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<sup>55</sup> F. Burlatsky, *Khrushchev and the First Russian Spring: The Era of Khrushchev Through the Eyes of his Adviser*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1991, p. 13.

<sup>56</sup> R. Pimenov, *Vospominaniya*, Moskva: Informatsionno-ekspertnaya gruppa ‘Panorama’, 1996. Pimenov was soon to become the founder of one of the period’s most notable underground groups, discussed later in the present chapter, and remained one of the regime’s most enduring critics for many years. In 1990 he was elected to the Congress of Peoples’ Deputies.

<sup>57</sup> R. Orlova, *An End to Silence: Memoirs*, New York: Random House, 1983, p. 112.

<sup>58</sup> See, for example, F. Barghoorn, *Détente and the Democratic Movement in the USSR*, London: Collier Macmillan, 1976, p. 11 and C. Gerstenmaier, *The Voices of the Silent*, New York: Hart Publishing Company, 1972, p. 42.

the ranks of the Party and *Komsomol*, it is from this point that one can begin to discern a quite clear strand of ‘intelligentsia dissent’ developing in addition to the kinds of spontaneous and crude worker dissent that had existed under Stalin. What generally began as honest and essentially loyal criticism directed at specific flaws was consistently frustrated, suppressed and punished by the authorities, eventually leading to far more fundamental critiques of the wider system.

Overlaying this theme of enthusiasm for the communist project was a general atmosphere of confusion, referred to by Michael Scammell as a ‘chasm of uncertainty’.<sup>59</sup> It was made clear not just by the Speech but also by articles in the national and regional press that the official approach to Stalin had changed, yet initially there was little indication as to exactly where the new boundaries of acceptable and unacceptable comment and behaviour lay.<sup>60</sup> This prompted numerous misjudgements on the part of individuals as to what constituted permissible behaviour in the wake of Khrushchev’s revelations. Consequently, many citizens unwittingly overstepped this boundary in the weeks and months that followed the XX Party Congress.

One of the most useful testimonies to this atmosphere of uncertainty and loyal questioning could be seen in a memorandum sent to the General Department of the Central Committee from the Department of Party Organs, which provided a summary of questions that had been submitted at the thousands of meetings held all across the

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<sup>59</sup> M. Scammell, *Solzhenitsyn: A Biography*, New York: WW Norton and Company, 1984, p. 404.

<sup>60</sup> Probably the most widely circulated of these articles was ‘Why the Cult of the Individual is Alien to the Spirit of Marxism-Leninism’, *Pravda*, 28 March 1956. Among other things, the article stated that Stalin had encouraged, rather than prevented, glorification of himself and referred to ‘grave errors’ that had resulted from his cult.

USSR to discuss the Secret Speech.<sup>61</sup> The three most common questions it listed were: ‘why was Khrushchev’s report so limited in its contents?’, ‘why was there no self-criticism or open discussion of the report?’ and ‘what guarantees are there that there will not be another cult?’ Among other frequently asked questions were: ‘are not other Presidium members also guilty? They must have known (what was happening) but will not admit it’, ‘is there not a cult around Lenin too?’ and ‘how could the newspapers lie for so long and now change so easily?’<sup>62</sup> These were exactly the kind of questions that members of the leadership had hoped would not be raised as a result of Khrushchev’s report.

These discussions of the Secret Speech witnessed a wave of critical questioning and comment on a scale that had not been seen for many years. In both the Party and the *Komsomol* there were sharp attacks on individual leaders and on the climate of subservience that had developed in the country. Anastas Mikoyan, for example, was labelled a hypocrite after people compared his fawning remarks on Stalin at the XIX CPSU Congress (1952) with his criticism of him at the XX CPSU Congress in 1956.<sup>63</sup> At Moscow State University (MGU), a student meeting demanded that the *Komsomol* be freed from the corrupting influence of Communist Party control.<sup>64</sup> Nonetheless, the legitimacy of the regime and the ideology on which it was based appears to have remained largely unchallenged at this time and the majority of those who made

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<sup>61</sup> These meetings primarily involved CPSU and *Komsomol* members but some non-communists were able to attend in many places.

<sup>62</sup> RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 139, l. 5.

<sup>63</sup> See A. Pyzhikov, *Opyt modernizatsiya Sovetskogo obshchestva v 1953-1964 godakh: obshchestvenno-politicheskii aspekt*, Moskva: Izdatel’skii dom Gamma, 1998, p57. Although not on the scale of Khrushchev’s revelations in the Secret Speech, Mikoyan too had been mildly critical of Stalin during his own speech to the congress.

<sup>64</sup> L. Silina, *Nastroeniya sovetskogo studenchestva 1945-1964*, Moskva: Russkii mir, 2004, p. 108.

critical remarks were actually idealistic communists hoping for improvements in the system.

Karl Aimermakher's collected volume of official documents relating to the Secret Speech shows that critical remarks occurred in every union republic.<sup>65</sup> Similarly, Boris Firsov has stated that by 26 August – almost exactly six months after the end of the XX CPSU Congress – the Central Committee had received over 2,000 letters regarding the Secret Speech, over 200 of which demanded that Stalin be removed from the mausoleum that he shared with Lenin on Red Square.<sup>66</sup> In this connection it is important to point out that questioning and criticism do not appear to have spread to Lenin in any noticeable way. In fact the recurring theme of letters demanding Stalin's removal from the mausoleum on Red Square was that Lenin should no longer have to suffer the presence of Stalin.<sup>67</sup> As Igor Volgin recalled of the time: 'all of my generation of students were anti-Stalinists, but they were not anti-Soviet'.<sup>68</sup>

It is worthwhile to pause and consider briefly the sources on which our understanding of events at this time is based. In the period that followed the XX Party Congress the most sizeable body of evidence on dissenting responses to the Secret Speech is to be found in reports filed by Party and *Komsomol* branches. One must, therefore, be aware that such reports may not necessarily reflect the responses of people who were not members of those two bodies. However, there is nothing in the primary or secondary literature on the period to suggest that there was any notable trend of

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<sup>65</sup> See K. Aimermakher, et al, eds. *Doklad N.S. Khrushcheva o kul'te lichnosti Stalina na XX s'ezde KPSS: Dokumenty*, Moskva: Rosspen, 2002.

<sup>66</sup> B. Firsov, *Raznomyslie v SSSR 1940-1960 gody: Istoriya, teoriya i praktika*, Sankt Peterburg: Izdatel'stvo Evropeiskogo universiteta v Sankt Peterburge, 2008, p. 258.

<sup>67</sup> Firsov, *Raznomyslie v SSSR*, p. 258.

<sup>68</sup> Interview with Igor Volgin in L. Polikovskaya, '*My predchuvstvie...predtecha*': *ploshchad Mayakovskogo 1958-1965*, Moskva: Obshchestvo 'Memorial', 1997, p. 44.

different responses to the Secret Speech on the part of communists and non-communists. With CPSU and *Komsomol* members attending official meetings held to discuss the Speech, it was surely they that knew most about its content and were therefore most likely to provide the first wave of responses. It is also important to remember that Khrushchev's 'revelations' about the Stalin era had focused primarily upon the sufferings inflicted upon members of the Communist Party rather than the country as a whole.

The sense of confusion and frustration that the Secret Speech triggered was exacerbated by Khrushchev's infrequent backtracking on the Stalin question. This can be seen in a letter sent to the Central Committee Presidium by M. Petrygin of Tuaps after Khrushchev had spoken about Stalin in glowing terms at the Chinese embassy in January 1957. The letter began sarcastically: 'Dear Comrades! It appears that there are two Khrushchevs: one who defends Stalin and one who attacks him'. Petrygin went on to ask, 'Who can believe in a Party that so naively explains the criminal activities of Stalin?' He then claimed that Khrushchev's speeches were 'causing disorder in our minds and creating uncertainty about whether the consequences of the cult will be overcome'. Tellingly, Petrygin ended the letter by saying 'sorry for being so direct but I think that this is the best way'.<sup>69</sup> The pointed but ultimately respectful tone of these remarks was characteristic of most criticism at that time and, as with many other examples, it represented something akin to loyal

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<sup>69</sup> RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 189, ll. 29-32. At the Chinese embassy Khrushchev had declared that being a communist was inseparable from being a Stalinist and stated: 'may god grant that every communist will be able to fight for the interests of the working class as Stalin fought'. Khrushchev had also spoken positively about Stalin at an official function to celebrate New Year's Eve a few weeks earlier when he had declared that he and all his colleagues were Stalinists in their uncompromising fight against the class enemy. In regard to both of these instances see W. Taubman, *Khrushchev: The Man and His Era*, p. 301.

criticism that, nonetheless, went some way beyond what the authorities considered permissible.

### ***1.2.2 THE THERMO-TECHNICAL INSTITUTE***

Probably the best example that combined these themes of uncertainty and essentially loyal criticism can be seen in the events at the meeting held to discuss the Secret Speech at Moscow's Thermo-Technical Institute.<sup>70</sup> Upon being requested to arrange a meeting of the Party cell for a discussion of the XX Congress' report on Stalin, Yuri Orlov and three colleagues (R.G. Arvalov, V.E. Nesterov and G.I. Shedrin) took it upon themselves to give their honest and complete opinions on the matters that Khrushchev had addressed.

In his own remarks, Orlov spoke of a prevailing sense of moral decay within the Party and society at large. He argued that, contrary to official pronouncements, Marxism-Leninism was not truly scientific and stated the need for greater democratisation in order to protect against further abuses of power in the future. Orlov then claimed that people at every level of society were still forced to compromise their moral conscience and to 'hold their fingers in the wind' in order to judge the atmosphere and adjust their behaviour to potentially dangerous changes in the political sphere.<sup>71</sup> His three colleagues gave broadly analogous and strident opinions on Stalin and the present state of the Soviet Union, with one member, Arvalov, even going so far as to

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<sup>70</sup> At the time this was the second most prestigious scientific institute in the USSR and the Party cell was attached to the Soviet Academy of Sciences. The only institute that could claim seniority was the Institute of Theoretical and Experimental Physics (ITEP), headed by the pioneer of the Soviet atom bomb, Igor Kurchatov.

<sup>71</sup> Interview with Yuri Orlov, Ithaca, December 2006.

insist that the working classes ought to be armed in order to protect against the regime's more authoritarian tendencies in the future.<sup>72</sup>

The fact that Orlov later went on to play a major role in the establishment of the Soviet chapter of Amnesty International in 1973 and subsequently founded the Moscow Helsinki Watch Committee in 1976 (arguably the most important of all the dissident organisations) makes the event significant as the point of his own break with the regime but does not necessarily indicate that he was one of its opponents. In fact, as he himself pointed out fifty years later: 'it would probably look good for me now to say that I really was an anti-communist but that is not true at all. I was still very much a communist then'.<sup>73</sup> When the head of the institute, Abram Alikhanov, informed the quartet that he had been ordered to fire them he said 'you are either heroes or fools for what you did'. When questioned whether heroism or foolishness had prompted their actions, Orlov conceded candidly that both had probably played a role.<sup>74</sup>

There were a few noteworthy consequences of the meeting at the Thermo-Technical Institute. Firstly, a motion put forward to condemn the quartet's remarks as having been immature and mistaken received very little support within the Party cell. The majority of those present chose to abstain or to reject the proposal. Secondly, aggrieved at the way the quartet had been treated, a number of fellow scientists from around the USSR collaborated in donating money to support the dismissed physicists until they were able to find work. The third notable consequence was that, after the four were attacked in the media, their case became known nationally and inspired considerable sympathy, in later years being cited as an inspiration by various

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<sup>72</sup> RGANI, f. 3, op. 14, d. 13, l. 78.

<sup>73</sup> Interview with Yuri Orlov, Ithaca, December 2006.

<sup>74</sup> Interview with Yuri Orlov, Ithaca, December 2006.

subsequent dissenters.<sup>75</sup> Unable to find scientific work any closer than Yerevan, Orlov arrived in Armenia a year later to discover that many people there were immediately well disposed toward him as a result of the media attack on the group.<sup>76</sup> One need only to contrast this state of affairs with stories from the Stalin era where people did not dare to speak of long-standing friends or even family members who had been taken away by the security organs.<sup>77</sup>

Perhaps the most important and enduring factor that proved tangential to the events of the XX Congress was the realisation that it had become increasingly possible to give an honest and critical opinion about the political situation without ultimately risking personal disaster. The Secret Speech gave final confirmation of a trend that was already becoming evident: that the price to be paid for criticism had lowered sufficiently that it need not be entirely prohibitive for those who might anticipate the consequences of their behaviour. As Moshe Lewin has written: ‘When in 1956, Nikita Khrushchev launched his sensational attack on Stalin at the Twentieth Party Congress, Soviet society, and especially the intelligentsia, understood that the days of Stalinist show trials and arbitrary arrests and executions had gone for good’.<sup>78</sup> Responses to dissent could still be harsh but not on the same scale as before.

What this meant was that protest and criticism were no longer the preserve of those who acted impulsively or without consideration of the potential consequences. However, in regard to Lewin’s assertion, it is worth adding the caveat that Stalinism

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<sup>75</sup> In conversation, Orlov stated that Petr Grigorenko had been one such individual. The memoirs of Revolt Pimenov show him to have been similarly influenced by Orlov’s speech. See Pimenov, *Vospominaniya*.

<sup>76</sup> Interview with Yuri Orlov, Ithaca, December 2006.

<sup>77</sup> See, for example, A. Applebaum, *Gulag: A History of the Soviet Camps*, London: Allen Lane, 2003 and O.Figes, *The Whisperers: Private Life in Stalin’s Russia*, London: Allen Lane, 2007.

<sup>78</sup> M. Lewin, *The Soviet Century*, London: Verso, 2005, p. 156.

had left a deep and lasting impression on many. Young people would probably have found it much easier to accept that show trials and arbitrary arrests had ended than would many people old enough to have been touched by those events or even to remember them.

This decline in fear of the authorities could also be seen in people's attitudes toward dissenters around this time. It has already been mentioned, for example, that Yuri Orlov received financial assistance from fellow scientists and found that his criticism of the regime had granted him a considerable degree of credibility in Armenia. Similarly, recalling his father Petr's break with the regime (of which he had previously been a particularly committed adherent) after making a speech critical of Khrushchev at a Moscow Party congress in 1962, Andrei Grigorenko said that 'yes, a few people began to avoid us after that but we also made new acquaintances because of it. I think maybe our social circle actually grew overall'.<sup>79</sup> Vladimir Shlapentokh also claimed that '...if publicly a majority of Soviet people continued to behave toward heretics in almost the same way as they had under Stalin, their private behaviour was very different. Unlike in the past, a significant number of people defied the authorities and continued to entertain relations with people denounced as foes of the Soviet system'.<sup>80</sup>

This appears to have been a time when many of the regime's critics could potentially have been 'brought back into the fold' but were not. As Boris Firsov has argued: 'it was at this stage that the regime chose not to enter into a dialogue with its critics and

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<sup>79</sup> Interview with Andrei Grigorenko, New York, October 2006.

<sup>80</sup> V. Shlapentokh, *Public and Private Life of the Soviet People: Changing Values in Post-Stalin Russia*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989, p. 123.

passed up the historical chance to stabilise the developing crisis'.<sup>81</sup> Instead, the regime only compounded many critics' frustrations over the following weeks and months. Already both sides of the regime-dissenter confrontation that would persist for much of the next three decades were beginning to take shape. What one can see from this time onward are the early stages of a process whereby loyal criticism began to shift toward cynicism and outright rejection of the regime, partly because of the ongoing personal 're-evaluations' and partly because of the way that the authorities ostracised those who had engaged in even relatively mild criticism.

### **1.2.3 MARXISM-LENINISM**

Not all of those who undertook dissenting activities in the wake of the Secret Speech attempted to do so in a constructive and loyal manner, however. In Arkhangel' *oblast'*, for example, Boris Generozov was arrested in April 1956 after producing six political leaflets and reading them to fellow workers at a forestry enterprise. Included in Generozov's leaflets were the following statements:

***The Stalinist Communist Party has nothing to do with Lenin's Party. It is now criminal and against the people. The Party hides Stalin's crimes from the country and is now run by cowards and degenerates. The Soviets and Trade Unions are used only to terrorise the people.***

***Do the people need such a Party? Or a Party at all? No! It is not needed!***

***All of the country is striving for communism, we do not need exploiters. The Party is not creating the conditions for this transition.***

***Is it possible to believe in this government? No! Never!***

***For three years the Party has hidden Stalin's crimes and now exposes them only because they are under pressure from public opinion.***<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Firsov, *Raznomyslie v SSSR*, p. 263.

<sup>82</sup> GARF, f. 8131, op. 31, d. 83224, ll. 1-12.

Generozov was certainly not alone in viewing the Secret Speech as little more than eyewash. Leningrad geo-physicist N.N. Smirnov was one of many who wrote to the Central Committee demanding that Stalin's crimes be examined and exposed in a more rigorous and open fashion with punishment for those around him who were found to be responsible. Smirnov was subsequently confined to a psychiatric hospital as a result of his letter.

Although a far more bitter attack on the authorities than previous examples cited in this work, it is again possible to see clearly that the ideological basis of Generozov's comments remained within a fundamentally Marxist-Leninist structure. Whether this trend existed primarily because years of Stalin-imposed isolation left the Soviet people with little capacity to envisage alternative political philosophies, as Jochen Hellbeck has suggested, or whether genuine communist utopianism had been re-ignited by Khrushchev is impossible to state definitively.<sup>83</sup> A broad range of contemporary and secondary sources do suggest that there was a renewed sense of communist idealism around this time, yet it was also the case that as the isolation of the Stalin years receded further into the past, fervent communist faith also seems to have declined and new political belief systems accordingly arose. However, these two arguments – that Marxist-Leninist ideology predominated because people were genuinely enthused about communism at the time or because competing ideologies had been so successfully wiped from the popular mindset by years of Stalinist isolation and indoctrination – are by no means mutually exclusive and the two may even have exacerbated one another.

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<sup>83</sup> See J. Hellbeck, *Revolution on my Mind: Writing a Diary Under Stalin*, London: Harvard University Press, 2006.

It seems that Khrushchev's revelations about Stalin did not fatally undermine the regime but did impact significantly upon the relationship between state and society. Many of those who later became critics and enemies of the Soviet regime became alienated from it largely because the promises that the XX Party Congress seemed to offer were not carried out. One can see this in a large numbers of speeches, leaflets and letters that condemned the authorities for 'betraying the spirit of the XX Congress'. Additionally, the Secret Speech facilitated the voicing of discontent and disagreement by demonstrating that criticism and protest no longer cost as high a price as previously and by decisively undermining the regime's claim to political infallibility.

#### ***1.2.4 PRO-STALIN DISSENT***

One also encounters a sharply contrasting theme of dissenting behaviour resulting from the attack on the 'Cult of Personality': that of protest and criticism on the grounds of defending Stalin. The mass disorders in Georgia on 8 and 9 March 1956 were the most famous instance of pro-Stalin dissent yet their origins remain somewhat unclear. Kozlov has suggested that they were essentially a Georgian nationalist phenomenon, while Jeremy Smith has argued that they genuinely were motivated by support for Stalin.<sup>84</sup> Events in Tbilisi are discussed at greater length in chapter 3, though it is worthwhile to point out here that there appears to be no evidence that communism as an ideology was the target of protesters' criticism.

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<sup>84</sup> See V. Kozlov, *Mass Uprisings in the USSR: Protest and Rebellion in the Post-Stalin Years*, London: M.E. Sharpe, 2002 and J. Smith, *Beria, Stalin, Khrushchev and Georgian Nationalism: The March 1956 Tbilisi Events in Context*, Unpublished conference paper presented to September 2008 Manchester University Workshop on Networks and Hierarchies in the Soviet Provinces.

As the period progressed, two reasonably distinct trends of pro-Stalin dissent could be witnessed. The first was driven by genuine support for Stalin and Stalinism while the second was employed primarily as a means of attacking Khrushchev because Stalin was seen as his enemy. The first trend was particularly notable after the Secret Speech but also in the wake of the June 1957 expulsion of the ‘anti-Party group’ that saw prominent arch-Stalinists such as Vyacheslav Molotov and Lazar Kaganovich removed from the leadership and disgraced. The subsequent renaming of enterprises and towns that had been named in their honour also saw sporadic outbursts of dissent.<sup>85</sup> In such instances Khrushchev was often attacked as a liar and a usurper who was fraudulently seeking to establish his own authority at the expense of Stalin’s reputation, and he was accused of weakening the state and causing living standards to plummet. One example of this could be seen in the case of N.N. Sitnikov (a CPSU member) who was jailed after sending six anonymous letters to the Central Committee in which he branded party policy as anti-Leninist and expressed vigorous opposition to the removal of the anti-Party group.<sup>86</sup>

Interestingly, there were relatively few prosecutions under article 58-10 for behaviour that could be categorised as pro-Stalin political dissent, suggesting that it was either rare in occurrence or was less likely to draw a punitive response than were other themes of dissenting activity. The two were not necessarily exclusive of one another yet the likelihood seems to be that in the ranks of the security organs at least, there may well have been a tendency toward indulging those who engaged in pro-Stalin protest and dissent provided that matters did not get out of hand as they clearly had

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<sup>85</sup> See, for example, E. Kulavig, *Dissent in the Years of Khrushchev: Nine Stories About Disobedient Russians*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002.

<sup>86</sup> GARF, f. 8131, op. 31, d. 80699, ll. 1-4.

done in Georgia. Khrushchev's attack on Stalin had, after all, brought great shame upon the security organs too for their part in the mass repressions.<sup>87</sup>

Evidently, the Secret Speech produced a complex web of dissenting responses; some that were strongly pro-Stalin, but more that were strongly anti-Stalin. What unified most of them was the absence of genuine opposition toward the communist regime as a whole. The Secret Speech's immediate impact was to cause widespread criticism of the authorities yet this did not truly threaten to go beyond the regime's control. In many ways the Secret Speech should be viewed as the beginning of a much longer process in terms of dissenting behaviour. It not only became clear that it was possible to dissent and survive but also roused hopes of liberalisation that were not to be fulfilled.

### **1.3 AMNESTIES AND PRISONERS**

One of the major consequences of Khrushchev's attack on Stalin was that it gave the final impetus toward the mass release, and sometimes rehabilitation, of those who remained confined in the *Gulag*. The process had already begun soon after Stalin's death but up to 1956 had proceeded in a stuttering and largely unenthusiastic fashion, apparently often hindered by uncooperative camp bosses and the security organs.<sup>88</sup> The camp network was by no means completely disbanded in the wake of the Secret Speech and most who had been sentenced under political articles were actually not included in the amnesties of 1956. The sheer volume of prisoners flowing out of the

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<sup>87</sup> See J. Elkner, 'The Changing Face of Repression Under Khrushchev' in M. Ilic and J. Smith eds, *Soviet State and Society Under Nikita Khrushchev*, London, Routledge, forthcoming (2009).

<sup>88</sup> See N. Adler, *Trudnoe vozvrashchenie: sud'by sovetskikh politzheklyuchennykh v 1950-1990 gody*, Moskva: Izdatel'stvo 'Zven'ya', 2005.

*Gulag* and back into society nonetheless made this a highly significant step in regard to practically all aspects of Soviet life, not least in terms of dissent.

### **1.3.1 RELEASED PRISONERS**

The effect that these prisoner releases had upon dissenting activity was rather complicated. As Miriam Dobson has shown, there were numerous instances in 1953 when former prisoners wrote anti-Soviet leaflets and engaged in political outbursts, apparently with the sole intention of being sent back into the camp network as a result of their limited prospects on the outside.<sup>89</sup> Much the same thing happened in the amnesties that followed the Secret Speech, with many of those who were sentenced under article 58-10 around this time having been apprehended as a result of making hostile political statements at train stations or on trains shortly after being released. Whether these people had the direct intention of being returned to camps is unclear, though the similarities with cases presented by Dobson are striking at times.

One example of this type of behaviour can be seen in the case of the Ukrainian P.N. Sobolev of Kirovskaya *oblast'* who was sentenced in January 1957 after making what his case file referred to only as 'anti-Soviet remarks' on a train to Perm after being released from camp.<sup>90</sup> Similarly, in March 1957 the just-released prisoners I.A. Bodinkov and S.A. Kuznetsov were both sentenced under article 58-10 on the same day in different parts of the country: the former after making threats against

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<sup>89</sup> M. Dobson, 'Show the Bandit Enemies no Mercy!: Amnesty, Criminality and Public Response in 1953', in Jones ed., *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization*.

<sup>90</sup> GARF, f.8131, op. 31, d. 81493, l. 1.

communists and approving of life in the US; the latter after engaging in what the KGB investigation only referred to as ‘anti-Soviet hooligan behaviour’ at a train station.<sup>91</sup>

In the light of such oblique terminology as that referred to above, it is important to consider the nature of the KGB evidence on which a large part of this study is based. Firstly, the timing of the above-cited cases is important, coming as they did during a major crackdown on dissent (see chapter 2). Although disconcertingly vague, terms such as ‘anti-Soviet hooligan behaviour’ did not necessarily imply groundless persecution. What they usually involved were drunken outbursts and threats against members of the regime or individual communists along with other politically indiscreet remarks. In instances such as those above one usually finds citations from a handful of witness testimonies in the investigation protocol and often some acknowledgement of repentance on the part of the accused. While in themselves not completely indefatigable evidence, these do allow us to place some confidence in the basic facts presented by KGB investigations.

One example of a released prisoner left deeply politicised by his time in the *Gulag* was the Georgian Kh.A. Asadulin, who had been sentenced for ‘betrayal of the motherland’ in 1945 and released in February 1955. Between that time and his arrest in 1960, Asadulin produced over 10,000 anti-Soviet leaflets that were distributed in Baku, Tbilisi and Kirovabad. According to the KGB investigation protocol, the leaflets in question consisted of calls for citizens to struggle against the Soviet regime, slander of the CPSU’s domestic and foreign policy and praise for the American way

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<sup>91</sup> GARF, f. 8131, op. 31, d. 78019, ll. 1-4 and f. 8131, op. 31, d. 81617, ll. 1-7.

of life. Under interrogation Asadulin stated that he had decided to struggle against the regime whilst in prison and promptly did so upon his release.<sup>92</sup>

However, cases of persistent dissent among former prisoners appear to have been relatively few. It is, for example, a theme of Nanci Adler's work on returning prisoners that amnesty and rehabilitation effectively bought a prisoner's silence in most cases.<sup>93</sup> It is hard to say for certain whether similar acts of defiance actually took place among released prisoners on any kind of scale in the Stalin years or not, though one assumes that such behaviours would have been less common. Typically of worker dissent, what one finds is that although often quite extreme in tone, these outbursts were almost entirely ephemeral, with the individuals in question generally not undertaking these kinds of behaviours again.<sup>94</sup>

### ***1.3.2 THE INFLUENCE OF RETURNEES***

Arguably more enduring than the behaviour of released prisoners themselves was the impact that their suffering had upon the next generation. Like many others, Mikhail Aksenov (a Brezhnev era dissident) recalled that it was the influence of Gulag returnees that destroyed the last of his faith in the regime and eventually turned him into a dissident.<sup>95</sup> Vladimir Bukovsky too spoke at length about the influence that meeting released prisoners and hearing their stories had had upon his own attitude

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<sup>92</sup> RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 320, ll. 60-61.

<sup>93</sup> See N. Adler, *Life in the 'Big Zone': The Fate of Returnees in the Aftermath of Stalinist Repression*, *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 51, No. 1, January 1999, p. 15.

<sup>94</sup> We know this because procurator files on individuals not only contain one investigation but also include details of any other arrests and sentences against the same individual. While in theory this may only prove that they were not actually arrested for the same offence again it is also important to consider that with one political sentence already recorded, it is unlikely that such individuals would be treated with any leniency were the same matter to arise a second time.

<sup>95</sup> Interview with Aksenov in I. Kirk, *Profiles in Russian Resistance*, New York: Quadrangle, 1975, p. 209.

toward the regime.<sup>96</sup> This is not a theme that was often manifested in concrete dissenting activity, however, suggesting that it was a contributory factor toward developing a critical or oppositional mentality rather than a direct catalyst for action. Philip Boobbyer's assertion that 'existential questions often preceded political opposition in the evolution of dissident thought' surely has some resonance in this respect.<sup>97</sup> Clearly, there were also a great many people who encountered released prisoners without going on to engage in dissenting behaviour, suggesting that for the 'average' Soviet citizen (if such a thing can be said to have existed) this was not a subject that would turn them into active dissenters on its own.

This touches upon a rather fundamental question as to why some people engaged in dissenting behaviour and others remained passive in their disenchantment. There is probably some validity in pointing to personality characteristics as a factor that made certain individuals more inclined to rebel against authority yet this may not give the whole picture. For example, in regard to later years when riots and large demonstrations flared, one must surely also look to studies in social psychology on the way that people behave in large crowds. Similarly, with many people being jailed in the late 1950s on the basis of statements made whilst intoxicated, it is quite clear that there were important variables that should also be taken into account when one considers why people engaged in dissenting behaviour. It should be emphasised, however, that 'mob behaviour' and alcohol-related dissent are more closely linked to protest among workers than members of the intelligentsia, among whom it does seem that individual values and personality characteristics were the major driving forces behind acts of criticism and protest.

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<sup>96</sup> Interview with Vladimir Bukovsky, Cambridge, March 2007.

<sup>97</sup> P. Boobbyer, *Conscience, Dissent and Reform in Soviet Russia*, London: Routledge, 2005, p. 59.

It is also instructive to elucidate briefly some reasons why those with grievances against the authorities refrained from engaging in acts of protest and criticism. Vladimir Bukovsky cited a list of reasons that he heard from people for their continued passivity. These included the need to look after the interests of one's own family, belief that protest only played into the hands of hardliners within the regime, belief that protest could achieve nothing other than to incite trouble and that the only way to achieve change was from within the system, which firstly involved displaying outward loyalty.<sup>98</sup> Although all of these arguments probably had some degree of validity, it seems eminently sensible to suggest that the main cause for inactivity was simply fear, or what the dissident thinker Valentin Turchin labelled 'the inertia of fear'.<sup>99</sup> It is one of the central themes of this thesis that fear of the authorities declined markedly during the Khrushchev years but this in no way suggests that it disappeared entirely. On the contrary, fear seems to have remained a significant impulse in Soviet society throughout the Khrushchev era and beyond. Only a few years after the abuses of the Stalin years, this was entirely understandable. The difference was that people now had a better chance of calculating the consequences of their actions.

It has been suggested by some commentators that because many dissidents were close relatives of victims of the Stalin era, this must have been the key stimulus for their criticism of the authorities: an eminently logical conclusion.<sup>100</sup> The most commonly cited examples of this trend are the dissidents Roy and Zhores Medvedev, whose

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<sup>98</sup> V. Bukovsky, *To Build a Castle: My Life as a Dissenter*, London: Andre Deutsch, 1978, pp. 62-4.

<sup>99</sup> See V. Turchin, *The Inertia of Fear*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1980.

<sup>100</sup> See, for example, Shatz, *Soviet Dissent in Historical Perspective* and A. Rothberg, *The Heirs of Stalin: Dissidence and the Soviet Regime 1953-1970*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972.

father was repressed as an enemy of the people during the Great Terror.<sup>101</sup> However, Zhores Medvedev himself stated this was not the reason he found himself becoming a critic of the regime.<sup>102</sup> Aleksandr Esenin-Volpin lost a brother in the repressions of the late 1930s but did not see it as the cause of his own non-conformism, Boris Vail' did not meet his father until he was already a teenager because he was jailed before Vail' was even born, yet he too did not suggest this to have been a conscious motivation for his own political activity.<sup>103</sup>

While there may well have been a link between Stalin era repression and dissenting behaviour in a number of cases, it would appear that the grounds for such a causal relationship have been overstated. In fact, it does not seem improbable to suggest that the proportion of victims' relatives among dissident circles may not have been significantly different to the overall proportion of victims' relatives within society as a whole. While some dissenters were related to those who were persecuted in the Stalin era, there were also a considerable number of others, such as Andrei Sakharov, Vladimir Bukovsky, Yuri Orlov and Petr Grigorenko, who had little or no familial link to the mass repressions of the Stalin era.

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<sup>101</sup> See, for example, Barghoorn, *Détente and the Democratic Movement*; Z. Katz, *Soviet Dissenters and Social Structures in the USSR*, Massachusetts: Centre for International Studies, 1971.

<sup>102</sup> Interview with Zhores Medvedev, London, March 2007. Medvedev stated that, like a number of scientists, his own growing disenchantment with the regime was prompted by the continuing influence of the geneticist Trofim Lysenko. This is a theme that is raised in more detail in chapter 3.

<sup>103</sup> Interview with Aleksandr Esenin-Volpin, Revere, Massachusetts, November 2006. It seems fair to suggest that Volpin's own rejection of political conformity was rooted not in any specific event but at least partly in the contrarian nature of his personality. See, for example, B. Nathans, 'The Dictatorship of Reason: Aleksandr Vol'pin and the Idea of Rights Under "Developed Socialism"', *Slavic Review*, Vol. 66, No. 4, Winter 2007, pp. 630-663.

### 1.3.3 SERVING PRISONERS

It is also instructive to look at the kinds of dissenting behaviour that were taking place in the surviving camps and prisons around this time, not least because approximately ten per cent of those who were sentenced for anti-Soviet activity and propaganda during the early Khrushchev years were already serving prisoners. For the most part those serving prisoners who were sentenced under 58-10 were not originally 'politicals' but had been initially convicted, and in some cases repeatedly convicted, for 'criminal' acts such as theft, assault or worse.<sup>104</sup> The kinds of dissenting acts that these people generally engaged in were particularly unsophisticated and frequently represented little more than hooliganism or anti-state protest under a political façade: the most base form of worker dissent.

One example of this crude form of protest could be seen in the case of the Chuvash I.E. Kryshkin. Already serving a criminal sentence in Chelyabinsk *oblast'*, he was convicted in May 1957 under article 58-10 after being caught drawing swastikas on a wall in the camp compound.<sup>105</sup> Later that same month the Russian N.A. Saparov was re-sentenced in Kemerova *oblast'* as a result of writing anti-Soviet slogans on walls and on his own clothes which called for struggle against the regime.<sup>106</sup> Another case, from 1964, involving the prisoner V.A. Vasil'ev in the Mordova camp network, stated only that he had been sentenced for anti-Soviet activity after etching a 'politically

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<sup>104</sup> There were exceptions to this rule. One was Boris Vail', discussed later in the present chapter, who was re-sentenced after forming an underground group while serving a camp term for underground activity on the outside. See GARF, f. 8131, op. 31, d. 73957, l. 37 and B. Vail', *Osobo opasnyi*, London: Overseas Publications Interchange, 1980.

<sup>105</sup> GARF, f. 8131, op. 31, d. 80497, ll.1-2. In fact, swastikas were the most common item of camp graffiti according to Vladimir Kozlov. See Kozlov, *Neizvestnyi SSSR*, p. 119.

<sup>106</sup> GARF, f. 8131, op. 31, d. 83874, ll. 1-2.

offensive' tattoo across his own face.<sup>107</sup> The investigation protocol did not state exactly what Vasil'ev had inscribed on his face but Anatoly Marchenko's eyewitness account of the Khrushchev era camps cited some of the most common slogans of self-made tattoos as 'Khrushchev's whore' and 'Slave of the CPSU'.<sup>108</sup>

One of the most common themes of dissent among prisoners has been referred to as 'the enemy of my enemy is my friend'.<sup>109</sup> What this meant in this context was that anyone deemed to be an enemy of Khrushchev was liable to be championed by camp and prison inmates. One, therefore, encounters examples of figures such as Eisenhower, Kennedy, Hitler and Stalin all being hailed as hero figures among the camp population on the basis that they were seen as enemies of Khrushchev. Furthermore, one can also see that the corpus of those deemed to be enemies of Khrushchev kept pace with political developments. Members of the anti-Party group and later Mao Tse-tung came to feature prominently in such statements and graffiti for a time around their respective clashes with the ruling clique.<sup>110</sup>

At first glance the aim of these behaviours would appear to have been nothing more than to offend the political sensibilities of the Soviet authorities. Undoubtedly for some prisoners this was the primary reason for undertaking such forms of behaviour. In many cases these were people who essentially had nothing more to lose and nothing to gain from submission to the authorities. However, for others there was a more rational reason for these acts of self-mutilation and crude abuse of authority.

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<sup>107</sup> GARF, f. 8131, op. 36, d. 1015, ll. 1-3. This case file reveals that Vasil'ev was sentenced again for the same offence in 1966.

<sup>108</sup> A. Marchenko, *My Testimony*, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1969, p. 97.

<sup>109</sup> See Kozlov, *Neizvestnyi SSSR*, p. 119.

<sup>110</sup> See Kozlov, *Neizvestnyi SSSR*, p. 121.

Incorrectly believing rumours that political prisoners were held in better conditions and subject to lower work norms, many ‘criminals’ attempted to have themselves reclassified as ‘politicals’ by making anti-Soviet statements and drawing political slogans around the camp complex.<sup>111</sup> A 1958 Supreme Court resolution warned procurators that this was going on and that such individuals should no longer be classified as ‘anti-Soviet’.<sup>112</sup> From that point onwards the frequency with which one encounters serving prisoners among those convicted under article 58-10 drops markedly. This would suggest that in this case what we are observing is the masking or non-recording of this kind of dissent rather than genuinely low levels of political criticism among serving prisoners.

What one can see, therefore, is that people who were either released from the *Gulag* or who were serving terms in camps and prisons tended to engage in acts of protest that did not entail any prolonged or considered political criticism. They may well have considered themselves genuine opponents of the Soviet regime but it seems that in many cases their resistance to authority was not ideologically based but crude resentment of authority. Instances of protest and criticism among serving and released prisoners can mostly be considered in the same light as the kind of worker dissent that had existed for years and could be seen in various countries and contexts around the globe.<sup>113</sup>

It seems that the impact that released prisoners had upon young people and members of the intelligentsia was particularly important. Roy and Zhores Medvedev have

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<sup>111</sup> Marchenko, *My Testimony*, and GARF, f. 8131, op. 30, d. 5080, l. 8.

<sup>112</sup> GARF, f. 8131, op. 32, d. 5080, l. 33.

<sup>113</sup> See, for example, K. McDermott and M. Stibbe eds, *M. Revolution and Resistance in Eastern Europe: Challenges to Communist Rule*, Oxford: Berg, 2006.

argued that: ‘the mass rehabilitation of Stalin’s victims had an inestimable impact upon the psychological outlook of every thinking person in the Soviet Union’.<sup>114</sup> The Medvedev brothers most likely exaggerated in suggesting that ‘every’ thinking Soviet citizen was affected – one ought not to forget that the pair were outspoken critics of the regime – though it is quite clear that this was true of many people. Nonetheless, it was still a relatively small proportion of those ‘thinking people’ who went on to engage in overt acts of criticism and protest.

## **1.4 THE HUNGARIAN RISING**

As we have already seen, the Secret Speech gave rise to countless outbursts of criticism and pointed questions, particularly within the Party and *Komsomol*, but for the most part did not generate widespread and truly embittered dissenting behaviour. Within a few months, however, the ‘chasm of uncertainty’ that was opened up by the Speech had been closed and liberalisation stalled in the face of conservative resistance. As 1956 progressed, events in Hungary and to a lesser extent in Poland too, began to have a major impact upon dissent, particularly among those young people and members of the intelligentsia who had been enthused by the Secret Speech.

The feeling of hope and enthusiasm that had followed the Secret Speech contrasted sharply with the immediate and visceral anger with which many people reacted to the Soviet invasion of Hungary.<sup>115</sup> Even several decades later, in response to the question

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<sup>114</sup> R. Medvedev and Zh. Medvedev, *Khrushchev: The Years in Power*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1976, p. 20.

<sup>115</sup> See Lur’e and Malyarova eds, *1956 god*.

of whether they remembered the Hungarian rising, almost all of the attendees at the Mayakovsky Square poetry readings (see chapter 3) gave an emphatic ‘very clearly!’ and described the general sense of resentment that it had provoked in them.<sup>116</sup> As Vladimir Bukovsky recalled: ‘after all the exposures, denunciations and posthumous rehabilitations, after all the reassurances about the impossibility of repeating the past, we were now presented with corpses, tanks, brute force and lies all over again. Just one more convincing proof that nothing had changed at all’.<sup>117</sup> It is important to note that Bukovsky was one of the Soviet regime’s most strident critics, and, moreover, wrote his memoirs shortly after being sent directly from prison into exile, yet in this case his sentiments seem to have been widely shared among other dissenters in particular.

As with the events of the 1968 Prague Spring, many of those who fervently hoped for genuine liberalisation inside the USSR had viewed the developing reforms in Hungary with hope for the Soviet system. They believed that if some degree of flexibility and plurality had been proven successful elsewhere then the Soviet regime may eventually accept a similar scenario. With the Secret Speech only recently engendering a sense of optimism and ‘rebirth’, the brief process of liberalisation in Hungary during the summer and early autumn of 1956 can only have heightened this sense of optimism.

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<sup>116</sup> See Polikovskaya, ‘*My predchuvstvie...predtecha*’, p. 214. Discussed at more length in chapter 3, these were a series of unsanctioned poetry readings held in the centre of Moscow during the late 1950s and early 1960s.

<sup>117</sup> Bukovsky, *To Build a Castle*, p. 89.

### ***1.4.1 STUDENT PROTEST***

Cornelia Gerstenmaier has given some insight into the volume of critical remarks among young people on this theme by stating that in Leningrad alone the *Komsomol* recommended that over 4,000 students be expelled from high school on the basis of comments made in relation to the Soviet invasion of Hungary.<sup>118</sup> Among those who found themselves reprimanded at school – in Moscow rather than Leningrad – after talking about events in Hungary were Eduard Kuznetsov and Viktor Khaustov, both of whom were later involved in the dissident movement for many years.<sup>119</sup> However, among high school students it seems that one could expect to find that, in fact, many did not possess strong opinions on the invasion of Hungary and had unknowingly transgressed the borders of acceptable behaviour in a relatively innocent fashion.

A *Daily Mail* report from 5 December 1956 gave further details, claiming that over 1,000 students had been expelled from Moscow State University alone on the basis of criticism and demonstrations against the regime, most of them in the earliest days of the Hungarian rising.<sup>120</sup> Unfortunately neither Gerstenmaier nor the *Daily Mail* report have provided any kind of verifiable evidence in regard to their respective figures, meaning that they ought to be regarded with a considerable degree of caution. Nonetheless, these numbers do not seem at all implausible.

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<sup>118</sup> Gerstenmaier, *The Voices of the Silent*, p. 92.

<sup>119</sup> Interview with Eduard Kuznetsov in Polikovskaya, *My predchuvstvie...predtecha*, p. 214.

<sup>120</sup> *Daily Mail*, 5 December 1956. Although the *Daily Mail* report failed to provide any kind of verifiable source for this figure, there undoubtedly was a purge of 'unreliable elements' taking place across the Soviet higher education system (both staff and students) at this time. See G. Kuzovkin, 'Partiino-Komsomol'skie presledovaniya po politicheskim motivam v period rannei 'ottepel'', in L. Eremina and E. Zhemkova eds, *Korni Travy: Sbornik statei molodykh istorikov*, Moskva: Zven'ya, 1996.

Collective student and youth protests sporadically flared for a time in late 1956 at a number of universities including Moscow State University, Leningrad State University, Gorky University, Sverdlovsk University, Kuibyshev University and elsewhere.<sup>121</sup> In Yaroslavl riot police had to be drafted in to disperse protesters before order was fully restored and there were also cases of Polish and Hungarian students in Moscow, Kiev and Leningrad banding together and forming groups to agitate amongst Russian students in an attempt to stir up further protests.<sup>122</sup> With newspapers from People's Democracies including Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Poland having recently gone on sale in a number of major Soviet cities, it became possible to find less heavily censored information on events in Hungary. The Soviet authorities were therefore faced with one of the first major breaches in their monopoly of information on the outside world – a key factor in the evolution of dissent throughout the entire post-Stalin period.

A meeting at the USSR Ministry of Internal Affairs club that subsequently aroused the interest of the KGB had seen students of the Moscow State Historical Archive Institute raise toasts to the Polish and Hungarian revolutions and to the 'impending fourth Russian revolution'.<sup>123</sup> According to Erik Kulavig, KGB monitoring of the Nobel Prize winning physicist Lev Landau – who had even been willing to incur the wrath of Stalin by refusing to work on military projects – showed that he had openly supported the Hungarian rising and branded the CPSU 'fascists' on the basis of Soviet

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<sup>121</sup> M. Kramer, 'The Soviet Union and the 1956 Crises in Hungary and Poland: Reassessments and New Findings', *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 33, No. 2, April 1998, p. 196. In addition to the institutes listed above, Kramer also cited protests at the Ural Pedagogical Institute, Moscow Aviation-Technical Institute, Potemkin State Pedagogical Institute, Herzen Pedagogical Institute, the Bashkirian Pedagogical Institute and Smolensk Pedagogical Institute. It is entirely unclear why so many of the universities that witnessed disturbances were pedagogical institutes.

<sup>122</sup> See Kramer, 'The Soviet Union and the 1956 Crises in Hungary and Poland', p. 196.

<sup>123</sup> Iu. Aksiutin, 'Popular Responses to Khrushchev', in W. Taubman, S. Khrushchev, A. Gleason eds., *Nikita Khrushchev*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000, p. 193.

intervention there. In private conversations recorded by the KGB Landau was reported to have said that 'our people are literally waist-deep in blood. What the Hungarians have done is a magnificent achievement. They are the first to have dealt a blow to the Jesuitical ideas of our time. And what a blow.'<sup>124</sup>

There were also numerous protest activities around the 7 November 1956 Revolution Day holiday. One example included several Leningrad University students joining the main rally in the city and shouting anti-Khrushchev slogans and declaring their opposition to the Soviet action in Budapest.<sup>125</sup> In Yaroslavl the student Vitaly Lazaryants and two friends interrupted the parade there by marching toward the tribune with a banner demanding the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Hungary.<sup>126</sup> On 4 November two sculptures of Stalin were vandalised at a park in Kherson and in Sebastopol 14 posters of Party and government leaders were vandalized. In addition, a total of over 1,000 anti-Soviet leaflets were distributed in the street or dropped from hot air balloons in regions including Leningrad, Transcarpathian *oblast'*, Barnaul and Riga.<sup>127</sup> The focus of protest and criticism continued to be restricted to specific events, individuals and policies rather than the regime as a whole.

It seems extremely doubtful that Lazaryants or the Leningrad students would have behaved the way they did on Revolution Day if the same situation had presented itself five years earlier, while Stalin was alive. Similarly, a dozen years later the Soviet-led invasion of Czechoslovakia also provoked consternation in parts of society but led to only one especially notable instance of public protest that has come to light – the

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<sup>124</sup> Kulavig, *Dissent in the Years of Khrushchev*, p. 103. Lev Landau was awarded the Nobel Prize for Physics in 1962.

<sup>125</sup> GARF, f. 8131, op. 31, d. 89522, ll. 1-4.

<sup>126</sup> GARF, f. A-461, op. 2, d. 10996, l. 17.

<sup>127</sup> RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 141, ll. 54-56.

famous 'demonstration on Red Square'.<sup>128</sup> One can point to a whole range of reasons why things were different in late 1956 but two factors stand out most of all. Firstly, the reaction to events in Hungary was all the more impassioned because it dashed hopes that had recently been raised by the Secret Speech. Secondly, the new relationship between the state and society was not yet fully settled by 1956. Fear, and perhaps also respect, had diminished but this had not yet been compensated by the relative material prosperity and deeply embedded social control mechanisms that existed in the Brezhnev years.

#### ***1.4.2 OPEN CRITICISM WITHIN THE CPSU***

It was also around this time that the Communist Party witnessed some of the last notable stirrings of open dissent within its ranks before iron discipline and conformity were restored among Party members for most of the next three decades. The specific catalyst for this spate of strident criticism within the Party was, ironically, a letter sent out to Party organisations that signalled the beginning of a crackdown on dissenters that had been prompted by events in Hungary.

At a Party meeting in Cherkasskaya *oblast'* for example, candidate CPSU member A.I. Zem'sha declared that the CPSU was 'no longer a party of communists but one of fascists' – for which he was subsequently jailed.<sup>129</sup> A report filed by the head of the RSFSR Department of Party Organs, V. M. Churaev, on 21 February 1957 outlined a

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<sup>128</sup> On 25 August 1968 a group of eight dissenters (Larisa Bogoraz, Konstantin Babitskii, Tat'yana Baeva, Vadim Delaunay, Vladimir Dremlyuga, Viktor Fainberg, Natal'ya Gorbanevskaya and Pavel Litvinov) gathered at the Kremlin's Spassky Gate and unfurled banners protesting the invasion including 'For your Freedom and Ours' and 'Hands off Czechoslovakia'. See N. Gorbanevskaya, *Polden': delo o demonstratsii na Krasnoi Ploshchadi 25 avgusta 1968 goda*, Moskva: Novoe izdatel'stvo, 2007.

<sup>129</sup> GARE, f. 8131, op. 31, d. 80330, ll. 1-4.

series of 'anti-Party speeches' around the country. In Yaroslavl the builder Kiselev attacked the media coverage of events in Hungary and other People's Democracies and students at a forestry institute in Bryansk stated that the Soviet regime had not improved the life of the ordinary Russians and made unfavourable comparisons with the standard of living in the US.<sup>130</sup>

Material shortages were at the root of many outbursts around this time. At a meeting of the Levoberezhnyi *raion* Party organization of Kuibyshev a report from the Department of Party Organs stated that CPSU candidate member Dubrovin had declared that the Party leadership was holding back poorer kolkhozes and only helped those which were more successful. Dubrovin was followed by Zelenov who attacked the Party leadership for eulogising Stalin for so many years and then by Politov who stated that the only people who lived well in the USSR were those who did no real work, namely bureaucrats and officials. An electrician named Denyakin then posed the 'provocative' question as to what was considered the minimum subsistence wage for Soviet citizens.<sup>131</sup> As with the earlier meeting at the Thermo-Technical Institute, there was loud support for people who criticised the official Party line and heckling aimed at those who attempted to cut short the dissenters. Evidently, there was some considerable sympathy within the Party for even quite pointed criticism of the authorities, arguably implying, therefore, that there may have been some considerable resentment too.

As will be shown in the following chapter, the authorities' attempts to restore discipline within the ranks of the Party were bearing fruit by the end of 1956. Critics

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<sup>130</sup> RGANI, f. 89, op. 6, d. 6, ll. 1-5.

<sup>131</sup> RGANI, f. 89, op. 6, d. 5, l. 1. The term 'provocative' is taken from the official report on the meeting.

were either ‘weeded out’ or intimidated into silence and discipline was thoroughly restored. What this meant, however, was that the most discontented elements within the Party tended to engage in underground dissenting behaviour instead. Among young people this could mean forming groups and distributing leaflets, while older dissenters were more liable to send hostile letters. Presumably this distinction had its roots in the older generation’s experiences during the Stalin years. Around this time the *Komsomol* also became the object of a major drive to re-establish conformity and obedience in its ranks but continued to be the setting for open criticism of the authorities beyond the end of 1956.

### ***1.4.3 DISSENT IN THE KOMSOMOL***

The records of the Department of *Komsomol* Organs and the *Komsomol* Department of Agitation and Propaganda from around this time show that open criticism was still occurring among members of the Communist Party’s youth wing. A report sent to Vladimir Semichastnyi (at the time, a member of the *Komsomol* Central Committee but later to become KGB chairman) on 10 December 1956 stated that ‘*Komsomol* organisations have not drawn the correct conclusions from the XX Party Congress and need to strengthen their work amongst young people. As a result, in some *Komsomol* branches an unhealthy atmosphere has appeared with mistaken views on life, speeches alien to Marxist-Leninist views and a tendency to think in bourgeois terms’.<sup>132</sup>

The same report also stated that there had been numerous calls to limit CPSU control over the *Komsomol*, that students had criticised the lack of freedom in the country,

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<sup>132</sup> RGASPI, f. 1, op. 6, d. 925, l. 17.

attacked the privileges of the political elite and regularly listened to the BBC. Among the concluding remarks of the report it was stated that ‘...as a rule such demagogic speeches receive the necessary rebuff, but some *Komsomoltsy* do support them...’<sup>133</sup> Knowing the ‘sugar coating’ that was generally employed in official reports on such matters, one could perhaps surmise that it was not necessarily a small proportion of *Komsomol* members that supported these ‘demagogic speeches’.<sup>134</sup>

Perhaps even more so than the Communist Party, the *Komsomol* echoed with criticism of the authorities. Again though, this dissatisfaction was not always ideologically based. As the Kursk student I. Rykov stated at a meeting in 1956 ‘the *Komsomol* is boring and if I had the option to join it now, I would refuse. All it expects from us is work and study instead of happiness’.<sup>135</sup> Radio Liberty analyses of the Soviet press suggested that Rykov was voicing a widely held view and that an increasing number of *Komsomol* members were voicing disenchantment at the organisation by writing to newspapers and making strongly critical speeches, attempting to evade their duties as members and more generally feeling resentful toward the Communist Party.<sup>136</sup>

This resentment by *Komsomol* members toward the Communist Party was indicative of a generational divide that had begun to emerge since the XX Congress: a kind of

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<sup>133</sup> RGASPI, f. 1, op. 6, d. 925, l. 9.

<sup>134</sup> For example, almost every report on dissenting speeches that were made at Party meetings or in student debates began by saying something like ‘*resheniya XX s’ezda KPSS vstrecheny sovetskim narodom edinodushnym odobreniem*’ (the decisions of the XX CPSU Congress have met with the unanimous approval of the Soviet people), before going on to concede that ‘*vmeste s tem, TsK KPSS otmechaet chto imeyutsya otdel’nye sluchai vystuplenii antipartiinnykh elementov*’ (nonetheless, the Central Committee has noted that individual anti-Party elements made speeches), before sometimes going on to list several pages of quite sharp criticism levelled at the authorities. According to Sarah Davies this same basic formula was also used by the Stalin-era NKVD. See Davies, *Popular Opinion in Stalin’s Russia*.

<sup>135</sup> A. Pyzhikov, *Opyt modernizatsii sovetskogo obshchestva v 1953-1964 godakh: obshchestvenno-politicheskii aspekt*, Moskva: Izdatel’skii dom ‘Gamma’, 1998, p. 68.

<sup>136</sup> Radio Liberty Analysis of Current Developments in the Soviet Press. HU OSA 300-80-1, Box 394.

‘fathers and sons’ debate for Soviet times.<sup>137</sup> Idealistic young people were increasingly scornful of the generation before them that had either participated in the abuses of the Stalin years or had remained silent in order to protect themselves. Valery Ronkin, a dedicated and active *Komsomol* member at the time, recalled that he was bitterly disappointed at his own father’s refusal to speak out in the Stalin years and told him so.<sup>138</sup> The fact that speaking out would have led to almost certain annihilation suggests that there was some considerable romanticism, rather than sound reasoning, informing this particular debate.

This divide was in itself reflective of the wider situation: Ronkin was able to criticise and reject Stalin and the generation that had lived under him but continued to be a dedicated believer in communism himself. That Ronkin subsequently became involved in underground struggle against the authorities (he was a member of the so-called *Kolokol group* in the mid 1960s – see chapter 4) is indicative of the trend whereby many political dissenters tended to begin as close adherents of the regime and its ideology before becoming increasingly alienated from it.<sup>139</sup>

The eighteen months that followed the Hungarian rising witnessed a notable high-water mark in convictions for anti-Soviet activity and propaganda. KGB reports to the Central Committee and case files from the Procurator’s office indicate a

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<sup>137</sup> The original ‘fathers and sons’ debate had taken place in Russia around the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century when a young generation of political radicals began to disavow the liberal romanticism of the previous generation. The name comes from Ivan Turgenev’s literary depiction of the subject in *Fathers and Sons* (1862). On this theme see M. Fainsod, ‘Soviet Youth and the Problem of Generations’, *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, Vol. 108, No. 5, October 1964, pp. 429-436. However, Fainsod rightly pointed out that one must remain cautious in making statements about a group so large and varied as a whole generation.

<sup>138</sup> V. Ronkin, *Na smenu dekabryam prikhodit yanvari...*, Moskva: Obshchestvo ‘Memorial’, 2003, p. 25.

<sup>139</sup> To cite only a handful of well-known dissidents who had previously been dedicated and idealistic communists; this was the case with Petr Grigorenko, Leonid Plyushch, Yuri Orlov and Zhores Medvedev.

substantial growth in what the authorities referred to as ‘anti-Soviet phenomena’, such as people sending anonymous and threatening letters to Party officials, publicly declaring hatred for specific members of the leadership and forming underground groups. As it became increasingly clear just how limited the scope for loyal criticism continued to be, the dynamics of dissent altered somewhat.

Considered political criticism came to be less frequently voiced in public, and instead began to move underground. Worker dissent, on the other hand, seems to have increased in the public sphere around this time, with hundreds of citizens being arrested after spontaneous declarations of hatred for communists or threats of violence against members of the leadership. This most likely reflected the extent to which fear of the authorities had declined in recent times, though one should also be aware of the possibility that such behaviour may actually have been happening for some time but had previously been met with a less formal response.

Although the volume of dissent around the country appears to have increased markedly – largely because of the combined impacts of the Secret Speech and Hungarian rising – one still encounters very few genuine opponents of the regime or of communism. This reflected the fact that most dissenters seem to have believed that the system should be fixed rather than destroyed.

Nonetheless, after a several-month long tour of the USSR in 1957, Zinaida Schakovsky wrote of an ‘all-pervading atmosphere of discontent’ and an ‘immense discontent which is rumbling through the Soviet Union today’.<sup>140</sup> As a White Émigré

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<sup>140</sup> Z. Schakovsky, *The Privilege Was Mine*, London: Jonathon Cape, 1959, pp. 30, 47.

princess whose family was ruined by the October Revolution, one should not be surprised to see that Schakovsky gave such a withering assessment of the communist regime's fortunes, but even far less politically motivated accounts by well-informed visitors to the USSR at that time suggest that Schakovsky's remarks were not at all unrealistic. After a lengthy visit to the USSR around the same time, Maurice Hindus argued that the Soviet people were entirely loyal to the regime and to communism but did concede that the young generation in particular was brimming over with questions and frustrations.<sup>141</sup>

#### ***1.4.4 FORMS OF DISSENTING ACTIVITY***

Owing to the fact that the Soviet authorities were paying close attention to the problem of dissent throughout 1957 and 1958, this is a period on which a considerable volume of official documentation exists on the matter. A 1958 Procurator review of sentences for anti-Soviet activity gives some useful statistical data on the prevailing forms of dissent around this time. From the 2,498 sentences for counter-revolutionary activity in 1957 (of which 1,964 were for anti-Soviet activity and propaganda) the following statistics were presented: 91.3% of those sentenced had acted alone, 6.1% in groups of 2-3 people and a further 2.6% in groups of 3 or more people. Isolated acts constituted 62.6% of all sentences while repeated acts made up 37.4%.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> M. Hindus, *House Without a Roof: Russia After Forty Three Years of Revolution*, London: Victor Gollancz, 1962, p. 58.

<sup>142</sup> GARF, f. 8131, op. 32, d. 5080, l. 17. The important point to note at this stage is that 'counter-revolutionary crimes' (article 58 of the RSFSR criminal code) did not just include 'anti-Soviet activity and propaganda' (article 58, subsection 10 or 58-10) but also included other articles that dealt with crimes such as terrorism too. Nonetheless, well over three quarters of conviction for counter-revolutionary crimes were for anti-Soviet activity and propaganda.

The predominant trend at this stage was, therefore, for lone individuals to engage in single instances of dissenting behaviour. It is worth remembering, however, that these people may have undertaken more acts of dissent that the KGB remained unaware of. The review also discerned four forms of dissenting activity: oral expressions of a counter-revolutionary nature (57.3% of sentences), anonymous anti-Soviet letters, diaries and songs (22%), anti-Soviet leaflets (13%) and possession of anti-Soviet literature (7.7%).<sup>143</sup>

This same document also provided a basic demographic breakdown of convictions under article 58-10 in 1957. It showed that workers accounted for 46.8% of all sentences, followed by white-collar workers (18.3%), collective farm workers (9.9%) and miscellaneous – such as pensioners and invalids – (25.0%).<sup>144</sup> In regard to age, the review showed only that 17.4% of those convicted were less than 24 years of age, 67.2% were between 24 and 40 years of age and the remaining 15.4% were over 40 years old.<sup>145</sup> By some way the greatest number of those sentenced were Russians (957 convictions), followed in numerical order by Ukrainians (443), Lithuanians (68) and Belarusian's (65).<sup>146</sup>

Although not mentioned in the document, it is also worth pointing out that well over 90% of those convicted were men. Whether this reflected that women were less likely to be involved in dissenting behaviour or were simply less likely to be sent to jail for 'anti-Soviet activity and propaganda' is unclear, though it seems likely that both would have been true to a considerable extent.

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<sup>143</sup> GARF, f. 8131, op. 32, d. 5080, ll. 17-18.

<sup>144</sup> GARF, f. 8131, op. 32, d. 5080, l. 6.

<sup>145</sup> GARF, f. 8131, op. 32, d. 5080, l. 6.

<sup>146</sup> GARF, f. 8131, op. 32, d. 5080, l. 5. A complete breakdown of sentences by union republic is provided in chapter 2.

In some ways these statistics undoubtedly reflect the priorities of the campaign against dissent that was underway at the time rather than presenting an accurate snapshot of which elements of society were the most likely to be involved in protest and criticism. For example, the breakdown of convictions by age seems to imply that people under 24 years old were no more inclined toward dissenting behaviour than were other age groups, but what it actually shows is that the authorities usually resisted using custodial sentences against young people in all but the most serious cases.<sup>147</sup> The question of how far these figures represented a true picture of increased dissenting behaviour or one that was distorted by the ongoing campaign is discussed at more length in the following chapter. However, with a reasonably large sample of cases, one can put some faith in the general trends that the report demonstrated: arguably the most notable of which was that, unlike in later years, dissent was a surprisingly diverse social phenomenon.

#### ***1.4.5 SPONTANEOUS OUTBURSTS***

If one were to draw a composite picture of a ‘typical’ act of dissent in light of the above statistics it would reveal a lone individual engaging in a single, oral outburst against the regime. In the vast majority of cases these ‘oral expressions of a counter-revolutionary nature’ were not made in the form of considered and critical remarks at Party meetings like those in the aftermath of the Secret Speech, but can better be described as hooligan-type outbursts. They were practically always spontaneous and were usually fuelled by one or more of the following three factors: clashes with the individual representatives of the regime (most commonly the militia), difficult personal circumstances and drunkenness.

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<sup>147</sup> See G. Kuzovkin, ‘Partiino-Komsomol’skie presledovaniya po politicheskim motivam v period rannei ‘ottepeli’ in Eremina and Zhemkova eds, *Korni travy*, pp. 88-126.

These clashes often contained quite sharp political expressions such as threats to kill communists or members of the government but in fact seem to have belied little or no deep-seated dissatisfaction at the political situation, or at least did not reflect any genuine intention to act on such dissatisfaction. Such outbursts can essentially be seen as a continuation of the kinds of crude dissenting behaviour that Sarah Davies and others have shown existed during the Stalin era. As far as the Soviet authorities were concerned, this kind of protest proved to be the more easily manageable.

In late 1956 and early 1957 these spontaneous outbursts often cited the uprising in Hungary as an example to be copied in the USSR. Yu. L. Rozman's outburst in a shop in the Transcarpathian *oblast'*, in which he demanded that people should 'beat communists like in Hungary'<sup>148</sup> and I.V. Yaniv's declaration, in a Drogobych bus station café, that 'communists should be attacked and overthrown as they are being in Hungary', are just two examples from a great many in which individuals were sentenced for remarks referring to the Hungarian rising.<sup>149</sup> However, it seems that in many cases events in Hungary were merely a timely point of reference rather than the root of deep-seated anger among those who engaged in this kind of public attack on the authorities. Like many others, there is no evidence in the respective case files of Rozman and Yaniv to suggest that either actually showed any genuine support for the revolution in Hungary.<sup>150</sup> The statements that were made by both of them celebrated violence and protest more than they did the cause of the Hungarian rebels.

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<sup>148</sup> GARF, f. 8131, op. 31, d. 88957, l. 1. The Transcarpathian *oblast'* was a region where tensions were extraordinarily high owing to its proximity to Hungary.

<sup>149</sup> GARF, f. 8131, op. 31, d. 87486, ll. 1-2.

<sup>150</sup> In fact, it is probable that most Soviet citizens either supported the suppression of the Hungarian rising or were ambivalent about it. This was not just because of the impact of state propaganda branding the events a 'counter-revolutionary uprising' but also, according to Zhores Medvedev, because it was only a little over a decade previously that Hungary had been one of Nazi Germany's staunchest allies and fighting there had resulted in the death of countless Soviet soldiers. As such they were not regarded in the same manner as 'real friends' such as Czechoslovakia, for example.

Public eruptions of anger that did not refer to Hungary around this time often included themes such as threatening to side with the US in the ‘forthcoming’ war that was widely rumoured to be on the horizon in the late 1950s, criticism of privileges enjoyed by political elites, unfavourable comparisons between the standard of living in the Soviet Union and the West, branding members of the militia as ‘fascists’ and ‘Beriaites’ or more general slogans such as ‘down with the Soviet regime’ or threats and abuse aimed at communists.

One quite typical example was the case against Aleksei Lepekhin, an invalid from Astrakhan *oblast*, who was arrested in August 1957 after stealing a shirt, trousers and a pair of shoes from a man who had passed out in the street whilst drunk. Upon being confronted by a member of the militia, and later whilst in detention at the militia station, Lepekhin made a series of highly political statements that led to him being convicted for anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda. The testimony of fellow prisoners, members of the public and militia staff attributed the following remarks to Lepekhin: ‘I lived better under the (Nazi) occupation’, ‘Communists do not give us the freedom to live’, ‘Khrushchev and Bulganin are strangling the working class’ and ‘Down with the Soviet Union, long live Eisenhower’: the last statement being shouted out of an open window at the militia station.<sup>151</sup>

These public outbursts occupy an interesting place in the wider spectrum of dissenting behaviour and it is worthwhile to consider what can be deduced from such occurrences. They were clearly not the kind of purposive and persistent acts of dissent that would usually indicate genuine opposition to the regime. Nor were they

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<sup>151</sup> GARF, f. 8131, op. 31, d. 84518, ll. 4-6.

anything like the principled and brave defence of others that characterised human rights dissent during the Brezhnev era. Nonetheless, declaring a hatred of communists or publicly calling for the overthrow of the leadership clearly was a serious act of dissent in its own right, whether there was any real desire for such an occurrence or not. For people to have made such outspoken, and ultimately dangerous, remarks apparently in the absence of genuine opposition to the regime seems rather surprising. Again, it is hard to avoid reaching the conclusion that this was partly a reflection of declining fear and respect for authority.

That socio-economic issues such as poverty and unemployment could become so sharply politicised probably indicated more than anything else the extent to which politics, in the form of language, rituals and symbols, was so entrenched and inescapable in everyday life that it quickly became a target for criticism and abuse in hard times. To a considerable extent it was, therefore, the Soviet system itself that caused grievances which were, in certain respects, typical all around the world (such as unemployment or poor housing conditions) to take on such a politicised form at this time. In later years the authorities' were far more successful at ensuring that passive discontent did not translate into this kind of public activity.

The frequency with which drunkenness was reported in such instances is clearly not without significance. However, alcohol had been a feature of Soviet and Russian life for many years before Khrushchev came to power. Numerous sources suggest that drunkenness and alcoholism were phenomena which actually became more acute in the Brezhnev years, yet they do not seem to have led to similar behaviours on any

comparable scale.<sup>152</sup> Again, it is important to look to the changing dynamics of the relationship between society and the regime at this point. Neither the widespread physical repression of the Stalin era nor the relative material prosperity of the Brezhnev years existed at this point. Once the utopianism that had been engendered by the Secret Speech faded, it left something of a hole in the authorities' means of social control. By the end of the 1950s, however, a new system was being put into place that helped to re-establish popular compliance and minimise dissenting behaviour that lasted throughout the Brezhnev era and beyond.

Drunkenness does not in itself automatically imply that there was no genuine political disenchantment underlying such outbursts, however. In the words of the Russian proverb: *chto u trezvoga v golove, to u p'yanogo na yazyke* (approximately – 'what a sober man thinks, a drunk man says'). One's intuition and experience would suggest that there is probably some credibility in this proverb but one can say little more than that with any confidence. What we do know from the case files of such individuals, however, is that very few of those who were arrested and sentenced on the basis of these kinds of outbursts were found to be involved in any other kind of dissenting activity at that time or later, suggesting that these were acts of protest inspired by temporary factors rather than a more fundamental sense of political discontent. Alcohol and anger may have helped to turn passive discontent into active dissent, yet in most cases this was very much a temporary transformation.

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<sup>152</sup> See, for example, Shlapentokh, *Public and Private Life*. It is possible that such instances did continue to occur in the Brezhnev years but have not yet come to the attention of historians. As and when detailed information on the application of prophylactic measures (see chapter 4) becomes available it will be possible to give a more definitive assessment on this question.

Despite the fact that such acts of criticism and abuse were often only superficially political they were not entirely without danger for the authorities. Had the growth of public outbursts been allowed to go unchecked it is entirely possible that the problem could have taken on serious proportions and begun to erode the still predominantly submissive social order inside the USSR. This was a fact that the highest authorities privately acknowledged according to Mark Kramer.<sup>153</sup> As the Hungarian rising had demonstrated, matters could spiral out of control very quickly where so many pent-up frustrations were present.

### **1.5 UNDERGROUND DISSENTING ACTIVITY**

Underground activity represented what could be seen as a more purposive form of political dissent and, despite the latter's insistence on open activity, also the genre from which one can trace many connections to the Brezhnev era dissident movement. On the whole it was carried out by individuals and groups consciously acting on ideological grievances against the authorities or certain of their policies. Anonymous dissent was far more likely to be repeated in occurrence (partly because of the generally more hostile nature of its participants but also because of the protection offered by anonymity) and, therefore, more dangerous in the eyes of the authorities because of that.

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<sup>153</sup> Kramer, 'The Soviet Union and the 1956 Crises in Hungary and Poland', p. 195.

### ***1.5.1 ANTI-SOVIET LEAFLETS***

Anti-Soviet leaflets (*listovki*) were probably the most consistently widespread manifestations of political dissent under Khrushchev.<sup>154</sup> The total number that were produced and distributed undoubtedly ran into hundreds of thousands and possible even millions over the course of the entire period. They were discovered by the KGB in practically every large and medium sized town throughout the Soviet Union, sometimes pasted up on the walls and windows of public buildings or scattered on public transport, furtively left in mailboxes, or simply handed out in the street. Some were manifestos of underground political groups, information on strikes and disorders around the country, appeals to the people to rise up against the regime, transcriptions of foreign radio broadcasts or simply slogans and crude attacks against the regime and certain of its representatives.<sup>155</sup>

After 1956, state holidays and official events continued to witness an increased level of dissenting activity, yet open acts of protest – such as Lazaryants’ interruption of the 7 November parade in Yaroslavl – were notably absent. The 1957 anniversary of the revolution, for example, saw significant numbers of leaflets discovered in numerous major cities around the Soviet Union. In Moscow, anti-Soviet leaflets were found in the Luzhniki sports stadium, on a police car bonnet and pasted to the wall of a militia station. Further cases of anti-Soviet leaflets being uncovered that day were reported

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<sup>154</sup> Whether the phenomena existed on any kind of scale under Stalin and Brezhnev is as yet unclear. It seems likely that the boom in political *samizdat* literature would have supplanted the format in later years, however.

<sup>155</sup> It is worthwhile here to refer back to the leaflets produced by Boris Generozov, cited on page 18. Further examples of anti-Soviet leaflets are cited at some length in chapter 3.

in Leningrad, Riga, Kaliningrad, Minsk, Brest, Kiev, Donetsk, Poltava Vilnius and Stanislav.<sup>156</sup>

Elections for the Councils of Workers' Deputies in March 1957 gave an early indication of this trend toward clandestine protest, with posters attacking the Soviet leadership and 'fraudulent' elections being found attached to buildings in Sumy and at the library of Kiev State University among other places.<sup>157</sup> Several Ministry of Internal Affairs reports spoke of voters openly tearing up and burning ballot cards, refusing to vote and publicly insulting or threatening the candidates.<sup>158</sup> Similarly, KGB reports show that elections to the 'People's Courts' in December 1957 led to minor disturbances in Moscow, threats against candidates in Kiev and anti-Soviet leaflets being stuffed into a ballot box in Perm.<sup>159</sup>

The main reason that state anniversaries and elections witnessed a notable rise in the level of dissenting activity seems to have been that these were the few occasions when Soviet citizens were expected to perform the basic rituals that demonstrated their outward support for the regime. This was, therefore, the time when dissent was most visible and would most offend the authorities' sensibilities.

After assessing a sample of 50 cases involving anti-Soviet leaflets during 1956 and 1957 the Procuracy categorised their contents in the following way:

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<sup>156</sup> Aksiutin, 'Popular Responses to Khrushchev', p. 198.

<sup>157</sup> RGANI, f. 89, op. 18, d. 37, ll. 1-3.

<sup>158</sup> RGANI, f. 89, op. 18, d. 37, ll. 1-3.

<sup>159</sup> RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 231, ll. 122-124.

*Leaflets containing calls to overthrow the regime or attempting to provoke uprisings and strikes.*

*Leaflets containing slander against the leaders of the Party and government.*

*Leaflets containing slander against the democratic principles of Soviet society, the rights and freedoms of the Soviet people and calls not to believe Soviet radio and press.*<sup>160</sup>

At this early stage of the Khrushchev era it is notable that leaflets tended to be hand written and reproduced in quite small quantities of around half a dozen copies or less. Although often few in number, the contents of such leaflets tended to be particularly sharp. On 30 December 1956 Semen Atamanenko was jailed in Leningrad after producing and pasting up a leaflet which read ‘Comrade Workers! The Hungarian people are calling on you to follow their example!’<sup>161</sup> In Riga, A.V. Kanakhin was arrested in May 1956 after distributing 17 leaflets that said ‘Down with Soviet imperialism! Down with communist propaganda and terror!’<sup>162</sup> In Zhitomir *oblast*’ V.A. Demchenko pasted 19 leaflets onto the walls of public buildings that read ‘Down with the Soviet regime! Down with Communists!’<sup>163</sup>

### **1.5.2 ANONYMOUS LETTERS**

Anonymous anti-Soviet letters (*anonimiki*) were another phenomenon that characterised dissenting activity during the Khrushchev years. Most frequently these letters were addressed to political organisations such as the Central Committee, individual representatives of the regime, editors of newspapers and journals or managers of industrial enterprises. In later years they were also sent abroad, either to

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<sup>160</sup> GARF, f. 8131, op. 32, d. 5080, l. 26. Unfortunately, the review in question did not give any details on which of these trends were the most prevalent.

<sup>161</sup> GARF, f. 8131, op. 31, d. 76946, l. 1.

<sup>162</sup> GARF, f. 8131, op. 32, d. 5080, l. 26.

<sup>163</sup> GARF, f. 8131, op. 32, d. 5080, ll. 27-29.

the 'safe' addresses in Germany and Holland that were broadcast by stations such as Radio Liberty or to foreign political figures, embassies and organisations. Numerous case files of individuals convicted for this offence clearly demonstrate that the dissenters responsible often sent such letters repeatedly, and sometimes over several years, until they were tracked down.

One typical anonymous letter, sent to Aleksandr Shelepin (the First Secretary of the Komsomol) at the end of 1956, included a vehement attack on official propaganda. It read: '...you say black is white. Prices are supposed to be coming down but you are skinning people', 'it is no surprise that there has been trouble in Poland, Hungary and Germany, we have suffered even longer' and 'stop writing and talking about the happiness of the people. It is insulting that we know the opposite is true. Nowhere in the world do people live worse'.<sup>164</sup>

Another particularly interesting case was reported to the Central Committee on 12 December 1957. The letters editor of the newspaper *Trud*, Dmitrii Kiselev, was arrested after sending a series of anonymous anti-Soviet letters that, according to the KGB, 'slandered government activity and policy, said the people were starving and the Party does not care'. He also called for the entire leadership to resign and for them to be expelled from the Party. Kiselev wrote and sent 22 such letters in total between February and August 1957, addressing them to government bodies, industrial enterprises and delegations from capitalist countries at the 1957 World Youth Festival.<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 141, ll. 81-84.

<sup>165</sup> RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 141, ll. 106-107.

On the whole one can view anti-Soviet letters as an inherently less hostile form of dissent than leaflets – the goal of which was usually to provoke a response from among the wider population. That letters were usually intended for private audiences whereas leaflets were intended for public consumption is a key distinction. The risks involved in producing and distributing leaflets must also have been considerably greater than those of simply writing and posting a letter, again showing that the former represented a more resolute form of dissenting activity. Nonetheless, the fact that many of those sentenced had sent multiple letters, sometimes over a period of several years, highlights the fact that this was still a considered and planned act of protest.

It is useful to explore briefly the question of what the people who wrote such letters hoped to achieve by doing so. For those writing to political figures and organisations outside of the Soviet Union or to bodies such as the Central Committee Presidium it seems unlikely that they could have realistically expected their letters to reach the target destination, even less so to change anything at all if they did get there. Those who wrote letters to newspapers and journals attacking Soviet policy or abusing Khrushchev would most likely have known that their letters would never be printed. Why send a letter calling for struggle against the regime to the address of what must surely be one of the least receptive audiences for such an appeal? The answer seems to be that such letters were essentially a means of registering protest and attempting to embarrass the authorities rather than anything more purposive.

Not all critical letters were anonymous, however. One interesting example from this time was written by eleven Lithuanian workers and sent to Khrushchev in mid-1958.

It began by stating that ‘we wanted to be part of the Soviet Union but it is terrible’, it explained that several years had gone by in Kaunas without sugar or meat and declared that ‘he who works is hungry, while he who steals is able to live’.<sup>166</sup> According to Kozlov and Mironenko, young people were more likely to affix their names to such letters than were older people – something that was certainly true in this instance.<sup>167</sup> This may well have been related to the fact that people of around 30 years or older had lived through such extensive state repression and naturally remained cautious of the state’s repressive apparatus. It may also have said something about the naivety and impetuosity of youth.

This distinction between generations has already been touched upon in reference to the emerging ‘fathers and sons debate’. As will be shown in chapter 2, the authorities feared that young people were becoming disconnected from the Soviet system and lacked ‘revolutionary commitment’. In actual fact, it seems that young people and others were not growing disillusioned with the ideals of communism but were growing disenchanted by the conservatism and hypocrisy of the authorities in the late 1950s. In later years this did begin to spread to flagging enthusiasm for communism in general but, as the massive number of young people who volunteered to work on the Virgin Lands campaign and the predominance of Marxist-Leninism among young dissenters testified, the idealistic appeal of the communist project was still a powerful force at this point.

One of the most important developments that can be seen in regard to the relationship between society and the state at this time is a growth in the mistrust and cynicism with

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<sup>166</sup> RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 141, ll. 62-63.

<sup>167</sup> V. Kozlov and S. Mironenko eds, *Kramola: Inakomyslie v SSSR pri Khrushcheve i Brezhneve 1953-1982*, Moskva: ‘Materik’, 2005, p. 229.

which people viewed the activities and pronouncements of the authorities. One can see that this process was at least partly fuelled by Soviet society's growing interaction with the outside world, whether in the form of meeting foreign visitors (mostly restricted to a few major cities), reading newspapers from the People's Democracies or listening to Western radio broadcasts. The 1957 World Youth Festival appears to have been a particularly notable turning point in this respect. What all of this meant was that doubts about the rightness of the Soviet course or about the truthfulness of official propaganda were increasingly confirmed and crystallised – a process that the authorities proved singularly unable to reverse.

### ***1.5.3 UNDERGROUND GROUPS***

At the most extreme end of this cynicism and resistance to authority were those who engaged in underground group activity. As Shlapentokh has written: 'The people know from birth that any attempt to create an unofficial organisation is considered by the authorities as a direct threat to the regime and those participating in meetings convened by such an organisation take a serious risk'.<sup>168</sup> Nonetheless, dozens of underground groups were uncovered by the KGB in the second half of the 1950s. However, although they offered strident criticism of the authorities on a range of themes, few groups were calling for revolution at this stage.

In most cases the activities and achievements of such groups were extremely limited. Usually they consisted of only three or four members and were uncovered by the KGB within a few months of being formed, during which time they had often

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<sup>168</sup> Shlapentokh, *Public and Private Life*, p. 124.

managed only to agree upon a manifesto and to distribute leaflets on a handful of occasions.<sup>169</sup> In all but a few cases they did not tend to have formal organizational structures or regulations of membership because of their small size and generally informal nature – reflecting the fact that many of these groups were founded on the basis of already existing friendships circles.

Still, there was little indication of genuinely anti-communist sentiment behind such groups. Most considered that the regime had become stagnant and sought to create, or recreate, a form of ‘true communism’ sometimes called neo-Leninism or neo-Bolshevism. The names of several such groups are a testament of their political leanings: ‘the Worker-Peasant Underground Party’, ‘the Socialist Party of the Soviet Union’ and ‘the Party of Struggle for the Realisation of Leninist Ideas’.<sup>170</sup> Although a particularly dangerous form of activity for those who participated, one still ought to be cautious in viewing such people as determined, revolutionary-type figures. For example, Valery Ronkin recalled the case of some friends who planned to form their own group in the late 1950s: ‘They definitely believed that any kind of anti-Party position would, in the first instance, lead to girls and Western music’.<sup>171</sup> One gets the impression that there was also a certain *joie de vivre* as well as political dissatisfaction among young dissenters.

This actually raises an important point in regard to dissenters during the period, particularly in regard to establishing a distinction with the well-known dissidents of the Brezhnev era, such as Andrei Sakharov, whose lives were, to a considerable

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<sup>169</sup> L. Alexeyeva, *Soviet Dissent: Contemporary Movements for National, Religious and Human Rights*, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1987, p. 295.

<sup>170</sup> Kozlov and Mironenko eds, *Kramola*, p. 326.

<sup>171</sup> Ronkin, *Na smenu dekabryam*, p. 152.

extent, defined by the fact that they were dissidents. Like Ronkin, Eduard Kuznetsov also recalled that although he was angered by events in Hungary, politics came second to sports and socialising for him at that time.<sup>172</sup> In other words, dissent was not yet a 'lifestyle choice' at this stage.

Two of the early Khrushchev period's most notable underground groups were based around Revolt Pimenov and Lev Krasnopevtsev in Leningrad and Moscow respectively. The Pimenov group was founded in Leningrad in December of 1956 as a result of anger at the suppression of the Hungarian rising. Pimenov, a mathematician at Leningrad State University, had previously prepared and distributed *samizdat* copies of the Secret Speech and sent letters to deputies of the Supreme Soviet demanding the withdrawal of troops from Hungary and criticising the authorities among friends. He then made the acquaintance of Boris Vail', a student at the Leningrad Bibliotechnical Institute, who had been preparing and distributing anti-Soviet leaflets since 1955.

On Pimenov's initiative the pair formed a group including several of Vail's student colleagues from the Leningrad Bibliotechnical Institute and Pimenov's common-law wife Tat'yana Verblovskaia. All but Pimenov were members of either the CPSU or *Komsomol* and were idealistic communists.<sup>173</sup> Vail' arranged three group meetings, two at the Bibliotechnical Institute in December 1956 and a third at Mars Field in Leningrad during January 1957. At the first meeting Pimenov declared that Stalinist policies were still in place in the Soviet Union, that there was neither freedom of speech nor of the press and that the workers were not the true masters in the Soviet

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<sup>172</sup> Interview with Eduard Kuznetsov in Polikovskaya, 'My *predchuvstvie...predtecha*', p. 214.

<sup>173</sup> It has already been mentioned earlier in the present chapter that Pimenov had begun to consider joining the Communist Party in the wake of the Secret Speech.

system. He then attacked the *kolkhoz* system and stated that the Yugoslav method of agricultural development was superior to the Soviet system.<sup>174</sup>

Where this group differed from others was that they briefly succeeded in establishing a secondary cell in Kursk, Boris Vail's hometown. Vail had visited in January 1957 and persuaded his friend Konstantin Danilov to create an organisation along the same lines as his own in Leningrad. According to the KGB investigation protocol, subsequent correspondence between the pair showed that Vail urged Danilov to study Marx, to learn 'Bolshevik methods of struggle and conspiracy' and to gather fake documents such as passports, tickets and licenses.

Further letters from Vail included leaflets for Danilov's group to distribute, with the slogan 'land to the peasants, factories to the workers and culture to the intelligentsia' and a request for the group there to work out a programme of anti-Soviet activity.<sup>175</sup> According to Vail's letters, the overall aim was to create as many cells as possible and eventually to hold a conference in order to plan a wide programme of anti-Soviet activity.<sup>176</sup> As it transpired, one of the group members, Vladimir Vishnyakov, had been 'turned' by the KGB and both the Leningrad and Kursk cells were quickly uncovered and neutralised.

The Krasnopevtsev group was based around Moscow State University; its members were teachers, students and recent graduates (six of whom were *Komsomol* members and one a full CPSU member). Like the Pimenov group, they were inspired by events in Hungary. They prepared materials on the 'true history of the CPSU' and

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<sup>174</sup> GARE, f. 8131 op. 31, d. 73957, ll. 32-41.

<sup>175</sup> Pimenov, *Vospominaniya*, p. 85.

<sup>176</sup> GARE, f. 8131, op. 31, d. 73957, l. 66.

distributed leaflets around the city and scattered them on buses, in the latter case approximately 300 that called for reform ‘in the spirit of the XX Congress’, and held a meeting at Izmailovskii Park in Moscow.

The most significant activity of this group as far as the authorities were concerned was in its attempt to establish contacts with several foreigners ‘in order to further their aims of changing the present system’.<sup>177</sup> In April of 1957 Krasnopevtsev met with a Pole named Lyasotoi for a discussion of how the pair could work together against their respective governments, according to the KGB investigation protocol.<sup>178</sup> In August 1957 group member Vadim Kozovoi established contact with the Englishman Julian Watts – a British intelligence officer according to the KGB – at the World Youth Festival and attempted to pass him damaging information about the USSR.<sup>179</sup> Soon after Watts, contact was made with a Frenchman named Lerasno, to whom they apparently passed ‘sensitive information’ about the ‘anti-Party affair’ at the 1957 June plenum (obtained by group member Kozovoi, whose father was a Party functionary).<sup>180</sup>

In both of the above cases and many others like them at the time, the group members did not fashion themselves as alternative political parties, and did not speak of overthrowing the regime but instead sought to strive for democratisation and to expose its shortcomings and lies. Speaking at his trial, Lev Krasnopevtsev admitted that the group had done everything they were accused of but denied that they had ever

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<sup>177</sup> It is unclear from the case file whether the phrase ‘in order to further their aims of changing the present system’ was a direct quote from the testimony of a group member or a KGB summary of their activity. As such it should be regarded with some caution.

<sup>178</sup> GARF, f. 8131, op. 31, d. 73957, l. 49.

<sup>179</sup> The KGB reports do not specify what was in this ‘harmful information’ though it seems likely that it was the same information that was subsequently passed to Lerasno.

<sup>180</sup> GARF, f. 8131, op. 31, d. 79866, ll. 1-110.

been 'anti-Soviet' in their intent.<sup>181</sup> This was to be a line of defence that was employed by many dissenters during the Khrushchev period and after. In Krasnopevtsev's case, and most others, it proved to be entirely unsuccessful in averting a harsh punitive response.<sup>182</sup>

These traits were quite common among intelligentsia dissenters of this time in particular. By the second half of the Khrushchev period, underground groups increasingly spoke of violence and revolution but this was rarely the case in the late 1950s. Maurice Hindus illustrated this point when, after a lengthy visit to Russia in 1957, he concluded that 'The intellectual underground into which the student or any inquiring youth moves produces only talk; protests, parodies, anecdotes, songs for the relief of his frustration; it hides no guns, manufactures no bombs'.<sup>183</sup>

## **1.6 CONCLUSIONS**

The most notable theme that can be drawn from dissent in the first half of the Khrushchev period is that there was very little anti-communist sentiment or desire for revolution even among the regime's critics. Worker dissent tended to be based upon anger at hard material conditions while intelligentsia dissent was characterised by a desire to 'fix' the system rather than to overthrow it. The sense of utopianism that the Secret Speech had re-ignited not only evaporated after the Hungarian rising but exacerbated the sense of disenchantment that it created. Those critics who were not intimidated into silence by the authorities increasingly began to move further and

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<sup>181</sup> GARF, f. 8131, op. 31, d. 79865, ll. 1-34.

<sup>182</sup> For example, this was a defence similar to that employed by the writers Sinyavsky and Daniel almost a decade later.

<sup>183</sup> Hindus, *House Without a Roof*, p. 383.

further away from a position of loyal support and questioned more fundamental aspects of the regime and its ideology.

What underpinned the majority of strident criticism and protest, especially among the intelligentsia but also among workers, was the realisation that it had become possible to dissent and still survive. The XX Party Congress had been the single most important factor in demonstrating this to be the case yet the fitful liberalisation that followed it left many doubly disenchanted. What this shows is that Khrushchev's exposure of Stalin did not by itself fatally undermine the system, nor was the painful legacy of the *Gulag* an entirely insurmountable obstacle. Many dissenters at that time wanted to tackle these problems and move forward rather than condemn the Soviet project to failure. It was the unwillingness to fulfil the tacit promise of liberalisation offered by the Secret Speech that pushed anti-Stalinists into acts of protest and dissent, from where they steadily moved further and further away from the regime.

The influence that the Secret Speech had upon dissenting behaviour is one of the most informative aspects of the period, particularly when viewed in the context of the subsequent Hungarian rising. It is interesting to note that it was the Soviet invasion of Hungary rather than the exposure of Stalin that provoked the most widespread and vociferous criticism. The two were, of course, inextricably linked. It was the Secret Speech that clearly lowered the price to be paid for acts of criticism and simultaneously raised hopes of liberalisation but it was the events in Hungary that caused frustrations to crystallise and spill over into impassioned dissent.

Active dissenters constituted a small minority within the overall Soviet population yet the biographical data held in the files of the Procurator's office shows that acts of protest and criticism were by no means dominated by the Moscow intelligentsia, as they later seem to have become. All areas of the country and all social classes witnessed some degree of dissent. Nonetheless, workers and the intelligentsia showed practically no inclination to work together either during this period or later.

There is also an interesting point to be raised in the fact that elements of society sometimes responded positively in support of the regime's critics in the early Khrushchev period. Reports from the Department of Party Organs and the *Komsomol* show that in many instances audience members met dissenting speeches with great enthusiasm. Evidently, there was some considerable discontent among many of those who had some interest in political life. Fear of the authorities had declined notably over the previous half-decade, though it probably still remained one of the more important factors that constrained people's behaviour in this respect.

One can also see that the first half of the Khrushchev era was a time in which the parameters of the new relationship between society and the regime were being set out. Dissenters were at the vanguard in establishing where these new boundaries of permissible and impermissible lay. With the confusion and uncertainty caused by the Secret Speech this was a process that was at its most dynamic in 1956 but then became ever less so as the extent to which the political environment had changed since Stalin's death became clearer with the passing months.

## CHAPTER 2

### OFFICIAL RESPONSES TO DISSENT: 1956-1958

As Elena Papovyan has asserted: ‘for people who are not normally interested in the subject, repression in the second half of the 1950s causes amazement’.

<sup>1</sup> As has already been stated, political persecution under Khrushchev is a theme that has attracted rather limited attention, especially in comparison to the preceding and succeeding periods of Soviet history. In fact, the total of 3,764 sentences for anti-Soviet activity and propaganda that were handed out between 1956 and 1958 far exceeded that of any other period of the post-Stalin era. Unsurprisingly then, it is one of the central arguments of the present chapter that depictions of the Khrushchev era as one of ‘thaw’ are not entirely applicable in this respect.

Official responses to infractions of acceptable comment had undoubtedly become markedly less draconian but the scope for criticism remained almost as narrow. Entirely groundless state violence had been largely reined in but a considerable volume of repressive activity remained. William Henry Chamberlain’s assessment that the Soviet Union had changed ‘from a terror state to a strict police state’ is perhaps the most applicable.<sup>2</sup>

Policy against dissent was a dynamic field of activity in the first half of the Khrushchev era as solutions were sought for behaviours that, to a large extent,

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<sup>1</sup> E. Papovyan, ‘Primenenie stat’i 58-10 UK RSFSR v 1957-1958 gg. po materialam Verkhovnogo Suda SSSR i Prokuratury SSSR v GARF’, in L.S. Eremina and E.B. Zhemkova eds, *Korni travy: sbornik statei molodykh istorikov*, Moskva: Obshchestvo ‘Memorial’, 1996, p. 73.

<sup>2</sup> W. Chamberlain, ‘USSR: How Much Change Since Stalin?’, *Russian Review*, Vol. 22, No. 3, July 1963, p. 228.

constituted fundamentally new challenges for a regime in the process of adapting to the new post-Stalin, post-terror environment. What one can see during the second half of the 1950s is essentially a process of experimentation by trial and error in regard to the policing of dissent. Different approaches were employed and mistakes learned from before an effective corpus of policy began to crystallise from around the end of the decade.

Inside the regime one can clearly see that, although the leadership were rarely involved in responding to specific cases of protest and criticism, they were consistently well informed about such occurrences and continued to set the general tone of repressive policy. This is not a field in which one encounters the clear-cut divisions between ‘conservatives’ and ‘liberals’ within the leadership as was sometimes the case with cultural policy, for example. Even quite mild political criticism was still equated with opposition at this stage in particular.

It is also clear that the second half of the 1950s in particular witnessed a degree of inter-institutional competition – specifically between the KGB and the legal establishment – that had a direct impact on the way in which a corpus of policy against dissent was constructed over the course of this short period. At the grassroots level, where the leadership initially demanded that dissenting behaviour receive an appropriate response, there was some confusion in regard to how to police dissent in the new, post-Stalin and post-Secret Speech environment, leading to numerous inconsistencies.

Preserving domestic stability remained the one priority that stood above all others, suggesting that the tone of official responses to acts of protest and criticism gives an insight into how concerned the authorities were in regard to the threat posed by dissent at any given time. Nonetheless, the authorities had begun striving to reduce and control dissenting behaviour rather than to attempt its complete eradication by force – something that would have demanded a great deal of effort and repression. In this, one can see not only that pragmatism dominated over ideological considerations in terms of responses to dissent but also that this was a key part of a fundamentally new social contract that was being established between the state and the people it ruled over. The authorities were keen to avoid provoking resentment within society and tacitly came to accept that they were no longer able to impose their will with virtual impunity.

Many of the basic assumptions that the leadership made in regard to dissent were either essentially correct or can at least be viewed as eminently logical. However, they were also frequently unsophisticated and inappropriate in their application, often pushing the authorities into exaggerated and unhelpful responses to dissenting behaviour. Nonetheless, the evidence shows that the policies against dissent that were pursued under Khrushchev ultimately paid dividends by reining in the growth of both intelligentsia and worker dissent. What this meant, however, was that the grievances that existed within society were stifled rather than remedied.

One of the most important themes to be noted is that of change and continuity. One can see this period as a time in which Soviet repressive policy was in the later stages of the transition away from Stalinism, with its reliance on crude methods of social

control such as labour camps and prisons. Looking to the succeeding Brezhnev period, it is also possible to draw a number of fundamental continuities in regard to official attitudes and responses to dissent that were put forward already in the early Khrushchev years and lasted for most of the following three decades.

## **2.1 RESPONSES TO DISSENT PRIOR TO THE XX CONGRESS**

One need only look to the imprisonment of Alexander Radishchev after the publication of *A Journey from St Petersburg to Moscow* in 1790 or Nicholas I's infamous Third Department to see that intolerance toward criticism of the ruling authorities was by no means a specific product of the October Revolution. Nor, for that matter, was it a phenomenon restricted to the Russian Empire and the USSR. Suppression of dissenting opinion has always been the bedrock of even far less authoritarian regimes than the USSR under Khrushchev. Nonetheless, to contemporary Western observers, and to many historians who study the post-Soviet states, the stifling of protest and criticism is one of the most prominent features of the Soviet regime.

### ***2.1.1 THE PUBLIC FACE OF POLITICAL PERSECUTION***

Before entering into a discussion of official responses to dissent, it is firstly instructive to elaborate upon the public facet of the authorities' attitudes toward dissenters throughout the Soviet period. Here the regime consistently strove to maintain an image of the USSR as a progressive and tolerant state. Most notably for the period at hand, there were numerous instances during his time as leader of the

Soviet Union when Khrushchev insisted that there were no longer any political prisoners in the USSR; something that he almost unquestionably knew not to be the case.<sup>3</sup>

Even more strikingly, on 27 January 1964 the Soviet representative to the UN on human rights issues, Boris Ivanov, voted in favour of two motions that proclaimed ‘every citizen’s right to freedom of expression and opinion; the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association’ and ‘every citizen’s right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to that country’.<sup>4</sup> These were, of course, complete fallacies that were not to materialise until decades after Khrushchev’s ouster.

This was entirely in keeping with a long history of disinformation and propaganda on the theme of the regime’s attitudes toward its critics. In a gesture loaded with even more irony than that of Boris Ivanov, the Stalin regime had refused to ratify the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights on the grounds that it ‘did not go far enough’.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, in the Brezhnev years the Soviet Union signed the 1975 Helsinki Accords with little or no intention of fulfilling the numerous human rights clauses of the so-called ‘Third Basket’.<sup>6</sup> Gorbachev too, initially engaged in the same process of misinformation, like Khrushchev insisting that there were no longer any political prisoners in the USSR until Anatoly Marchenko’s death in Chistopol prison, in

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<sup>3</sup> See W. Taubman, *Khrushchev: The Man and His Era*, London: Free Press, 2003, p. 303. Perhaps the most notable instance in which he made this statement was from the rostrum at the XXI CPSU Congress in January 1959.

<sup>4</sup> HU OSA, 300-80-1, Box 688.

<sup>5</sup> HU OSA, 300-80-1, Box 688.

<sup>6</sup> The contents of the Helsinki Accords were divided into three ‘baskets’. The first basket was concerned with the post-Second World War national borders throughout Europe, the second with various aspects of co-operation between East and West and the third with human rights issues.

December 1986, prompted an international scandal.<sup>7</sup> Clearly then, the public pronouncements of the Soviet regime over the years on this matter shared a common thread of audacious levels of deception.

Successive Soviet leaders engaged in this practice of ritual dishonesty for a variety of reasons. Occasionally intended for a domestic audience but more commonly used to impress the outside world, in order to help win client states in Asia, Africa and Latin America. There were clear benefits for the regime in lying about what was a consistently woeful record on civil liberties and domestic repression. Clearly, pragmatism had always been, and would always be, the key factor in the regime's public attitude toward protest and criticism.

### **2.1.2 FROM THE REVOLUTION TO THE SECRET SPEECH**

One of the best known examples of the way in which the new Bolshevik regime had originally sought to deal with its critics could be seen in the deportation of academic and cultural figures, the most notable of which was the renowned philosopher Nikolai Berdyaev, on what came to be known as the 'philosopher's boat' in 1922.<sup>8</sup> As Robert Service has pointed out, from the very beginning 'The deportations taught the intelligentsia that no overt criticisms of the regime would be tolerated'.<sup>9</sup> Contrary to

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<sup>7</sup> Marchenko had been a member of the Moscow Helsinki Watch Group and had spent many years in labour camps, jails and exile settlements. He achieved his most lasting impact as a dissident by writing the *samizdat* book 'My Testimony', an account of his time spent in the Khrushchev era *Gulag*. The exact cause of his death was not officially announced, but Marchenko had been engaged in a lengthy hunger strike and been badly beaten by prison guards shortly prior to his death.

<sup>8</sup> See L. Chamberlain, *Lenin's Private War: The Voyage of the Philosophy Steamer*, London: St Martin's Press, 2007, and G. Arbatov, et al. eds, '*Ochistim Rossiyu nadolgo...': Repressii protiv inakomyslyashchikh, konets 1921 – nachalo 1923*', Moskva: Mezhdunarodnyi fond 'Demokratiya', 2008.

<sup>9</sup> R. Service, *A History of Modern Russia from Nicholas II to Putin*, London: Penguin Books, 2003, p. 137.

what the Khrushchev era's neo-Bolshevik dissenters seem to have believed, the Lenin years were certainly not free of political persecution. However, those who were considered essentially loyal but 'misguided' were often responded to in a different fashion. For example, it was generally the case that dissenting Bolsheviks were subjected to admonition rather than punishment, with mitigating factors taken into account.<sup>10</sup> Those who were seen as enemies, on the other hand, were still liable to face 'revolutionary justice'.

From the late 1920s onwards, official attitudes toward dissenters became markedly more severe, with terms such as 'enemies of the people' increasingly bandied about in official rhetoric. Characteristic of the crude and Manichean legal processes of the time, even off-the-cuff remarks such as 'I wish Stalin were dead' could be deemed the equivalent of an attempted assassination and accordingly punished as terrorism while practically any kind of protest or criticism was branded as the work of Trotskyists, SRs or anarchists.<sup>11</sup>

Debates about how many people were executed, jailed or otherwise repressed in the Stalin years fall outside of the scope of the present work but what is important is the fact that a large proportion of such cases were entirely baseless and apparently at random. Unsurprisingly, the number of annual convictions for political crimes was high, especially in the immediate post-war years as the authorities pursued reprisals against real or supposed former collaborators and nationalist guerrillas in the Ukraine and the Baltic States, often handing out sentences of twenty-five years in such cases.

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<sup>10</sup> See, for example, O. Kharkhodin, *The Collective and the Individual in Russia: A Study of Practices*, London: University of California Press, 1999, p. 37.

<sup>11</sup> See S. Davies, *Popular Opinion in Stalin's Russia: Terror, Propaganda and Dissent 1934-1941*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 5.

However, the number of sentences for counter-revolutionary crimes was actually in quite pronounced decline during Stalin's last years, dropping from 129,826 convictions in 1946 to 69,233 in 1948 to 53,179 in 1950 and finally 27,098 convictions in 1952.<sup>12</sup> Knowing that Stalin took a close personal interest in the work of the security organs, it seems doubtful that such a marked drop in sentences could have occurred without his assent yet there seems to be no evidence that his last years were characterised by a more liberal side to his thinking; quite the opposite in fact. Most likely this decline in convictions for anti-Soviet activity and propaganda could be attributed to the fact that the campaign against Baltic and Ukrainian guerrillas and collaborators was winding down as the number left at liberty declined. There is also a possibility that fabricated political cases were simply being replaced by fabricated criminal cases.

That the high-profile and entirely invented 'Doctors' Plot' was immediately disbanded by Stalin's successors and the first few *Gulag* inmates were soon released augured well for the future, as did the break up of Beria's powerful MVD apparatus. From approximately this point onwards the volume of entirely groundless convictions declined greatly. Basic improvements were made to the legal system whereby the notorious *troikas* were abolished, the accused were allowed access to a lawyer and the state's reliance on free *Gulag* labour (which had necessitated a steady supply of convictions) was ended.<sup>13</sup> This is not to say that investigations and trials became unbiased or that the authorities' responses to dissent were reasonable but that the process at least became more predictable and did not tend to touch upon those who

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<sup>12</sup> Y. Gorlizki and O. Khlevniuk, *Cold Peace: Stalin and the Soviet Ruling Circle, 1945-1953*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, p. 125.

<sup>13</sup> Some of the best coverage on the breaking up of the MVD and on reforms to the Soviet legal system after Stalin's death can be found in M. Lewin, *The Soviet Century*, London: Verso, 2005.

kept silent. Many problems remained though, most notably in the way that the legal apparatus enjoyed practically no independence from the dictates of the Communist Party leadership.

The years of collective leadership continued to witness a consistent and marked drop in annual sentences under article 58 for counter-revolutionary crimes, from 2,124 in 1954 to 1,069 in 1955 and 623 in 1956.<sup>14</sup> What this demonstrates is that the practice of showing greater restraint in punishing dissent was not simply a product of the XX CPSU Congress or of Khrushchev's apparently liberal political leanings but that it had actually been in progress virtually since Stalin's death and certainly before Khrushchev had risen to dominance over his rivals.

This suggests that the declining level of repression on the basis of anti-Soviet activity during the years of collective leadership, with numerous arch-Stalinists at the apex of power, was not a product of a more liberal atmosphere in the wake of the Secret Speech. As Gorlizki and Khlevnyuk have shown, the authorities were well aware of the threat posed by looming economic and demographic crises arising from the mass repression of the Stalin era.<sup>15</sup> However, the refusal of successive amnesties to release those jailed on political charges, the brutal suppression of the camp rebellion at Kengir in 1954 and the anti-religious drive of the same year demonstrated that the

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<sup>14</sup> GARF, f. 8131, op. 32, d. 5080, l. 3. Article 58-10 was the name employed only in the RSFSR criminal code since no overall Soviet code existed. Other union republics had different code numbers for the same article but for reasons of clarity and consistency the title '58-10' is used throughout this thesis.

<sup>15</sup> See Gorlizki and Khlevnyuk, *Cold Peace*.

regime remained intolerant and capable of resorting to violence in order to enforce its will.<sup>16</sup>

Furthermore, Stalin's successors were from the very start aware that the relationship between state and society had changed following his death. While 'scared' may well be too strong a word, one could at least say that the new leaders were highly apprehensive about society's mood on coming to power. As Leonard Schapiro pointed out: 'the leaders of the Party had graphically summed up their own view on the state of popular feeling towards the Party when, immediately after Stalin's death, they spoke of the need for measures to prevent disorder and panic'.<sup>17</sup>

## **2.2 AFTER THE XX CONGRESS**

Surprisingly, no concrete plans were established before or immediately after the Secret Speech in regard of how to police popular responses to it. Ekaterina Furtseva – at the time a member of the Central Committee Secretariat and later a full Presidium member – admitted to this lack of planning when she said that: 'after the XX Congress we were not ready to give a response when the remarks began to come'.<sup>18</sup> In all likelihood this lack of pre-planning was a result of the short timescale that existed between the decision for Khrushchev to deliver Pospelov's report on Stalin to the Congress and the actual event taking place. It also demonstrated one of the central characteristics of policy against dissent in the early Khrushchev years: the authorities

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<sup>16</sup> The most detailed account of the Kengir camp rising can be found in A. Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago, Vol. 3*, London: Collins/Fontana, 1978.

<sup>17</sup> L. Schapiro, *The Communist Party of the Soviet Union*, London: Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1970, p. 608.

<sup>18</sup> E. Zubkova, *Obshchestvo i reformy 1945-1964*, Moskva: Izdatel'skii tsentr 'Rossiya molodaya', 1993, p. 136. Zubkova cites her source for this as RTsKHIDNI, f. 556, op. 1, d. 693. Furtseva is probably best known for being one of very few women to rise to the very highest levels of political power and for occupying the position of Culture Minister, which she did between 1960 and 1974.

were rarely proactive in seeking to forestall outbursts of criticism and protest but instead responded to them afterwards. In later years there would be a more sophisticated and integrated approach to preventing and punishing dissent but the early Khrushchev period was essentially characterised by ‘fire-fighting’.

Khrushchev’s memoirs – not always the most reliable source but in this instance supported by other accounts – tell us that fellow members of the collective leadership, particularly Lazar Kaganovich and Kliment Voroshilov, had strongly resisted his proposal to deliver the report on Stalin at the XX Congress. They reportedly claimed that it would do untold damage to the regime and said that, ‘We will be called to account. The Party will assume the right to call us to account...we’ll be held responsible for it all’.<sup>19</sup> With at least a few of its members already in a state of some trepidation over the potential consequences of the report, it is entirely unsurprising that the Politburo took an active interest in monitoring the lists of comments and questions that arose at the meetings held to discuss the Secret Speech around the country.<sup>20</sup>

### ***2.2.1 RESPONDING TO DISCUSSIONS OF THE SECRET SPEECH***

It is interesting to note that when reports of dissenting remarks that took place at meetings held to discuss the Secret Speech reached the centre, the response was, in Soviet terms, still rather measured. This vindicates Elena Papovyan’s assertion that

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<sup>19</sup> See S. Khrushchev ed. *Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev Volume 2: Reformer, 1945-1964*, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006, pp. 209-10. Among other sources, Khrushchev’s account is supported by Aleksandr Pyzhikov in *Khrushchevskaya ottepel’*, Moskva: Olma Press, 2002.

<sup>20</sup> See E. Kulavig, *Dissent in the Years of Khrushchev: Nine Stories About Disobedient Russians*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002. The list of questions submitted at meetings held to discuss the Secret Speech, cited in chapter 1, demonstrates this point.

1956 was characterised by ‘an unusual liberalism in the punitive organs’.<sup>21</sup> This was largely true yet, as mentioned earlier in the present chapter, political repression had already been dropping markedly since Stalin’s death. The restraint was, therefore, indicative of a trend that had already been in place for some time, even though the problem of critical speeches in particular was essentially a new one.

At the lower levels of the Party there were a number of factors that dictated these restrained responses to dissent. Firstly, according to Polly Jones, Party activists and officials were usually too deeply embroiled in the rituals of criticism and self-criticism to act decisively and promptly.<sup>22</sup> Secondly, the ‘chasm of uncertainty’ that had facilitated some of the dissenting behaviour of the time also took hold in local Party organisations. If, as Yuri Orlov asserted, people everywhere were still ‘holding their fingers in the wind’, then it was evident that the wind was blowing against the Stalinists and to pursue vigorous repression at this stage would clearly not have been a sensible move.

In later months and years the KGB was consistently at the vanguard of the struggle against dissent, yet for the most part they remained inactive in the wake of the Secret Speech. Although very much a client of Khrushchev (the pair had worked together in wartime Ukraine) the presiding KGB chairman, Ivan Serov, was by no means a liberal and was in fact one of the louder voices insisting that a hard line had to be taken against dissenters.<sup>23</sup> That the newly constituted KGB had been charged with leading the struggle against protest and criticism could be seen in the 15 February 1954

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<sup>21</sup> Papovyan, ‘Primenenie stati 58-10’ in Eremina and Zhemkova eds. *Korni travy*, p. 73.

<sup>22</sup> P. Jones, ‘From the Secret Speech to the Burial of Stalin’ in P. Jones ed. *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization: Negotiating Social Change in the Khrushchev Era*, London: Routledge, 2006, p. 46.

<sup>23</sup> See, for example, N. Petrov, *Ivan Serov: Pervyi predsedatel’ KGB*, Moskva: Materik, 2005; Y. Albats, *KGB: State Within a State*, London: I.B. Tauris, 1995.

Central Committee resolution 'On the Formation of the Committee for State Security (KGB) under the Council of Ministers' which defined one of the organisation's principal roles as being 'struggle against the enemy activity of any kind of anti-Soviet elements inside the USSR'.<sup>24</sup> One can point to the ongoing aim of the Party, and Khrushchev in particular, to bring the security organs to heel as the reason for their relative inactivity at this time. Until sanctioned by the Party to take action, the KGB were forced to wait.

Summaries of discussions that took place in all union republics were compiled and sent to the Central Committee by the Department of Party Organs.<sup>25</sup> The leadership cannot have been unconcerned by the negative reports reaching them after such a long period of conformism within the Party ranks. According to Erik Kulavig, reports from local Party branches quickly convinced the top leadership that even the limited liberalisation that had taken place had already shaken the foundations of the system.<sup>26</sup> This seems like an exaggeration, however, as later events would show that when the authorities perceived any potential threat to the regime's stability they were far quicker to act decisively than was the case at this point in time. Nonetheless, it is evident from this interest in monitoring the public mood that, unlike in previous times, popular opinion had come to matter more to the Soviet leadership and that it was ultimately to have a major impact on policy formulation.

One of the first attempts by the authorities to silence critics was a letter sent out to Party organisations in response to events at the Thermo-Technical Institute discussed

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<sup>24</sup> RGANI, f. 3, op. 8, d. 84, l. 18.

<sup>25</sup> See K. Aimermakher et al eds. *Doklad N.S. Khrushcheva o kul'te lichnosti Stalina na XX s'ezde KPSS: Dokumenty*, Moskva: Rosspen, 2002.

<sup>26</sup> Kulavig, *Dissent in the Years of Khrushchev*, p. 16.

in chapter 1. However, having gone into some detail in describing the events that took place at the meeting in question, it is worthwhile to return briefly to the subject in order to describe the official response that followed.

### ***2.2.2 THE THERMO-TECHNICAL INSTITUTE: REVISITED***

It has already been mentioned in the previous chapter that members of the Party cell at the Thermo-Technical Institute were presented with a motion to censure the critical speeches that had been made by Orlov, Arvalov, Nesterov and Shedrin, but most refused to condemn the quartet. In this Party cell, and others like it at the time, the vote on whether to condemn the dissenters' remarks was deemed insufficiently supportive of the motion and the entire cell was subsequently disbanded. A raft of similar instances around the country showed that the Party leadership feared the existence of genuinely sizeable resistance within certain Party cells.<sup>27</sup> Those deemed to be 'harmful elements' were then expelled from the Party and the remaining 'healthy' elements would be re-registered with other local groups. This last point serves to flag up the kind of imagery that the regime often used to characterise dissenters: 'unhealthy' and 'contagious' elements in an otherwise healthy society.

One of the more unique aspects of the authorities' response to the meeting at the Thermo-Technical Institute was that the fate of the four speakers was decided at the very top of the political hierarchy. According to Orlov, the head of the institute, Abram Alikhanov, informed the quartet that, 'I telephoned Khrushchev on your behalf but he said that he was not the only member of the Politburo. Other members

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<sup>27</sup> Jones, 'From the Secret Speech', in Jones ed. *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization*, p. 47.

demanded your arrest. He told me “they should be glad that they got off with dismissals””.<sup>28</sup> It is entirely likely that the wave of critical responses to the Secret Speech had left Khrushchev in a weakened position within the leadership yet it seems disingenuous to suggest that he was entirely powerless on the matter.

The foursome undoubtedly did gain a measure of protection from the fact that they were talented physicists, and therefore particularly useful to the regime, rather than ordinary members of the public.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, for the regime to launch a harsh response would have risked alienating the wider scientific community just as the nuclear arms race was gathering momentum. It is quite clear that this was a case in which both liberalisation and rationalisation played an important part.

Fedor Burlatsky has gone on record as stating that Mikhail Suslov, the ultra-conservative ideologue, was the driving force behind putative moves to have the four arrested.<sup>30</sup> Although there was a degree of personal animosity between Burlatsky and Suslov, there is little doubt that the latter may well have taken it upon himself to play a personal role in responding to dissent. A further example of this kind of behaviour on Suslov’s part was demonstrated by his personal involvement in conducting an investigation into uncovering the authors of a December 1956 article in a university newspaper on students who had been expelled from their institute.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Yu. Orlov, *Dangerous Thoughts: Memoirs of a Russian Life*, New York: William Morrow and Company, 1991, p. 121.

<sup>29</sup> Yuri Orlov denied the rumour that Igor Kurchatov, ‘the father of the Soviet atom bomb’, also intervened on behalf of the four, threatening to retire from all scientific work if they were jailed. Interview with Yuri Orlov, Ithaca, December 2006.

<sup>30</sup> F. Burlatsky, *Khrushchev and the First Russian Spring: The Era of Khrushchev Through the Eyes of his Adviser*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1991 p. 72. Suslov and Burlatsky had particularly different ideological beliefs – in the Soviet context – and this led to a series of clashes during the Khrushchev years before Burlatsky was sidelined under the Brezhnev regime.

<sup>31</sup> V. Ronkin, *Na smenu dekabryam prikhodit yanvari...*, Moskva: Izdatel’stvo Zven’ya, 2003, p. 98. It is also worth noting here that recent works have pinpointed Suslov as the figure whose intrigues led to

Members of the Party and state leadership generally did not involve themselves in such affairs, however. This was perhaps a result of the leadership wanting to avoid getting ‘blood on their hands’ again: something that Khrushchev had employed to powerful effect in his rivalry with those more deeply implicated in Stalin’s crimes, such as Molotov and Malenkov. It should also be pointed out that members of the leadership had many of their own ministerial and Party concerns and tended not to encroach upon other fields of responsibility without invitation. Nonetheless, as matters in December of 1956 would subsequently demonstrate, it was the Central Committee Presidium that continued to prescribe the broad tone of political repression in spite of their minimal day-to-day involvement in the matter.

On 5 April 1956, *Pravda* carried an editorial attacking the quartet of young physicists, claiming that they had ‘sung with the voices of Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries’.<sup>32</sup> With both of those political groups having been effectively wiped out in the USSR over two decades previously, this would probably have meant little to much of the population but it did betray more than a hint of the language that had been used in the Stalin years.<sup>33</sup> More significantly, as stated in chapter 1, the media attack largely failed to provoke public indignation at the four and instead gave rise to approving comments. The lesson was soon learned by the authorities and media references to dissenters vanished for a time before later re-appearing with a tone of moral rather than ideological condemnation.<sup>34</sup>

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Khrushchev’s notorious attack on non-conformist artists at the Manezh gallery in December 1962, mentioned in chapter 3. See, for example, M. Zezina, *Sovetskaya khudozhestvennaya intelligentsiya i vlast’ v 1950-1960 xx*, Moskva: Dialog MGU, 1999; Yu. Gerchuk, *Krovoizliyanie v MOSKh, ili Khrushcheve v Manezhe 1 dekabrya 1962 goda*, Moskva: NLO, 2008.

<sup>32</sup> *Pravda*, 5 April 1956.

<sup>33</sup> Orlov himself wrote that he knew very little about either the Mensheviks or Socialist Revolutionaries. See Orlov, *Dangerous Thoughts*, p. 121.

<sup>34</sup> This remained the case throughout the Brezhnev years. For example, Aleksandr Ginzburg was characterised as a drunkard and Yuri Orlov as an uncaring father. Elena Bonner, in particular, was

### **2.2.3 THE BOUNDARIES OF PERMISSIBLE AND IMPERMISSIBLE**

What then lay inside, outside and on the edges of these new boundaries of permitted behaviour? S.V. Mironenko has argued that scope for the expression of alternative views had actually ‘not changed one iota’ after the Secret Speech. He has asserted that the most significant impact of the XX Congress was that those who did not transgress the boundaries of acceptable comment and behaviour were no longer in danger of repression.<sup>35</sup> Mironenko’s assertion is not without some validity, though it seems that a better argument would go beyond the question of repression no longer touching upon innocent citizens and suggest that, although the scope for expressing criticism had not changed, what the authorities deemed an appropriate response to these criticisms had clearly become far less severe. Still though, the matter was one of rationalisation just as much as it was about liberalisation.

In fact there was a limited degree of acceptable criticism in the Khrushchev years that had not existed under Stalin. Most famously there were numerous examples of authors such as Vladimir Dudintsev, Lev Pomerantsev and Ilya Ehrenburg who published work in the first half of the Khrushchev period that presented a degree of criticism on themes including poor living conditions among the peasantry, bureaucratic abuse of power and the stifling influence of Socialist Realism on Soviet cultural life. However, this was an avenue of criticism that could be somewhat unpredictable, as shown by the publication of Dudintsev’s *Not by Bread Alone* in autumn 1956 which initially met an enthusiastic popular response only to be followed

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subjected to a long running and vicious smear campaign in the 1970s and 1980s that depicted her as leading her husband, Andrei Sakharov, astray.

<sup>35</sup> V. Kozlov and S. Mironenko eds, *Kramola: Inakomyслиe v SSSR pri Khrushcheve i Brezhneve 1953-1982*, Moskva: ‘Materik’, 2005, p. 29.

by the author's subsequent mauling at the hands of conservatives and later by Khrushchev himself.

Often viewed by scholars as having had the function of a safety valve intended to vent the frustrations of the liberal intelligentsia, this was one area where it clearly was possible to point to an ongoing internecine struggle between liberals and conservatives within the corridors of power.<sup>36</sup> Whether the publication of a few liberal works had in fact helped to appease the frustrated intelligentsia cannot be proved for certain, yet some memoirs from the period do suggest this to have been the case.<sup>37</sup> It is also noteworthy that as the authorities stemmed the flow of critical works being published in journals such as *Novyi Mir* dissent became an increasingly intelligentsia-dominated phenomenon.

This was not an avenue in which the ordinary citizen was able to participate in any active capacity, however. Broadly speaking, there were two spheres of acceptable criticism open to the general public. The first of which was mild criticism of proposed policies that were not yet in force (once in force, there was to be no further debate on their merits or otherwise). The second avenue was censure of specific abuses of power by individuals at the lower levels of the political spectrum.<sup>38</sup> One could see the former in the public consultation campaigns of the period and the latter occasionally appearing in the letters sections of newspapers and journals, for example. The most important point was that such letters and comments were not to be aimed at

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<sup>36</sup> The literature on this theme is particularly voluminous in both English and Russian. Two of the best works are P. Johnson, *Khrushchev and the Arts: The Politics of Soviet Culture, 1962-1964*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1965 and Zezina, *Sovetskaya khudozhestvennaya intelligentsiya i vlast'*.

<sup>37</sup> See, for example, L. Alexeyeva and P. Goldberg, *The Thaw Generation: Coming of Age in the Post-Stalin Era*, Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1990.

<sup>38</sup> See C. Kenney, 'The Twentieth CPSU Congress and the 'New' Soviet Union', *The Western Political Quarterly*, Vol. 9, No. 3, September 1956, pp. 570-606.

the top leadership nor seen to be directed at undermining the foundations of the Party or its decisions, but must be ‘businesslike in character’ according to *Voprosy partiinoi raboty* – an authoritative collection of official articles and editorials on ideological developments.<sup>39</sup>

The political and social order, along with the economic system, were the most explicitly forbidden themes of criticism.<sup>40</sup> What these subjects instantly implied to the authorities was the presence of deep-seated hostility toward the fundamental principles of Soviet rule: a not entirely unfounded, though undoubtedly extreme, viewpoint. In addition to these three subjects, one can also add the broad theme of ‘the West’ as a subject that could only be broached in a negative manner. Because the authorities saw citizens’ attitudes toward the West as a key indicator of their political loyalty, it naturally followed that any kind of dissenting behaviour involving the West, such as negative comparisons between the standard of living in the Soviet Union and the US or attempts to communicate with foreign organisations, instantly made any transgression more dangerous.

There were also certain ‘grey areas’ to these new boundaries. For example, Kozlov has cited the fact that there was no legal definition of what constituted a ‘counter-revolutionary organisation’ as proof that in fact the authorities purposely did not establish complete clarity of the rules.<sup>41</sup> The main reason for this was that a degree of uncertainty often prompts caution. This could also be seen in later years when psychiatric confinement was employed against dissenters apparently at random,

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<sup>39</sup> *Voprosy partiinoi raboty*, Moskva: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stov politicheskoi literatury, 1957, p. 48.

<sup>40</sup> V. Shlapentokh, *Soviet Intellectuals and Political Power: The Post-Stalin Era*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990, p. 78.

<sup>41</sup> Kozlov and Mironenko eds *Kramola*, p. 31.

meaning that all acts of dissent theoretically carried the risk of indefinite detention: undoubtedly a powerful deterrent.

#### ***2.2.4 RESTORING DISCIPLINE IN THE PARTY***

On 5 April the Central Committee Presidium issued a secret resolution to be circulated among Party organisations entitled ‘On the harmful attacks at the meeting of the Thermo-Technical laboratory of the USSR Academy of Sciences Party organisation’. It said that although the majority of meetings had passed in the desired manner ‘the Central Committee has noted that there have been individual cases of harmful speeches by anti-Party elements that have tried to employ criticism and self-criticism for their own aims’. It accused the quartet of trying to use the discussion session to discredit the Party and Soviet state, acknowledged that the majority of those present had refused to condemn their remarks and criticised the leadership of the Party cell for failing to give a decisive response.<sup>42</sup>

Another Party letter demanding an end to internal criticism was sent out on 16 June, entitled ‘On the results of discussions on the decisions of the XX Party Congress’. On 30 June the Central Committee issued a further decree: ‘On the overcoming of the Cult of Personality and its consequences’.<sup>43</sup> According to Susanne Schattenberg, this decree in particular was intended as a threat to those who persisted in their ‘exaggerated’ criticism at Party meetings.<sup>44</sup> As Gennadyi Kuzovkin has stated, the overall purpose of these letters was to demonstrate the new limits of acceptable

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<sup>42</sup> RGANI, f. 3, op. 14, d. 13, ll. 76-79.

<sup>43</sup> RGANI, f. 3, op. 14, d. 37, ll. 1-25.

<sup>44</sup> S. Schattenberg, ‘“Democracy” or “Despotism”? How the Secret Speech Was Translated into Everyday Life’, in Jones ed. *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization*, p. 66.

criticism and discussion, to judge proper from improper in the new environment, and to establish that punishment would follow any transgression of these boundaries.<sup>45</sup>

Kulavig has cited figures to show that between 1954 and 1961 a total of 550 CPSU members were expelled on the grounds of ‘participation in anti-Party groups’, almost 1,000 were expelled for ‘anti-Party conversations’ and almost 900 for ‘lack of political conviction’.<sup>46</sup> Although they do give some idea as to the scale of Party expulsions, the timescale covered in Kulavig’s figures is too broad for any detailed analysis of responses to discussions of the Secret Speech. Very few CPSU and *Komsomol* members were jailed as a result of remarks made at Party meetings and discussions. This does not indicate that inner-Party criticism had become more acceptable but that the level of response which was deemed appropriate in such instances had been lowered considerably. Again, it is worth emphasising the contrast with the likely responses to public criticism that would have occurred in the Stalin years. That such events were practically unheard of in the later Khrushchev years and during the Brezhnev period is a testament to the authorities’ success not just in purging the CPSU of ‘undesirable elements’ during this period but also in clearly establishing powerful sanctions to dissuade other potential critics.

The case of the Party meeting in Levoberezhnyi *raion* of Kuibyshev *oblast’*, mentioned in chapter 1, reflected some of the main practices in policing dissent within the Party at that time. The leadership of the Party cell in question was deemed to have failed in its duty to provide a sufficiently decisive rebuff against its critics, and the Kuibyshev *gorkom* eventually took control of the matter. It handed out expulsions or

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<sup>45</sup> G. Kuzovkin, ‘Partiino-Komsomol’skie presledovaniya po politicheskim, motivam v period rannei ‘otpepli’ in Eremina and Zhemkova eds, *Korni travy*, p. 90.

<sup>46</sup> Kulavig, *Dissent in the Years of Khrushchev*, p. 88.

severe reprimands to all of those who had made critical remarks or asked questions that were judged 'provocative'. Because of their weak response to the original incident, the organisation's *buro* was also disbanded.<sup>47</sup>

The above case reflects the fact that the authorities in Moscow were regularly dissatisfied with the way that local Party organisations failed to respond to members' critical remarks with sufficient vigour. As Polly Jones has observed, the leadership in Moscow at times seemed more angered by the local authorities' failure to detect and deal with anti-Soviet sentiment than by the dissenting outbursts themselves.<sup>48</sup> Clearly then, the letters sent out by the Central Committee in the Spring and Summer of 1956 had been vital in establishing where the new boundaries of permitted behaviour were - not just for ordinary Party members but also for those who were charged with policing dissent.

The aim was not to uncover those of differing opinions, as in the Stalin era, nor to persuade them of the rightness of the Party line, but to enforce silence upon them. This was not quite the return to Leninism that Khrushchev had promised but it was still a major divergence from the excesses of Stalinism. The tactic was, to a large extent, successful. From the end of 1956 there were relatively few traces of open criticism within the ranks of the CPSU. With only a handful of exceptions, open criticism was not heard within the Party again for many years. The result was that most disgruntled members suppressed their frustration, but a minority chose to move toward underground activity instead.

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<sup>47</sup> RGANI, f. 89, op. 6, d. 5, l. 3.

<sup>48</sup> Jones, 'From the Secret Speech' in Jones ed. *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization*, p. 44.

Already then, one can start to see an implicit acceptance of ‘doublethink’ whereby hostile or critical opinions and beliefs were no longer the concern of the authorities unless they were manifested in some way. Even though the state was becoming ever-more intrusive into the everyday lives of its citizens, it no longer concerned itself with their thoughts if they were not manifested in protest activity. The matter was clearly one of managing dissent rather than completely eradicating it. This does not suggest that the authorities felt any more tolerant to alternative views but that there existed neither the will nor the means to attempt the physical eradication of all critics.

### ***2.2.5 RESTORING DISCIPLINE IN THE KOMSOMOL***

Young people in particular became the subject of the regime’s attention by the second half of 1956. Along with released prisoners and members of the artistic intelligentsia, the young generation was seen as being among the most likely sources of domestic strife. The authorities spoke of problems such as insufficient respect for the value of labour and for the Soviet revolutionary heritage, particularly looking to the children of the burgeoning middle classes as the root of the problem.<sup>49</sup> However, in this the regime almost entirely failed to engage with the real issues that were causing disquiet among Soviet youth, such as the strenuous demands that the *Komsomol* placed upon its members, the generation gap that had been opened up by the Secret Speech and the poor living conditions endured by students.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> See J. Fürst, ‘The Arrival of Spring?’ in Jones ed. *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization*.

<sup>50</sup> *Komsomol* members were not only expected to attend the organisation’s meetings but also to take part in various groups and committees as well as undertaking civic work in the local area. When added to a demanding school or university schedule, many tried to avoid their *Komsomol* duties.

This concern was linked to the authorities' eminently logical fear that it was among young people that harmful bourgeois propaganda would have its biggest impact as Western fashions and culture began to appear in the USSR. The 1957 World Youth Festival in particular posed a major headache for the regime in this respect: it had the potential to generate fantastic propaganda successes but also meant bringing the negative influence of thousands of foreigners into the USSR for the first time. Frederick Barghoorn has argued that 'the regime saw itself as the moral shepherd of a naïve society'.<sup>51</sup> This may well be true. After years of isolation much of Soviet society was indeed naïve about the outside world, but it is also the case that much dissent among young and old was entirely organic in origin and adhered to Marxist-Leninist political philosophy.<sup>52</sup> Blaming discontent among young people on the influence of the West was an easy solution but it was not entirely the correct one.

The content of a January 1957 report from *Komsomol* secretary Shelepin to the CPSU Central Committee suggested that within the *Komsomol* there was some trace of Khrushchev's putative 'return to Leninism'. According to Shelepin, emphasis was being placed on educating those who were 'misguided' rather than simply taking punitive measures against them. Noting that a mood of pessimism and 'apoliticism' had emerged since the XX Congress, he wrote that political-ideological work among young people was being strengthened across all union republics, that agitators, teachers, workers and veterans of the revolution were being dispatched to work

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<sup>51</sup> F. Barghoorn, 'Observations on Contemporary Soviet Political Attitudes', *Soviet Studies*, Vol.18, No.1, July 1966, p. 68.

<sup>52</sup> The impression of Soviet society as naïve about the true state of affairs in the world comes across particularly clear in accounts by Zinaida Schakovsky and Maurice Hindus, both of whom travelled around the Soviet Union for several months in the second half of the 1950s. See Z. Schakovsky, *The Privilege Was Mine*, London: Jonathon Cape, 1959 and M. Hindus, *House Without a Roof: Russia After Forty Three Years of Revolution*, London: Victor Gollancz, 1962.

places, student dormitories, canteens and classrooms to explain the Party line and to provide a rebuff to bourgeois propaganda.<sup>53</sup>

Stronger measures were also put in place, however. Directors of Higher Education Institutes were empowered to expel students and to withhold their stipends if they were involved in any kind of dissenting behaviour. Pressure was increased on teachers to monitor their students and those deemed ‘unworthy of the title “student”’ were to be expelled and assigned productive labour tasks instead of academic studies and not permitted to enrol at another higher education institute for two to three years.<sup>54</sup> Unfortunately, it seems that figures on expulsions from universities and other higher education institutes were either not kept at the time or have simply failed to come to light for one reason or another. It is worth referring the reader back to the previous chapter, in which a *Daily Mail* article claiming that around 1,000 MGU students were expelled in connection with the Hungarian rising was cited.<sup>55</sup> Even a very conservative estimate suggests that this would have equated to perhaps 10,000 students at least across the country as a whole, and potentially a great many more.

The authorities were probably correct in viewing young people as a source of potential disquiet and were, in fact, largely successful in stifling the expression of discontent in that sector of society. Moreover, this process was carried out with minimal recourse to political sentencing and corrective labour. It was becoming clear to the authorities that they did not always need to ‘use a sledgehammer to crack a walnut’: the threat of expulsion from university or from the *Komsomol* was often

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<sup>53</sup> RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 233, ll. 1-73.

<sup>54</sup> See Kuzovkin, ‘Partiino-Komsomol’skie presledovaniya’ in Eremina and Zhemkova eds, *Korni travy*, pp. 88-126.

<sup>55</sup> *Daily Mail*, 5 December 1956. It is also important to reiterate the reservations that were originally expressed about the figures presented in this article.

sufficiently powerful to change someone's behaviour. In later years this principle was to be applied across society as a whole.

Although some labour camps did continue to function, Khrushchev's denial that there were any political prisoners in the USSR effectively took away their function as a deterrent from dissenting behaviour.<sup>56</sup> Instead, new sanctions were established that proved able to constrain people's behaviour without overt repressive activity, such as the loss of a job along with any accrued privileges or expulsion from the Party or *Komsomol* – which invariably entailed losing one's job and being debarred from all but the lowest paid positions in the future. These new sanctions also demonstrate the greater subtlety of the post-Stalin approach to social control that was being established. While this was undoubtedly an effective method of ensuring popular compliance in the short and medium term, it was not a genuine cure to the regime's ills.

The threat of expulsion from the Communist Party and the *Komsomol* were powerful stimuli that should not be underestimated. Furthermore, the threat of imprisonment still hung over those who were expelled from the Party and *Komsomol*. Comprehensive statistics on expulsions from the *Komsomol* relating to dissent have yet to be made available, though there are some highly informative scraps of information in the archives:

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<sup>56</sup> Accounts of the period by the likes of Ludmilla Alexeyeva and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn quite clearly indicate that people generally believed Khrushchev's boasts about there being no more political prisoners. See Alexeyeva and Goldberg, *The Thaw Generation*, p. 71 and A. Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago, Part 3*: London, Collins/Fontana, 1978, p. 476.

**Table 2.1 Annual expulsions from the Ukrainian Komsomol, 1956-1958.**

Oblast'	1956	1957	1958
Zaporozhskaya	539	274	57
Khersonskaya	376	161	48
Nikolaevskaya	444	290	66
Krymskaya	978	275	88
Odesskaya	1,057	628	113
Luganskaya	2,532	641	207
Stalinskaya	2,903	1,286	270
Dnepropetrovskaya	1,298	550	128
Kirovogradskaya	307	222	38
Kievskaya	902	451	99
Chernigovskaya	391	364	59

Source: Department of Komsomol Organs. RGASPI, f. 1, op. 33, d. 1690, ll. 32-35

The first trend that one will immediately notice in the above table is the extent to which the volume of expulsions decreased significantly from 1956 to 1957 and then from 1957 to 1958, suggesting that 1956 was a year in which expulsions were unusually high. This is a pattern that is supported in one of the few other pieces of statistical information on *Komsomol* expulsions.

**Table 2.2 Annual expulsions from the Kazakh and Uzbek Komsomol organisations, 1955-1957.**

Union Republic	1955	1956	1957
Kazakh	2,593	3,001	2,169
Uzbek	1,649	1,875	627

Source: Department of Komsomol Organs. RGASPI, f. 1, op. 33, d. 1690, l. 11 and d. 1722, l. 81

Unfortunately, both of the above tables only give data on overall expulsions from the *Komsomol* and there were naturally a variety of grounds on which one could be ejected. However, Kuzovkin's work on the regime's struggle against dissent within the *Komsomol* and figures that clearly show a surge of expulsions across three separate union republics in 1956 make it safe to conclude that the authorities were indeed purging the *Komsomol* of dissenting voices around this time, even though they were not being jailed.

The application of punitive measures against critics was soon about to be expanded significantly as the regime moved from a default position of jailing only the most strident and subversive critics to launching a wave of political arrests and sentences that sought to re-impose discipline throughout wider society. With its mass power-bases of the Party and *Komsomol* already in the process of returning to outward compliance by the end of 1956, the regime next turned its attention to the ordinary citizenry.

### **2.3 THE DECEMBER LETTER**

By November 1956 a meeting of the Central Committee Presidium saw the leadership taking an increasingly aggressive tone toward ‘unhealthy elements’ in the student body and elsewhere. The series of letters sent out to Party organisations by the Central Committee appears to have stemmed the tide of misjudged criticism within the CPSU and *Komsomol*, yet a considerable volume of dissent remained in wider society. Restoring discipline among the Communist Party and its youth wing was clearly not going to be enough to safeguard the regime’s stability. At the end of 1956 the ‘remarkable liberality’ in responses to criticism that Elena Papovyan referred to was replaced by a major clampdown on dissent.

On 10 November, *Pravda* published a speech that Khrushchev had delivered to a meeting of young people in which he explicitly linked the rebellious mood of students with the developing events in Hungary: a theme that was soon to become central to the policing of dissent.<sup>57</sup> With a major uprising in Berlin only three years previously, and disturbances in Poland running concurrent with those in Hungary, the Eastern Bloc was enduring arguably its most tumultuous period prior to the 1980s. Stalin’s ‘buffer zone’ against the West was beginning to look like a major source of political instability.

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<sup>57</sup> See Kuzovkin, ‘Partiino-Komsomol’skie presledovaniya’ in Eremina and Zhemkova eds, *Korni travy*, pp. 88-126.

### **2.3.1 FEARS OVER HUNGARY**

Mark Kramer has argued that, already well aware of political ferment within the USSR, the regime feared that events in Hungary could spill over into neighbouring countries and ultimately into the Soviet Union, potentially unravelling the entire socialist bloc if they did so.<sup>58</sup> The authorities' judgement in this instance was probably sound. Obviously one cannot say for sure that the entire region would have descended into chaos if matters in Hungary had not been taken in hand by the Soviet leadership, yet when one considers the way that events in one East European satellite impacted on the next as the system rapidly began to collapse at the end of the 1980s it gives some support to the regime's assessment of events.

Khrushchev's son-in-law, Aleksei Adzhubei, even suggested that social unrest within the USSR itself had been one of the main catalysts for the decision to send Soviet armed forces to suppress the Hungarian rising.<sup>59</sup> If the Soviet leadership had intended their response to events in Hungary to demonstrate that protest and criticism would not be tolerated in the USSR, the plan clearly backfired because it stoked even more unrest at home. However, this was not the case everywhere. Stefani Sonntag, for example, has argued that the impact of the Soviet invasion of Hungary played a role in bringing an end to ongoing disturbances in Poland in late 1956.<sup>60</sup>

Adzhubei's assertion would clearly have major ramifications for the extent to which we can consider the Soviet leadership to have been concerned about the level of

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<sup>58</sup> M. Kramer, 'The Soviet Union and the 1956 Crises in Hungary and Poland: Reassessments and New Findings', *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 33, No. 2, April 1998, p. 192.

<sup>59</sup> A. Adzhubei, *Te desyat' let*, Moskva: Sovetskaya Rossiya, 1989, p. 97.

<sup>60</sup> S. Sonntag, 'Poland' in D. Pollack and J. Wielgoch eds, *Dissent and Opposition in Communist Eastern Europe: Origins of Civil Society and Democratic Transition*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004, p. 6.

protest and criticism around the country, yet there seems to be little evidence to support this rather bold claim. His status as an insider in the Khrushchev family by no means indicates that Adzhubei would have been privy to such information. On the contrary, Sergei Khrushchev insisted that his father rarely ever spoke about such matters at home.<sup>61</sup> Memoirs and documents produced by other members of the political elite have also failed to offer any support for Adzhubei's claim.

In his memoir of the era, which he spent working among the Soviet political elite, Fedor Burlatsky suggested that Khrushchev had developed a 'Hungary complex' after seeing the rapidity at which matters had spun entirely out of the authorities' control there.<sup>62</sup> Party functionaries too, were apparently in a state of some agitation and panic around this time according to Zubkova.<sup>63</sup> Indeed, it would be particularly surprising if there had not been a great deal of concern at the way events were unfolding in Hungary as communists and members of the Hungarian security services were being attacked and even killed in the streets by protesters.

It should also be noted that Mikhail Suslov, already shown to be an energetic opponent of dissent, had been one of Khrushchev's emissaries in Budapest and had apparently been horrified by the chaos and anti-communist sentiment that he had witnessed there.<sup>64</sup> KGB chief Ivan Serov too had been dispatched to Budapest for a time during the rising. Key elements of the Soviet leadership, therefore, had tangible

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<sup>61</sup> Interview with Sergei Khrushchev, Rhode Island, December 2006.

<sup>62</sup> See Burlatsky, *Khrushchev and the First Russian Spring*, p. 85.

<sup>63</sup> Zubkova, *Obshchestvo i reformy*, p. 153.

<sup>64</sup> V. Sebestyen, *Twelve Days: Revolution 1956*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2006, p. 121. Although not an important figure in the struggle against dissent during the Khrushchev years it is also particularly noteworthy that Yuri Andropov, the future KGB chairman of the Brezhnev era, was the Soviet ambassador in Hungary at that time and had in fact resurrected what was a seemingly ailing career by his handling of the uprising there.

experience of a regime on the edge of collapse. As subsequent developments were to show, there may have been division within the leadership on a number of issues, and particularly on the subject of whether to send troops into Hungary, but in the autumn of 1956 there was undoubtedly a growing consensus among the leadership that dissent had to be reined in at home.<sup>65</sup>

The Soviet Union had been able to maintain its Hungarian satellite regime by force of arms, but no power would be able to prop up the Soviet regime if a similar situation were to arise inside the USSR: a fact that the leadership must have been painfully aware of. As the superpower rivalry heated up, the Soviet regime could not be seen to be in trouble. As Fursenko and Naftali have pointed out, ‘The Hungarian effect could also be seen in the Kremlin’s hardening attitude toward political dissent at home’.<sup>66</sup>

The form that this ‘hardening’ took was a campaign of legal repression against dissenters, initiated by a secret Central Committee letter that was sent out to all Party organisations on 19 December 1956, entitled ‘On the strengthening of the political work of Party organisations in the masses and the suppression of attacks by anti-Soviet enemy elements’.<sup>67</sup> As the KGB’s own internal history textbook, written in 1977, stated: ‘the December letter began a merciless (*besposhadnyi*) campaign against anti-Soviet elements’.<sup>68</sup> The veteran sociologist and historian Boris Firsov has even argued that the December letter was one of the key moments in the entire history of

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<sup>65</sup> Khrushchev vacillated for some time over the matter before eventually acceding to the exhortations of Suslov and Serov, among others, and agreeing to sanction the use of force. The most strident opponent of this move was Khrushchev’s long-time ally, Anastas Mikoyan.

<sup>66</sup> A. Fursenko and T. Naftali, *Khrushchev’s Cold War: The Story of an American Adversary*, New York: W.W. Norton, 2006, p. 141.

<sup>67</sup> RGANI, f. 89, op. 6, d. 2, ll. 1-15.

<sup>68</sup> V. Chebrikov et al. *Istoriya sovetskikh organov gosudarstvennoi bezopasnosti: uchebnyk*, Moskva: Vysshaya krasnoznamenskaya shkola komiteta gosudarstvennoi bezopasnosti pri sovete ministerov SSSR, 1977, p. 527.

the Soviet regime.<sup>69</sup> This may be a slight exaggeration but in regard to the Khrushchev era it is undoubtedly true.

### **2.3.2 FORMULATING THE LETTER**

The records of the Central Committee Presidium session held on 6 December show that the subject of dissent was formally included on its agenda, the aim of which was to produce a draft letter to be sent out to all Party organisations, KGB branches and regional Procurators.<sup>70</sup> The list of those present at the session was as follows: Khrushchev, Nikolai Bulganin, Lazar Kaganovich, Georgy Malenkov, Anastas Mikoyan, Vyacheslav Molotov, Kliment Voroshilov, Maksim Saburov, Mikhail Pervukhin and Georgy Zhukov. These were, of course, all men who had risen to positions of power under Stalin but that should not, in itself, be taken as a direct cause behind the conservative turn that was about to follow in regard to social control. It should also be remembered that, by virtue of their occupying high positions in the Stalin years, these were figures who had first-hand knowledge of the problems that unrestrained Stalinism had bequeathed the country and who had moved quickly to bring the situation back under control after his death.<sup>71</sup>

The principal question to be addressed was ‘What should be done with anti-Soviets (*antisovetchiki*)?’ The minutes of the session show that Malenkov proposed the strengthening of Party discipline, Molotov spoke of the need to improve propaganda and overcome shortages, Mikoyan emphasised that the views of the Party must be more clearly presented to the people and Khrushchev proposed increased monitoring

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<sup>69</sup> B. Firsov, *Raznomyslie v SSSR 1940-1960 gody: Istoriya, teoriya i praktika*, Sankt Peterburg: Izdatel'stvo Evropeiskogo universiteta v Sankt Peterburge, 2008, p. 261.

<sup>70</sup> GARF, f. 3, op. 12, d. 1006, l. 54.

<sup>71</sup> See Gorlizki and Khlevnyuk, *Cold Peace*.

of potentially hostile elements that had recently been released from the camps, particularly Trotskyites.<sup>72</sup> The threat of rising unrest at home was a subject on which it appears that there was minimal disagreement within an otherwise divided leadership: Derek Watson described the session in question as having been ‘surprisingly united’.<sup>73</sup>

From his vacillating over employing the use of force in response to events in Hungary, and later at Novocherkassk, as well as his undoubted bravery in taking the lead on exposing Stalin’s crimes, we can be reasonably certain that Khrushchev was not by nature a leader inclined to large scale repression. Nonetheless, despite his reputation as something of a risk-taker on the international stage, Khrushchev consistently came down on the side of the hardliners when the question of domestic stability arose. It therefore seems reasonable to speculate that he could have been persuaded into giving his approval by conservative figures within the leadership such as Suslov and Serov, the latter of whom was cited by Mikoyan as being someone able to manipulate Khrushchev to his own ends.<sup>74</sup>

It is not a new hypothesis to say that Khrushchev was an inconsistent promoter of liberalisation yet it is a theme that is starkly presented here. His specific reference to Trotskyites – who were never a genuine feature in dissenting behaviour at this time or later – perhaps indicated that he too struggled to see beyond the impact of his formative experiences during the Stalin period. As we will see again in the summer of 1962, when faced with what was considered a potentially destabilising situation,

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<sup>72</sup> GARF, f. 3, op. 12, d. 1006, ll. 1-54.

<sup>73</sup> D. Watson, *Molotov: A Biography*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, p. 259.

<sup>74</sup> See A. Mikoyan, *Tak bylo: Razmyshleniya o minuvshem*. Moskva: Vagrius, 1999.

the Khrushchev regime was still ultimately liable to revert to large-scale repression and violence in order to force the desired outcome.

The results of the 6 December session were passed down to a Central Committee commission for editing before being transformed into a confidential Party letter. The redrafting commission was headed by Leonid Brezhnev and included among others Georgy Malenkov, Averkii Aristov, Nikolai Belyaev, Ivan Serov and Roman Rudenko.<sup>75</sup> The commission met on 14 December to ‘exchange opinions’ on the results of the Presidium session and to draft the letter that was to be sent out to all Party organisations.<sup>76</sup>

It is immediately noteworthy to point out that the combined make up of the two bodies that were principally involved in the production of this letter (firstly the Central Committee Presidium and then the drafting commission) effectively spanned three successive administrations (those of Stalin, Khrushchev and Brezhnev), and this was perhaps one of the main reasons why it is possible to see such strong links with both the past and the future in the regime’s responses to dissent during the Khrushchev period.

### ***2.3.3 THE FINAL TEXT***

The drafting was completed by 14 December and sent to the Presidium for final approval. The tone of the letter was actually softened slightly in redrafting –

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<sup>75</sup> RGANI, f. 89, op. 6, d. 1, ll. 1-15. At the time of the redrafting these men occupied positions of Central Committee Secretary, Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers, two Central Committee secretaries and the heads of the KGB and Procuracy respectively.

<sup>76</sup> RGANI, f. 3, op.14, d. 83, ll. 1-2.

specifically, a clause was added insisting that punishment should not be aimed at people who were ‘mistaken’ rather than truly anti-Soviet – before the letter was dispatched to all Party organisations five days later. In its very earliest lines the letter asserted that the ‘present harmful atmosphere’ in the USSR was a product of events taking place elsewhere, particularly in Hungary, where the imperialist powers had increased their efforts to undermine the socialist camp. The ultimate goal of the West, according to the letter, was the restoration of capitalism across Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union: a sufficiently apocalyptic threat that would justify the new direction.<sup>77</sup>

The letter went on to upbraid local Party organisations for allowing instances of criticism to go without a decisive and timely response and stated that bourgeois elements were attempting to ‘hijack’ the struggle with the Cult of Personality for their own ends. The real crux of the document could be found in statements such as ‘each and every communist must play their part in fighting for the Party line and defending its interests’ and ‘in the struggle against anti-Soviet elements we must be strong and unrelenting’.<sup>78</sup>

It is not hard to see why the KGB interpreted this as signalling a ‘merciless’ struggle against dissenters, but such remarks were actually tempered somewhat in the letter. For example, only a few lines below the comment about being ‘strong and unrelenting’ toward anti-Soviet elements, a cautionary note was included that said ‘we have to work on people who are being influenced by foreign propaganda, they should not be automatically considered enemy elements’.<sup>79</sup> This acceptance that dissenters were not necessarily enemies but could simply be mistaken or naïve was a major

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<sup>77</sup> RGANI, f. 89, op. 6, d. 2, ll. 1-5.

<sup>78</sup> RGANI, f. 89, op. 6, d. 2, l. 12.

<sup>79</sup> RGANI, f. 89, op. 6, d. 2, l. 12.

break with past doctrine but it also sent out conflicting signals to those who were expected to do the policing at ground level. However, this clause went almost entirely unheeded over the next eighteen months.

Whether or not it did so intentionally, the letter seriously misrepresented the situation on the ground at several vital junctures. For example, the majority of dissenters at this stage were not ‘bourgeois elements’ but often strongly adhered to Marxist-Leninist ideological principles and were by no means ‘agents of imperialism’. This kind of hyperbolic rhetoric bore little relation to the real state of affairs around the country. Similarly, it is shown at various points throughout the thesis that although the Soviet authorities were at least partly correct to see outside involvement in unrest across the socialist camp, they consistently overstated the problem. The Eisenhower regime spoke of pursuing a policy of ‘rolling back’ communism and rumours abounded that the CIA had allocated millions of dollars to fund opposition groups inside the Soviet Union yet no evidence has ever surfaced of any groups that received such material assistance.<sup>80</sup>

It is unclear whether the Soviet authorities truly believed in the scenario that they presented in the December letter. Suslov’s biographer, Serge Petroff, has asserted that he firmly believed the US to be the driving force behind the Soviet regime’s domestic discontent, yet it remains unclear whether his colleagues felt the same way.<sup>81</sup> Other sources have suggested that Khrushchev considered the Hungarian regime to be

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<sup>80</sup> In fact, the ethical questions that were raised by the station’s encouragement of the Hungarian rising proved to be especially far-reaching after it was bloodily put down. One of the results was that Radio Free Europe’s sister station changed its name from Radio Liberation to Radio Liberty, thus striking a slightly less militant tone.

<sup>81</sup> S. Petroff, *The Red Eminence: A Biography of Mikhail A. Suslov*, New Jersey: Kingston Press, 1988, p. 117.

largely responsible for provoking the uprising on account of its ineptitude and brutality.<sup>82</sup> The most important point was that, almost regardless of how the situation had come about, Hungary had got completely out of hand and the same could not be allowed to happen inside the USSR.

## **2.4 THE CAMPAIGN AGAINST DISSENT**

One of the characteristic aspects of the Khrushchev years was the regime's tendency to undertake widespread, but often short-lived, campaigns in order to overcome its problems. The struggle to cultivate the Virgin Lands of Siberia and Kazakhstan, the battles against 'social parasites', religion and financial speculation, to name just a few, were all conducted in this way. Unlike other campaigns, however, the struggle against dissent was conducted without media fanfare and seems to have gone largely unnoticed among the general population.

Although the Central Committee Presidium set the tone for the forthcoming clampdown in the December Letter, responsibility for its implementation was placed squarely with regional officials. Correctly perceiving that they had not only been shown the green light to take measures against critics but also that there would be negative consequences for themselves if they did not, local officials began to act. As Boris Firsov has written: '...the call was heard. All the links of the Party and state apparatus began to move and to reply, just like in the old days'.<sup>83</sup> The campaign that followed was nowhere near the scale of the Great Terror of the late 1930s yet neither

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<sup>82</sup> See Fursenko and Naftali, *Khrushchev's Cold War*, p. 140.

<sup>83</sup> Firsov, *Raznomyслие v SSSR*, p. 261.

did it resemble the kind of ‘thaw’ that has so often been used to characterise the Khrushchev years.

#### **2.4.1 CONVICTIONS UNDER ARTICLE 58-10**

The table below shows the number of individuals sentenced under article 58-10 during the Khrushchev period. The surge of convictions in 1957 and 1958 is particularly noticeable. The data was provided by Viktor Chebrikov, chairman of the KGB between 1982 and 1988, in response to a request from Mikhail Gorbachev for details on repression in the post-Stalin era.

**Table 2.3 Annual sentences for anti-Soviet activity and propaganda, 1956-1964.**<sup>84</sup>

Year	Annual sentences	Proportion of all political sentences during the Khrushchev period. %
1956	384	6.7%
1957	1,964	34.3%
1958	1,416	24.7%
1959	750	13.1%
1960	162	2.8%
1961	207	3.6%
1962	323	5.6%
1963	341	6%
1964	181	3.2%
Total	5,728	100%

Source: *Istochnik*, 1995, No. 6, p. 153.

<sup>84</sup> For the complete list of annual political sentences up to 1987 see appendix.

It is important to point out that the above figures on sentences for anti-Soviet activity do not only include those who engaged in political dissent but also nationalist and religious activity. For the most part though, the authorities did not clampdown on any two of these three kinds of dissent concurrently. Anti-religious drives were begun in 1954 and again toward the end of 1958, while persecution against nationalist activity was in decline for some time prior to the Secret Speech but rose again toward the mid-1960s. Across the period as a whole approximately two-thirds to three quarters of those jailed for anti-Soviet activity and propaganda were political dissenters. During the campaign that followed the December Letter, however, almost all convictions under article 58-10 were based upon political dissent.

As Burlatsky wrote in his memoir of the era: 'Later I learned that under Khrushchev many hundreds of people had suffered for so-called political crimes, that is, for voicing disagreement with his policies. Brezhnev developed this practice on a massive scale and with even greater deceit, but it must be acknowledged that it began under Khrushchev'.<sup>85</sup> In fact, the practice of imprisoning dissenters in this way not only began under Khrushchev but was actually more prevalent during his time as First Secretary – a fact that would probably come as a surprise for most people.

At no other time in the entire post-Secret Speech era were a comparable number of citizens arrested and sentenced for dissenting activity. Although many times lower than the amount sentenced for anti-Soviet activity and propaganda in the Stalin years, the total of 1,964 sentences for anti-Soviet activity and propaganda in 1957 alone by far outstripped that of any subsequent year. It is worth noting that in the entire period

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<sup>85</sup> Burlatsky, *Khrushchev and the First Russian Spring*, p. 97.

of 1966 to 1980 (when the Soviet dissident movement was most active) the total number of ‘political sentences’ was 1,829.<sup>86</sup> However, one must exercise some caution in making sweeping comparisons between the two periods by reference to this measure alone, as there was a general move away from large-scale custodial sentencing in later years (see chapter 4). Nonetheless, the records quite clearly show that many more people were jailed for dissent under Khrushchev than Brezhnev, and over half of those were sentenced during 1957 and 1958.

#### ***2.4.2 GROUNDS FOR ARREST AND CONVICTION***

By providing only a rudimentary outline of what constituted anti-Soviet behaviour, the ensuing campaign saw a considerable degree of unpredictability return to the Soviet repressive apparatus. That the provincial officials charged with conducting the clampdown were often poorly educated and trained, and eager to appear vigilant was a cause of considerable inconsistency and one of the reasons why the December Letter spawned a full-blown campaign, according to Aleksandr and Elena Papovyan.<sup>87</sup> The result was that local procurators and KGB branches frequently erred on the side of caution and employed article 58-10 in a wide-ranging and often wholly unsuitable fashion. As a subsequent review of sentences during the period noted, there were many cases where citizens were jailed for private conversations or jokes and instances of local authorities pursuing vendettas against individuals on the basis of personal

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<sup>86</sup> The figures provided on the Brezhnev period included sentences under article 70 (the successor to article 58 – see chapter 4) as well as article 190-1 which was introduced in 1960 as a means of strengthening the already existing legal provisions for dealing with dissent.

<sup>87</sup> A. Papovyan and E. Papovyan, ‘Uchastie verkhovnogo suda SSSR v vyrabotke repressivnoi politiki, 1957-1958’ in Eremina and Zhemkova eds, *Korni Travy*, p. 86.

animosities or instances of entirely acceptable criticism such as letters of complaint about poor housing conditions or low wages.<sup>88</sup>

Most notable, however, was the sheer volume of those sentenced as a result of apparently isolated, and often drunken, outbursts: over fifty per cent of all sentences during the campaign. Several instances have already been cited in chapter 1 where individuals found themselves arrested and sentenced for anti-Soviet behaviour after drunkenly calling members of the militia ‘fascists’ or shouting slogans such as ‘long live Eisenhower’. Numerous underground groups – such as those of Pimenov and Krasnopevtsev – and anonymous letter writers were also arrested and jailed at this time yet the authorities largely failed to make a distinction between this kind of purposive, deliberate behaviour and angry drunken outbursts. Those who remained silent were still unlikely to be embroiled in any kind of ‘trumped up’ charges, but there was rarely any attempt made to establish whether a person who criticised the authorities was actually opposed to the regime or not.

The citizens of Moscow and Leningrad were hit hardest by the clampdown, with records showing 102 and 45 convictions in those cities respectively during 1957. From a total of 1,964 sentences in 1957 only 63 were women and out of 1,416 in 1958 there were 45 women (a little over 3% of all convictions in both years) – most of whom were jailed on the basis of underground activity rather than spontaneous and drunken outbursts in 1956 and 1957. However, although no documentation has yet arisen to prove the matter, this huge discrepancy between sentences against men and

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<sup>88</sup> GARF, f. 8131, op. 32, d. 5080, ll. 30-35.

women may not only reflect that females were less inclined to engage in dissent but also that the authorities were more reluctant to jail them for it.

Females who distributed leaflets and became members of underground groups were almost always outnumbered by their male group-mates, with the one exception of a five strong all-female group uncovered in Krasnoyarsk in 1961. This group was particularly active for a short while in late 1961, pasting up leaflets in many locations around the city under the name of *The Krasnoyarsk Workers* and attempting to hold anti-Soviet meetings with fellow *Komsomol* and trade union members.<sup>89</sup> It also seems that in several cases they were the wives or girlfriends of the more prominent males within a given group and so their impetus to join possibly came from an already existing bond.

Although the statistics held in Procurator files are incomplete, one can see that 476 of those convicted in 1957 were classified as having achieved 'lower' level education and almost 150 were recorded as having undergone some form of higher education.<sup>90</sup> Clearly, a sizeable majority of dissenters had only a few classes of formal education. However, the 1959 census stated that less than two per cent of the Soviet population had undergone higher education – indicating that the most educated people were actually considerably over-represented among those jailed for dissent. This marks a clear distinction from the dissident activity of the Brezhnev era in which members of the intelligentsia famously predominated.

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<sup>89</sup> GARF, f. 8131, op. 31, d. 91724, Ll. 1-8.

<sup>90</sup> Unfortunately, the KGB appears to have been less consistent at recording political prisoners' education levels. Approximately two thirds of case files for individuals sentenced under article 58-10 give some basic data on educational achievement. The category of 'lower educated' contains everything from illiterate up to 10 classes of schooling, 'middle' usually involves some kind of technical qualification and 'higher' indicates attendance at university or some other higher education institute.

It is also interesting to look briefly at the number of CPSU and *Komsomol* members jailed for dissent around this time. For the period of 1957-1958 a total of 99 full CPSU members and 100 *Komsomol* members were jailed for acts of political dissent. When one looks at the kinds of dissent that they engaged in there was a strong trend for Party and *Komsomol* members to have been involved in anonymous rather than open activity. Most commonly among CPSU members this meant individual acts of protest such as the writing of anonymous anti-Soviet letters and leaflets. In the *Komsomol* there was a more pronounced trend toward group activity such as the formation of underground political parties. This was presumably a further reflection of the fact that a person's age tended to have an impact upon what kinds of dissenting behaviour they became involved in.

It has already been established that CPSU and *Komsomol* members were less likely to be jailed as a result of dissenting activity than were ordinary members of the public, yet it is a point worth revisiting. One can put forward two potential reasons for this trend. The first reason would be to suggest that because these people were Party and *Komsomol* members – and therefore communists – the authorities were less likely to jump to the conclusion that they were genuine enemies of the Soviet regime. A second explanation would be that these were people over whom the authorities had a wider breadth of punitive measures available. For example, one could punish a dissenting CPSU member with a Party reprimand or expulsion (with all the negative consequences that this entailed) as well as with article 58-10. For a non-Party member who engaged in dissent at this time the only major sanction available was imprisonment.

These two factors were not mutually exclusive yet the second was perhaps the more important. The fact that, like CPSU and *Komsomol* members, students were also less likely to be jailed than ordinary members of society supports this argument because the authorities had the option to expel them from university rather than simply jailing them or doing nothing. As Moshe Lewin has shown, this was a time when workers were in short supply and, therefore, in a strong position when it came to finding employment. As such, simply having a dissenting worker fired from his or her job would not necessarily have been a major sanction.<sup>91</sup>

In later years the authorities were less inclined to jail dissenters and instead came to rely heavily on what were known as ‘prophylactic measures’ – essentially a form of targeted intimidation intended to forestall dissenting behaviour. This showed that once a viable deterrent that could be applied to all members of society had been established it quickly supplanted more forceful means of response. Nonetheless, CPSU and *Komsomol* members who engaged in acts of protest and criticism remained less likely to be jailed than non-communist dissenters and those who were actually convicted of political crimes were generally dealt with less severely than others once in jail and seem to have fared better in appeals for release and rehabilitation.<sup>92</sup>

One of the interesting aspects of the campaign was the way that it was applied across the entire country. Although detailed figures are not available for the second year of the campaign, the following table gives an indication of how matters were played out in the individual union republics during 1957:

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<sup>91</sup> See Lewin, *The Soviet Century*, p. 172.

<sup>92</sup> See Kozlov and Mironenko eds, *Kramola*, p. 100.

**Table 2.4 Distribution of sentences for anti-Soviet activity and propaganda by union republic in 1957**

Union Republic	Total sentenced in 1957	% of all sentences in 1957	of Soviet population by union republic %
Russia	957	53.1%	56.4%
Ukraine	443	24.5%	20.5%
Belarus	65	3.3%	3.8%
Moldova	27	1.4%	1.3%
Latvia	43	2.3%	1%
Lithuania	68	3.6%	1.3%
Estonia	39	2.1%	0.6%
Georgia	25	1.3%	2.1%
Armenia	11	0.6%	0.9%
Azerbaijan	10	0.5%	1.6%
Turkmenistan	22	1.1%	0.7%
Kirgizstan	11	0.6%	1.1%
Uzbekistan	55	3.1%	3.4%
Kazakhstan	44	2.3%	4.3%
Tadzhikistan	4	0.2%	1
Total	1,796	100%	100%

Source: *1958 Procurator review*. GARF, f. 8131, op. 32, d. 5080, l. 5.<sup>93</sup>

<sup>93</sup> The data on the composition of the Soviet population (in the right-hand column) is taken from the 1959 census. See Tsentral'noe statisticheskoe upravlenie pri Sovete Ministrove SSSR, *Chislennost', sostav i razmeshchenie naseleniya SSSR: kratkie itogi Vsesoyuznoi perepisi naseleniya 1959 goda*, Moskva: Gosstatizdat TsSU SSSR, 1961, p. 3-8.

As we can see from the above data, this was undoubtedly an all-Union campaign. Broadly speaking, the volume of sentences in each union republic was roughly proportionate with its contribution to the overall Soviet population. The fact that the total number of sentences provided by the Procurator's Office does not tally with data provided by the KGB – cited in table 2.3 – is, unfortunately, reflective of the fact that Soviet statistics can be incomplete and contradictory at times. This discrepancy may have stemmed from the fact that some legal records were apparently lost during the numerous administrative reshuffles of the Khrushchev era.<sup>94</sup> The fact that the KGB figures were compiled three decades later would suggest that they may have incorporated information that was unavailable at the time of the original Procurator review and, therefore, may be the more accurate of the two. Nonetheless, the two different totals provided by the Procuracy and KGB (1,964 and 1,796 respectively) are sufficiently close together that some faith can be placed in their general validity in terms of regional distribution.

### **2.4.3 LEGAL PROCESSES**

The processes involved in prosecuting acts of dissent on a legal basis provides a useful example of the way that the different elements of the law enforcement apparatus functioned in tandem with one another. More often than not where acts of dissent involved some kind of public manifestation, such as drunken outbursts against the leadership, it was the militia that were first to respond since they were the regime's most numerous and most visible representatives at ground level. The case would then usually be passed directly to the KGB, who theoretically had complete

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<sup>94</sup> See Kozlov and Mironenko eds, *Kramola*.

jurisdiction in all matters concerning political crimes, though arrests and searches had to be sanctioned by the Procurator of a given *oblast*'.

Indicative of the improved legal procedures that emerged following Stalin's death was the creation in 1953 of the 'Department of Supervision of KGB Investigations' (*otdel' po nadzoru za sledstviem v organakh gosbezopasnosti prokuratury SSSR*) within the Procurator's office. However, although this new department theoretically had the authority to challenge evidence provided by the security organs and to re-classify and overturn cases where inconsistencies or lack of evidence were found to be present, there is little evidence to suggest that it did so at this time. Subsequent years would show that considerable division and rivalry existed between the security organs and the legal establishment when the latter did begin to reclassify and overturn sentences that had been passed during the campaign of 1957 and 1958.

Prior to the establishment in 1968 of the specialised Fifth Directorate under the chairmanship of Yuri Andropov, matters relating to dissent had been under the jurisdiction of the KGB Second Chief Directorate, that of Internal Security and Counter-Intelligence (again demonstrating the regime's perception of dissent as a foreign-inspired phenomenon).<sup>95</sup> This seems to have meant that there was less coordination of practice and specialised skills within the security organs for dealing with dissenters during the early Khrushchev period in particular.

The security organs' investigation techniques had changed much since the Stalin era. After his own arrest in 1957 Revolt Pimenov recalled that his interrogators were

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<sup>95</sup> See C. Andrew, *The Sword and the Shield: The Secret History of the KGB*, London: Basic Books, 1999, p. 568.

almost unfailingly, and at times even obsequiously, polite.<sup>96</sup> Violence and torture had ceased to be staples of KGB investigations yet pressure could still be applied in other ways, such as threats to arrest suspects' friends and loved ones. Stool pigeons were regularly placed in prisoners' cells while they were under interrogation and deception in regard to co-defendants testimonies remained widespread.

What one repeatedly encounters even among classified materials is a tendency to shy away from presenting detailed information on the 'nuts and bolts' of the investigation process. For example, reports sent from the KGB to the Central Committee's General Department tend to be studded with phrases such as 'the KGB is utilising all its resources' or 'measures are being taken' to investigate a specific occurrence. Exactly what the use of such oblique terminology covers up is unclear yet the reasons for it can be easily inferred. The condemnation of Stalin's abuses created a situation whereby information directly linking any individual to repressive measures would naturally be avoided where possible. The Secret Speech had established a precedent that could well be repeated at some stage in the future.

Unfortunately, what could potentially have been the most valuable document in regard to the policing of dissent was destroyed on the orders of General Procurator Roman Rudenko. In 1958 a putative manual had been produced, entitled 'On Procurator Supervision in Cases of State Crimes'. The manuscript had been intended as a general guide on how the courts and security organs ought to handle cases of anti-Soviet activity, particularly useful in the provinces where improved legal practices were less well established and mistakes in investigations and legal procedures were

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<sup>96</sup> R. Pimenov, *Vospominaniya*, Moskva: Informatsionno-ekspertnaya gruppa 'Panorama', 1996, p. 103.

made more frequently. However, on reviewing the completed document Rudenko ordered that all plans for its publication be abandoned and that the existing copies (38 in total) be removed from circulation. All but one were destroyed and the final copy was classified but has yet to come to light.<sup>97</sup> Since there was clearly some need for this document, and no replacement was produced, one can only assume that Rudenko decided that it was too incautious to commit such matters to paper.

Despite various improvements to the legal system, a Soviet courtroom was still not a place where one could expect anything resembling a fair trial. By all accounts, judges did not see their task as establishing guilt or innocence but in establishing the level of guilt and reflecting this in their sentencing; a fact neatly demonstrated in the March 1964 trial of Joseph Brodsky where a sign had been hung on the entrance to the courthouse that read ‘trial of the parasite Brodsky’.<sup>98</sup> At any rate, no cases have yet come to light in which KGB evidence was dismissed in court and an individual was judged innocent of the accusations against them.

Unfortunately, few case files contain information in regard to the duration of individual sentences passed down upon conviction for anti-Soviet activity and propaganda. However, it is possible to find some basic details on the subject:

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<sup>97</sup> Kozlov and Mironenko eds, *Kramola*, p. 32.

<sup>98</sup> See Burford Jr, R. ‘Getting the Bugs Out of Socialist Legality: The Case of Joseph Brodsky’, *The American Journal of Comparative Law*, Vol. 22, No. 3, Summer 1994, pp. 465-501.

**Table 2.5 Length of sentences under article 58-10 in the period 1956-57<sup>99</sup>**

Year	Up to 5 Years	6-10 Years	Over 10 Years	Total
1956	95 (41.1%)	131 (56.7%)	5 (2.2%)	231 (100%)
1957	930 (52%)	829 (46.4%)	29 (1.6%)	1,788 (100%)

Source: *1958 Procurator review*. GARF, f. 8131, op. 32, d. 5080, l. 7

From the above evidence, contained in a 1958 Procurator review of anti-Soviet activity, it appears that the average length of sentence under article 58-10 was approximately five years. Perhaps most striking is the fact that so few were sentenced to periods of ten years or more and, though the above table does not show this, none were executed as a result of dissenting behaviour. Although the potential price to be paid for dissenting behaviour remained high, it was far lower than during the Stalin years.

The fact that this campaign progressed throughout 1957 without any kind of interruption raises two interesting points. Firstly, it suggests that this was not something that had simply been forced upon Khrushchev by the hard-line Stalinists in the leadership, since the most senior among them were removed after the anti-Party affair in June 1957, yet the campaign continued unabated for another year afterward. This may offer support for Carl Linden's supposition that Khrushchev's victory over

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<sup>99</sup> The document in question gives no indication as to why the percentage figures do not add up to one hundred. Again, this is testament to the occasional weakness of Soviet statistical data.

the anti-Party group had been achieved after colleagues in the leadership had made him agree to shelve, or at least to slow down, the process of deStalinisation.<sup>100</sup>

It is also notable that all of this was ongoing before, during and after the World Youth Festival, which brought tens of thousands of visitors to Moscow from around the world. It made good sense for the authorities to remove vocal discontents from the streets, leaving visitors with the impression that all was well inside the Soviet Union – a practice that was repeated during the 1980 Olympics. In fact, the Youth Festival appears to have been something of a propaganda victory for the Soviet regime and helped to propagate its image as a progressive state, showing that the campaign proceeded largely unnoticed by those not directly affected.

The lack of wide-scale press coverage accompanying the crackdown on dissent suggests that the campaign cannot have been intended to intimidate potentially rebellious elements into silence. It was, therefore, most likely intended as a short-term measure: a palliative against the existing unstable environment that the Hungarian rising had provoked. This showed the extent to which the relationship between the Soviet regime and society had already come to involve the outside world to an ever increasing extent since Stalin's death and also the extent to which the regime still, in the first instance, looked to use repression as a sticking plaster to cover up its problems rather than seeking a longer term solution.

Although generally not its default approach to the matter, the Khrushchev regime clearly was willing to revert to arrests and sentences on a fairly large scale when it

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<sup>100</sup> C. Linden, *Khrushchev and the Soviet Leadership*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990, p. 47.

was deemed necessary. This increased level of repressive activity did not just reflect that the authorities were more attentive to dissent during 1957 and 1958 but also that there had been a real growth in the number of individuals who were either publicly attacking the regime or undertaking clandestine political activity according to evidence presented by the KGB and Procurator's office.<sup>101</sup> That there has been practically no mention of this campaign against dissent in Western historiography on the Khrushchev era is perhaps one of the reasons why many commentators have overstated the liberality of that time.

## **2.5 WINDING DOWN THE CAMPAIGN**

The Soviet regime's struggle with dissenters was, of course, to carry on virtually without pause up to the eventual collapse of the USSR and later years featured two more particularly important clampdowns on dissenters – one in the early 1970s and another toward the end of that decade.<sup>102</sup> The campaign that had been initiated by the December letter lasted until around the middle of 1958. By that time over 3,000 individuals had been jailed for anti-Soviet activity since the letter had been circulated. This was a total far lower than for any eighteen month period under Stalin yet also much higher than any comparable period of time under Brezhnev.

By the middle of 1958, the main stimulus for the crackdown on dissent – the threat of instability prompted by events in Hungary – had all but evaporated. The extent to which the application of article 58-10 had been dependent upon the prevailing

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<sup>101</sup> GARF, f. 8131, op. 32, d. 5080, l. 4.

<sup>102</sup> The first of these two Brezhnev era clampdowns was primarily aimed at destroying the *samizdat* journal *The Chronicle of Current Events*. It proved to be a failure in the long-term but did prevent *The Chronicle* from appearing for well over a year. The second campaign was most notable for the fact that leading members of the Moscow Helsinki Group were arrested and subsequently jailed, including Yuri Orlov, Aleksandr Ginzburg and Anatoly Shcharansky.

domestic and international programme was shown by the Soviet legal experts Kurlasnky and Mikhailov. They explained that ‘in the period of the counter-revolutionary revolt in Hungary, persons hostilely inclined toward the socialist order expressed approval of the revolt, who lauded the acts of the rebels and called for restoration of capitalist ways in the USSR were properly held responsible under article 58-10’ yet criticism of other areas of Party policy did not require such a harsh response.<sup>103</sup> In other words, while the rising in Hungary was considered a potential source of domestic instability the authorities would take a hard line against dissenters who spoke on this theme. At other times, when the domestic situation was more stable, such comments could go without a severe response.

Although the causes of the campaign may have disappeared, it still required some kind of tangible catalyst for it to be decisively drawn to a close. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the way that the campaign was ended is the fact that the telling pressure was applied neither from outside of the regime nor from within the top political leadership. Instead what can quite clearly be seen is that it was the entreaties and advice of the Soviet legal establishment, in the form of the Procurator’s office and the Supreme Court in particular, that played a leading role in winding down the wave of arrests and sentences.

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<sup>103</sup> V. Kurlanskii and M. Mikhailov eds, *Osobo opasnye gosudarstvennye prestupleniya*, Moskva: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel’stvo iuridicheskoi literatury, 1963, p. 126.

### **2.5.1 THE PROCURATOR REVIEW**

The Supreme Court had in fact been expressing reservations about the legality of the campaign for some months by the summer of 1958. According to Aleksandr and Elena Papovyan, pressure had already started to build for the campaign to be ended in 1957 but, they suggested, inertia within the repressive mechanisms and KGB resistance had prevented any softening of policy.<sup>104</sup> Perhaps the Party leadership had simply not been ready to listen to voices urging caution at that time. One particular document in which doubts were raised in respect of several specific cases and calls were made for sentences to be reviewed was the report entitled 'Information on the results of legal practice in cases of counter-revolutionary crimes'.<sup>105</sup> Compiled in early 1958, and drawing upon numerous cases from 1956 and early 1957, the report essentially argued that too many of those who were being sentenced under article 58-10 should not have been branded 'anti-Soviet' but dealt with in some more appropriate manner.

In May 1958 this report was forwarded to the CPSU Central Committee. The timing of its submission to the Central Committee suggests that the Supreme Court *spravka* (report) was the direct catalyst for a review of sentencing policy in cases of counter-revolutionary crimes that was subsequently carried out during May and June of 1958. The ultimate impact of this report leads one to conclude that it had been sanctioned by the very highest political authorities and that, in all likelihood, its recommendations may well also have been pre-ordained.

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<sup>104</sup> Papovyan and Papovyan, 'Uchastie verkhovnogo suda SSSR' in Eremina and Zhemkova eds, *Korni Travy*, p. 68.

<sup>105</sup> GARF, f. 9474, op. 16c, e.kh. 648, ll. 1-73.

The review began by presenting detailed figures on the numbers and social composition of those who had been sentenced during the campaign. It went on to cite numerous individual cases of citizens arrested and jailed for anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda since Stalin's death, and particularly since the December letter. It pointed to the uprising in Hungary and the unmasking of Stalin as the two main catalysts for raised levels of dissenting activity and stated that the increased number of convictions showed that the KGB and Procuracy had been effective and vigilant in following the new guidelines set out in December 1956.<sup>106</sup>

However, after the 'sugar coating' that was traditional at the beginning of such reports, it then painted a more complete picture. In its concluding remarks the review stated 'the (security) organs are essentially conducting the struggle well but are sometimes apprehending people who are not truly anti-Soviet', before proceeding to assert that '...complaints about individual shortages or problems are not anti-Soviet. This can entail gossip about leaders, jokes of a political character, complaints about agriculture – all of which can be without counter-revolutionary meaning'.<sup>107</sup> It then referred back to the statement in the December letter that had urged caution in sentencing as anti-Soviet those who were simply mistaken in their views, naïve or materially unhappy. The closing lines of the review proved to be the most significant of all: 'Mistakes are being made in cases of counter-revolutionary crimes. The courts require a clarification from the Plenum of the Supreme Court as regards what does and does not constitute anti-Soviet behaviour'.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> GARE, f. 8131, op. 32, d. 5080, l. 17.

<sup>107</sup> GARE, f. 8131, op. 32, d. 5080, l. 42.

<sup>108</sup> GARE, f. 8131, op. 32, d. 5080, l. 43.

### ***2.5.2 THE SUPREME COURT***

The Supreme Court resolution duly arrived on 13 June 1958. Its overall message can be summed up by the following line: ‘for an act to be considered anti-Soviet it has to be consciously aimed at harming the Soviet state’. It then went on to recommend that those who drunkenly curse the authorities or act primarily out of material discontent should not *necessarily* (italics added) be charged under article 58-10 and that courts and investigators should look at individuals’ biographies, including their work and war record, social status and age, in order to help distinguish between anti-Soviet activity and a ‘faulty attitude toward certain events or policies’.<sup>109</sup> At the end of 1958 these recommendations were included in a new set of basic legal principles for dealing with what were now termed ‘crimes against the state’ rather than ‘counter-revolutionary crimes’ (see chapter 4).

This was a crucial step in the creation of a more sophisticated and effective corpus of policy against dissent. It marked the point where the regime’s ‘fire fighting’ approach to policing dissent began to be replaced with a more sophisticated and less outwardly repressive approach. It showed that by the end of the 1950s the authorities themselves had implicitly begun to distinguish between conscious acts of dissent such as those often carried out by members of the intelligentsia and the spontaneous expressions of frustration and anger that tended to feature more among workers, and subsequently to tailor their response accordingly. Roughly speaking, the regime had come to see that even when reflected in political language, material dissatisfaction was inherently less dangerous than political dissatisfaction provided that it was kept at manageable levels.

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<sup>109</sup> GARF, f. 8131, op. 32, d. 5080, l. 64.

There was some considerable wisdom in making this distinction between the kinds of spontaneous worker dissent and the more persistent and pre-planned dissent that reflected some degree of genuine discontent at the contemporary political situation. However, it is also true that much of the pre-planned and more deeply politicised dissenting behaviour that took place around this time was still not ‘consciously aimed at harming the Soviet state’ or genuinely opposed to the regime either – something that the authorities completely overlooked.

What this new distinction signalled was that the political authorities were beginning to gain a more nuanced understanding of dissent. As chapter 4 of the thesis shows, this was to prove an important and effective shift in the direction of policy against dissent. Nonetheless, to suggest that this represented proof of the Soviet regime embracing the rule of law would be a step too far. More effort was put into creating a façade of legality yet, in actual fact, the regime continued to enjoy a virtually free hand in the way that it responded to its critics. As soon as the authorities perceived a threat to domestic stability, all other considerations – such as legal processes and international public opinion – could still be brushed aside.

A wider point arising from the way that the campaign was brought to a close is that of the role played by the Soviet legal establishment. This was not the first or last time that the Supreme Court and Procurator’s office were able to have a restraining effect on Party policy. As Harold Berman pointed out in regard of the parasitism laws that Khrushchev attempted to force through, Soviet jurists were able to exert a degree of pressure on the leadership preventing a return to the arbitrariness and mass illegality of Stalinism – something that was also the case here in regard to the persecution of

dissenters.<sup>110</sup> Yoram Gorlizki has shown that justice officials also resisted Khrushchev's attempts to give Comrades' Courts the power to exile citizens for up to five years and Moshe Lewin has stated that Soviet jurists took the lead in pushing for greater liberalisation of criminal justice during the 1970s.<sup>111</sup> This is not to suggest that one should consider the legal establishment to have been somehow 'liberal' but instead one should see it as an attempt to become more 'professional' and a little more independent of the political authorities. This was a development that also seems to have been taking place among scientists at the time (see chapter 3).

The reality is that the legal establishment was able to have a restraining influence such as this only when the leadership allowed them to do so, meaning that any gains in this area could always be reversed at a stroke. In support of this argument Leonard Schapiro cited a remark that was apparently made by a Soviet Deputy Procurator General to a visiting American professor of law: '...if it becomes necessary we will restore the old methods. But I think it will not be necessary'.<sup>112</sup> Naturally one must place a question mark over the validity of such anecdotal evidence, especially as it seems doubtful that a senior member of the Soviet legal establishment would have spoken so candidly with a visiting American. Ultimately though, whether these words were actually uttered by the Deputy Procurator or not, this was the position that had been adopted.

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<sup>110</sup> See H. Berman, 'The Struggle of Soviet Jurists', *Slavic Review*, Vol. 22, No. 1, June 1963, pp. 314-320.

<sup>111</sup> See Y. Gorlizki, 'Delegalization in Russia: Soviet Comrades' Courts in Retrospect', *American Journal of Comparative Law*, Vol. 46, No. 3, Summer 1998, pp. 403-425 and Lewin, *The Soviet Century*, p. 171.

<sup>112</sup> Schapiro, *The Communist Party*, p. 611.

## **2.6 CONCLUSIONS**

This was clearly a period in which the regime struggled to find the most effective way of getting to grips with dissent: a fact that is reflected in the characteristic policy zigzags. Rather than implementing a pre-planned series of measures to forestall protest and criticism, the regime was often occupied with reacting to events that had already happened. This generally entailed reliance upon more traditional Stalin-era responses such as sentencing critics to labour camps and prisons. Although members of the leadership were rarely involved in responding to individual acts of dissent, it was the Central Committee Presidium that set the overall tone for the way that society was policed.

The assumptions and attitudes on which policy against dissent was based were rarely entirely unrealistic yet they were frequently exaggerated or unsophisticated. What this meant was that the authorities' perception of the danger presented by dissenting activity was occasionally overestimated and thus led to an unnecessarily severe response to acts that actually belied little or no genuine oppositional sentiment or intent. In turn this served to increase the alienation of some dissenters and in the long term force them from a mildly critical position to one approaching outright condemnation of the regime.

Even though the regime could not be described as pursuing a coherent and sophisticated plan, their attempts to combat dissenting behaviour were not without success. Open dissent within the Party and *Komsomol* was quickly reined in within less than a year after the Secret Speech. The student body too seems to have become

a far less notable source of criticism and protest once the regime began to take measures to neutralise 'unhealthy elements' in its midst. There were also failures, however. Although CPSU and *Komsomol* members had largely ceased to engage in public criticism, and remained outwardly obedient for decades after, they did continue to participate in underground groups and sent anonymous letters. Eliminating public acts of dissent did not equate to eliminating all dissent and in fact the first half of the 1960s saw underground activity flourish.

The general characterisation of the Khrushchev period as one of relative liberality is called into question by the evidence presented in this chapter. The fact that well over a thousand people were jailed for anti-Soviet activity and propaganda on the basis of isolated drunken clashes with the militia or for telling jokes about political figures clearly demonstrates that a strong vein of authoritarianism remained. The key difference with the Stalin era was not that the scope of acceptable criticism had been expanded significantly but that the regime had reduced the severity of what it considered to be an appropriate response to acts of criticism and protest.

In regard to the way that dissent was policed in later years, it was the winding down of the 1957-1958 campaign that was most significant. The insistence that acts of protest and criticism had to show genuine intent to undermine or weaken the Soviet regime for them to be regarded as 'anti-Soviet' became a keystone of the authorities' responses to critics. Many of the lessons that were learned, however, showed how not to react to dissent. Reliance upon local Party organisations to respond to critical remarks without providing detailed guidelines prompted inconsistency. Later years witnessed a degree of centralisation in this sphere as a more methodical and

considered approach was employed. By the end of the 1950s, the Soviet regime began to punish less but to punish better.

The relationship between the state and society was undergoing major changes around this time as the transition away from unrestrained Stalinism continued. This was a period when the authorities viewed society with more than a little trepidation, fearing that the stability of the regime was not entirely certain – perhaps rightly so. One of the key aspects of the Khrushchev era as a whole in regard to the relationship between state and society was the way that the regime became more sensitive to public moods. Although more noticeable in the later part of the Khrushchev era, this could already be seen in the authorities' panicked response to the Hungarian rising, for example.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **PROTEST AND DISSENT: 1959-1964**

In many ways the first half of the 1960s were not fundamentally different to the late 1950s in regard to dissenting behaviour; people still made anti-Soviet leaflets, formed underground groups and generally criticised the regime's failings. As a social phenomenon in which participants were almost entirely isolated from each other, one would not expect dissenting behaviour to evolve quickly or evenly across years, regions or classes. However, when one takes a more panoramic view of the entire period, there were also some important developments that can be observed during the second half of Khrushchev's rule.

While the years following Stalin's death could be characterised as a time of great political and social oscillation, for the country at large life had begun to settle down a little by the end of the 1950s and living standards continued to improve. With a rising standard of living and higher levels of education came greater aspirations and increased demands were made upon the regime. There were no political upheavals comparable to the XX CPSU Congress and no foreign activity as divisive as the Hungarian invasion yet, in a number of ways, the problem of dissent became even more acute for a time before the authorities were able to again reduce acts of protest and criticism to a minimum.

With dissenting behaviour taking on a more stable form around the turn of the decade, the present chapter (and that which follows) has a slightly more thematic focus. It addresses the most important themes and forms of protest and criticism among

workers and the intelligentsia, such as opposition to Khrushchev, mass disorders and underground activity, as separate phenomena. Approaching the subject in this way, one can see that although there was still relatively little appetite for revolution, popular enthusiasm and respect for the regime and, to an extent also for Marxism-Leninism, were in decline. Social stability was becoming dependant upon material satisfaction and the formative stages of the Brezhnev era human rights movement were taking place during Khrushchev's last years in power.

The kind of misjudged criticism of the authorities that had been a feature of the post-Secret Speech period was eradicated as the new boundaries of acceptable and unacceptable comment had been firmly established by the end of the 1950s. It was not only the uncertainty of the post-Secret Speech period that had faded by the turn of the decade but also much of the atmosphere of utopianism that it had engendered. Many dissenters and would-be dissenters had already been jailed, removed from the Party and *Komsomol* or otherwise intimidated into silence. Even before the end of the 1950s it had become entirely evident that there was still practically no legitimate outlet for loyal political criticism. Many acquiesced to this new reality but some grew ever more alienated from the regime because of it. As such, the dissent that did surface increasingly took on a much sharper and more quasi-subversive tone while manifestations of worker protest often also became more volatile.

Marxism-Leninism continued to be the dominant political philosophy among most dissenters but was a waning force throughout the 1960s and even a growing number of those who still held out hope for a more liberal form of socialism no longer believed it could happen under the existing regime. Khrushchev in particular became

a 'lightning rod' for people's dissatisfaction as the legitimacy of the incumbent Soviet leadership and support for its domestic activity seems to have begun a notable decline in the eyes of the people.<sup>113</sup>

Material concerns remained the overwhelming catalyst for acts of protest among workers in particular. Although still cloaked in Marxist-Leninist rhetoric, it was apparent that the workers were essentially demanding an acceptable standard of living and were, on occasion, prepared to fight to achieve it. Importantly, they were, to a considerable extent, successful in forcing the authorities to address their most pressing concerns. During the first half of the 1960s worker dissent flared violently before almost entirely tailing off by the middle of the decade. The result was that the working class went on to remain outwardly passive until that same combination of political turbulence, general atmosphere of renewal and widespread material shortcomings again made themselves felt under Gorbachev years later.<sup>114</sup>

Among dissenters from the intelligentsia, spiritual matters (in the non-religious sense) dominated over material concerns while ideological issues generally became less important. Particularly in Moscow, critics of the authorities began to enter into each other's orbit and to find common ground, establishing rudimentary networks of like-minded individuals. Underground activity went into decline and the tendency toward open and more legalistic forms of criticism began to develop, displaying a number of very clear indicators of the subsequent human rights movement of the Brezhnev years.

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<sup>113</sup> See for example V. Shlapentokh, *Public and Private Life of the Soviet People: Changing Values in Post-Stalin Russia*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989 and E. Zubkova, *Obshchestvo i reformy 1945-1964*, Moskva: Izdatel'skii tsentr 'Rossiya molodaya', 1993.

<sup>114</sup> There was, however, a steady growth in tangential indicators of worker dissatisfaction, such as labour indiscipline and drunkenness, that arguably represented a form of 'silent resistance'. See for example P. Sorlin, *The Soviet People and Their Society: From 1917 to the Present*, London: Pall Mall Press, 1968.

Although still slanted heavily in favour of the latter, the relationship between society and the regime became slightly less one-sided than it had been in previous years. The disturbances of summer 1962, in particular, demonstrated to the authorities that popular dissatisfaction could have potentially cataclysmic results and had to be prevented as far as possible. One can also see the extent to which the outside world was becoming a more important actor in the relationship between society and the regime as ever-greater breaches were made in the authorities' monopoly on the information that reached Soviet citizens, seemingly causing cynicism and mistrust to grow exponentially.

### **3.1 OPPOSITION TO KHRUSHCHEV**

Considering the general tone of present-day appraisals of Khrushchev, one might reasonably have expected him not to feature among the most frequent targets of dissenters' criticism. Historians in the West have generally viewed Khrushchev quite positively as an individual and he was, after all, the man who had exposed Stalin's crimes, fostered a degree of cultural liberalisation and expended considerable effort on raising living standards.

On the contrary, Khrushchev was singled out for a great deal of criticism and personal abuse from dissenters. Like other Soviet leaders he was the subject of mocking nicknames, caricatures and *anekdoty* yet there was also an aspect to these attacks that was much more pointed but has rarely been raised in studies of the period. This was not a phenomenon that was entirely novel to the early 1960s but it was one that appears to have grown noticeably in both volume and intensity since the late 1950s.

Looking back three and a half decades after Khrushchev's ouster, Ludmilla Alexeyeva was able to state that 'in his uneven and boorish way, Khrushchev was one of the greatest leaders Russia ever had'. However, Alexeyeva also conceded that this degree of admiration for Khrushchev had not developed until some time after he had been deposed in 1964.<sup>115</sup> As Stephen Bittner has argued: 'from the vantage point of October 1964...the thaw seemed like a long sequence of missed opportunities and squelched reforms. From the vantage point of 1968 and later, the thaw was a "magical era that ended as quickly as it has begun"'.<sup>116</sup> Hindsight has since done much to exonerate Khrushchev from some of the criticism and abuse that was directed his way, yet the fact that a multitude of vitriolic attacks took place at the time remains significant.

### **3.1.1 EARLY ATTACKS ON KHRUSHCHEV**

A strain of anti-Khrushchev sentiment already existed in the second half of the 1950s; something that can be seen in numerous case files of individuals convicted for anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda around that time. One example could be seen in the case of N.P. Ipatov of Kirovskaya *oblast'* who was jailed after publicly declaring in February 1957 that 'Khrushchev and Bulganin drink the people's blood'.<sup>117</sup> Another case that had proceeded through the courts a month previously saw M.K. Yusubov, a CPSU member from Azerbaidzhan, sentenced after sending anonymous letters to

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<sup>115</sup> L. Alexeyeva and P. Goldberg, *The Thaw Generation: Coming of Age in the Post-Stalin Era*, London: Little, Brown and Company, 1990, p. 105.

<sup>116</sup> S. Bittner, *The Many Lives of Khrushchev's Thaw: Experience and Memory on Moscow's Arbat*, London: Cornell University Press, 2008, p. 7. The quote cited by Bittner is taken from M. Gessen, *Dead Again: The Russian Intelligentsia after Communism*, London: 1997, p. 12.

<sup>117</sup> GARF, f. 8131, op. 31, d. 81365, l. 1.

*Pravda* in which he accused Khrushchev of ‘leading the country toward disaster’.<sup>118</sup> The kind of hyperbolic language and lack of constructive comment involved reflect that this was a theme more prevalent among workers in the first half of the era. This is perhaps indicative of the fact that a degree of co-operation and even mutual reliance still existed between Khrushchev and the intelligentsia during the second half of the 1950s.<sup>119</sup>

Predictably, at this early stage one of the prominent trends among those who attacked Khrushchev specifically was opposition to the exposure of Stalin’s crimes – a theme that soon became apparent in the above-cited case of Yusubov, who had also declared that the Secret Speech had been a disaster. However, it was by no means only Stalinists who attacked Khrushchev in this way. Swingeing troop cuts in the Red Army, restrictions on peasants’ private plots and unpopular shake-ups of the bureaucracy and education system are just a few examples of ways in which different strata of society would have understandably felt great animosity toward Khrushchev.

### **3.1.2 ‘BRINGING DISGRACE UPON THE COUNTRY’**

One case that shows how this trend was manifested among workers can be seen in a series of leaflets that were distributed around Moscow by Yuri Grimm and Abdulbai Khasyanov in November 1963. The pair produced 500 copies of three different leaflets and distributed them around *Kievskii Vokzal* and *Bauman, Kuibyshev* and

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<sup>118</sup> GARF, f. 8131, op. 31, d. 80118, ll. 1-5.

<sup>119</sup> Numerous scholars have suggested that Khrushchev saw the intelligentsia as a key ally in the struggle with his conservative rivals and that the intelligentsia in turn saw that only Khrushchev offered the possibility of any degree of liberalisation. See, for example, Zezina, M. *Sovetskaya khudozhestvennaya intelligentsiya i vlast’ v 1950e-60e gody*, Moskva: Dialog MGU, 2000 and V. Shlapentokh, *Soviet Intellectuals and Political Power: The Post-Stalin Era*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990.

*Pervomaiskii raiony* of the capital. The first leaflet stated, among other things, that ‘You are nothing to Nikita, just as you were nothing to Stalin’ and asked ‘is it not time for Khrushchev to claim his pension before he converts to a god?’<sup>120</sup> The second leaflet included statements such as ‘Are you a patriot for your homeland? If yes then you cannot calmly relate to the disaster that our leaders are taking us to’ and ‘for almost half a century of this regime we have strained with titanic labour and yet we still live worse than other peoples’.<sup>121</sup> The third and final leaflet is reproduced in its entirety below:

***Comrades!***  
***In the name of a happy life for the Soviet people,***  
***in the name of a bright future for our children,***  
***in the name of saving our country from the disgrace***  
***that the windbag Khrushchev has brought us to,***  
***demand that the Supreme Soviet quickly removes him***  
***from all of his positions, together with all his toadies***  
***and names them enemies of the people.***  
***Wake up comrades!***  
***Don’t wait for a change, make it happen!***<sup>122</sup>

It is eminently clear that in this instance, and in many others like it, it was Khrushchev and the ruling clique rather than the overall Soviet regime that drew people’s anger. The closing remark inciting readers to action is indicative of the growing militancy that featured among leaflets of the time, while the belief that the Supreme Soviet would or could remove Khrushchev and his associates from power displays a political naivety typical of worker dissent. The word ‘windbag’ (*boltun*), like ‘maize nut’ (*kukharuznik*) and ‘joker’ (*paren*), was among the most common insults directed at Khrushchev. The demand that Khrushchev be declared an ‘enemy of the people’

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<sup>120</sup> GARF, f. 8131, op. 33, d. 96712, l. 22.

<sup>121</sup> GARF, f. 8131, op. 33, d. 96712, l. 23.

<sup>122</sup> GARF, f. 8131, op. 33, d. 96712, l. 24.

(*vrag naroda*), on the other hand, does not seem to have been a staple of dissenters' attacks.

One of the more notable remarks of the accompanying investigation protocol was that 'Grimm had a long-standing and unhealthy interest in the broadcasts of Voice of America and the BBC as well as in capitalist films and literature which had caused him to relate negatively to Soviet activity'.<sup>123</sup> However, this presents something of an inconsistency since neither the BBC nor Voice of America were among the stations that tended to attack Khrushchev personally or attempted to incite Soviet citizens to engage in acts of protest.<sup>124</sup> Whether the statement was true or simply something that Grimm had conceded in order to appease his investigators remains unclear, though it seems likely that the security organs would have pursued this avenue of questioning. It again demonstrates the extent to which the regime sought to tie acts of dissent with foreign powers.

The notion that Khrushchev was somehow bringing disgrace upon the country or leading it to disaster is one that repeatedly cropped up in such attacks. It seems that for many people low living standards in general and particularly agricultural failures lay at the heart of this apparent disgrace. For example, leaflets scattered on a bus in Odessa *oblast'* during September 1963 simply read: 'Increased prices and lowered wages. Agriculture is collapsing. This is Khrushchev's work!'<sup>125</sup> Similarly, Vladimir Bukovsky recalled spending summers labouring on a collective farm in his youth and being woken daily by the sound of peasant women outside swearing,

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<sup>123</sup> GARF, f. 8131, op. 33, d. 96712, l. 3.

<sup>124</sup> According to Vladimir Petrov, both the BBC and Voice of America had 'ruled out' the use of anti-Soviet propaganda in their broadcasts during the 1950s. See Petrov, V. 'Radio Liberation', *Russian Review*, Vol. 17, No. 2, 1958, pp. 104-114.

<sup>125</sup> GARF, f. 8131, op. 31, d. 96255, ll. 1-7.

cursing and singing vulgar songs about Khrushchev while they worked.<sup>126</sup> Khrushchev's (largely unsuccessful) meddling in agricultural matters and the decision to buy grain from abroad for the first time in 1963, as well as restrictions that were imposed on peasants' private plots, left him unpopular and lacking credibility among the peasantry in particular, despite a number of major improvements that his rule had brought for them.<sup>127</sup>

In regard to the peasantry, Khrushchev was not alone in being the target of their animosity. Sheila Fitzpatrick, for example, has stated that the peasants had also hated Stalin.<sup>128</sup> Whether they engaged in open abuse and criticism of him to the same degree seems doubtful, however. It is entirely logical to suggest that the generally lower levels of fear that existed within society under Khrushchev would have been an important factor in such relatively public displays of animosity. It is important at this stage to flag up the point that evidence of peasant involvement in anti-Soviet activity at any point whatsoever is hard to come by in the files of the Procurator and KGB yet that may well say more about the relatively low level of policing that existed within village communities than about their attitudes toward the regime.

It is worth highlighting the value of Bukovsky's anecdotal evidence at this point. In the same way that Yuri Orlov's recollections helped to provide a much stronger picture of events at the Thermo-Technical Institute in 1956, so Bukovsky has provided information that most likely exists in no archives, memoirs or secondary accounts. It helps to give some insight into the scale of opposition to Khrushchev

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<sup>126</sup> Interview with Vladimir Bukovsky, Cambridge, March 2007.

<sup>127</sup> Improvements that were specific to the peasantry included raising procurement prices for meat and grain and ending the practice of withholding internal passports from peasants.

<sup>128</sup> See S. Fitzpatrick, *Stalin's Peasants: Resistance and Survival in the Russian Village After Collectivization*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994, p. 289-296.

around the country and also into the world of political attitudes among the Soviet peasantry – both of which are areas on which available information is particularly scarce.

Khrushchev's frequent and occasionally lengthy trips abroad with a huge retinue and the holding of vast state banquets for visiting dignitaries aroused considerable anger among the working class in particular. An anonymous letter left in a Kaliningrad ballot box spoke of 'communist millionaires', stating that 'They are stealing money, living in luxurious palaces and they see workers as beasts'.<sup>129</sup> This reflected the fact that people were angry not just at the general contrast in living standards between the USSR and the West but also between the political elites and ordinary citizens and was indicative of the way that people were becoming more cynical and losing respect for the authorities.

This same pattern of cynicism and declining respect can also be seen in regard to Khrushchev's boasting about rising living standards, of catching up with the West and predicting that communism would be 'just about built' by the year 1980. Alexeyeva cited a popular joke on this theme: 'Is it true that Comrade Khrushchev's health is declining? Yes. He is suffering from a hernia caused by lifting the level of agricultural production, hyperventilation caused by trying to catch up with America, and verbal diarrhoea caused by God knows what'.<sup>130</sup> In many cases this cynicism took a more pointed form. One response to the 1962 price rises that has been cited by Samuel Baron seems to have been reflective of the growing resentment: 'If only we'd keep

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<sup>129</sup> GARF, f. 8131, op. 31, d. 80462, l. 33.

<sup>130</sup> Alexeyeva and Goldberg, *The Thaw Generation*, p. 104.

quiet about already overtaking America. It's disgusting to hear our loudspeaker (going on) every day about we, we, we. All this endless boasting'.<sup>131</sup>

### **3.1.3 THE KHRUSHCHEV CULT**

Among other themes that saw Khrushchev provoke a sense of consternation among some of the population was that of a burgeoning 'Khrushchev cult': something that has already been touched upon in Grimm and Khasyanov's first leaflet that asked 'isn't it time for Khrushchev to claim his pension before he converts to a god?'<sup>132</sup> What has since become the most famous attack on this apparently developing cult took place on 7 September 1961 when Petr Grigorenko (at that time a general in the Red Army but later to become one of the most celebrated figures in the dissident movement) addressed Moscow's Lenin District Party conference.<sup>133</sup> He talked of the need to struggle against careerism, bureaucracy, servility, and privilege within the Party but his main point lay in the question 'Is everything being done to prevent the repetition of a personality cult while the personality itself is perhaps arising?': a clear attack on Khrushchev himself.<sup>134</sup> This was subsequently followed by an open letter to Moscow voters in which Grigorenko attacked the 'unreasonable and often harmful activities of Khrushchev and his team'.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> S. Baron, *Bloody Saturday in the Soviet Union: Novocherkassk, 1962*: Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2001, p. 10.

<sup>132</sup> GARF, f. 8131, op. 33, d. 96712, l. 19.

<sup>133</sup> In later years Grigorenko chose to revert to using the more Ukrainian-sounding 'Petro' instead of 'Petr'. He is, however, referred to throughout the present work as Petr on the basis that this was the spelling he used at the time.

<sup>134</sup> P. Grigorenko, *Memoirs*, New York: W.W. Norton, 1982, p. 240.

<sup>135</sup> H. Fireside, *Soviet Psychoprisoners*, London: W.W. Norton, 1979, p. 18.

One of the problems that this burgeoning cult exacerbated was that of declining faith in the authorities' pronouncements. Elena Zubkova has argued that when Khrushchev renewed his attack on Stalin at the XXII CPSU Congress – this time more bitterly than at the XX Congress and without official secrecy – it was largely greeted with cynicism because he was widely perceived to be building his own cult at that very time.<sup>136</sup> It is true that responses to the XXII Congress were muted in terms of dissenting behaviour yet this was not just caused by cynicism. After the initial attack on Stalin one probably could not expect the same subject to have made such a profound impact a second time, and neither was the uncertainty of the post XX Congress period replicated in October 1961. It will also be shown in chapter 4 that this time the authorities had taken steps to deal with potential outbursts of open dissent inside the Party arising from the renewed attack on Stalin and were able to quickly snuff them out.

Among workers and peasants in particular, where dissent often resembled something akin to a primal lashing out at authority, it seems to have been that in some cases Khrushchev became the focus of dissatisfaction on account of his being the regime's figurehead and therefore the most prominent target. Although he had proved to be a skilful political intriguer during the struggle to succeed Stalin, Khrushchev was not always adept at presenting a favourable image of himself to the public.

Khrushchev not only failed to distance himself from unpopular or failing policies but allowed his name to be inextricably linked to them. Where Stalin's March 1930 *Pravda* article *Dizzy with Success* had seen him attempting to deflect the blame for

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<sup>136</sup> Zubkova, *Obshchestvo i reformy*, p. 175.

‘excesses’ that had occurred during the collectivisation process – laying it at the door of local officials instead of national elites – Khrushchev demonstrated no comparable grasp of political strategy.<sup>137</sup> The price rises of June 1962 were a prime case in point; Khrushchev had been advised to distance himself from the measure yet declined to do so and even tied his own name to the initiative more closely.<sup>138</sup> Consequently, many of the manifestations of discontent that followed had a pronounced anti-Khrushchev tone. This included instances of his portraits being vandalised, demonstrators using slogans threatening to make sausages or pies out of him and even an instance of one female protester at Novocherkassk being beaten by an angry mob solely on the basis that her surname happened to be Khrushcheva.<sup>139</sup>

It is demonstrative of the bind that Khrushchev was confronted with that his decision to purchase grain abroad was repeatedly cited in attacks on him as a great disgrace and embarrassment for the Soviet state. It was clearly a blow to national pride yet in previous times bad harvests had meant widespread hunger and even starvation; a cycle that Khrushchev broke, yet for which he was pilloried.<sup>140</sup> Evidently, it was the wound that was inflicted on Soviet national pride that had the greatest impact in the short term but those looking back on events with a little more objectivity would struggle to argue that Khrushchev had done the wrong thing. This is not necessarily a reflection of moral values in the present or in the West being different from those of the Khrushchev era USSR, but one whereby an ability to view such an undertaking in

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<sup>137</sup> *Pravda*, 2 March 1963.

<sup>138</sup> R. Medvedev and Zh. Medvedev, *Nikita Khrushchev: Otets ili otchim sovetskoi ‘ottepeli’*, Moskva: Yauza, 2006.

<sup>139</sup> See Baron, *Bloody Saturday*, p. 29. The reference to making pies out of Khrushchev can be traced back to Novocherkassk workers’ complaints that they could no longer afford to buy meat and were told by the factory director that they should make pies with liver instead.

<sup>140</sup> The Soviet Union had experienced major famines in which a huge number of people starved to death in 1921-1922, 1932-1933 and 1947.

a wider perspective, and with more information, than that available at the time facilitates a different conclusion.

The way that people related to Khrushchev as the Soviet leader raises two vital points in regard to the way that the relationship between the state and society had changed following the exposure of Stalin's crimes. Undoubtedly no single figure could again arouse the same degree of public adulation that Stalin had – even though displays of his popularity were to a large extent stage managed, there is little doubt that he also commanded a degree of genuine veneration in much of the Party and society at large. However, the lack of reverence for Khrushchev was not only a result of cynicism fostered by the Secret Speech but also because of other issues such as rising education levels and the growing flow of critical information coming from the West. More importantly, the problem was not simply that of a lack of veneration for Khrushchev but in some cases one of seemingly genuine detestation. After Stalin it may have been impossible for a leader to be so admired again but this did not necessarily mean that he would be despised by so many people either.

### ***3.1.4 KHRUSHCHEV'S CHARACTER***

One of the reasons that Khrushchev was subjected to so much criticism was that he was deemed in some quarters, particularly among educated citizens, to be an embarrassment as a statesman. In a society that was becoming increasingly well educated there was considerable resentment at being represented by a leader capable of such boorish and impulsive behaviour. Eduard Kuznetsov, for example, recalled how he had felt certain that Khrushchev's reckless behaviour would provoke a Third

World War even before the Cuban Missile Crisis brought such a possibility perilously close to reality.<sup>141</sup>

Yakov Rizoi, a CPSU member of 20 years, was jailed in 1962 after sending a series of anonymous letters to political figures, including one which stated that ‘we have to make the government turn and face the people. Mistakes in its policies will undoubtedly lead us to war’.<sup>142</sup> Kuznetsov and Rizoi did not expand upon their reasons for believing this to be the case yet one could confidently point to issues such as the increasingly hostile Sino-Soviet split, the unsettled status of the Berlin question and Khrushchev’s occasionally bullying behaviour toward other world leaders as potential sources for this war.<sup>143</sup>

Ludmilla Alexeyeva recalled Khrushchev’s ‘kitchen debate’ with Richard Nixon at the 1959 American Exhibition as an event that had caused a deep sense of shame in herself and her friends at the time.<sup>144</sup> A brief account of Khrushchev’s visit to Egypt gives some indication of his unsophisticated behaviour: ‘He also ate and drank like a peasant, downing six large sweet cakes at one sitting even after his daughter Rada had begged him to stop, guzzling brandy and pouring his soup into a saucer and then drinking it without a spoon’.<sup>145</sup> His ‘shoe-banging’ episode at the UN, plainly ridiculous boasts about overtaking the US in production of meat and milk, crude outbursts against the intelligentsia, apparent climb-down in the Cuban Missile Crisis,

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<sup>141</sup> Interview with Eduard Kuznetsov in L. Polikovskaya, *‘My predchuvstvie...predtecha’: ploshchad Mayakovskogo 1958-1965*, Moskva: Obshchestvo ‘Memorial’, 1997, p. 223.

<sup>142</sup> GARF, f. 8131, op. 32, d. 94020, l. 1.

<sup>143</sup> One of the best examples to cite in this respect is Khrushchev’s boast to Prime Minister Anthony Eden in 1956 that Soviet missiles could easily reach Britain. See W. Taubman, *Khrushchev: The Man and His Era*, London: Free Press, 2003.

<sup>144</sup> Alexeyeva and Goldberg, *The Thaw Generation*, p. 105.

<sup>145</sup> Taubman, *Khrushchev*, p. 611.

reputedly frequent drunkenness and unrefined manners all went a long way to undermining Khrushchev as a credible figure. Again, history has since exonerated him on a few of these ‘charges’, particularly that of his apparent capitulation in the Cuban Missile Crisis.

It is particularly notable that the figure of the leader and the legitimacy of the regime were no longer inextricably linked to the same extent that they seem to have been under Lenin and Stalin. The above-cited leaflet by Grimm and Khasyanov, and many others like it, showed that even very bitter opposition to Khrushchev and his clique did not necessarily equate to rejection of the regime and the goals that it stood for – a distinction that some authors have suggested was rarely made under Stalin.<sup>146</sup> Carl Linden broached this subject when he wrote that ‘unlike Stalin, Khrushchev was to a great extent judged on the success or failure of his policies’.<sup>147</sup> There were undoubted successes for the regime during the period, most notably with Yuri Gagarin’s orbit of the earth, yet there were also some painful and embarrassing failures such as the diplomatic crises over Berlin and rapidly dwindling returns from the much-heralded Virgin Lands programme.

Veniamin Iofe touched upon this last point when he wrote that ‘the late Khrushchev years were characterised by arbitrariness and incompetence by the higher political authorities in various spheres of life that provoked new political activism’.<sup>148</sup> This theme of incompetence is certainly something that comes across in the anti-Soviet

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<sup>146</sup> See, for example, C. Gerstenmaier, *The Voices of the Silent*, New York: Hart Publishing Company, 1972, p.40.

<sup>147</sup> C. Linden, *Khrushchev and the Soviet Leadership*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990, p. 15.

<sup>148</sup> V. Iofe, *Granitsy smysla: Stat’i, vystupleniya, esse*, Sankt Peterburg: Nauchno-informatsionnyi tsentr ‘Memorial’, 2002, p. 181.

leaflets from the period. However, whether it actually caused a growth of active dissent is unclear.

### ***3.1.5 LEGITIMACY***

The distinction between the legitimacy of the existing leadership and of the wider regime could be seen in the fact that Lenin was almost never a target of dissenters' criticism and many dissenters still revered him unquestioningly. As Baron wrote of the events that took place when striking workers forced their way into a factory director's office at Novocherkassk in June 1962: 'they did not tear down the portraits of Lenin; it was Khrushchev they reviled. Khrushchev had betrayed the ideals of the founder, to whom they remained steadfastly loyal. When the next day they marched with portraits of Lenin and red banners, they were implicitly asserting that they and not the established authorities were the true legatees of the revolution'.<sup>149</sup> In other words, the legitimacy of the regime as a whole was not in question among the workers at Novocherkassk, but the legitimacy of Khrushchev and the group around him was.

Taking a slightly wider view of why the legitimacy of the regime was no longer inextricably bound to that of the leader, it is noteworthy to point out the diminished personal links to the revolutionary era of those who were now leading the Party and state. Even though propaganda had subsequently inflated his role immeasurably, Stalin had indeed been a close associate of Lenin and been a reasonably important figure among pre-revolutionary Bolsheviks. After Stalin's death, the top leadership still had some ties to Lenin and to the state's revolutionary heritage in the likes of

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<sup>149</sup> Baron, *Bloody Saturday*, p. 37.

Vyacheslav Molotov, Lazar Kaganovich and Kliment Voroshilov among others.<sup>150</sup>

By the 1960s these ties to the past were considerably weaker, with only Mikoyan of the frontline leadership able to claim any real legitimacy as a figure of the revolutionary era.<sup>151</sup>

After Khrushchev's ouster the Soviet victory in the Great Patriotic War was to become a key totem of the regime's legitimacy, as demonstrated by the widespread and grandiose memorialisation and the repeated over-inflation of Brezhnev's own role in that war. Perhaps because of its association with Stalin, this was not such a prominent theme of discourse under Khrushchev. Although he had been a political commissar rather than a direct combatant, Khrushchev had been present for much of the battle of Stalingrad and for both the unsuccessful defence and eventual liberation of the Ukraine, yet made relatively little capital out of it. The unceremonious firing of the popular war hero Marshall Georgy Zhukov from his position as Defence Minister in October 1957 further demonstrates the extent to which Khrushchev failed to bolster the regime's prestige and legitimacy in this respect.

The sense that he had somehow 'betrayed Lenin' is interesting because of the emphasis that had been placed on 'return to Leninism' by Khrushchev himself in the drive to overcome the consequences of the Cult of Personality. From the very outset there had been no shortage of people, mostly among the intelligentsia, who did not subscribe to Khrushchev's brand of Leninism. However, in many such cases this

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<sup>150</sup> Molotov had been a Party member since 1906, Kaganovich since 1911 and Voroshilov since 1903.

<sup>151</sup> Mikoyan had been a Bolshevik agitator in and around Baku shortly prior to the revolution. Despite his involvement in the anti-Party group, Voroshilov's loss of standing was not as severe as that of his colleagues in the plot. He was titular head of state until 1960 and thereafter a member of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet. Despite this he had been effectively sidelined and carried very little stature or influence. See Taubman, *Khrushchev*.

accusation of betraying Lenin was a charge that seems to have been largely devoid of any ideological basis but was instead principally driven by questions of workers' self-interest, such as wages or prices. If something was seen as detrimental to the material interests of the workers, it was therefore un-Leninist in their eyes. This simplistic interpretation of Marxism-Leninism in fact reflected the essence of the new contract between state and society: an acceptable standard of living was to be provided in exchange for outward political conformity.

One must take care not to overstate the link between criticisms made by dissenters and the mood in society at large, yet neither were the two entirely unrelated. Dissenters did not necessarily represent any kind of 'silent majority' yet, as this thesis has repeatedly shown, they were drawn from a diverse range of backgrounds all across the USSR and were therefore not simply some kind of small and unrepresentative clique. We cannot say confidently how many people complained and criticised Khrushchev without coming to the authorities' attention, though the available evidence leads one to suspect that this was at times a fairly widespread trend.

By the time of his ouster there seems to have been little support or even sympathy left for Khrushchev anywhere. This was perhaps ultimately demonstrated by the complete lack of popular protest at his enforced retirement in October 1964. Furthermore, an August 1965 report from KGB chairman Vladimir Semichastnyi to the Central Committee on the subject of Khrushchev stated that since his removal from power, not only had the number of anti-Soviet documents circulating dropped by around fifty per cent compared to the same period of the previous year but also that a

large proportion of those that had been found since then actually expressed satisfaction at Khrushchev's ouster.<sup>152</sup>

That Khrushchev was unpopular among large elements of the population must have been well known among members of the Presidium and Central Committee at the time. Reports came in from the KGB and Ministry of Internal Affairs that alluded to this unpopularity by describing instances of dissent around the country with phrases such as 'abuse of specific individuals among the leadership' or 'attacks on a leading Party and state figure': this practically always meant Khrushchev. Although it is, of course, speculation, it makes sense to suggest that knowing the extent of his unpopularity may have been a factor in the minds of those who plotted to overthrow Khrushchev in 1964 – at least to the extent that they knew such a move would be unlikely to arouse any significant show of popular discontentment.

### **3.2 THE OUTSIDE WORLD**

In Stalin's final years, great effort had been spent on sealing the Soviet Union off from the outside world, particularly from the capitalist West.<sup>153</sup> Very few foreign visitors entered the USSR and cultural exchange was virtually unheard of. The result was that the Soviet people were largely isolated from outside information and often remained naïve about the true state of the outside world and of events in the USSR itself – something already touched upon in chapter 1. When the authorities' monopoly on information was undermined, the massive gap that often existed

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<sup>152</sup> RGANI, f. 89, op. 6, d. 28, l. 2.

<sup>153</sup> However, Solomon Volkov has pointed out that a number of American films that had been seized during the defeat of Nazi Germany or given as gifts to the state were subsequently screened around the USSR to eager audiences during the late 1940s and early 1950s. See S. Volkov, *The Magic Chorus: A History of Russian Culture from Tolstoy to Solzhenitsyn*, New York: Alfred Knopf, 2008.

between state propaganda and reality was to be one of the major catalysts for declining faith in the regime. As trust and faith diminished, so the regime's credibility came to be ever-more bound to its ability to provide a decent standard of living.

The opening up of the system began quickly, though hesitantly, after Stalin's death. A limited amount of Western literature was published, student exchange programmes were enacted and foreign tourism encouraged.<sup>154</sup> The primary importance of the West in regard to Soviet dissent at this time did not lie, as the authorities asserted, in overt attempts at subversion but in the steady erosion of faith in the regime's pronouncements and activities. As Vladimir Bukovsky recalled of the 1957 World Youth Festival and the 1958 American Exhibition, 'All this talk about "putrefying capitalism" became ridiculous. The importance of these events was comparable to the exposure of Stalin'.<sup>155</sup> The latter part of Bukovsky's remark may have been somewhat hyperbolic yet the broader message it conveyed was undoubtedly realistic. Official propaganda looked increasingly anachronistic when faced with evidence to the contrary and the credibility of the authorities duly suffered.

### ***3.2.1 LIVING STANDARDS***

The issue of poor living standards among the population grew more pressing as it became evident how far superior conditions were in the West – something that could be seen in media coverage attacking citizens for 'praising life in the West' (see chapter 4). Even though the Khrushchev era had begun to bring palpable

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<sup>154</sup> In regard to the publication of Western literature, see M. Freidburg, *A Decade of Euphoria: Western Literature in Post-Stalin Russia, 1954-1964*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1977.

<sup>155</sup> V. Bukovsky, *To Build a Castle: My Life as a Dissenter*, London: Andre Deutsch, 1978, p. 113.

improvements to the lives of Soviet citizens, the system was still found badly wanting in comparison. Alexis de Tocqueville's assertion that material grievances become intolerable once it is made apparent that a better situation exists elsewhere seems particularly apt in this regard.<sup>156</sup> For years state propaganda had told of inhuman conditions endured by workers in the West, a factor that had ameliorated the many privations endured by the Soviet people to some extent, but by the Khrushchev era it was an increasingly obvious lie of major proportions.

In his study on dissent in the former GDR, Jonathon Grix claimed that citizens there had been able to use the vastly more successful West Germany as a comparison for the shortcomings of their own state and that this went a long way to undermining the prestige of the regime in the eyes of its people.<sup>157</sup> Although lacking in the racial and historical aspects of the German model, the analogy of Soviet citizens looking at the way that the people of the world's only other superpower lived would most likely have had a similar effect. Furthermore, Soviet students and young people were apparently deeply agitated when they found that even students from People's Democracies such as Poland and East Germany invariably had considerably better clothes than they did.<sup>158</sup> Growing contact with the outside world, therefore, had a two-pronged impact in this respect: it showed that people had more goods elsewhere and that the Soviet regime had persistently deceived its people. In the long term this may well have made communist ideology lose a degree of credibility among the wider population.

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<sup>156</sup> See L. Strauss and J. Cropsey eds, *History of Political Philosophy*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987.

<sup>157</sup> J. Grix, *The Role of the Masses in the Collapse of the GDR*, Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 2000, p. 10.

<sup>158</sup> Z. Schakovsky, *The Privilege Was Mine*, London: Jonathon Cape, 1959, p. 166.

The theme of material shortages and hardship was subsequently seized upon and exacerbated by some Western radio stations broadcasting to the USSR. Gene Sosin – an early Radio Liberty staff member – recalled that during the Cuban Missile Crisis Radio Liberty regularly ran messages such as ‘for every Soviet missile in Cuba, enough money, material and labour have been expended to provide shoes for 25,000 people’.<sup>159</sup> Already inflammatory in a country often lacking basic necessities, broadcasting such material in late 1962, not long after a period of tension and unrest sparked by price rises and low wages, would undoubtedly have had some resonance among those who heard it. It may or may not be a coincidence that the *Washington Evening Star* reported in November 1963 that longshoremen in Odessa had refused to load butter on a boat bound for Cuba because butter had not been available to ordinary people in Odessa for several months.<sup>160</sup> However, one must be particularly cautious about putting any great faith in US media reports on Cuba and the Soviet Union, especially so soon after the Missile Crisis and the Bay of Pigs fiasco.

The subject of Cuba raises another interesting aspect of dissenting behaviour in the Khrushchev period which supports the notion of diminishing enthusiasm among the people for the communist project: that of criticising Soviet aid to satellite and client states. One of the leaflets distributed by Grimm and Khasyanov in 1963, mentioned earlier in the present chapter, shared this sentiment: ‘The Soviet people tighten their belts every year yet they suffer and stay silent, still clapping for Nikita when necessary. We work in order to feed ‘unlucky’ Negroes and ‘poor’ Germans yet the Soviet people have no bread’.<sup>161</sup> The General Department’s correspondence also

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<sup>159</sup> G. Sosin, *Sparks of Liberty: An Insider’s Memoirs of Radio Liberty*, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999, p. 97.

<sup>160</sup> *Washington Evening Star*, 12 November, 1963.

<sup>161</sup> GARF, f. 8131, op. 33, d. 96712, l. 24.

contains several anonymous letters in which this theme was raised, including one addressed to Aleksandr Shelepin from Komi ASSR that attacked the domestic situation and ended with the line ‘The hunger here is because you and your colleagues are giving all of our products away’.<sup>162</sup>

However, this was not a theme that was restricted solely to the Khrushchev era. As mentioned in chapter 1, calls for subscriptions to aid the Republican side during the Spanish Civil War had also met with a highly critical response in some quarters even during the late 1930s.<sup>163</sup> What one could conclude from this is that some of the Soviet people, and this seems to apply most specifically to workers, had long resented giving away the fruits of their collective labour while there were major shortages to be addressed at home.<sup>164</sup> This again demonstrates that the sources of frustration which afflicted Soviet workers were not always unique to the period or to the Soviet system but could easily have been reproduced anywhere in the world.

### **3.2.2 WESTERN RADIO BROADCASTS**

Western intrusion into Soviet airwaves increased throughout the Khrushchev period as the number of stations expanded along with the number of broadcasting hours, languages and signal strengths. A report sent to Khrushchev from the Ministry of Culture in May 1956 showed the extent to which this was already a growing problem, pointing out that there were already 25,000,000 private radio sets in the USSR but by the end of the sixth five-year plan in 1960 this figure would have risen to around

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<sup>162</sup> RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 141, l. 2.

<sup>163</sup> See S. Davies, *Popular Opinion in Stalin's Russia*.

<sup>164</sup> Private conversations with Russian citizens would seem to suggest that there is still some resentment at the huge volume of Soviet money and products that were given to client states around the world.

70,000,000.<sup>165</sup> Even allowing for variable factors such as signal jamming, it is evident that the potential audience for hostile broadcasts was becoming truly massive. Its monopoly on information had long been one of the Soviet state's most effective weapons against criticism and political heterodoxy, Western radio broadcasting, and later *samizdat* too, badly undermined this monopoly.

More than any other broadcaster, it was Radio Liberty that cropped up in investigation protocols and KGB reports to the Central Committee. As a rule, its broadcasts did not call for listeners to rise up against the regime but emphasised the need for democratisation, condemned central tenets of the Soviet system such as collectivisation and sometimes broadcast banned novels like *Dr Zhivago* (occasionally at an intentionally slow speed so that listeners would be able to transcribe the broadcast and thus eventually have a copy of the book).<sup>166</sup> There were exceptions to this trend of calling for outright resistance, however, such as when a speech by Trotsky's widow, Natasha Sedova, that called for the overthrow of the regime was broadcast in 1956.<sup>167</sup> The proliferation of broadcasts in non-Russian languages also made it harder for station bosses in the USA and Germany to control the content of such shows on account of the fact that they were frequently able to understand only Russian. As such, shows aimed at non-Russian nationalities were occasionally far more strident in their criticisms of the regime and did call upon their audience to rise up.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 141, ll. 17-18.

<sup>166</sup> Sosin, *Sparks of Liberty*, p63.

<sup>167</sup> Sosin, *Sparks of Liberty*, p. 58.

<sup>168</sup> See Sosin, *Sparks of Liberty*.

An important matter to note in regard to Radio Liberty in particular is that, in line with the Soviet regime's accusations, the station actually was an integral part of US propaganda efforts against the Soviet regime. Set up, supervised and covertly funded by the CIA, the long-term goal of the station was not so dissimilar to that which Soviet authorities alleged; to undermine and discredit the Soviet system in the eyes of its citizens.<sup>169</sup> The name of its official parent company *Amcomlib* – an acronym for 'American Committee for Liberation from Bolshevism', and its staff of Second World War émigrés and Soviet national minorities clearly suggest that Radio Liberty had a distinctly political function.

### 3.2.3 NTS

Even more hostile than Radio Liberty was the Frankfurt-am-Main based 'People's Labour Union' or '*Narodno trudovyi soyuz*', known as NTS. Although largely neutralised and reduced to a semi-mythical 'bogyman' status by the Brezhnev years, the organisation was very real during the Khrushchev era and its efforts to stir unrest inside the Soviet Union were considerable to say the least.<sup>170</sup> For example, a July 1956 report to the Central Committee from KGB chairman Ivan Serov described the NTS strategy of sending unmanned hot-air balloons packed with anti-Soviet propaganda materials from bases in West Germany across Soviet and East European territory, reporting that in the preceding six months a total of 806 balloons had been found in Ukraine and Belarus, along with Russian *oblasts* including Moscow,

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<sup>169</sup> The fact that Radio Liberty was funded by the CIA was not exposed until 1971. The link between the two was officially severed soon after.

<sup>170</sup> Numerous dissidents, including Aleksandr Ginzburg and Yuri Galanskov, were falsely accused of links to NTS during the Brezhnev era. See J. Rubenstein, *Soviet Dissidents: Their Struggle for Human Rights*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1980, p. 70. Yuri Orlov recalled that even in the late 1970s he had believed the group to be a fictional invention of the KGB. Yu. Orlov, *Dangerous Thoughts: Memoirs of a Russian Life*, New York: William Morrow and Company, 1991, p. 205.

Yaroslavl, Ivanov, Voronezh, Chelyabinsk, Omsk and Tyumen containing over 106,000 leaflets, brochures and newspapers in total.<sup>171</sup> That this practice continued into the 1960s could be seen by figures cited in the KGB's classified history textbook which stated that over 5,000 such balloons were discovered on Soviet territory during 1961-1962, containing a total of over 1,000,000 anti-Soviet leaflets.<sup>172</sup>

A KGB report of 10 June 1960 warned that NTS had been attempting to establish contacts among Soviet tourists visiting West Germany and trying to persuade them to smuggle leaflets back into the USSR and to distribute them on their return.<sup>173</sup> NTS also sent agents into the Soviet Union attempting to incite unrest or otherwise attack the regime, though without any notable success. There were even rumours that the organisation operated a mobile radio station from inside the Soviet Union, though Pavel Litvinov pointed out that, like many oppositional groups, NTS habitually promulgated entirely false rumours such as this and stated that he personally never saw or heard any evidence of its existence.<sup>174</sup>

This does raise the point that, as with the pronouncements of the authorities on the subject of dissent, one must be cautious in ascribing validity to any assertions made by dissenters in this highly politicised and adversarial context. In the case of NTS in particular, these were generally extremists bearing practically no resemblance to the

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<sup>171</sup> RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 141, ll. 54-56.

<sup>172</sup> V. Chebrikov et al, *Istoriya sovetskikh organov gosudarstvennoi bezopasnosti: uchebnik*, Moskva: Vysshaya krasnoznamenskaya shkola komiteta gosudarstvennoi bezopasnosti pri sovete ministerov SSSR, 1977, p. 543.

<sup>173</sup> RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 320, l. 12.

<sup>174</sup> Interview with Pavel Litvinov, New York, December 2006. Some pirate radio broadcasts did exist within the USSR around this time, though they were largely limited to playing Western music rather than political content. See P. Taylor, 'Underground Broadcasting in the Soviet Union', *Russian Review*, Vol. 31, No. 2, 1972, pp. 173-174.

well-known, respectable and broadly liberal figures of the later human rights movement.

NTS did have sporadic successes with its anti-Soviet radio broadcasts, however. In Stavropol the medical worker (*fel'dsher*) M.M. Ermizin posted tens of anti-Soviet leaflets between 1962 and 1964 to local and national newspapers and to the Central Committee Presidium in the name of NTS, calling for others to produce and circulate anti-Soviet materials and to hold strikes and risings.<sup>175</sup> A similar example could be seen in the case against I.I. Unger, I.I. Kuk and V.G. Neifel'd (all ethnic Germans) of Tomsk *oblast'* in which the trio had recorded and transcribed a number of NTS broadcasts. On 14 October 1962, an election day, they attached copies of these transcriptions to walls of factory buildings and stuffed them into the ballot box. The leaflet discovered in a ballot box read as follows:

***Voice of the People***

***NTS calls on you to join the struggle against the Khrushchev dictatorship.  
Ask yourself a question: what exactly is 'Soviet power'?  
The radio and press say nothing about many events that are happening  
in our country. For example, the rising in Temirtau,  
the attempt on Khrushchev's life at the Soviet-Polish border  
and the strikes at the Kirov factory in Leningrad.  
Comrades! The time has come to struggle against the existing order.  
We have great faith in the strength of the people,  
Russia is waking up and we are hearing a new sound.  
It is the future!  
Of that there can be no doubt!***

***NTS***<sup>176</sup>

Although there undoubtedly was a rising at Temirtau around this time (discussed later in the present chapter), further research has failed to reveal evidence of either the

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<sup>175</sup> GARF, f. 8131, op. 31, d. 97853, ll. 1-13.

<sup>176</sup> GARF, f. 8131, op. 31, d. 94153, ll. 1-9.

strike in Leningrad or the attempt on Khrushchev's life at the Polish border, raising the possibility that these events were also fabrications.

It seems that the number of Soviet citizens who responded to the incitements of NTS was particularly small. As has already been stated at several points during this thesis, the general desire among most of the populace does not appear to have been for revolution but for stability and better living standards. Soviet patriotism remained strong among Russians at least, and the legitimacy of the regime remained largely unquestioned. This was a fact further supported by Radio Liberty's own research on its Soviet audience which found that many people either did not like or felt offended by anything that was deemed to be sharply hostile toward the Soviet Union.<sup>177</sup>

One of the main questions arising from this is how far such broadcasts were essentially 'preaching to the converted' rather than turning previously obedient citizens into critics of the regime. It seems doubtful that completely loyal Soviet citizens would have even listened to the more extreme anti-Soviet broadcasts such as those of NTS. However, those who were wavering in their belief were likely to find abundant encouragement for their disenchantment, not just in extreme broadcasts but in those of the BBC and Radio Liberty among others. It seems probable that most listeners remained passive dissenters and manifested their discontent in less tangible ways, such as workplace drunkenness and theft.

### ***3.2.4 COMMUNICATING WITH THE WEST***

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<sup>177</sup> V. Petrov, 'Radio Liberation', *Russian Review*, Vol. 17, No. 2, 1958, p. 105.

Among the most interesting facets of the developing relationship between dissenters and the West was the small but growing volume of communication flowing outward from the USSR. In the second half of the 1950s communication between Soviet citizens and the West had been a predominantly unidirectional affair – information was being broadcasted into the USSR but news about Soviet society was reaching the West far less often. By the early 1960s dissenters were gradually beginning to open up a route outwards.

One of the first notable instances of this developing route to the West could be seen in Yuri Galanskov's utilisation of links with foreign journalists to transmit information on the riots that took place in Murom and Aleksandrovsk during 1961.<sup>178</sup> The main significance of sending this information to the West arguably lay in the extent to which it both foreshadowed and contrasted with the human rights activity of the Brezhnev years. After hearing rumours of the risings in Murom and Aleksandrov, Viktor Khaustov, Eduard Kuznetsov and Vladimir Osipov immediately visited the towns in order to gather information on what had happened. They then wrote up the details in leaflet form and sent them abroad through Galanskov. This was similar to the kind of activity that would later characterise the information gathering practices of the Chronicle of Current Events.<sup>179</sup> The contrast, which provides a useful illustration of the distinction between dissent under Khrushchev and under Brezhnev was that, as opposed to the sober and rigorously factual work of these later reports, the trio

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<sup>178</sup> Polikovskaya, *'My predchuvstvie...predtecha'*, p. 221.

<sup>179</sup> *The Chronicle of Current Events* was a regular *samizdat* journal of the Brezhnev era containing factual reports on the regime's abuses of human rights around the country. Founded in 1968, *the Chronicle* was published and distributed secretly and appeared 63 times before disappearing in 1983. See P. Reddaway ed, *Uncensored Russia: Protest and Dissent in the Soviet Union*, New York: American Heritage Press, 1972. The website of *Memorial* carries a digitised back catalogue of the Chronicle of Current Events. See <http://www.memo.ru/history/diss/chr/index.htm>.

produced a heavily romanticised and politicised account of what were to some extent hooligan uprisings.

A growing number of Soviet citizens were arrested and jailed as a result of attempts to communicate with the West around this time. As mentioned in chapter 1, in many cases this involved correspondence with organisations such as Radio Liberty or NTS whereby Soviet citizens wrote to ‘safe addresses’ that were usually located in Holland or West Germany. However, not all cases were entirely as they seemed. Nina Barbarchuk, a doctor from Minsk, was jailed in January 1962 after writing a series of anonymous letters to US President John F. Kennedy during December of the previous year. One letter held in Barbarchuk’s case file included a warning to the President of her own doubts about the Soviet regime’s desire for peace and outlined the poor living standards and frustrations of the Soviet people.<sup>180</sup> As an educated citizen it seems doubtful that Barbarchuk could have reasonably expected her letter to reach the US President – care of the American embassy in Moscow – without being intercepted. This would suggest that Barbarchuk was perhaps using the letter to President Kennedy as an oblique channel of communication between herself and the Soviet authorities in order to make clear the extent of people’s dissatisfaction.<sup>181</sup>

### **3.2.5 CHINESE ANTI-SOVIET AGITATION**

Foreign involvement in anti-Soviet activity was not restricted to the West, however. One of the less well-known themes of dissenting behaviour in the Khrushchev era is the role of Chinese anti-Soviet agitation. The catalyst for China’s ideological

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<sup>180</sup> GARF, f. 8131, op. 31, d. 91673, ll. 23-25.

<sup>181</sup> See V. Kozlov, and S. Mironenko eds *Kramola: Inakomyslie v SSSR pri Khrushcheve i Brezhneve, 1953-1982*, Moskva, Materik, 2005, p. 120.

antagonism against the Soviet authorities was the Sino-Soviet split – a fact that could be seen in the extent to which Khrushchev was a prominent target of Chinese propaganda attacking the Soviet regime. On 4 May 1963 KGB chairman Vladimir Semichastnyi reported to the Central Committee that China was ‘continuing to send propaganda into the Soviet Union’ and that in April 1963 alone over 5,000 Chinese anti-Soviet brochures had been discovered and confiscated by the KGB.<sup>182</sup> This was followed on 20 May by a further communiqué that explicitly linked the Chinese regime to such documents. An informer named Chzhao Pin-Khyan reported to the KGB that the Chinese embassy in Moscow had been preparing anti-Soviet materials and forcing Chinese students studying in the USSR to distribute them. Furthermore, the report also claimed that regular meetings and seminars were held at the Chinese embassy in which Soviet domestic and foreign policy were slandered along with members of the leadership – most likely meaning Khrushchev.<sup>183</sup>

By January 1964 the Chinese had also begun using radio to transmit their ‘schismatic views’ in broadcasts amounting to eight hours per day according to the KGB.<sup>184</sup> It was soon discovered that the Albanian regime had been colluding with the Chinese in this behaviour. A report from the Ministry for the Protection of Public Order dated 8 January 1964 stated that over 2,000 anti-Soviet leaflets had been discovered at the site of the recently vacated Albanian embassy in Moscow while others had been posted to 356 individuals and official organisations around the country including libraries, newspapers and embassies.<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 424, l. 67.

<sup>183</sup> RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 424, l. 82. As stated earlier in the present chapter, this kind of formulation was usually employed to refer to attacks on Khrushchev.

<sup>184</sup> RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 435, ll. 1-2.

<sup>185</sup> RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 454, l. 8. The Ministry for the Protection of Public Order (MOOP) was established in Russia after the Soviet Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) was abolished in 1962 and its

Chinese anti-Soviet agitation was not without some success, particularly in the Eastern provinces of the USSR where their radio signals were strongest. In August 1963 *Komsomol* members G.A. Svanidze, L.M. Kizilova and V.S. Miminoshvili were caught pasting up leaflets in Batumi that called for Khrushchev to be overthrown and declared 'Our leader is Mao-Tse Tung!'<sup>186</sup> In December of the same year, I.M. Panasetskii was sentenced for writing graffiti on walls in Chernigov *oblast'* with slogans including 'Long Live the KPK' (the Chinese Communist Party) and 'Long Live Mao Tse-Tung'.<sup>187</sup> Leaflets supporting the Chinese position on various political questions were discovered in the Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, in the Tatar and Bashkir ASSRs along with Novosibirsk and Omsk *oblasti*.<sup>188</sup> Others, such as a former Party worker named Fedoseev and several underground groups, including one named the 'Organisation of Idealistic Communists', had attempted to establish contacts with representatives of the Chinese regime and offered to share 'hostile materials' with them and to otherwise agitate on their behalf according to the KGB report.<sup>189</sup> What this clearly demonstrated was that the individuals in question were not anti-communists but were disenchanted at the prevailing ideological situation in the USSR.

The role played by the outside world in dissenting behaviour during the Khrushchev period can be divided into two distinct categories. The first can be seen as overtly subversive; activity promoted by the likes of NTS or the Chinese, aimed at directly

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powers were passed to republican ministries of internal affairs. During the Brezhnev period the organisation reverted back to its former name.

<sup>186</sup> GARF, f. 8131, op. 31, d. 96151, ll. 1-3.

<sup>187</sup> GARF, f. 8131, op. 31, d. 95901, l. 1.

<sup>188</sup> RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 454, l. 112.

<sup>189</sup> RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 435, ll. 3-6. Unfortunately, the report did not give any details on exactly what these 'hostile materials' consisted of.

provoking disturbances and resistance to authority. While this may have occasionally yielded some immediate results its impact was almost entirely superficial and short-term, not least because for many people those who were attempting to incite resistance and disturbances were even less appealing than the existing Soviet regime. As such, the kinds of foreign-inspired subversive activity that the authorities feared most were actually rather rare.

The second way that the outside world came to impact upon political dissent was by exposing the Soviet regime's failures, lies and hypocrisy. This largely resulted from the less overtly hostile broadcasts of stations such as the BBC, Voice of America or Radio Liberty and in the simple process of Soviet citizens coming into contact with their Western counterparts. While this may not have provoked an impassioned and immediate response from dissenters, the long-term result was an ever-growing cynicism that left the regime ideologically holed and ensured that obedience became increasingly dependant upon the state's ability to adequately fulfil basic needs such as employment and the provision of goods.

### **3.3 UNDERGROUND ACTIVITY IN THE EARLY 1960s**

As stated in chapter 1, Maurice Hindus seems to have been correct in arguing that the Soviet underground of the late 1950s 'hid no bombs and manufactured no guns'.<sup>190</sup> One could not say the same thing about the first half of the 1960s, when underground activity distinctly became more hostile in tone and more subversive in its aims. Marxist-Leninist ideology continued to predominate in this sphere yet a growing

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<sup>190</sup> M. Hindus, *House Without a Roof: Russia After Forty Three Years of Revolution*, London: Victor Gollancz, 1962, p. 383.

number of dissenters that participated in underground activity no longer felt that the incumbent regime could be fixed but now had to be replaced.

These changing trends of clandestine activity reflected the fact that the underground was no longer so dominated by students and the intelligentsia. This was partly because the intelligentsia began to move toward more open and legalistic forms of dissent in the early 1960s, and partly because underground workers' groups started to appear. The former theme is discussed later in the present chapter; the latter probably reflected the extent to which there was no legitimate outlet for sharp criticism as well as the fact that there was still a certain romanticism attached to underground activity.

For the most part, these acts of dissent offered little in the way of realistic alternatives to the perceived failures of the existing system but instead traded in a rhetoric that was imbued with a sense of revolutionary romanticism which lacked any real substance. Many such groups can be seen as 'playing at revolution' and ultimately achieved practically nothing in the way of concrete activity, yet the growing extremism in terms of the language that they used and the demands that they made remains significant. Ultimately, this reflected the fact that the sense of disillusionment at the regime seemed to be deepening among dissenters.

### ***3.3.1 GROWING DISILLUSIONMENT***

What had largely begun as disappointment at the authorities' failure to live up to the apparent promise of liberalisation that was offered by the Secret Speech had already spread to antipathy toward the ruling authorities and was gradually beginning to touch upon the regime as a whole. Again, it is worth emphasising that this did not mean the

regime had lost legitimacy in the eyes of all Soviet citizens but it does go some way toward explaining the cynicism and stagnation that seemingly characterised the Brezhnev period.

One symptom of this spreading disillusionment at the political authorities was the growing influence of the Yugoslav dissident Milovan Djilas' stinging critique against the state of the Soviet regime, *The New Class* (1957).<sup>191</sup> His fundamental argument stated that the Soviet Union was no longer a dictatorship of the proletariat on the path toward communism but had become a dictatorship of the bureaucracy, permanently mired in self-interest. Although *The New Class* was banned inside the USSR, copies began to appear and Djilas' ideas soon emerged primarily among the intelligentsia but also among some working class dissenters. It was for attempting to reproduce a copy of *The New Class* that Bukovsky was first jailed in 1963.

A leaflet that was distributed in Donetsk, Zhitomir, Rovensk and Lugansk *oblasti* during May 1963 gives some indication of the themes and language that featured among underground dissent in the late Khrushchev period:

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<sup>191</sup> Djilas had been a high-ranking member of the Yugoslav regime until his split with Tito in early 1954. He was then expelled from the government and Party before being jailed in 1956. It was while in prison that he wrote *The New Class*.

***ALL UNION DEMOCRATIC FRONT –  
REVOLUTIONARY SOCIAL-DEMOCRATIC PARTY***

***The reaction is coming. Khrushchev is reviving Stalinism.***

***His plan spells disaster.***

***The people are rising for the struggle***

***We demand***

***1. 100 roubles minimum wage.***

***2. A 30 hour working week.***

***3. Minimal bureaucracy and militarism***

***4. Democratic freedoms.***

***5. Legalisation of the VDF and RSDP.<sup>192</sup>***

***6. Amnesty for political prisoners.***

***The state order in our country is a bureaucratic clique  
based on the exploitation of the workers.***

***Our aim is to replace this order with  
socialist democracy.***

***Comrades!***

***The struggle has begun.***

***The strike movement is widening.***

***The soldiers are refusing to fire on the people***

***All to the ranks of the revolution!***

***We will win!***

***Down with Khrushchev's reactionary clique!***

***Long live socialist democracy!***

***Long live the fourth Russian Revolution!<sup>193</sup>***

Over 800 copies of this particular leaflet were scattered in the streets and sent by post to various private individuals and political figures. The subsequent KGB investigation confiscated a further 1,221 copies that had either already been distributed or were ready for distribution. The interrogation revealed that the main culprit, V.I. Bul'binskii, had prepared the leaflets alone but had been assisted in handing them out by the three others, including a student named N.M. Trofimovich – who had already scattered 1,200 leaflets in Odessa and Rovensk – and the former

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<sup>192</sup> VDF refers to the All-Union Democratic Front (*Vsesoyuznyi demokraticeskii front*) and RSDP refers to the Revolutionary Social Democratic Party (*Revolutsionnaya sotsial-demokraticeskaya partiya*).

<sup>193</sup> RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 412, l. 67.

prisoner S.A. Babich – who had distributed over 1,000 leaflets around Zhitomir.<sup>194</sup> Particularly indicative of the changing times was the sheer volume of leaflets involved.

Again and again one finds reports and interrogation protocols from the early 1960s in which leaflets and brochures were discovered in their hundreds or even thousands whereas in the 1950s a total of even twenty copies was quite rare. For example, the case of Grimm and Khasyanov that has already been cited in the present chapter involved 500 leaflets. In February 1963 Galina Zakharchenko and Viktor Khozyainov were arrested after distributing over 2,000 leaflets in Vinitza and Zhitomir, in September of the same year an underground group calling itself ‘Oreol’ distributed around 200 leaflets in Frunze (Kirgiz SSR) and in April 1964 the so-called ‘Democratic Union of Socialists’ distributed over 850 leaflets including statements such as ‘the dictatorship of the Party means freedom for communists and unquestioning obedience for the vast majority of people’.<sup>195</sup> This trend of high print-runs of these anti-Soviet leaflets could be seen in countless other cases besides.

One can see the influence of Djilas’ political philosophy in Bul’binskii’s statement that read: ‘the state order in our country is a bureaucratic clique based on the exploitation of workers’.<sup>196</sup> That the leaflet concluded with a call for citizens to ‘join the ranks of the revolution’ is indicative of one of the most fundamental differences between the political dissent of the Khrushchev era and the human rights activity of the Brezhnev era. The former most frequently relied upon the threat of domestic

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<sup>194</sup> RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 412, ll. 69-71.

<sup>195</sup> GARF, f. 8131, op. 32, d. 95164, ll. 1-4, GARF, f. 8131, op. 31, d. 96174, ll. 3-4 and RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 454, l. 72.

<sup>196</sup> GARF, f. 8131, op. 30, d. 412, l. 67.

unrest as its main lever for applying pressure on the authorities while the latter primarily relied upon Western public opinion and diplomatic pressure. The big difference was that the threat of civil unrest was for the most part a hollow one and was furthermore fraught with even greater danger since the safeguarding of domestic stability remained the authorities' single greatest priority. Reliance on the West was dangerous too, and often frustrating for dissidents, but it did offer some protection for those who spoke out.

The importance of material concerns – already shown in Bul'binskii's leaflet – was demonstrated in numerous reports sent by the KGB to the Central Committee's General Department. For example, on 30 December 1961 anti-Soviet leaflets were pasted up on walls in the centre of Chita with remarks including 'Loudmouth Khrushchev – where is your abundance?' and 'Comrades! How much longer will we live half-starving and destitute?'.<sup>197</sup> An anonymous letter sent to the Central Committee presented the situation as follows: 'There are five million people who are living under communism – they are the government and the ministers. Ten million are living under socialism – these are the directors, generals, engineers and bureaucrats. The other one hundred and eighty five million of us are waiting for socialism and do not even know what it is.'<sup>198</sup> Again, one can clearly see the resentment at privileges enjoyed by the elite and criticism at Khrushchev's boasting which contrasted sharply with widespread discontent at the low living standards endured by the bulk of the population.

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<sup>197</sup> RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 378, l. 28.

<sup>198</sup> GARE, f. 8131, op. 31, d. 82931, l. 1.

Incidentally, this problem was not unique to the Soviet system. A note sent by the KGB to the Central Committee in 1962 stated that the Bulgarian security organs (the *Darzhavna Sigurnost* or DS) were experiencing similar forms and themes of protest, reporting that 529 investigations had been initiated as a result of anonymous letters and leaflets that year alone, predominantly complaining about high food prices. Like their Soviet counterparts, the Bulgarian security organs placed the blame for this kind of activity squarely on capitalist subversion.<sup>199</sup> Whether they were simply following the Soviet regime's lead in this respect is unclear but it is again worth raising the point that foreign powers actually were attempting to carry out subversion in the socialist bloc on occasion, just as members of the socialist bloc were undertaking subversive activity in Western Europe, Latin America, Africa and elsewhere.

### **3.3.2 1962-1963**

The year 1962 saw a major resurgence of clandestine dissenting activity; a fact that was demonstrated by a KGB report from 25 July of that year. It stated that in the first half of 1962 the security organs had recorded 7,705 different anti-Soviet leaflets and documents distributed by 2,522 authors – a figure twice as high as that of the same period in 1961. The main centres of dissenting activity were the Ukraine, Azerbaidzhan, Georgia, Latvia, Stavropol, Krasnodar, Rostov, Leningrad and Moscow.<sup>200</sup> According to the report, these documents were characterised by themes including calls for active struggle against the Soviet authorities, malicious attacks on individual leaders, nationalist attitudes, lack of faith in the building of communism and slander of Soviet democracy. A growing number also expressed hatred of the

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<sup>199</sup> RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 424, l.30.

<sup>200</sup> RGANI, f. 89, op. 51, d. 1, ll. 1-4.

CPSU and made terrorist threats against communists, *Komsomol* members and members of the Party *aktiv*.<sup>201</sup> This kind of tone had been particularly rare in the second half of the 1950s.

A survey of a few cases that arose in the first six months of 1963 gives some indication of this growing tendency toward extremism. A group of three citizens from Sverdlovsk *oblast'* fashioned themselves as 'The Revolutionary Party' and produced a programme of action in which they pledged to establish contact with the embassies of capitalist states, to acquire weapons and launch a wave of terror against the authorities and to carry out agitation work inside the army. The group was uncovered and its participants were arrested in January 1963 while attempting to attract new members.<sup>202</sup> On 13 March 1963, and then again on 31 August and 1 September, over 100 anti-Soviet leaflets were discovered in Tashkent that had been produced by the 'Secret Terrorist Union' – though there appears to be no record of group members being arrested.<sup>203</sup> In June 1963 the Belarusian KGB arrested three participants of an underground group in Minsk, the members of which had managed to acquire several firearms and explosives and had produced detailed plans to blow up Minsk radio station number 3 and to attack a local militia station.<sup>204</sup>

The above cases serve to highlight the extent to which underground activity had come to reflect an increasing degree of alienation from the existing regime among some dissenters. It is also true, however, that even though they may have been entirely earnest, most groups did not get the chance to put their militant programmes into

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<sup>201</sup> RGANI, f. 89, op. 51, d. 1, l. 1.

<sup>202</sup> RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 412, ll. 34-35.

<sup>203</sup> RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 429, l. 88.

<sup>204</sup> RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 412, ll. 70-77. As the next section of the present chapter will show, attacks on militia stations also occurred elsewhere around this time.

action. In the case of the Petr Grigorenko's underground group, 'The Union of Struggle for the Restoration of Leninism', Andrei Grigorenko – himself a member of the organisation – conceded that although the group's leaflets spoke of uprisings and revolution there was never any effort made to acquire weapons or to plan any kind of rising.<sup>205</sup> Underground groups seem to have been particularly isolated from the population, partly because of their extremism and partly because of the need for secrecy in order to evade the attention of the KGB.

It appears that the period of 1962-63 was to be the last time that underground activity was such a major feature of dissenting behaviour until it later began to re-emerge under Gorbachev.<sup>206</sup> This could be seen by a June 1964 KGB report stating that a significant reduction in the volume of anti-Soviet documents in circulation had been noted. It was announced that in the first five months of 1964 a little over 3,000 leaflets and letters had been discovered as compared to approximately 11,000 documents found during the same period of the previous year.<sup>207</sup> When one adds to this a report from Semichastnyi to the Central Committee in August 1965, which stated that the volume of anti-Soviet documents had dropped by over half in comparison with the same period of the previous year, it is possible to see a marked decline in progress.<sup>208</sup>

One can point to numerous reasons for the decline in this form of dissenting activity.

After the events of summer 1962 in particular, the authorities took the danger posed

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<sup>205</sup> Interview with Andrei Grigorenko, New York, October 2006.

<sup>206</sup> This re-emergence of underground dissent in the Gorbachev era was apparently a response to the perceived failures of the Brezhnev era dissident movement, which was effectively crushed by the early 1980s. See L. Alexeyeva, *Soviet Dissent: Contemporary Movements for National, Religious and Human Rights*, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1987, p. 384.

<sup>207</sup> RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 454, ll. 110-111.

<sup>208</sup> RGANI, f. 89, op. 5, d. 28, l. 2.

by worker dissent more seriously and accordingly took new measures to forestall it, such as deeper KGB penetration of workplaces and greater use of informers among society. However, what seems to have been by some way the most important reason for the move away from underground dissent was that since a considerable volume of protest and criticism was prompted by material dissatisfaction it naturally declined as the authorities increased their efforts to provide an acceptable standard of living.

### **3.4 MASS DISORDERS**

The greater social volatility of the early 1960s was not only evident in attacks on Khrushchev and increasingly hostile underground activity but, most famously, in the series of public disorders that occurred among workers, culminating in what Rudolf Pikhoya referred to as ‘an explosion of popular discontent at Khrushchev’s policies’ in the summer of 1962.<sup>209</sup> In an article entitled ‘Uprisings that the country did not know about!’ the newspaper *Novoe vremya* listed fourteen different cities that had experienced significant disturbances between 1960 and 1962, including Novocherkassk, Aleksandrov, Murom, Nizhnyi Tagil, Temirtau, Odessa, Dneprodzerzhinsk, Lubna, Kuibyshev, Kemerova, Krivoi Rog, Grozny, Donetsk and Yaroslavl.<sup>210</sup> Again, the point to emphasise here is the extent to which this was a period of real domestic turbulence that arguably had the potential to spiral out of control yet has been largely overlooked in many accounts of the era.<sup>211</sup>

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<sup>209</sup> R. Pikhoya, *Sovetskii Soyuz: Istoriya vlasti, 1945-1991*, Moskva: Rossiiskaya akademiya gos. sluzhby pri Prezidente Rossiiskoi Federatsii, 2005.

<sup>210</sup> *Novoe vremya*, April 22, 1991. Exactly what constituted a ‘significant disturbance’ remains unclear from the text of the article.

<sup>211</sup> The most notable exception to this has been the Russian historian Vladimir Kozlov whose work on the theme remains very much authoritative. See V. Kozlov, *Massovye Besporyadki v SSSR pri Khrushcheve i Brezhneve, 1953-1980gg*, Novosibirsk: Sibirskii Khronograf, 1999 or in translation: V. Kozlov, *Mass Uprisings in the USSR: Protest and Rebellion in the Post-Stalin Years*, London: M.E.

These disorders were almost exclusively made up of workers and were bore clear similarities to the kind of spontaneous public outbursts against the authorities for which so many individuals were jailed during 1957 and 1958. The fact that acts of group protest could turn violent like this not only says something about the extent to which those involved were embittered by the present situation but also of the way that people have long behaved in crowds, especially when drunk and angry. It seems quite clear that something had changed within society for such a proliferation of large public disorders to occur in what was still being labelled by some seasoned observers as a totalitarian system.<sup>212</sup> Essentially, Charles Zeigler was correct to argue that the threshold whereby material dissatisfaction turned into violence, among workers in particular, had been significantly lowered.<sup>213</sup>

There were a multitude of overlapping reasons for this working class volatility in the late Khrushchev years, such as declining fear of, and respect for the authorities, raised aspirations and growing public cynicism to name just a few. What this again demonstrates is that with rule by terror abandoned and the relative material wealth and stability of the Brezhnev era not yet in place, this was very much a transitional phase of Soviet history.

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Sharpe, 2002. Samuel Baron's work on the rising at Novocherkassk, *Bloody Saturday in the Soviet Union: Novocherkassk, 1962*, is also a vital addition to the field.

<sup>212</sup> See, for example, Schapiro, L. *The Communist Party of the Soviet Union*, London: Methuen & Co., 1970.

<sup>213</sup> C. Ziegler, 'Worker Participation and Worker Discontent in the Soviet Union', *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol.98, No.2, 1983, pp. 235-253.

### ***3.4.1 DISTURBANCES IN THE LATE 1950s***

A relatively brief survey of some large-scale disturbances during this period gives an indication of their tone and position in the wider scenario of dissenting behaviour. Although already touched upon in chapter 1, it is worth revisiting briefly the disorders in Tbilisi during March 1956. Anger had begun to spread in the Georgian capital once the content of the Secret Speech became known and an angry mob of approximately 70,000 gathered around a Stalin monument in the centre of town.<sup>214</sup> The next day and the day after, 8 and 9 March, angry crowds again gathered in the centre of Tbilisi and the atmosphere turned even more volatile, with key buildings being stormed and occupied by demonstrators. When soldiers tried to disperse the crowds on March 10 they encountered violent resistance and tanks were brought in with hundreds of arrests and tens of deaths soon followed. What the events in Tbilisi showed was that when citizens protested en masse, it was now they, rather than the authorities, who were usually first to become violent.

The disturbances that took place during the Virgin Lands programme of the late 1950s were largely provoked by ethnic tensions between settlers and the indigenous population, and as such were manifested in gang fights in which the authorities tended to come between warring factions. This trend was also reflected in the disorders which took place between returning members of the deported nationalities and those who had since settled in the places they had been banished from. This was most

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<sup>214</sup> Kozlov, *Mass Uprisings*, p. 115.

extreme in Grozny, where conflict between returning Chechens and Russians provoked a murder that ended in mass riots and pogroms during August 1958.<sup>215</sup>

The only notably politicised uprising of the Virgin Lands campaign took place at Temirtau in Kazakhstan from 1-3 August 1959 when over 500 workers, predominantly from Belarus and the Ukraine, protested at poor living conditions by erecting barricades in the street, throwing rocks at members of the militia and then looting shops and warehouses. A subsequent commission set up to investigate the event reported to the Central Committee in September 1959 that protesters had written graffiti on walls such as ‘anarchy is the mother of order’ along with shouting slogans in demand of a shorter working day, higher wages and the right to go on strike.<sup>216</sup>

### **3.4.2 DISTURBANCES IN THE 1960s**

The June 1961 disorders in Murom (Vladimir *oblast'*) had been sparked after a worker died whilst held in police custody and a rumour began that he had been killed by the militia.<sup>217</sup> Three days later the worker’s funeral procession descended into a mass riot after mourners attacked a local police station. Kozlov has argued that ‘...hardly any of the activists thought that, dissolved within the anonymous crowd, they were carrying out something more serious than their typical hooliganism’.<sup>218</sup> It is true that there was an element of common hooliganism in most of the mass disorders of the Khrushchev period yet this does not imply that they were, therefore,

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<sup>215</sup> Gang fights also flared up in Dagestan, Ingushetiya, Kalmykiya and elsewhere during the same period.

<sup>216</sup> RGANI, f. 3, op. 12, d. 576, ll. 30-48.

<sup>217</sup> Kozlov, *Mass Uprisings in the USSR*. In fact, the man in question had died of a brain haemorrhage incurred during a drunken accident for which he had originally been arrested.

<sup>218</sup> Kozlov, *Mass Uprisings in the USSR*, p. 198.

apolitical. For example, the subsequent Procurator report on events in Murom stated that protesters did significant damage to the militia and KGB buildings; breaking windows, doors and furniture, severing telephone connections and stealing official documents and a large quantity of firearms: this was clearly not just looting for personal gain.<sup>219</sup>

The following month, partly inspired by events in Murom, another major disturbance was registered in nearby Aleksandrov after a fracas, that had begun when a policeman arrested a pair of drunken soldiers, quickly degenerated into a riot. Again the subsequent disorders were short-lived and localised but involved extensive alcohol-fuelled hooliganism and anti-police sentiment. With Murom and Aleksandrov being situated on the edge of Moscow's '101 kilometre ring' – inside which many 'undesirables' were not permitted to reside – they both featured an unusually high proportion of released prisoners and known 'trouble-makers'.<sup>220</sup> One could perhaps speculate that the risings therefore demonstrated some kind of residual anger at the Soviet regime that could quickly flare into violence under the right circumstances.

The pinnacle of this rising tide of social volatility was witnessed at Novochoerkassk in June 1962. The rising there included over 5,000 protesters and ended with 62 individuals being convicted of anti-Soviet activity (seven of whom were sentenced to death) as a result of their part in the demonstrations and left an estimated 24 dead and 100 wounded.<sup>221</sup> KGB reports from that summer give an idea of the scale of discontentment all around the country, referring to angry crowds, calls for strikes or

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<sup>219</sup> GARF, f. 8131, op. 31, d. 91127, ll. 1-5.

<sup>220</sup> It is of some importance to point out that the mass releases which drained the Gulag population after Stalin's death included a large proportion of thieves and violent criminals.

<sup>221</sup> Baron, *Bloody Saturday*.

demonstrations and terrorist threats occurring in cities including Riga, Kiev, Perm, Minsk, Krasnoyarsk, Moscow, Gor'kii, Tambov, Donetsk and Chelyabinsk among others.<sup>222</sup> That the discontent around the country was linked to the 17 May announcement of price rises on a range of staple goods has been well established, yet there were also other factors. There was a growing anger at the discrepancy between the living standards of officials and ordinary citizens. Massive state banquets and officials' perks were contrasted by the fact that further restrictions had recently been placed on peasants' private plots.<sup>223</sup> That acts of dissent showed an increasing bitterness should probably come as no surprise in light of this.

### **3.4.3 NOVOCHERKASSK**

One of the most important catalysts that made the rising at Novocherkassk turn so extreme was a raise in the work norms at the town's main factory.<sup>224</sup> Nonetheless, as with Murom and Aleksandrov, it required a specific, local event to spark off mass unrest. This local catalyst was the insensitive and inappropriate reaction to workers' complaints by the factory director B.N. Kurochkin. On hearing concerns at the impact of the new rises Kurochkin retorted that 'if there isn't enough money for meat and sausage let them eat pies (*pirozhki*) made from liver'. This was apparently the 'spark that touched off the powder keg'.<sup>225</sup> It again shows that acts of protest among workers in particular tended to be caused by resentment at specific individuals or events rather than at the Soviet system overall. Although these actions probably

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<sup>222</sup> See RGANI, f. 89, op. 6, d. 12, ll. 1-4 and RGANI f. 89, op. 6, d. 14, ll. 1-3.

<sup>223</sup> Zubkova, *Obshchestvo i reformy*, p. 177.

<sup>224</sup> The factory in question was the Novocherkassk Electric Locomotive Works (NEVZ)

<sup>225</sup> Baron, *Bloody Saturday*, p. 26.

reflected a considerable element of pent-up frustration, it seems likely that this would not have crossed over into active dissent if it were not for specific local events.

At around 8 am on the morning of June 1 the factory workers decided to go out on strike. Within a matter of hours the military had been brought in and attempts to make the protesters return to work by force only served to heighten their indignation. The striking workers, with women and children alongside, marched from the outlying factory district toward the centre of town, gathering sympathisers along the way yet the procession remained peaceful.

When it became evident that the crowd would not be met by a delegation that had been hurriedly flown in from Moscow (headed by Anastas Mikoyan, Frol Kozlov, Aleksandr Shelepin and Andrei Kirilenko), the mood turned more hostile.<sup>226</sup> Frustration boiled over and the more aggressive elements in the crowd forced their way into the town's Party building and began to ransack and vandalise the place. Soon afterward a group of the demonstrators attempted to release prisoners from the police station (there were in fact none there by that time) and it was then that the armed forces began to fire into the crowd that had gathered outside the town's *gorkom* building, killing dozens of people and wounding hundreds more.

Aside from insisting that overall there had been few complaints and most people agreed that the price rises were a good and necessary measure, a subsequent KGB report of 7 June 1962 was surprisingly candid but nonetheless incomplete in its content. It stated that the workers had been justifiably angry at poor levels of

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<sup>226</sup> As the crowd headed toward the centre of Novochoerkassk the decision was taken for the deputation to be evacuated from the Party building in the centre of town to a nearby military base.

workplace safety and some wages had decreased by up to thirty per cent and that the local Party committee knew about this growing discontentment but did nothing to tackle it.<sup>227</sup> What it singularly failed to mention, however, was that the situation would most likely never had occurred were it not for the raft of price rises.

With tensions high across the country in the wake of the June 1962 price rises it seems entirely feasible that if society at large had been aware of the rising in Novochoerkassk and the way in which it was violently put down, it could have triggered an untold degree of domestic strife. The most immediately striking comparison is with the events surrounding the Bloody Sunday massacre of January 1905 (a theme that is alluded to in the title of Baron's volume on Novochoerkassk) which prompted months of rebellion across Russia after government forces fired into a crowd of petitioners outside the Winter Palace. That the authorities also seem to have drawn this analogy with 1905 could be seen in the fact that great effort was expended on preventing news of the events from leaking out of the city both while the rising was underway and for many years after.<sup>228</sup>

It is worthwhile to consider how workers' protest had come to take on such a drastic tone and what this said about their relationship with the authorities. One point that has to be raised is that 1962 witnessed a qualitatively different kind of protest because of the nature of its immediate catalyst. Unaffordable prices, like unavailable goods, were always likely to provoke a different calibre of response to less tangible issues

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<sup>227</sup> RGANI, f. 89, op. 6, d. 16, ll. 1-3.

<sup>228</sup> Naturally, rumours did quickly emerge that something major had taken place in the region yet they remained unsubstantiated for some time. The first Western report appeared in the French newspaper *Paris-Presse* on 27 July yet was somewhat inaccurate. Samuel Baron recalled that even during the late Gorbachev period he found few people in Novochoerkassk who were willing to talk about the event with an outsider. See Baron, *Bloody Saturday*, p. 108.

such as foreign policy or stalled liberalisation because, at their most extreme, they presented a question of survival rather than one of political principles.<sup>229</sup> Their goals may not have been primarily political but to suggest, as some authors have in the past, that Soviet workers showed no revolutionary potential is to underestimate the danger that these mass disturbances posed.<sup>230</sup>

The events at Novochoerkassk provide further evidence of the new social contract that was emerging between state and society. What had long been apparent to Stalin's successors, that living standards would have to be raised appreciably if the regime were to survive in the long term, was brought into focus more sharply than ever before. It became quite clear to the authorities that they could no longer act with virtual disregard for the popular mood without provoking a potentially ruinous response. As the next chapter will show, disorders around the country ultimately forced the Soviet authorities to take the public mood into greater account before taking major decisions.

It is also important to point out that, in so far as we know at present, there were no public disturbances on this kind of scale during the later part of the Stalin period or at any time under Brezhnev. Here one can again point to the fact that the Khrushchev era was a time of transition; highly repressive policing had been discredited but the relative prosperity and more sophisticated social control of later years were not yet in place. What the summer of 1962 showed most of all was that although ordinary people generally did not stand in opposition to the Soviet regime, they did demand

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<sup>229</sup> It is worth reiterating here that Khrushchev had also recently imposed further restrictions on the cultivation of peasants' private plots, meaning that not only were many people already angry but that they were even more reliant upon buying goods which they could no longer afford.

<sup>230</sup> See, for example, F. Barghoorn, *Détente and the Democratic Movement in the USSR*, London: Collier Macmillan, 1976, p. 168.

that it provided an acceptable standard of living and were liable to respond with real force if the circumstances presented themselves.

### **3.5 A PRECURSOR TO THE HUMAN RIGHTS MOVEMENT**

One of the key factors in the development of intelligentsia dissent in the late Khrushchev era was the lack of room for even quite mild criticism. Educated professionals who were essentially loyal to the regime but continued to harbour reservations about specific policies were increasingly required to remain silent and 'toe the line'. Most ultimately acquiesced and returned to the fold, but others did not. There was still no dissident movement to speak of but it was at this stage that initial networks were being forged and new kinds of dissenting behaviour were emerging, particularly in Moscow. The names of some of those involved in various forms of dissenting activity at this stage constitute a veritable 'who's who' of the Soviet human rights movement: Aleksandr Esenin-Volpin, Vladimir Bukovsky, Yuri Galanskov, Aleksandr Ginzburg, Petr Grigorenko and Andrei Amalrik to name just a few.

Whereas previously students and other educated dissenters had shown a tendency toward clandestine activity, the early 1960s witnessed the start of a general move toward the kind of behaviour that would later characterise the more open and legalistic dissident activity of the Brezhnev years. With the inexorable decline of faith in Marxism-Leninism that took place among disgruntled elements of the intelligentsia around this time, the early 1960s were effectively a period of searching

for new philosophies and forms of expression. This was, according to Veniamin Iofe, a process that had been largely completed by the middle of the decade.<sup>231</sup>

### **3.5.1 MAYAKOVSKY SQUARE**

Among the key events in intelligentsia dissent were two series of unofficial poetry meetings held at Mayakovsky Square in Moscow. The first series of gatherings had begun in 1958 and ended in early 1960; the second began at the end of that year and lasted into the autumn of 1961. The initial meeting had begun as a spontaneous affair after the unveiling of a statue dedicated to the futurist poet Vladimir Mayakovsky in 1958. After officially approved speakers had given readings, enthusiastic members of the crowd took it upon themselves to continue the evening by giving their own recitals. Having enjoyed the evening, many of the participants arranged to meet again a week later and soon the readings were taking place regularly. Initially the authorities had looked quite benignly on these gatherings but became increasingly uneasy about them as time passed, often employing volunteer police (*druzhiniki*) to intimidate and apprehend participants approaching the Square.<sup>232</sup> By the spring of 1960 the authorities had managed to put a stop to the meetings.

They were then revived in September 1960 on the initiative of Vladimir Bukovsky and Vladimir Osipov and again drew large crowds on Saturday and Sunday evenings. Over the course of the next year these poetry readings would go on to play a crucial role in bringing together various nonconformist elements from Moscow and

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<sup>231</sup> Iofe, *Granitsy smysla*, p. 119.

<sup>232</sup> The *druzhiniki* were a volunteer police force intended to complement the work of the militia. The organisation was founded in 1959 and recruited its members by levying quotas on local factories and enterprises. It seems that most who participated did so grudgingly. See L. Shelley, *Policing Soviet Society: The Evolution of State Control*, London: Routledge, 1996.

elsewhere. While many who attended the readings did so as poetry lovers rather than dissenters, there was also a strong political undercurrent to events – a fact that is perhaps not surprising since Vladimir Bukovsky recalled that his main motivation for resurrecting the sessions was to draw together like-minded critics of the regime.<sup>233</sup> He was not alone in this – Apollon Shukht (one of the attendees and a close friend of many participants) suggested that Vladimir Osipov too had conceived of the meetings as something akin to the Petöfi Circle that had played such an important role in triggering the Hungarian rising.<sup>234</sup>

Events were not just restricted to the public gatherings in the centre of Moscow. Participants also used to gather at friends' apartments in the centre of the city and hold 'salons' consisting of anything between ten and thirty people, where conversations turned far more open and critical than anything that was said during the readings at Mayakovsky Square. There was no attempt to form any kind of unified group among the participants yet most were on friendly terms and spoke of similar notions such as democratisation, loss of faith in socialism and the desirability of establishing some form of loyal opposition to the existing regime.<sup>235</sup> It was in these salons and friendship groups (*kompanii*) and others like them throughout the capital that many of the personal and philosophical bonds that later united members of the dissident movement were first forged.

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<sup>233</sup> Interview with Vladimir Bukovsky, Cambridge, March 2007.

<sup>234</sup> Interview with Apollon Shukht in Polikovskaya, *'My predchuvstvie...predtecha'*, p. 66. The Petöfi Circle was a group of young Hungarian communists – named in honour of the Hungarian national poet, Sander Petöfi. Formed in April 1956, the group's meetings quickly became highly critical of the state of the Hungarian regime and helped provoke workers and intellectuals into the protests and uprising that followed.

<sup>235</sup> Polikovskaya, *'My predchuvstvie...predtecha'* p. 114.

As Alexeyeva wrote of her own experiences of the time: '*kompanii* were initially about dancing to jazz, drinking vodka and talking till dawn'.<sup>236</sup> They later became arenas where *samizdat* was shared, philosophies were debated and lifelong friendships were formed. It was also in these groups that the fusion of politics and culture became more pronounced and where dissenters began to co-ordinate their activity before ultimately becoming a relatively coherent movement around the middle of the decade.

One of the more interesting comments from Lyudmila Polikovskaya's collection of interviews with Mayakovsky Square attendees ('*My predchuvstvie...predtecha*', 1997) was provided by Zinaida Eskina. She stated that even when the authorities began to put pressure on participants by summoning them for 'chats' with the KGB and had several expelled from their universities, they were still not scared and had always known that they were taking a risk.<sup>237</sup> This was very much the same kind of ethos that many members of the subsequent human rights movement lived by – again reflecting the degree of continuity between the attitudes and activities of the late Khrushchev period and the Brezhnev era dissident movement.

One must also consider whether this was an accurate reflection not only of other participants' emotions at the time but also of Eskina's own. Her name does not feature as having been an active dissenter at this period or any other, suggesting that attendance at the Square was perhaps her sole act of overt defiance against the regime. The fact that Polikovskaya's interviews were conducted in the mid-1990s, when it

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<sup>236</sup> Alexeyeva and Goldberg, *The Thaw Generation*, p. 83.

<sup>237</sup> Interview with Zinaida Eskina in Polikovskaya, '*My predchuvstvie...predtecha*', p. 127. In the same interview Eskina also mentioned that she recalled Joseph Brodsky coming to Moscow from Leningrad and hearing him read his work at one of these salons.

was relatively fashionable in some quarters to salute those who had struggled with the regime in the Soviet days, may also have facilitated a slightly romanticised recall of events. It is therefore important to bear in mind that, whether she had consciously intended to or otherwise, Eskina may have presented a portrait of events that was somewhat at odds with the way things actually happened.

On the other hand, assuming that Eskina's recollection was accurate, and there is no overt reason to doubt this, it provides a telling snapshot of the domestic situation as it stood at that time. Firstly, it is again worth flagging up the extent to which this kind of behaviour would have been unthinkable not just a decade earlier but even five years previously. Furthermore, it not only demonstrates the extent to which fear of the authorities had diminished in some quarters of society but also the way in which culture, and literature in particular, was fusing with politics as both a theme and a form of intelligentsia dissent.

Although the authorities had immediately begun to apply various forms of pressure on those who attended the meetings, it was not until October 1961 that they came to an end. The reason for this halt was the arrest of two of the organisers – Vladimir Osipov and Eduard Kuznetsov – who had plotted an attempt on Khrushchev's life.<sup>238</sup> The pair had long been at the political extreme of those who participated in the meetings at Mayakovsky Square, apparently leaning toward a broadly anarcho-syndicalist philosophy, but had in fact been persuaded to call off the plot by Galanskov, Bukovsky and a few others shortly before the fateful day. Nonetheless,

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<sup>238</sup> The plot had been drawn up by an acquaintance named Anatolii Ivanov and the assassin was to be a man named Vitalii Rementsov. Both of these two were arrested and subsequently confined in psychiatric institutes.

the KGB got wind of the plot, arrested those involved and undertook a general crackdown across the board.<sup>239</sup>

The demonstration at Pushkin Square on 5 December 1965, held in order to demand *glasnost* in the forthcoming trial of Andrei Sinyavsky and Yuli Daniel, is widely acknowledged as having been the first collective protest for the observance of human rights in the USSR, yet philosophically, and perhaps for some also physically, the road to Pushkin Square seems to have begun at Mayakovsky Square. These were the first open and entirely peaceful meetings held in defiance of authority right in the centre of the capital and, moreover, featured at their core numerous individuals who were later to feature among the regime's most prominent critics.<sup>240</sup>

### 3.5.2 SAMIZDAT

The meetings at Mayakovsky Square also proved to be occasions on which large volumes of forbidden literature regularly changed hands and were integral to the birth of several of the earliest *samizdat* journals. *Samizdat* literature, generally viewed as the backbone of the entire dissident movement, was not only growing in volume during the early 1960s but was also becoming more politicised as alternative philosophies were gaining acceptance while Marxism-Leninism declined. What this meant was a further series of breaches in the regime's vital information blockade as well as the establishment of an unofficial forum for debate and discussion. *Samizdat* was, according to Solomon Volkov, 'one of the main reservoirs of intellectual

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<sup>239</sup> Polikovskaya, *My predchuvstvie...predtecha*.

<sup>240</sup> See P. Litvinov, *The Demonstration in Pushkin Square*, London: Harvill Press, 1969; N. Kostenko, et al eds. *Pyatoe dekabrya 1965 goda v vospominaniyakh uchastnikov soytii, materialakh samizdata, dokumentakh partiinykh i komsomol'skikh organizatsii i v zapiskakh komiteta gosudastvennoi bezopasnosti v TsK KPSS*, Moskva: Memorial, 1995.

opposition' to the Soviet authorities.<sup>241</sup> Importantly, it was very much a phenomenon that had distinct roots in the Khrushchev era.

Aleksandr Ginzburg, often regarded as the pioneer of *samizdat*, had already produced three volumes of his anthology *Syntaxis (Sintaksis)* featuring uncensored work by Moscow and Leningrad writers (among the most notable of whom were Bulat Okudzhava and Joseph Brodsky) before he was arrested whilst preparing a fourth edition in July 1960. Following Ginzburg's arrest, Mayakovsky Square attendees Vitalii Skuratovskii and Anatolii Yakobson produced *Cocktail (Kokteil')* while Yuri Galanskov compiled the almanac *Phoenix (Feniks)* and Vladimir Osipov set up *Boomerang (Bumerang)*. Prompted by the authorities' success in putting an end to the meetings, Mikhail Kaplan then released two volumes of *Sirens (Sirena)* in the first half of 1962 – both were dominated by the works of people who had read out their work at Mayakovsky Square.<sup>242</sup>

### **3.5.3 THE LEGALIST APPROACH**

The most significant outcome of the trial of Osipov and Kuznetsov in the spring of 1962 proved to be the growing credence of legalistic forms of dissent that were being espoused by Aleksandr Esenin-Volpin. His numerous experiences of the state's repressive apparatus under both Stalin and Khrushchev had convinced Volpin that the authorities had to be faced openly and with knowledge rather than with threats and arms.<sup>243</sup> It was an argument that few had taken seriously at first.

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<sup>241</sup> Volkov, *The Magic Chorus*, p. 180.

<sup>242</sup> See V. Igrunov, ed. *Antologiya samizdata: nepodtsenzurnaya literatura v SSSR 1950-1980, Tom 1 Kniga 2*, Moskva: Mezhdunarodnyi institute gumanitarno-politicheskikh issledovani, 2005.

<sup>243</sup> Interview with Aleksandr Esenin-Volpin, Revere, Massachusetts, November 2006.

Although trials like that of Osipov and Kuznetsov were declared ‘open’, in reality they were very much closed to the public. Nonetheless, Volpin had studied the Soviet constitution, learned his rights under the law and demanded access to the trial. Vladimir Bukovsky summed up Volpin’s successful entry in the following way: “Little did we realise that this absurd incident, with the comical Alik Volpin brandishing his criminal code like a magic wand to melt the doors of the court, was the beginning of our civil rights movement and the movement for human rights in the USSR”.<sup>244</sup> The creation of the human rights movement was not quite that simple, of course, but this undoubtedly was a pivotal moment that demonstrated the changing dynamics of dissenting behaviour. What Volpin had done was to hasten a change in the rules of engagement between dissenters and authority.

There were several reasons for the decline of underground dissent among the intelligentsia. Perhaps the most important was that, as Petr Grigorenko entitled his famous book: ‘in the underground one can meet only rats’.<sup>245</sup> His view, and that of a growing number of others at the time, was that reliance on what were seen as Bolshevik means of struggle could ultimately only produce a new dictatorship and all the negativity it would entail – exactly what most dissenters among the intelligentsia did not want. Another important factor was that underground dissent had proved itself almost entirely ineffective. It was an irritant for the authorities but seems to have made no real impression on the public mood. Indeed, it seems highly probable that, rumours aside, ordinary people knew practically nothing concrete about this kind of activity. The serious risks that group members took in producing and distributing

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<sup>244</sup> Bukovsky, *To Build A Castle*, p. 131.

<sup>245</sup> See P. Grigorenko, *V podpol’e možno vstretit’ tol’ko krysy*, N’yu Iork: Detinets, 1981. This was the conclusion reached by Grigorenko after his own group, the Union of Struggle for the Restoration of Leninism, was arrested in February 1964.

manifestos or leaflets simply did not produce any kind of tangible return among society.

In Leningrad – a city generally depicted as one where underground activity continued to flourish for some time – the situation was a little different. Valery Ronkin's *Kolokol group* came together in the summer of 1964 and subsequently distributed a Djilas-inspired manifesto entitled *from dictatorship of the bureaucracy to dictatorship of the proletariat* which spoke of overthrowing the regime with a Hungarian-style revolution.<sup>246</sup> Others, however, leaned toward a more Russian nationalist ethos, such as the *All-Russian Social-Christian Union* and *The Path (Put')*.

Procurator records show that people all around the country continued to be arrested and sentenced after sending anonymous anti-Soviet letters and, less often, distributing leaflets. As the middle of the decade approached a growing proportion of the state's attention was again turned toward nationalist and religious dissent, particularly group activity. One occasionally still encounters underground political groups toward the middle of the 1960s but with far less frequency than in previous years.

Outside of Moscow it becomes much harder to piece together a pattern in regard to the evolution of intelligentsia dissent. It remains unclear whether this is primarily because acts of protest and criticism became less common or because evidence of these acts has not yet come to light. Open acts of defiance, such as the Mayakovsky Square poetry readings, would have been a far more risky undertaking in the provinces where the authorities were less constrained by factors such as the presence

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<sup>246</sup> See Iofe, *Granitsy smysla* p. 120.

of the Western media. Perhaps the most important point to raise in this respect is that the available evidence is too scant to indicate anything definitively.

#### **3.5.4 KHRUSHCHEV AND THE LIBERAL INTELLIGENTSIA**

It also appears that the evolution away from more subversive forms of intelligentsia dissent could be partly attributed to the fact that dissent had begun to draw in a growing number of educated professionals whose attitudes had previously been on the margins of what was deemed acceptable and unacceptable. Within the scientific community, for example, there was growing disquiet at the continued official support for the ‘charlatan biologist’ Trofim Lyenko.<sup>247</sup> Simmering resentment burst into the open when Lyenko was publicly denounced by a number of leading physicists in 1962, including Petr Kapitsa – later a Nobel laureate – yet Lyenko retained his dominance in the field. It was not just his controversial, and ultimately false, work on ‘hybridization’ that riled his fellow scientists but the fact that he had marginalized and denounced many within the scientific community who had opposed him and his acolytes.<sup>248</sup>

Two years later, in June 1964, Andrei Sakharov too weighed in with an attack on Lyenko and his followers, an act that he later recalled as an early landmark on his

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<sup>247</sup> See Zh. Medvedev, *The Rise and Fall of T.D. Lyenko*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1969.

<sup>248</sup> Lyenko had risen to prominence in the 1930s. His work essentially rejected Mendel’s principles of genetic inheritance, claiming instead that crop yields could be increased and ripening times reduced by what he called ‘acquired characteristics’ – ‘teaching’ wheat to grow in spring or places where it would not normally grow, for example. These were ideas that had long been bereft of credibility elsewhere in the world but had seemingly offered a way out of the USSR’s chronic agricultural problems and so caught Stalin’s eye. Lyenko continued to enjoy predominance under Khrushchev, though he was quickly sidelined at the accession to power of Leonid Brezhnev in October 1964.

way to becoming an active dissenter.<sup>249</sup> In resisting a proposal that Lysenko's associate Nikolai Nuzhdin be elevated to full membership of the Academy of Sciences, Sakharov took the rostrum and rounded on Nuzhdin, stating that '...together with academician Lysenko, he is responsible for the shameful backwardness of Soviet biology..., for the adventurism, for the degradation of learning and for the firing, arrest, even death of many genuine scientists'.<sup>250</sup>

The event that Sakharov had considered his first foray into what he called 'civic activity' had actually come two years earlier when he protested to Khrushchev about the decision for the USSR to resume nuclear testing in 1962. The result was a strongly worded rebuke from Khrushchev in which Sakharov was warned not to meddle in politics. As Khrushchev recalled in his memoirs 'this disagreement left its mark on Sakharov'.<sup>251</sup>

The tentative alliance that had existed between Khrushchev and the liberal intelligentsia during earlier years was not to survive to the end of the period. Although the relationship had been through numerous ups and downs already by the early 1960s, it reached a new low point after Khrushchev's outburst against non-conformist artists at the Manezh gallery in December 1962. On visiting the exhibition which included numerous abstract paintings, Khrushchev soon flew into a rage, crudely abusing some of the artists and threatening to send several of them to logging

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<sup>249</sup> See A. Sakharov, *Memoirs*, New York: Alfred Knopf, 1990, p. 235. Sakharov heard rumours that when Khrushchev found out about his attack he ordered KGB chief Semichastnyi to begin gathering compromising material on the physicist.

<sup>250</sup> Sakharov, *Memoirs*, p. 234.

<sup>251</sup> S. Khrushchev ed. *Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev: Volume 2, Reformer*, Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006, p. 493. That Khrushchev had personally been Lysenko's patron could be seen in the fact that almost immediately after Khrushchev's overthrow in October 1964, Lysenko too was disgraced and demoted.

camps in the far north. This was, it seems, the result of a provocation engineered by Mikhail Suslov, intended to facilitate an attack on the liberal wing of the cultural establishment.<sup>252</sup> The aftermath of this attack saw conservatives driving home their advantage over powerful liberals and their supporters, taking almost complete control within the cultural establishment and finally closing off the avenue of ‘permitted dissent’ in the cultural sphere.

Shortly before this decisive turn toward conservatism in the cultural sphere, the November 1962 edition of the celebrated liberal literary journal *Novyi Mir* had carried Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn’s seminal debut novella *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*. This was undoubtedly the most daring publication to come out of the Khrushchev period, and one that the First Secretary himself had pushed through against the resistance of several colleagues.<sup>253</sup>

At home and abroad, the success of *Ivan Denisovich* was huge, with successive print runs selling out almost immediately. The massive domestic success of *Ivan Denisovich* unquestionably proved that Stalin’s *Gulag* was a subject that remained close to the surface within society. The subsequent explosion of *Gulag* literature ‘had an enormous impact on Soviet society and, in fact, altered the ideological climate in the country. With each new work, it became increasingly evident that Stalin’s terror

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<sup>252</sup> See Zezina, *Sovetskaya khudozhestvennaya intelligentsiya*; F. Burlatsky, *Khrushchev and the First Russian Spring: The Era of Khrushchev Through the Eyes of his Adviser*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1991.

<sup>253</sup> Numerous accounts exist of Khrushchev’s personal involvement in the publication of Ivan Denisovich. Aside from Solzhenitsyn’s own memoirs the most informative and revealing works are V. Lakshin, *Solzhenitsyn, Tvardovsky and Novyi Mir*, Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1980 and P. Johnson, *Khrushchev and the Arts: The Politics of Soviet Culture, 1962-1964*, Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1965. The wider impact of the story is covered at some length in Zh. Medvedev, *Ten Years After Ivan Denisovich*, London: Macmillan, 1973.

had possessed deep roots...'<sup>254</sup> The result was that all the awkward questions arising from the abuses of the previous era were brought back into focus. In addition to this, the international acclaim that greeted *Ivan Denisovich* was ultimately to provide Solzhenitsyn with a platform from which to air his many criticisms of the Soviet regime.

### **3.5.5 JOSEPH BRODSKY, ANDREI SINYAVSKY AND YULI DANIEL**

In what can be seen as an important forerunner of the 1966 trial of Sinyavsky and Daniel, the arrest and sentencing of the young Leningrad poet Joseph Brodsky demonstrated that the tide had turned definitively against the relative cultural liberality of previous years. Having already subjected Brodsky to official censure when he was caught attempting to pass illicit materials to Western tourists, and having had two friends sentenced for anti-Soviet activity, he was surely a marked man for some time prior to his arrest. However, according to a KGB report it had been decided that Brodsky would not be jailed for anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda as he was both too young and 'insufficiently hostile'.<sup>255</sup> Instead, a case was constructed under parasitism legislation in what can be seen as a key show trial that marked an intensification of the government's drive to silence the liberal intelligentsia.<sup>256</sup>

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<sup>254</sup> Shlapentokh, *Soviet Intellectuals*, p. 112.

<sup>255</sup> RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 454, ll. 98-100. On the basis that this information was contained in a KGB report it seems likely that the decision not to try Brodsky for anti-Soviet activity and propaganda had been taken by the security organs.

<sup>256</sup> Philip Boobbyer, for example, has suggested that the Brodsky trial was effectively the first in a series of show trials that culminated with that of Aleksandr Sinyavsky and Yuli Daniel. P. Boobbyer, *Conscience, Dissent and Reform in Soviet Russia*, London: Routledge, 2005, p. 77. Solomon Volkov has concurred with this assessment. See Volkov, *The Magic Chorus*, p. 234.

A KGB report to the Central Committee from May 1964 showed that the creative intelligentsia were reacting negatively to the persecution of Brodsky. Writers' Union members Lev Kopelev, Raisa Orlova and Lidiya Chukovskaya were quoted by the KGB as stating that the trial represented a return to Stalinism. The poet Evgeny Evtushenko described the trial as 'fascistic' and others, including the director Samuil Marshak, the celebrated children's author Kornei Chukovskii and composer Dmitry Shostakovich, promised to undertake a petition in defence of Brodsky.<sup>257</sup>

Although there was never any doubt in regard to the outcome of his trial, it was nonetheless notable for the fact that Brodsky vigorously defended himself against the accusation that he was a social parasite. He was also ably supported by a number of key defence witnesses who testified to both his skill as a poet and his willingness to work.<sup>258</sup> Presumably because of the standing of supporters such as Anna Akhmatova, Brodsky's case began to draw international attention and he was eventually released from exile in the far north of Russia ahead of schedule in October 1965. However, the fact that Brodsky's early release came at the same time as the arrest of Sinyavsky and Daniel was most likely not a coincidence.

Had Brodsky been a young poet from Moscow rather than Leningrad it may well have been the case that his trial would have provided the spur for events that followed the arrest and sentencing of Sinyavsky and Daniel almost two years later. As it happened, Khrushchev was soon overthrown and, contrary to rumours circulating amongst the intelligentsia at the time, a period of relative calm between the liberal intelligentsia

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<sup>257</sup> RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 454, ll. 98-100.

<sup>258</sup> Burford Jr, R. 'Getting the Bugs Out of Socialist Legality: The Case of Joseph Brodsky', *The American Journal of Comparative Law*, 1974, pp. 465-501.

and the authorities followed until the trial of Sinyavsky and Daniel re-ignited the standoff at the end of 1965.<sup>259</sup>

Because it occupies such a prominent place in the historiography of Soviet dissent it is worthwhile to look briefly at the lineage of the January 1966 trial of Sinyavsky and Daniel. Although integral to the cycle of protest and repression that occurred throughout much of the Brezhnev era, it was actually a sequence of events that was deeply rooted in the preceding Khrushchev years. Andrei Sinyavsky, an employee of the Gorky Literary Institute in Moscow, had begun to send his works abroad for publication under the pseudonym Abram Tertz in 1959 and his co-defendant Yuli Daniel had done likewise since 1961 under the pseudonym of Nikolai Arzhak.

The KGB investigation against the pair had been initiated in the early 1960s but for several years had produced no success in uncovering Tertz and Arzhak or even verifying that they definitely were writing from within the Soviet Union.<sup>260</sup> In early 1964 the investigation led detectives to Yuli Daniel and from there to Sinyavsky. For several months they were monitored along with others involved in the smuggling operation and were finally arrested in September 1965.

The point to be made here is that the traditional association which is made between the persecution of the two writers and the conservatism of the Brezhnev regime has been somewhat overstated: the pair's dissenting activity, the KGB investigation, and

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<sup>259</sup> The main rumour doing the rounds was that a list existed bearing the names of about a thousand liberal intellectuals who were to be arrested. See A. Solzhenitsyn, *The Oak and the Calf: A Literary Memoir*, London, Collins and Harvill, 1980, p. 90.

<sup>260</sup> C. Andrew, and V. Mitrokhin, *The Sword and the Shield: The Mitrokhin Archive and the Secret History of the KGB*, New York: Basic Books, 1999, p. 535. That the KGB took so long to uncover the writers is rather curious as their identities were not a particularly well kept secret in the Moscow *kompanii* of the time. See Alexeyeva and Goldberg, *The Thaw Generation* p. 118.

by implication the events that followed it, were all deeply rooted in the Khrushchev years.

### **3.6 CONCLUSIONS**

The second half of the Khrushchev era witnessed some truly embittered acts of protest and criticism that indicated a growing antipathy toward the regime as a whole. KGB reports stretching across the duration of the period show that tens or even hundreds of thousands of anti-Soviet leaflets and letters were distributed or posted and well in excess of a hundred underground groups of various political shades were uncovered. While the first half of the period had arguably been characterised by frustration at the stalled progress of deStalinisation, the 1960s saw resentment increasingly focused on the ruling political authorities. The sense of utopianism that had been evident in the late 1950s had largely evaporated and, although Marxist-Leninist ideology continued to dominate many dissenters' political philosophy, there was an increasing sentiment that the regime could no longer be 'fixed' but required fundamental change.

The most notable theme of intelligentsia dissent in the second half of the Khrushchev era was that the scene was quite clearly being set for the confrontation between dissenters and authority that took place throughout the Brezhnev era. On the side of the dissenters many of the leading figures of the human rights movement had already emerged as critics of the regime and had become embroiled in the cycle of repression and reaction that would characterise the dissident movement. The principle of relying on open, legal struggle had begun to take root and key tools such as *samizdat* literature and communication with the West had either emerged or were in the process of establishing themselves.

It remained the case that most acts of protest among workers were prompted by specific incidents, people and policies rather than any kind of wider rejection of the Soviet regime. As the numerous uprisings of the period demonstrated, Soviet workers were by no means unquestioningly obedient and were more than capable of venting their frustrations at the authorities. While worker dissent displayed a growing degree of cynicism in regard to the authorities this was, by the later stages of the period, increasingly kept in check by rising living standards and increasingly effective methods of social control.

Even more than the earlier part of the Khrushchev era, the gulf between worker dissent and that of the intelligentsia remained pronounced: the former demanded material improvement and the latter wanted political reform. There were a multitude of reasons why workers and members of the intelligentsia never found common ground, not least of which were the authorities' efforts to prevent such an alliance by methods such as presenting an image of the intelligentsia as 'eggheads' and 'cry babies' according to Kagarlitsky.<sup>261</sup>

Unlike the intelligentsia, the working class had the sheer number of people and the forceful manner of protest to engineer change yet their desires were ultimately rather limited. Lenin had perhaps been correct to argue that without the guidance of the intelligentsia the workers would only ever develop a 'trade union mentality', as discontent among the working classes was effectively 'bought off' by the regime after the disorders of 1962. From that point onwards overt dissenting activity was largely

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<sup>261</sup> B. Kagarlitsky, *The Thinking Reed: Intellectuals and the Soviet State from 1917 to the Present*, London: Verso, 1989, p. 110.

reduced to a small core of the Moscow intelligentsia and, according to Alexei Yurchak's research, was of little relevance to most people's everyday lives.<sup>262</sup>

After a somewhat tumultuous period around 1962, the relationship between society and the regime began to settle down again as the middle of the decade approached. The measures taken were essentially aimed at neutralising the threat of major unrest among the working class, and thus reducing the threat to the regime's stability. What the dissenting activity of this period in particular had achieved was to demonstrate to the authorities that society's compliance could not be taken for granted but had to be earned and maintained.

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<sup>262</sup> A. Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation*, Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006, p. 106.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **OFFICIAL RESPONSES TO DISSENT: 1959-1964**

While the development of policy against dissent during the early Khrushchev period was largely characterised by a sense of trial and error, the first half of the 1960s saw the authorities employing a more consistent and thought out approach. Neither the uncertainty of the immediate post-Secret Speech period nor the ‘fire-fighting’ approach that had followed the December letter were to be repeated. Instead the regime began to develop a more sophisticated and varied corpus of policy whereby greater efforts were made to prevent dissenting behaviour among the population in the long term as well as continuing to employ punitive responses against those remaining dissenters who were perceived as being genuinely anti-Soviet. Less serious transgressions were treated with greater lenience while more serious offences continued to be met with a harsh punitive response: naked coercion was no longer the only response to dissent but it did remain an option for the authorities.<sup>263</sup>

In many ways the regime’s responses to dissenting behaviour were becoming markedly less Stalinist in that they came to see the use of camp and prison sentences as a last resort rather than a default reaction. The ever-growing reliance on ‘soft’ methods of social control, such as prophylactic measures, succinctly demonstrated this fact. Nonetheless, the authorities’ more outwardly restrained approach continued to be backed up by the application of severe punitive measures against hundreds of dissenters.

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<sup>263</sup> See F. Feldbrugge, ‘Soviet Criminal Law. The Last Six Years’, *The Journal of Criminal Law, Criminology and Police Science*, Vol. 54, No. 3, September 1963, p. 263.

What these factors and others, such as the growth of psychiatric confinement, demonstrate is that by the early 1960s one can see very clear continuities with the struggle against dissidents that took place during the Brezhnev era. That the authorities' principal aim was to minimise and stifle criticism rather than to eradicate it was increasingly evident, as was the fact that rationalisation rather than liberalisation dictated responses to dissent. New restraints upon the authorities appeared and existing ones became more important, such as improvements in the legal system and a desire to avoid negative publicity abroad, yet ultimately the regime was still willing and able to disregard any such factors if domestic stability was deemed to be at stake.

It is evident that a new relationship between society and the regime had been just about established by the time of Khrushchev's ouster in October 1964. In particular, the authorities had become increasingly cautious of provoking widespread discontent within society. As Kozlov wrote: 'The lessons of the early 1960s pushed the Party leadership into a search for means of compromise in the conflict between authority and the people'.<sup>264</sup> In practice, this meant that those whose discontent was based on material factors were largely placated or intimidated into silence, while those with genuinely political grievances were ostracised or crushed.

#### **4.1 POLICING DISSENT**

As dissenting behaviour had begun to take on a more consistent and stable form by the end of the 1950s, so the authorities too increasingly honed their tactics and

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<sup>264</sup> V. Kozlov, *Neizvestnyi SSSR: Protivostoyanie naroda i vlasti 1953-1985*, Moskva: Olma-Press, 2006, p. 408.

practices of policing. Stalin-era investigators and security agents had been replaced by people who were better educated and trained, without direct involvement in the crimes of previous years. Reviews and reorganisations of the camp and prison system were conducted, the KGB was reorganised and slimmed down and new legal guidelines were enacted as the process of rationalisation continued. While the second half of the 1950s can arguably be seen as a time when the regime began to move away from the most brutal aspects of its Stalinist past, it was during the early 1960s that new policies began to crystallise and the Brezhnev era system of policing society began to take hold.

#### ***4.1.1 THE LEADERSHIP***

For the most part, members of the top leadership were less actively involved in the minutiae of the struggle against dissent than they had been in the 1950s. However, they were still kept abreast of the most important developments around the country in general and particularly during times of heightened unrest such as summer 1962. While the Central Committee Presidium was provided with occasional summaries of dissenting behaviour, its General Department received regular updates from the KGB, and less frequently from the Ministry of Internal Affairs or Procurator's office, on specific instances of protest and criticism around the country as and when they took place.

Often these reports related to foreign attempts to stir unrest inside the USSR or to the exposure of underground groups and supposed terrorist plots, but information about even quite banal occurrences could also be sent practically to the top of the political

ladder. For example, when three anti-Soviet leaflets were found scattered in the halls of the Central Lenin Museum in Moscow during June 1964, the case was brought to the attention of the General Department.

This gives a useful indication as to where the policing of dissent lay among the regime's priorities and of the role that the General Department played as a 'clearing house' for a whole range of information that was key to policy formation and implementation. For the vast majority of the time dissent would probably not have been a subject that occupied the likes of the First Secretary or other top leaders, according to Sergei Khrushchev.<sup>265</sup> Instead, the law enforcement agencies seem to have been left to conduct affairs without the kind of constant interference that had been the case under Stalin. The KGB's own history textbook stated it was they rather than the Central Committee Presidium that began to take the more active role in drawing up measures to deal with dissent in this period.<sup>266</sup>

There were, however, a number of cases in which members of the top leadership did become actively involved in dealing with dissent. We know that when Aleksandr Esenin-Volpin's philosophical treatise *A Leaf of Spring* was smuggled out of the USSR and published in the West in 1961 it prompted Leonid Il'ichev, head of the Central Committee's Department of Agitation and Propaganda, to declare that the tract displayed 'hatred toward Soviet society and the Soviet people' and to brand the author 'pretentious and illiterate' as well as 'mentally ill' – a denunciation that most likely led to Esenin-Volpin's subsequent spell of psychiatric incarceration. Evgeny

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<sup>265</sup> Interview with Sergei Khrushchev, Rhode Island, December 2006.

<sup>266</sup> V. Chebrikov et al, *Istoriya sovetskikh organov gosudarstvennoi bezopasnosti: uchebnik*, Moskva: Vysshaya krasnoznamenskaya shkola komiteta gosudarstvennoi bezopasnosti pri sovete ministerov SSSR, 1977, p. 581.

Evtushenko – a poet who will be forever associated with deStalinisation – even stated at the same meeting as Il’ichev that Volpin was ‘scum’.<sup>267</sup>

The most notable instance where the leadership did play a direct role in responding to dissent was in relation to the rising at Novocherkassk. Mention has already been made in the preceding chapter of the fact that a delegation composed of high-ranking figures was immediately dispatched to the town – showing just how concerned the leadership was by the developing situation.<sup>268</sup> It seems that, as in Hungary, the delegation was expected to report back to Moscow on how events were developing but were perhaps also supposed to make recommendations back to the centre on how to proceed and to placate the protesters.<sup>269</sup>

The composition of this delegation was in itself significant. Its most senior figures were the hard-line conservative Frol Kozlov and the more moderate Anastas Mikoyan. This duo practically embodied the authorities’ policy against dissent at the time. As Samuel Baron argued: ‘While one (Mikoyan) could explore the chances for a peaceful solution, the other (Kozlov) could be relied upon to crack down should the situation warrant’.<sup>270</sup> This bore a close resemblance to the way that events had panned out in Budapest six years previously (that time Mikoyan had been dispatched as Khrushchev’s envoy and was accompanied by arguably the era’s most unreconstructed hardliner, Mikhail Suslov). As in Hungary, Khrushchev had hoped to

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<sup>267</sup> B. Nathans, ‘The Dictatorship of Reason: Aleksandr Vol’pin and the Idea of Rights Under “Developed Socialism”’, *Slavic Review*, Vol. 66, No. 4, Winter 2007, p. 650.

<sup>268</sup> The delegation included four of the eleven Central Committee Presidium members - Frol Kozlov, Anastas Mikoyan, Andrei Kirilenko and Dmitrii Polyanskii. Alongside this quartet were included former KGB chairman Aleksandr Shelepin and the previously mentioned Leonid Il’ichev.

<sup>269</sup> As a point of interest, it is worthwhile to note that Samuel Baron suggests that Mikoyan had hoped to stay in the town and to address the crowd personally yet others, most notably Frol Kozlov, insisted that the delegation retreat to a safer location. See S. Baron, *Bloody Saturday in the Soviet Union: Novocherkassk, 1962*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001.

<sup>270</sup> Baron, *Bloody Saturday in the Soviet Union*, p. 47.

avoid violence but was willing to take a more aggressive stance if he thought it necessary. Again he found the exhortations of conservatives within the leadership the more convincing and ultimately sanctioned the use of force, which saw the protest end with a bloodbath.

What we can see, therefore, is that while Khrushchev was liable to take daring and even reckless risks in fields such as foreign policy, he was less inclined to do so at home. This not only demonstrates the fact that domestic stability continued to be the regime's single over-riding priority but also emphasises the point that notions of Khrushchev as a 'liberal' and of the era as one of 'thaw', can be misleading. As was shown in the campaign against dissent of 1957 – 1958, the authorities were quick to revert to a more repressive approach when the possibility of significant unrest surfaced.

In this sequence of events one can determine several notable factors at work that reflect upon the wider state of the regime at the time. Most noticeable was the division that existed between what can be broadly categorised as liberal and conservative elements and the fact that representatives of both groups were sent to Novocherkassk, seemingly in order to balance each other out.<sup>271</sup> In regard to Khrushchev, one can see that he was not by nature a leader inclined to ruthlessness but in a tight spot tended to hedge his bets with conservatives instead of liberals. It is also clear that violence against the people was seen as a last resort but by no means an impermissible one; showing that the regime did indeed continue to reserve the right to

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<sup>271</sup> The sphere in which this practice of balancing liberals and conservatives has been most widely examined is literature. See, for example, E. Rogovin-Frankel, *Novy Mir: A Case Study in the Politics of Literature, 1952-1958*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981.

resort to more brutal and characteristically Stalinist methods, as Leonard Schapiro has suggested.<sup>272</sup>

From a closer examination of events, one can also see that the demonstration at Novochoerkassk was forcefully put down not just because it was a protest and thus deserved to be punished but because of the regime's fear that events could spread to the surrounding area and beyond. This was demonstrated by the fact that all road and telephone links with the outside world were immediately cut by the authorities and the town held in an effective state of quarantine for several months afterward. As tensions died down and investigations against the demonstration's ringleaders went to trial, the authorities broadcast the harsh sentences on local radio (which included seven who were subjected to the death penalty) in order to intimidate the locals into silence.<sup>273</sup> However, they also made a point of shipping additional food supplies to the town in order to placate the local population – showing that the regime wished to restore order among the masses just as much as they wanted to punish those who were guilty.

#### **4.1.2 THE WORK OF THE KGB**

After the campaign against dissent began to be wound down in 1958 one of the authorities' main tasks was to put in place a means of stifling protest and criticism in the long term. For the KGB this firstly meant tackling the efforts of anti-Soviet organisations based outside of the USSR in order to minimise their influence on

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<sup>272</sup> L. Schapiro, *The Communist Party of the Soviet Union*, London: Methuen, 1970, p. 611.

<sup>273</sup> The last point is particularly indicative of the authorities' ability to subvert their own laws because the 1958 Law on State Crimes had expressly stated that the death penalty would no longer be applied to those jailed for anti-Soviet activity and propaganda, which included participation in mass disturbances.

Soviet society. NTS became a particular object of the security organs' attention as undercover KGB agents penetrated its structures at practically every level. From then on, when NTS agents were dispatched to the USSR they were almost immediately apprehended by the authorities and neutralised. With most KGB materials from the period still classified, one can say little of how successful or otherwise this focus on foreign centres of anti-Soviet agitation actually was, yet the organs' internal history textbook boasts of uncovering and liquidating 'many military and political plans aimed at the Soviet Union and other socialist powers'.<sup>274</sup>

Similarly, threats and intimidation were used against those who broadcast to Soviet audiences from the West. Gene Sosin recalled that Soviet agents were 'planted' at Radio Liberty by the KGB, émigrés working at the station's Munich offices regularly received silent telephone calls, threats and letters from relatives in Soviet Union begging them to stop slandering the regime and to return to the USSR. Most significantly, two Radio Liberty staff members were murdered – almost certainly by the KGB according to Sosin.<sup>275</sup>

This new focus on matters outside of the USSR did not prevent the security organs from taking stock of things at home too. On 19 July 1962 a report was sent from the Administrative Organs Department to the Central Committee which effectively constituted a review of the regime's policies against dissent. To give some idea of the report's significance it is worthwhile to point out that it included the signatures of Aleksandr Shelepin, Vladimir Semichastnyi, Matvei Zakharov, Roman Rudenko,

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<sup>274</sup> Chebrikov, *Istoriya sovetskikh organov gosudarstvennoi bezopasnosti*, p. 563.

<sup>275</sup> G. Sosin, *Sparks of Liberty: An Insider's Memoir of Radio Liberty*, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999, p. xiv.

Vadim Tikunov and Petr Ivashutin.<sup>276</sup> These men were the former KGB chairman, presiding KGB chairman, deputy KGB chairman, the head of the Procurator's Office, head of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the head of military intelligence respectively.

The report stated that the KGB had penetrated deeper into workers' organisations and had improved its 'prophylactic work' but conceded that there was still much to be done. Sticking to the traditional formula, it connected the growth in anti-Soviet activity with an increase in imperialist intelligence work and stated that there were only a few 'anti-social elements' who, under the influence of foreign propaganda, were 'continuing to try to use temporary hardships for their own ends'. Links between the KGB and militia were again described as 'weak' and it was acknowledged that the security organs were not 'mobilisationally prepared' for major disturbances such as Novocherkassk, conceding that they had struggled to influence events once the disturbance was already under way.<sup>277</sup>

The review then demanded that decisive measures were taken to strengthen the work of the KGB against anti-Soviet elements. Surveillance of 'suspicious types' and released prisoners was to be stepped up, the recruitment of informers and KGB agents increased and specific training undertaken for future scenarios of mass disturbances in built-up areas. To combat weaknesses in the placing and usage of undercover agents it called for an increase in the availability of technological services for observation purposes as well as improvements in the training and political education of agents.<sup>278</sup>

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<sup>276</sup> RGANI, f. 89, op. 6, d. 20, ll. 1-16.

<sup>277</sup> RGANI, f. 89, op. 6, d. 20, ll. 1-6.

<sup>278</sup> RGANI, f. 89, op. 6, d. 20, ll. 6-9.

Alongside the work of professional KGB employees there was a growing degree of reliance upon information provided by informants and so-called 'trusted people' (*doverennye litsa*) throughout society.<sup>279</sup> Although collaboration with the security organs was generally viewed by society at large as an ignoble endeavour, the authorities proved skilful at creating a web of informers. As Shelley pointed out: 'They (the KGB) offered powerful inducements to comply and severe punishments for disobedience, few citizens of the USSR were capable of resisting the power of the police'.<sup>280</sup>

Owners of ground-floor flats located near the lobby telephone in apartment blocks were expected to keep the security organs regularly informed about conversations that they overheard. A promise of cooperation with the KGB was often a precondition for jobs such as security guards and building commandants. Louise Shelley has even estimated that the proportion of the population that co-operated with the security police in some way was between thirty and sixty per cent.<sup>281</sup> As one can see, during the Khrushchev era the regime's machinery of social control was actually penetrating deeper into the fabric of society than it ever had before. What this state of affairs brings to mind is Michel Foucault's assertion that 'the controlled become the source of their own control'.<sup>282</sup> As the middle of the 1960s approached, this new system of social control was proving increasingly effective.

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<sup>279</sup> The distinction between the two was that the 'trusted people' were not formally linked with the security organs to the same extent as other informers and agents. See Chebrikov, et al. *Istoriya sovetskikh organov gosudarstvennoi bezopasnosti*.

<sup>280</sup> L. Shelley, *Policing Soviet Society: The Evolution of State Control*, London: Routledge, 1996, p. 6.

<sup>281</sup> Shelley, *Policing Soviet Society*, p. 119.

<sup>282</sup> See M. Foucault and A. Sheridan, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, London, Penguin, 1991, p. 24.

The militia were not systematically involved in the day-to-day policing of dissent during the Khrushchev years – a fact that was reversed under Brezhnev – though they were obliged to assist the KGB in its work when requested to do so. This could involve actions such as temporarily detaining citizens on trumped up charges, carrying out unsanctioned apartment searches and conducting provocations against specific individuals. One of their more important responsibilities was to register typewriters, printing presses and photographic equipment; something that played an important role in tracing the authors of *samizdat* documents, anonymous letters and anti-Soviet leaflets.<sup>283</sup>

#### **4.1.3 CENTRALISATION**

A theme that had not escaped the attention of the leadership was that of local officials' inability to handle potentially volatile situations. Going right back to the post-Secret Speech period, the authorities in Moscow had been unhappy with the way that regional officials had ineptly responded to acts of protest and criticism. Similarly, when Vladimir Semichastnyi's deputy at the KGB, Ivashutin, submitted a report to the Central Committee on the events at Novocherkassk, he placed much of the blame on the shoulders of local officials and the NEVZ (Novocherkassk Electric Locomotive Works) factory management and Party organisation for failing to address the growing atmosphere of discontent and proving unable to keep the disturbances localised.<sup>284</sup>

This reflected the extent to which the Soviet system continued to be one where the willingness to take bold decisions was in particularly short supply in the provinces.

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<sup>283</sup> See Shelley, *Policing Soviet Society*, p. 65.

<sup>284</sup> RGANI, f. 89, op. 6, d. 16, l. 2.

Whether this was a culture borne out of years of Stalinism, potentially dangerous fluctuations at the top of the regime, ineptitude and conservatism on the part of regional officials or genuinely restricted room for initiative at a local level is unclear. Nonetheless, it does serve to highlight the fact that the system remained very much inflexible and dependant on directions sent down ‘from above’.

The Procurator’s office in Moscow also seems to have tightened its control over the work of provincial branches. While the period immediately following the Secret Speech and December letter had seen numerous instances where regional offices had botched or mishandled investigations, by the turn of the decade more stringent control was being put into force by the centre.<sup>285</sup> This can be seen in the fact that case files from the second half of the period more frequently include communications from the centre to *oblast*’ procurators requesting more and more information on individual cases in progress and sentences that were handed out.

The case file of Andrei Danilovich Mosin – arrested in Kursk in October 1962 after sending two anonymous letters to the editor of *Izvestiya* – testifies to this trend. The Kursk Procurator contacted the Procurator’s office in Moscow on 26 October to inform that an arrest had been sanctioned and then contacted Moscow again on 16 November to inform that the investigation was complete and the case was about to proceed to court. On 7 January 1963 the Moscow office asked Kursk to inform of the trial’s outcome, which it did four days later – stating that Mosin had been sentenced to seven years corrective labour. On 23 January Moscow then requested to be informed of the content of Mosin’s letters and set a deadline of 1 February. On 2 February

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<sup>285</sup> On these flaws in the work of regional procurators see for example V. Kozlov and S. Mironenko eds, *Kramola: Inakomyslie v SSSR pri Khrushcheve i Brezhneve 1953-1982*, Moskva: ‘Materik’, 2005, p. 32.

another letter was sent from Moscow demanding that the Kursk office speed up its work and provide the requested information – which it eventually did so eleven days later.<sup>286</sup>

At a time when Khrushchev was attempting to implement a degree of decentralisation in fields such as agriculture and industry, the opposite pattern can be witnessed with regard to decision making on the subject of dissent. This was a trend that became even more pronounced from the late 1960s, especially after the KGB's Fifth Department was established in 1967 for the specific purpose of combating dissent. This indicated a realisation among the leadership that, since figures such as Sakharov and Solzhenitsyn were famous the world over, the way that the regime reacted to such prominent dissidents was no longer a strictly internal matter and could not be entrusted to regional apparatchiks. Under Khrushchev this centralisation of the struggle against dissent was most likely indicative of the extent to which policies against dissent were becoming increasingly planned and co-ordinated and the way that law enforcement agencies were placing greater emphasis on professionalism – something often lacking in the provinces.

Following the series of critical speeches that had occurred at Party meetings and debates in the wake of the Secret Speech, it appears that plans were drawn up to deal with this eventuality in the future. The best demonstration of this was provided by the events that followed Petr Grigorenko's speech at Moscow's Lenin District Party conference on 7 September 1961, mentioned in the previous chapter. After an attempt to deprive Grigorenko of the floor in mid-speech was voted down, his remarks were

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<sup>286</sup> GARF, f. 8131, op. 31, d. 924020, ll. 1-11.

followed by an extended and unscheduled intermission, during which the heads of delegations were assembled in a closed room and ordered to instruct their members to condemn Grigorenko's speech. When proceedings resumed a motion was put forward that Grigorenko be deprived of his delegate's credentials on the grounds of 'political immaturity' and, despite the motion receiving the support of less than a third of the delegates, it received no opposition and was passed accordingly.<sup>287</sup> Needless to say, Grigorenko's Party membership, like his military career, was very soon a thing of the past. That nobody was willing to vote in Grigorenko's defence was telling of the fact that discipline had been thoroughly restored within the Party, yet the number of people who refused to condemn his remarks also provided a commentary on the extent to which fear had lessened since the Stalin years.

Interestingly, on the very same day Valentin Ovechkin had also delivered a critical speech to a Party conference in Kursk that was dealt with in exactly the same way as Grigorenko's had been in Moscow.<sup>288</sup> Grigorenko claimed to have subsequently been informed that this tactic had been specifically worked out in preparation for the XXII Party Congress.<sup>289</sup> The fact that two such similar processes were put into action against dissenting speeches in different parts of the country at the same time does indeed offer persuasive evidence that the process had been prescribed in advance as a means of combating critical remarks. Furthermore, after experiencing the period of confusion and disunity within the Party ranks that had briefly arisen after Khrushchev's original exposure of Stalin, it would have been extremely remiss of the

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<sup>287</sup> P. Grigorenko, *Memoirs*, New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1982, p. 250.

<sup>288</sup> L. Alexeyeva, *Soviet Dissent: Contemporary Movements for National, Religious and Human Rights*, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1987, p. 271.

<sup>289</sup> Grigorenko, *Memoirs*, p. 250.

leadership not to have put some kind of plans into place for responding to dissenting speeches before attacking Stalin again at the XXII CPSU Congress.

#### ***4.1.4 POLICING THE MAYAKOVSKY SQUARE MEETINGS***

The authorities' policing of the Mayakovsky Square poetry readings provides a useful 'snapshot' of their struggle against dissent at the time. The fact that those who gathered at the Square were not immediately arrested, and indeed were never arrested in most cases, tells us something about the way that the regime had changed since even the early Khrushchev period. This showed that the policing of dissent in the second half of the Khrushchev era was, in many ways, closer to that of the Brezhnev years than it was to that of the late 1950s.

The authorities were keeping a very close eye on events at the Square. KGB agents were furtively photographing attendees, carrying out searches for *samizdat*, trying to provoke fights and summoning participants for individual 'chats'. Expulsions from universities and from the *Komsomol* soon followed.<sup>290</sup> The significance of this kind of 'black mark' against a citizen ought not to be underestimated since it was liable to stay on one's permanent record and would ultimately close a lot of doors for the respective individual throughout their entire life.

When this kind of pressure failed to keep people from attending the readings the next step was liable to be more forceful. Bukovsky, for example, has written of an occasion when he was accosted on his way home from the Square, bundled into a

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<sup>290</sup> See V. Bukovsky, *To Build a Castle: My Life as a Dissenter*, London: Andre Deutsch, 1978 and L. Polikovskaya, *'My predchuvstvie...predtecha': ploshchad Mayakovskogo 1958-1965*, Moskva: Obshchestvo 'Memorial', 1997.

passing car and driven to an unknown location where he was beaten for several hours before being warned that he would be killed if he went to the Square again.<sup>291</sup> The assailants were, according to Bukovsky, members of the ‘*Komsomol* operative detachments’ (*Komsomol’skyi operativnyi otryady*) that were used to carry out such beatings. Louise Shelley has also written that these same *Komsomol* detachments tended to conduct themselves violently when undertaking operations such as searches for *samizdat* literature among students.<sup>292</sup> Although officially subordinate to the militia and *Komsomol*, such groups were effectively employed to do the ‘dirty work’ that the KGB were no longer supposed to do themselves, according to Bukovsky.<sup>293</sup> This was broadly reflective of the way that dissent was policed not just under Khrushchev but throughout much of the post-Stalin era. It is true to say that, on paper at least, the Soviet regime was developing something like a ‘proper’ legal system yet it remained one that could be, and was, repeatedly subverted by the authorities in their efforts to combat dissent.<sup>294</sup>

The fact that the events discussed above were all played out in the centre of Moscow was not unimportant. In the capital city more than anywhere else, the regime had to conduct itself with most restraint in responding to acts of dissent. The presence of foreign journalists and tourists ensured that there was at least some degree of scrutiny over the authorities’ behaviour. Increasingly mindful of international public opinion for reasons already outlined, the authorities were more inclined to be seen to be ‘playing by the rules’ in the capital. Moscow also tended to be the city where the most educated and best equipped KGB and militia operatives were to be found,

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<sup>291</sup> Bukovsky, *To Build a Castle*, p. 126.

<sup>292</sup> Shelley, *Policing Soviet Society*, p. 113.

<sup>293</sup> Interview with Vladimir Bukovsky, Cambridge, March 2007.

<sup>294</sup> M. Lewin, *The Soviet Century*, London: Verso, 2005, p. 161.

meaning that there was less likelihood of a panicked and exaggerated response to acts of protest and criticism.<sup>295</sup>

Away from Moscow, responses to dissenting behaviour were likely to have been less restrained by the new rules and regulations that had been brought in to prevent a recurrence of the Stalin era's systematic disregard for legality. Even many of the Soviet Union's second-ranked cities such as Kiev and Minsk were still out of bounds to foreign journalists, enabling the authorities there to act against dissenters with virtual impunity if they so wished.<sup>296</sup> In the more remote and rural regions of the USSR the picture is less clear because evidence from these regions simply has not come to light so far, yet there is no reason to suspect that provincial authorities were any more lenient than elsewhere. Indeed, the likelihood is that they were harsher.

Details on one of the most interesting practicalities of policing dissent in the provinces was provided in a report from Secretary of the Kazakh Communist Party, Putintsev, to the Central Committee on 24 May 1960. Describing the discovery of over 450 leaflets in Aktyubinsk *oblast'*, written in the name of NTS, Putintsev reported that the Party *obkom* had immediately mobilised 200 people to trace the leaflets in circulation. These included local soldiers, *Komsomol* members, Party workers and KGB staff.<sup>297</sup> That the authorities had seen fit to devote so many people for this operation was surely indicative of the extent to which such leaflets were seen to constitute a social danger.

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<sup>295</sup> See Shelley, *Policing Soviet Society*, p. 86.

<sup>296</sup> Although falling outside of the timeframe of the present work the best example of this trend can be seen in official responses to the Soviet Helsinki Groups that were established outside of Moscow during the late 1970s in Kiev, Tbilisi, Yerevan and Vilnius. Members of the Ukrainian group in particular were subjected to numerous violent provocations, with many of them ultimately being sentenced to long periods of corrective labour.

<sup>297</sup> RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 320, ll. 9-10.

In a more general sense the resources available for the policing of dissent appear to have been practically limitless – again showing that the authorities took the threat very seriously. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the case file of Mikhail Ermizin – an assistant doctor (*fel'dsher*) from Stavropol who had posted tens of anti-Soviet leaflets between 1962 and 1964 - demonstrated this. The investigation protocol reported that Ermizin had been traced by 'graphic expertise' and 'forensic methods' yet the most notable fact was that it listed 20 separate KGB specialists who had been working on the investigation and a further two 'scientific experts'.<sup>298</sup>

The above case is demonstrative of the fact that not only were the authorities able and willing to go to great lengths in order to trace and nullify such behaviour but they were also determined to find the proper culprit. This is one of the main points to be emphasised in regard to the way that dissent was policed under Khrushchev. Those who had not transgressed the boundaries of acceptable behaviour were no longer at risk of facing the authorities' wrath. Those who had engaged in some form of proscribed behaviour were liable to be faced with the full power of the state. By the 1960s this did not always mean imprisonment, however.

## **4.2 PROPHYLAXIS**

The lessons of the Hungarian rising had shown that dissent could not be allowed to go unchecked, yet jailing all those who criticised some aspect of the regime was simply not a feasible option for the authorities. The Supreme Court resolution of June 1958, which censured the inappropriate use of article 58-10 in cases where individuals were not 'truly anti-Soviet', further expedited the need for a more viable long-term means

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<sup>298</sup> GARF, f. 8131, op. 31, d. 97853, ll. 10-14.

of managing protest and criticism within society. A little over six months later, at the XXI CPSU Congress in January 1959, Khrushchev announced that prophylactic measures (*profilaktika*) were to become the main feature of what he referred to as the state's 'educational work' (*vospitatel'naya rabota*).<sup>299</sup>

The semantic imagery of dissent as some kind of unhealthy phenomenon from which society had to be protected is immediately apparent but the precise meaning of the term 'prophylactic measures' is less clear. It was, as Julie Elkner has stated, 'a much used but only vaguely defined term'.<sup>300</sup> Vasily Mitrokhin's guide to KGB terminology defined *profilaktika* in the following way: 'Activity carried out by Soviet state bodies and social organisations aimed at the prevention of crimes against the state, politically harmful misdemeanours and other acts which affect the interests of the state security of the USSR'.<sup>301</sup> Whereas previously the state had focused its energies upon punishing dissent, now it was also striving to prevent acts of protest and criticism from arising in the first place. The reason that the authorities no longer chose to jail critics as they had done previously was not necessarily because the regime had become more liberal but because it had begun to take a more rational approach to social control.

What Mitrokhin's definition illustrates is that *profilaktika* was an umbrella term which incorporated a range of measures aimed at policing dissenting behaviour without recourse to labour camps and prisons, demonstrating that the Manichean nature of the

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<sup>299</sup> See E. Papovyan and A. Papovyan, 'Uchastie verkhovnogo suda SSSR v vyrobotke repressivnoi politiki, 1957-1958', in L. Eremina and E. Zhemkova, eds. *Korni Travy: Sbornik statei molodykh istorikov*, Moskva: Zven'ya, 1996, pp. 54-73.

<sup>300</sup> See J. Elkner, 'The Changing Face of Repression in the Khrushchev Era' in M. Ilic and J. Smith eds, *State and Society Under Nikita Khrushchev*, London: Routledge, Forthcoming (2009).

<sup>301</sup> V. Mitrokhin, *KGB Lexicon: The Soviet Intelligence Officer's Handbook*, London: Frank Cass, 2002, p. 329.

Soviet regime had softened somewhat in regard to who was considered an 'enemy'. Furthermore, it showed that the authorities were becoming increasingly proactive in fighting dissent: a reflection of the fact that the uncertainty and near-panic of the early post-Stalin years was fading away. Social control was becoming more rational and, owing to the fact that far fewer people were being jailed as a result of this rationalisation, more humanitarian.

One can distinguish two separate forms of prophylaxis: the first aimed at minimising protest and criticism throughout society as a whole by educational means (*glasnaya profilaktika*) and the second which employed measures against specific individuals who were perceived to be insufficiently compliant or in some way unreliable (*chastnaya profilaktika*). When combined, these two levels of prophylaxis provided a highly effective inter-locking mechanism of social control that played a major role in maintaining society's outward passivity for almost three decades.

#### **4.2.1 MEDIA ATTACKS ON DISSENTERS**

One of the key facets of the authorities' attempts to forestall dissenting behaviour across Soviet society as a whole lay in the studying and shaping of public moods. The former made the regime better able to head off potentially imminent unrest and the latter provided a more enduring foundation for stifling dissent in the long term. Professional study of public opinion had officially begun in 1959 and the Institute of Public Opinion was established at *Komsomolskaya pravda* in 1960.<sup>302</sup> The fact that a

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<sup>302</sup> The Institute of Public Opinion was subsequently closed down at the end of 1967, apparently because it continually told the highest authorities news that they did not want to hear. Both Firsov and Grushin worked at the Institute of Public Opinion. See B. Firsov, *Raznomyслиe v SSSR 1940-1960 gody: Istorija, teoriya i praktika*, Sankt Peterburg: Izdatel'stvo Evropeiskogo universiteta v Sankt Peterburge,

newspaper aimed at young people had been chosen as the base for this new institute was probably no coincidence. It demonstrated that the regime continued to be concerned by the apparent disengagement of the younger generation from the goals and principles of the Soviet regime.

Among the authorities' main propaganda targets in the late Khrushchev era were citizens who dared to voice positive views of the West: often this meant young people. However, the authorities were no longer attempting to portray living standards in the West as worse than those in the USSR – a myth that had already been comprehensively exploded by the end of the 1950s – but were essentially trying to stop people from saying in public what they thought in private. In other words, they were trying to 'manage' dissent rather than to eradicate it.

An example of this could be seen by a September 1963 article in *Kazakhstanskaya pravda* entitled 'From an Alien Voice' in which two miners from Leninogorsk were attacked for 'lavishing praise upon life in America at every opportune moment' and 'being unashamed to slander their homeland'.<sup>303</sup> A similar case was played out in the Georgian newspaper *Zarya vostoka* during November of the same year. The article, entitled 'A Bark behind the Gate', attacked citizens who listened to foreign radio stations and spread anti-Soviet literature 'with a foreign voice'. The author's conclusion was succinct and emotive: 'we have no right to be indifferent'.<sup>304</sup>

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2008 and B. Grushin *Chetyre zhizni Rossii v zerkale oprosov obshchestvennogo meneniya: Epokha Khrushcheva*, Moskva: Progress-Traditsiya, 2001.

<sup>303</sup> *Kazakhstanskaya Pravda*, 27 September 1963.

<sup>304</sup> *Zarya Vostoka*, 13 November 1963.

Media excoriation was not restricted to those who praised the West, however. A notable drive against public criticism began in March 1964 when *Izvestiya* published a letter, purporting to be from a Magadan miner named Nikolai Kuritsyn, entitled ‘This Must Be Fought!’ After allegedly overhearing two young people mocking that year’s poor harvest while waiting in line at a bank, Kuritsyn wrote to *Izvestiya* describing such people as ‘toadstools’ and insisting that the Soviet way of life must be defended. His comments on how to respond to such individuals were as follows: ‘...we cannot act like our woodcutter acted, passing himself off as a gardener for 30 years. However, we must fight them, disgrace them, shame them, unmask them in front of honest people’.<sup>305</sup>

Subsequent research by Radio Liberty claimed that Kuritsyn was in fact not a miner, as his letter had claimed, but a journalist.<sup>306</sup> Assuming that the allegation was accurate, this serves to flag up the point that the Soviet media remained very much an integral tool in the authorities’ efforts to mobilise public opinion. The disavowal of Stalin (‘the woodcutter’) was central to the letter’s message: we are not reverting to the ‘bad old days’ but criticism of the system will still not be tolerated. Additionally, the fact that only one instance of young people ‘praising the West’ had been raised was probably intended to give the impression that this was not a wider trend that was sweeping the country. The fact that this issue was raised in such a high-circulation newspaper as *Izvestiya* may suggest that this was not the case, however.

Kuritsyn’s rallying call was heard and numerous letters in support of his remarks were duly printed in *Izvestiya* later that month attacking ‘rumour-spreaders’ and those who

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<sup>305</sup> *Izvestiya*, 1 March 1964.

<sup>306</sup> Radio Liberty Monitoring report, March 6, 1964, HU OSA, 300-80-01, Box 44.

told anti-Soviet anecdotes. These letters included comments such as ‘It becomes offensive to the point of pain when you hear base, rotten anecdotes from the mouths of some young people’ and ‘...just some difficulty, some troubles in our huge economy and they are already buzzing like nasty autumnal flies’.<sup>307</sup> In fact, the language and imagery employed in this last letter were reminiscent of that which had recently been used by Khrushchev himself when he chastised a March 1963 gathering of the cultural intelligentsia, warning that the growth in literature on ‘the camp theme’ that had taken place since the publication of *Ivan Denisovich* was liable to ‘provide ammunition for our enemies, and huge, fat flies will fall on such materials like dung’.<sup>308</sup>

Probably the best example of this general whipping up of ill-feeling against dissenters could be seen in the February 1964 edition of *Trud* where it was said of the ‘anonymous calumniator’ G.R. Levitin (who had apparently written a series of anonymous and hostile letters to *Trud*, though the content of these letters was never made clear): ‘...he poured dirt on Soviet reality and blackened the state which gave him an education, a well-built home and guaranteed him a pension’, it then accused him of attempting to extort and threaten several of his own friends and concluded that ‘the anonymous calumniator is not only abominable but he is also dangerous. Here is an evil which we must not tolerate’.<sup>309</sup> One can immediately see that Levitin was not being attacked on ideological grounds but as someone of dubious morality.

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<sup>307</sup> Research Notes on Soviet Affairs, March 13, 1964, HU OSA, 300-80-1, Box 44.

<sup>308</sup> Khrushchev’s warning came as he stated that, in the wake of *Ivan Denisovich*, publishing houses were ‘being flooded with manuscripts about camps and prisons. See M. Scammell, ed. *The Solzhenitsyn Files*, Chicago: Edition Q inc, 1995, p. 3.

<sup>309</sup> *Trud*, 25 February 1964.

Over the course of the following year such articles, editorials and letters cropped up in the media with some regularity. A Radio Liberty analysis of developments in the Soviet media, written in May 1964, showed that in February and March of that year alone the newspapers *Izvestiya*, *Trud* and *Komsomolskaya Pravda* printed one or more articles on issues including anonymous letters, the telling of anti-Soviet jokes, spreading anti-Soviet rumours and public discussion of ‘thorny problems’.<sup>310</sup> These were all newspapers with large circulation figures, particularly *Izvestiya*, which carried four separate stories relating to dissent in this two-month period, meaning that their message would surely not go unheard among the population. However, this was clearly not a massive campaign – indicating that such behaviour was probably not seen by the authorities as an urgent problem at this stage.

The aim of such letters and articles was essentially to intimidate rather than to persuade. For the most part no arguments were put forward or official positions explained other than the simple message that criticism would not be tolerated. Referring back to the attack on G.R. Levitin in *Trud*, it is noteworthy that the content of his letters was not even discussed in the article. Presumably, the authorities were not willing to take the risk that Levitin’s criticism would resonate among the population as Yuri Orlov’s had back in 1956, and thus denied his remarks ‘the oxygen of publicity’.

That this attempt to silence critics was conveyed through newspaper articles, editorials and letters purporting to be from the public, suggests that the aim was to manufacture public opinion rather than simply to dictate how people should behave.

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<sup>310</sup> Radio Liberty Analysis of Current Developments in the Soviet Union, HU OSA 300-80-1, Box 632.

This was perhaps another indication that the authorities, or at least the experts at the Institute of Public Opinion, were aware of the declining faith in the regime's pronouncements. It is also important not to overlook the point that under Stalin, and even at times under Khrushchev, instances of citizens 'lavishing praise' upon foreign powers would most likely have led to a lengthy spell in a corrective labour camp instead of scathing press coverage.

One notable factor in the newspaper attacks on dissenters was the change of discourse on dissent. The media had begun to take a more subtle approach to tackling the subject and abandoned its previous tone of ideological outrage that had been employed in *Izvestiya's* accusation that Yuri Orlov and his colleagues had been guilty of 'singing Menshevik songs', for example. Instead, newspapers employed language intended to invoke hostility against dissenters by way of patriotic, moral or material grounds. This most likely showed the authorities were aware that ideological rhetoric was no longer capable of arousing a sufficiently passionate response throughout society but patriotism remained strong among Russians at least, while moral values and material concerns were still important to the everyday lives of most people.

As Shlapentokh has argued, aside from the idealised picture of society that was presented for public consumption, the Soviet leadership did actually hold a more practical and realistic image of society too and it was this that they acted upon. The authorities knew that consumer goods and family welfare were becoming more

important to citizens than building a communist utopia.<sup>311</sup> Attacking dissenters on moral and material grounds was a clear indication of this.

The theme of appealing to citizens' patriotism is one that can be seen at work in regard to propaganda against the foreign broadcasts being beamed into the USSR. Soviet media attacks on the Munich-based Radio Liberty regularly saw its Soviet émigré staff branded 'fascist riff-raff' and 'Vlasovites' – a label that Gene Sosin conceded was not entirely inaccurate.<sup>312</sup> In regard to the kind of Chinese anti-Soviet agitation that was discussed in the previous chapter, the authorities employed equally bellicose rhetoric, at one stage suggesting in *Izvestiya* that the Chinese regime was comparable to that of Hitler, Napoleon or Genghis Khan.<sup>313</sup> The intention of such remarks to stir up some kind of patriotic fervour as a means of combating dissent was entirely evident. To what extent this would have resounded among the USSR's non-Russian population is less clear, though it seems unlikely that the Mongol conquest of ancient *Rus* and the battle of Borodino would have roused a great deal of passion in Riga, Vilnius or Tallinn, for example.

It is hard to say with any great certainty just how successful the authorities were at shaping public opinion in this way. In particular it is worth remembering the arguments that have been raised at several points throughout this thesis in regard to the growing level of cynicism with which many members of society regarded official pronouncements: many Soviet citizens had already become skilled at 'reading

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<sup>311</sup> See V. Shlapentokh, *Public and Private Life of the Soviet People: Changing Values in Post-Stalin Russia*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989, p. 18.

<sup>312</sup> Sosin, *Sparks of Liberty*, p. 71. General Andrei Vlasov had been at the head of the Committee for the Liberation of the People's of Russia – an army of Soviet prisoners of war that had changed sides to fight against the Soviet regime during the Second World War.

<sup>313</sup> *Izvestiya*, 22 August 1963.

between the lines' when it came to the media. However, it does seem that by the end of the period this new approach had left some impact on public attitudes. It is instructive in this case to cite Ludmilla Alexeyeva's recollections of people's stance in regard to dissenters during the Brezhnev era: 'A Soviet dissident quickly became a pariah even among those who privately shared his views' and 'Isolated from society, we lived in what amounted to a ghetto'.<sup>314</sup> This stands in stark contrast with the earlier experiences of Yuri Orlov and Petr Grigorenko, both of whom felt that their social standing not only did not suffer but actually improved after their respective criticisms of the authorities.<sup>315</sup>

#### **4.2.2 THE ROLE OF SOCIETY**

This did not necessarily indicate that ordinary members of society became personally opposed to dissenters *per se*, but that they at least considered it too dangerous to associate with them. This in itself can be regarded as a success for the authorities. After all, they were not trying to counter the criticisms that were made by dissenters but were attempting to neutralise the impact that they had upon society. The regime's disfavour did not have to be viewed as legitimate for it to be acknowledged and acted upon. However, in the long term this arguably gave prominent victims of state persecution, such as Sakharov and Solzhenitsyn, considerable moral authority among elements of the population, according to Robert Horvath.<sup>316</sup>

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<sup>314</sup> L. Alexeyeva and P. Goldberg, *The Thaw Generation: Coming of Age in the Post-Stalin Era*, Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1990, p. 244.

<sup>315</sup> Interview with Yuri Orlov, Ithaca, December 2006 and interview with Andrei Grigorenko, New York, October 2006.

<sup>316</sup> This is an important theme of Robert Horvath's work on the role of dissidents in the fall of the Soviet Union and the subsequent emergence of the Russian Federation. See R. Horvath *The Legacy of Soviet Dissent: Dissidents, Democratisation and Radical Nationalism in Russia*, London: Routledge, 2005.

Pressure to conform did not come solely from above but was also embedded in the very fabric of life in the USSR. The Khrushchev regime was even more invasive into citizens' everyday lives than Stalin's had been and nowhere was this aspect of social control more evident than in the form of the *kollektiv* (collective). This was the basic unit of Soviet society and all citizens were automatically members of several collectives, in workplaces, housing blocks, recreational societies and elsewhere.<sup>317</sup>

Members of any given collective were increasingly expected to take an active interest in the ideological lives of their fellow members; as Elena Zubkova has argued, 'personal life was considered a public matter'.<sup>318</sup> By placing a degree of responsibility on the collective as a whole for the actions of its individual members, an unseen but powerful deterrent was added to prevent undesirable behaviour. Being 'against the collective' remained one of the most serious accusations that could be levelled at a Soviet citizen.<sup>319</sup>

Agitators also played an important role in this process of maintaining conformity. The KGB's internal history textbook stated that one of its main domestic tasks around this time involved holding agitation sessions with workers, peasants and the intelligentsia and 'warning them of the danger posed by Western propaganda'.<sup>320</sup> These sessions could also entail discussing cases of a specific individual's misbehaviour at Party, *Komsomol* or trade union meetings with the aim of shaming

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<sup>317</sup> See O. Kharkhodin, *The Collective and the Individual in Russia: A Study of Practices*, London: University of California Press, 1999, p. 75.

<sup>318</sup> E. Zubkova, *Obshchestvo i reformy, 1945-1964*, Moskva: Izdatel'skii tsentr 'Rossiya molodaya', 1993, p. 121.

<sup>319</sup> Shlapentokh, *Public and Private Life*, p. 131.

<sup>320</sup> Chebrikov, et al. *Istoriya sovetskikh organov gosudarstvennoi bezopasnosti*, p. 503.

them into conformity.<sup>321</sup> Agitators were apparently also expected to keep detailed records of questions that they were asked at their sessions that were then passed on to the Party hierarchy and used as a kind of barometer for public opinion – an example of which has already been cited in chapter 1.<sup>322</sup>

However, outside of the major cities these agitators were often poorly trained and largely ineffective. Anatoly Marchenko's account of compulsory Political Instruction Sessions that took place in labour camps shows that agitational work there was often particularly inept and effectively little more than a token gesture.<sup>323</sup> In all likelihood this did not indicate that the authorities were any less concerned about the threat of dissent in the provinces but instead reflected the regime's long-standing inability to get 'good people' to work and live outside of the major cities.

#### ***4.2.3 PREVENTING FUTURE UPRISINGS***

From 1962 onwards the regime took a growing interest in gauging public moods – an implicit acknowledgment of the fact that they had been genuinely rocked by the disorders that took place at Novocherkassk and elsewhere. This was entirely understandable since no regime could be expected to survive repeated disturbances and disquiet on the scale of that which arose during the summer of 1962. The message that these events had sent to the authorities was clear: another major swelling of popular discontent had the potential to pose a very real threat to the stability of the regime. With their determination to maintain social passivity at practically any cost, this was a message that the authorities could not ignore.

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<sup>321</sup> Mitrokhin, *KGB Lexicon*, p. 188.

<sup>322</sup> A. Inkeles, *Social Change in Soviet Russia*, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1968, p. 276.

<sup>323</sup> See A. Marchenko, *My Testimony*, London: Pall Mall Press, 1969, p. 239.

The desire to avoid a re-run of the Novocherkassk disaster was palpable. An example of this can be seen in the way that a potentially dangerous situation was averted in Pskov the following year. Radio Liberty monitoring reports recorded that, following the poor harvest in 1963 the town had suffered prolonged bread shortages which led to widespread discontent and a series of strikes were planned to take place during October. On being informed of the situation there the leadership in Moscow moved quickly and decisively to snuff out the danger. They immediately ordered the release of flour held in strategic reserves elsewhere around the country and had it sent directly to Pskov in order to placate the population there. The monitoring report's conclusion that 'the local authorities would probably have let matters get out of hand and produce another Novocherkassk' most likely reflected the judgement of the leadership.<sup>324</sup>

An article published in the *Washington Evening Star* in November of the same year offered further evidence on the same theme when it reported that there were strong rumours of unrest in the Russian countryside and stated that the remarks of the leadership had been 'unusually conciliatory recently'. It went on to say that Soviet radio stations had been dedicating a great deal of time to addressing listeners' complaints in recent weeks and that the government had made it known that overcoming these 'temporary shortages' was a top priority.<sup>325</sup> How far one can put faith in Western media reports about the Soviet domestic situation is open to debate, though this particular scenario does fit into the government's general pattern of behaviour at this time.

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<sup>324</sup> HU OSA, 300-80-1, Box 180.

<sup>325</sup> *Washington Evening Star*, 12 November 1963.

With bread queues forming even in the Ukraine – long regarded as the ‘bread basket’ of the Soviet Union – Khrushchev opted to import grain from abroad for the very first time rather than risk another series of domestic uprisings. The opprobrium that dissenters heaped upon Khrushchev as a result of this move has already been described. That such a humiliating step was taken, both for Khrushchev personally and for the regime as a whole, ultimately demonstrated just how much the regime had begun to understand that social stability was contingent on the provision of a generally acceptable standard of living.

Analysing 570 occasions of public unrest during the Soviet period, evidence presented in a study by Ludmilla Alexeyeva and Valery Chalidze supports this assessment. They showed that between the 1960s and 1980s the number of people involved in large civic disturbances had dropped consistently and concluded that this could be attributed to ‘...the stabilization of power and improvements in the methods of averting confrontations’, and specifically cited the stability of food prices as an example of this.<sup>326</sup>

#### ***4.2.4 THE PROPHYLACTIC CHAT***

The central feature of *profilaktika* as it touched upon the lives of individual Soviet citizens was the ‘prophylactic chat’ (*profilakticheskaya beseda*). What this usually involved was for individuals who were considered to be ideologically wayward or potentially troublesome, but not implacably hostile toward Soviet the regime, to be summoned to their local KGB offices for a ‘chat’. Unfortunately, no records have yet

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<sup>326</sup> L. Alexeyeva and V. Chalidze, *Mass Unrest in the USSR*. Vol. 2, Washington DC: Office of Net Assessments, 1985.

been uncovered on how this new practice came to be added to the corpus of policy against dissent but, judging from their growing influence on policy formulation in this sphere, it is probably safe to assume that the security organs were the driving force behind the adoption of the 'prophylactic chat'.

During the course of their meeting with the KGB, the person in question was usually bullied and cajoled into admitting and then renouncing any kind of dissenting activity. It was made clear that they were being watched by the security organs and that a resumption of 'undesirable behaviour' could have serious consequences such as the loss of one's job, refusal of a university place to one's children or the threat of imprisonment for either the interviewee or friends and family members. For the solitary individual to be brought face to face with the coercive power of the state in this way must have been particularly unnerving, especially considering the security organs' brutal past only a few years previously. This selective application of intimidation stood in great contrast with the mass repression of the Stalin years.

The criteria for what kinds of cases were resolved by the use of these prophylactic chats was broadly predictable but never entirely consistent. In many cases this would involve people who had played a relatively minor role in any particular act of dissent, whose names had come up in connection with an ongoing investigation or whom KGB agents and informants had picked out as being in some way politically unreliable. Those who were considered misguided dissenters – often this referred to young people apparently under the influence of harmful foreign propaganda – received this response, as did those who were not judged to be 'genuinely anti-Soviet'. However, this is not to say that all those who were jailed for dissenting

activity since the introduction of prophylaxis were hardened opponents of the regime since inconsistencies still remained in the way that these prophylactic measures were applied.

Most likely, this element of inconsistency was in itself a part of the authorities' strategy, meaning that any given act of protest and criticism could theoretically still end with imprisonment rather than prophylaxis, thus preventing an individual from being able to 'go right up to the line without crossing it'. It may also be that the authorities themselves had no fixed criteria on the matter but instead worked on a case-by-case basis in evaluating individuals' attitudes toward the regime before deciding whether they were genuine enemies or simply misguided and, importantly, whether a warning would prevent further dissenting activity. This would involve assessing evidence such as individuals' work records and details of any previous clashes with the authorities. By no means could one call this the foundation of a perfect or sophisticated legal system, yet it was clearly a massive improvement on the Stalin years.

Exactly how many of these 'prophylactic chats' were undertaken by the KGB is hard to say because only a limited amount of data has been made available.<sup>327</sup> Nonetheless, there are sufficient scraps of evidence to show that this became by far the most common form of official response to breaches of political norms from the early 1960s onwards. A KGB report to the Central Committee from 25 July 1962 stated that in the first half of that year 105 people had been sentenced for preparation and distribution of anti-Soviet documents, while a further 568 had been subjected to

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<sup>327</sup> The majority of the relevant information is held in the archives of the KGB and in the Presidential Archive of the Russian Federation. The latter was briefly opened up to a number of researchers during the early 1990s but both are now closed.

prophylactic measures.<sup>328</sup> An analogous report sent a little under two years later said that of the 385 authors of anti-Soviet documents uncovered in the first five months of 1964, 39 had been jailed while 225 had been subjected to prophylactic measures.<sup>329</sup> The above figures would, therefore, suggest that the ratio of prophylaxis to imprisonment was approximately 5:1.

Evidently, the regime had come to accept that camps and prisons were not always the most appropriate or effective means of response, especially since political prisons were becoming ‘schools of revolution’ according to Kozlov.<sup>330</sup> The authorities had clearly also begun to see that even some of the regime’s sharpest critics were not entirely beyond salvation. One case, albeit a rather extreme one, that was uncovered in Voronezh *oblast’* during July 1963 saw a self-styled fascist youth group that had managed to acquire various explosives and a machine gun, spared jail after they were uncovered by the KGB. The four members of the ‘National Socialist Party’, along with their parents, were subjected only to a series of prophylactic chats instead of imprisonment.<sup>331</sup>

Another example can be seen in the case against Yuri Grimm and Abdulbai Khasyanov, the authors of a series of anti-Soviet leaflets discussed in the previous chapter. The investigation protocol named a further nine accomplices who had helped the pair to distribute the leaflets around Moscow but who, unlike Grimm and Khasyanov, were not jailed.<sup>332</sup> What cases such as those above demonstrate is that if

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<sup>328</sup> RGANI, f. 89, op. 51, d. 1, ll. 1-4.

<sup>329</sup> RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 454, l. 110. The remaining 121 cases were still in process at the time the report was written.

<sup>330</sup> Kozlov and Mironenko eds, *Kramola*, p. 54.

<sup>331</sup> RGANI, f. 5, op. 30, d. 412, ll. 50-51.

<sup>332</sup> RGANI, f. 8131, op. 33, d. 96712, ll. 1-33.

and when detailed KGB records pertaining to the application of individual prophylactic measures become available, historians may well see that the volume, and perhaps also the intensity, of dissenting behaviour across the USSR was several times greater during the post-Stalin era than has been supposed.

The contrast with the repressive activity of the Stalin years was particularly sharp and highlights the extent to which serious changes had been enacted under Khrushchev. One ought to be wary of seeing this solely as a reflection of greater liberality during the Khrushchev years, however. There were, after all, various benefits for the authorities in adopting this new course. While Stalin's *Gulag* and massive arbitrary terror had done untold damage to the fabric of society and the regime, prophylaxis was a practice that came at little economic, demographic or political cost. Furthermore it avoided the kind of large-scale antagonism of society and international opprobrium that mass imprisonment would have incurred and which the authorities were desperate to avoid.

Most importantly, it appears that these individual prophylactic sessions were highly effective at stifling dissent. The KGB's account of the period stated that 'the majority of those subjected to prophylactic measures did not offend again.'<sup>333</sup> That the practice was not only continued but also significantly expanded under the subsequent Brezhnev regime can be seen as further testimony of this fact.<sup>334</sup> Had prophylaxis not

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<sup>333</sup> Chebrikov et al. *Istoriya sovetskikh organov gosudarstvennoi bezopasnosti*, p. 564.

<sup>334</sup> Rudolf Pikhoya has cited figures from the Presidential Archive which show that for the period of 1967 to 1970 there were 58,291 cases where prophylactic measures were applied and between 1971 and 1974 the figure rose further to 63,108. When one compares these figures to the number of sentences under political articles of the criminal codes, the ratio between imprisonment and prophylaxis rises to approximately 1:100. Figures on prophylaxis taken from R. Pikhoya, *Sovetskii Soyuz: Istoriya vlasti, 1945-1991*, Moskva: Rossiiskaya akademiya gos. sluzhby pri Prezidente Rossiiskoi Federatsii 1998, p. 277.

been effective in keeping dissent at manageable levels around the country it seems likely that the authorities would have had no option but to revert to a more aggressive means of maintaining domestic stability – as was the case with those hardcore dissenters who refused to be silenced by these attempts at intimidation.

### **4.3 CAMPS AND PRISONS**

As F.J. Feldbrugge pointed out in a 1963 article reviewing Soviet legal developments: ‘The social straggler is invited to rejoin the ranks immediately, and if he cannot or will not do so, he is annihilated’.<sup>335</sup> Feldbrugge’s assessment may have been a little hyperbolic but its message was not misleading. Even though the authorities were showing an increasing tendency to resist employing custodial sentences against dissenters, the number of people jailed for anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda during the early 1960s was far from insignificant. Over 1,200 individuals were sentenced for anti-Soviet activity between the turn of the decade and Khrushchev’s ouster – a figure that still exceeded that of any comparable period during the Brezhnev years.<sup>336</sup>

#### **4.3.1 THE LEGAL SYSTEM**

The Soviet legal system underwent a period of significant development after Stalin’s death as the promise of ‘strengthening socialist legality’ was offered as a guarantee

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<sup>335</sup> F. Feldbrugge, ‘Soviet Criminal Law. The Last Six Years’, *The Journal of Criminal Law, Criminology, and Police Science*, Vol. 54, No. 3, September 1963, p. 263.

<sup>336</sup> *Istochnik*, 1995, No.6, p. 153.

that there would be no return to the abuses of the recent past.<sup>337</sup> Many of the key changes that took place in this respect – such as the diminution of the security organs’ power, the end of state reliance on *Gulag* labour and the curtailment of entirely groundless repression had actually begun soon after Stalin’s death, during the period of collective leadership. However, the regime was still operating on the basis of a criminal code that had been enacted during the 1920s, when the Soviet Union was a very different place.<sup>338</sup>

The first significant change to the Soviet legal system came when a new ‘Law on State Crimes’ was published at the end of December 1958.<sup>339</sup> Combined with the introduction of prophylaxis at around the same time, this clearly marked a new stage in the regime’s responses to dissenting behaviour.<sup>340</sup> A key point of the new principles as they related to dissenters was that they abolished the legal classification of ‘counter-revolutionary crimes’, and thus also the notorious article 58-10. There were numerous reasons why the regime might have chosen to abolish the concept of ‘counter-revolutionary crimes’. These included an attempt to emphasise the break with the illegalities of the Stalin era and to reduce the degree of arbitrariness that the vague concept of ‘counter-revolutionary’ had entailed.<sup>341</sup>

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<sup>337</sup> For the best coverage of developments within the Soviet law enforcement apparatus see A.

Pyzhikov, *Khrushchevskaya ‘ottepel’* Moskva: Olma Press, 2002 and Lewin, *The Soviet Century*

<sup>338</sup> The criminal code referred to here is that of the RSFSR which was promulgated in 1926. Each union republic had its own criminal code yet in practice they differed very little from that of Russia.

<sup>339</sup> Those crimes that were defined as ‘anti-state’ fell under the jurisdiction of the federal government rather than that of individual union republics.

<sup>340</sup> The ‘Law on State Crimes’ came as part of a package of reforms concerned with the general principles of criminal law and criminal procedure at a federal level and included the ‘Basic Principles on Criminal Legislation’, the ‘Basic Law on Criminal Procedure in the USSR’ and the ‘Law on Military Crimes’.

<sup>341</sup> See P. Taylor, ‘Treason, Espionage and Other Soviet State Crimes’, *Russian Review*, Vol.23, No.3, July 1964, pp. 247-258.

In place of ‘counter-revolutionary crimes’ the new law featured the classification of ‘crimes against the state’ and ‘especially dangerous crimes against the state’.<sup>342</sup> However, this change appears to have been something of a semantic slight-of-hand. In place of article 58-10 came articles 70 and 72; the former dealt with ‘anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda’ and the latter with ‘activity by organised groups leading to especially dangerous crimes against the state and participation in anti-Soviet organisations’. In practice there was virtually no difference in the kinds of behaviour that the new principles saw dissenters jailed for. Critical leaflets, letters and underground groups all remained a potential trigger for arrest and imprisonment.<sup>343</sup>

The principles that had been laid out in the ‘Law on State Crimes’ were subsequently included in the new criminal codes of each union republic that were enacted during 1960 and 1961. Moshe Lewin has suggested that this overhaul of the legal system can be seen as an attempt to create a ‘proper justice system’ that was the product of extensive professional discussion and subjected to rigorous drafting and redrafting.<sup>344</sup> However, the Soviet concept of justice continued to be centred upon the ideals and aims of the CPSU and although the authorities had begun to make a more convincing pretence at operating within these new laws, they could always be bent to the Party’s will when necessary. It is worth restating that despite major improvements, the law enforcement apparatus and judiciary were very much under the sway of the Party. In this light, an alternative assessment of the post-Stalin legal system has been provided

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<sup>342</sup> The difference between ‘ordinary’ crimes against the state and ‘especially dangerous’ crimes against the state was defined as being the presence of anti-Soviet intent. Thus, for example, sabotage or fraud would generally be regarded as ‘ordinary’ crimes against the state but if anti-Soviet intent were proven they would then be tried as ‘especially dangerous’ crimes against the state.

<sup>343</sup> It is also notable that the almost-definitive anthology of people imprisoned under article 58-10 in the post-Stalin era also includes those jailed under articles 70 and 72 after the changes of December 1958. See V. Kozlov, and S. Mironenko, eds. *58-10 Nadzornye proizvodstva prokuratury SSSR po delam ob antisovetskoi agitatsii i propaganda: annotirovannyi katalog Mart 1953 – 1991*, Moskva: Mezhdunarodnyi Fond ‘Demokratiya’, 1999.

<sup>344</sup> Lewin, *The Soviet Century*, p. 161.





































































































































