

# YOUTH ATTITUDES TOWARDS STALIN'S REVOLUTION AND THE STALINIST REGIME, 1929-41

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## INTRODUCTION

Recently historians are vigorously studying various aspects of public opinion during the Stalin Era, especially in the 1930s. This became possible because of newly obtained access to declassified archives, such as letters and diaries written by ordinary citizens, official reports given by the party, OGPU/NKVD and other organizations which described the political and social atmosphere of Soviet citizens.<sup>1</sup> These studies revealed that popular opinion under Stalin was not homogeneous at all, but showed a significant diversity and complexity. In her work on popular opinion during 1934-41, Sarah Davies argues that "along the continuum from active consent to active resistance/dissent were a range of heterogeneous positions."<sup>2</sup> The present article will analyze the attitudes of Soviet youth towards Stalin's revolution from above at the end of the 1920s, and also towards the Stalinist regime of the 1930s.

Since the proportion of youth in urban society grew drastically after the revolution from above, especially in the factories, their views comprised an important part of the public opinion of those days. The number of young workers under 23 years old in "census industries" was 565,500 in January 1929, but skyrocketed to 1,909,800 in July 1933. Their proportion of the total population working in "census industries" grew as well, from 24.5% to 39.2%.<sup>3</sup> In spite of this importance these young workers' views on Soviet politics and society have been insufficiently studied. Conventionally, youth's loyalty to the regime has

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1 S.A. Shinkarchuk, *Obshchestvennoe mnenie v sovetskoj Rossii v 30-e gody* (Saint Petersburg, 1995); A.K. Sokolov, ed., *Obshchestvo i vlast': 1930-e gody. Povestvovanie v dokumentakh* (Moscow, 1998); Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Supplicants and Citizens: Public Letter-Writing in Soviet Russia in the 1930s," *Slavic Review* 55:1 (1996); Sarah Davies, *Popular Opinion in Stalin's Russia: Terror, Propaganda and Dissent, 1934-1941* (Cambridge: UK, 1997); Takeshi Tomita, *Sutârinizumu no touchi kouzou [The Stalinist System of Government]*(Tokyo, 1996), ch.4.

2 Davies, *Popular Opinion*, p.6.

3 TsKhDMO (Tsentral'nyi Khraneniia Dokumentov Molodezhnykh Organizatsii), f.1 [Tsentral'nyi komitet VLKSM], op.23, d.1064, l.6.

been emphasized under the assumption that the younger generation who grew up and whose personality was molded after 1917 could not imagine alternatives to the Soviet regime. Sheila Fitzpatrick contends that "active support [for the regime] came from the young, the privileged, office-holders and party members, ... Of these, the young are perhaps the most interesting category. Less inclined than their elders to react to economic hardship, urban youth, or at least an impressive proportion of that group, as well as many young peasants with some schooling, seem to have assimilated Soviet values, associating them with a rejection of all that was boring, corrupt, unprincipled, old, and routine, and identified, often passionately and enthusiastically, with Soviet ideals."<sup>4</sup>

This article does not refute, but instead, attempts to modify this view by proposing alternative images of youth's attitudes. For this purpose newly opened archival and other materials, including letters and diaries, will be mobilized. To begin with, let us classify youth's attitudes towards the regime, relying upon a typology proposed by an economist, Albert O. Hirschman: "exit," "voice," and "loyalty."<sup>5</sup> Largely, "exit" means the attempt to escape from the dominant value system and to confine oneself to one's own small world composed of confidants, for example, one's family and limited company. "Voice" means "openly expressed" discontent and criticism of the existing regime. "Loyalty" means belief in the regime's value system and active participation in its projects. In addition, this study proposes another type of youth, which cannot be included in these three kinds of attitude, i.e. "observant" or "analytical" behavior. This attitude will be exemplified by a diary written by Man'kov, a young man who lived in Leningrad in the 1930s.<sup>6</sup>

### URBAN YOUTH AND THE "REVOLUTION FROM ABOVE"

Previous historical studies assumed that a large number of young people were disgusted with NEP society and enthusiastically responded to Stalin's "revolution from above." Certainly the pattern of urban youth's views and behavior on the eve and at the beginning of the revolution from above would seem to confirm this view. However, we need to consider the possibility that their feelings and views changed considerably after 1929, as the reality of the revolution became more and more obvious.

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4 Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times. Soviet Russia in the 1930s* (New York, 1999), p.224.

5 Albert O. Hirschman, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States* (Cambridge: Mass., 1970).

6 Since this classification is just a "model," I am not saying that all the youth who lived in those days fit one or another of the four types. Likewise, we cannot suppose automatically that a person maintained a consistent attitude towards the regime throughout the years. Moreover, one could possibly assume contradicting, i.e. loyal and disloyal, attitudes to the regime simultaneously, according to the concrete issue concerned.

In the latter half of NEP, youth and Komsomol culture were characterized by the noticeable spread of “pathological phenomena,” such as heavy drinking, hooliganism, collective rape, and “infectious” suicide. Presumably, these phenomena represented forms of “exit” from the behavioral code expected by the regime.<sup>7</sup> Many party and Komsomol leaders, especially supporters of the Opposition, took these social phenomena as indicators of youth’s disillusionment with NEP society.<sup>8</sup> Actually, many members sent letters to Komsomol leaders, its Central Committee and other leading organs to “voice” their criticism of the NEP and its contradictions.<sup>9</sup> Komsomol and Party leaders could not read these statements without anxiety, especially as the letters began to express anti-Semitism.<sup>10</sup> A letter sent by a Komsomol member from Belorussia

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7 On the pathological phenomenon in the 1920s, see, for example, Ia. Bugaiskii, *Khuliganstvo kak sotsial’no-patologicheskoe iavlenie* (Moscow-Leningrad, 1927); A.G. Bordiugov, “Sotsial’nyi parazitizm ili sotsial’nye anomalii?: Iz istorii bor’by s alkogolizmom, nishchenstvom, prostitutsiei, brodiazhnichestvom v 20-30-e gody,” *Istoriia SSSR* 1 (1989); N.B. Lebina, *Povsednevnaia zhizn’ sovetskogo goroda.1920-1930 gody* (Saint Petersburg, 1999); Anne E. Gorsuch, “Enthusiasts, Bohemians, and Delinquents: Soviet Youth Cultures, 1921-1928,” Ph.D. dissertation in History (University of Michigan, 1992), ch.9; Yasuhiro Matsui, “Byt rabochei molodezhi v gody NEPa,” in *Soviet Society and Culture in the 1920-30s* (Hokkaido: Slavic Research Center, Occasional Papers, 46, 1993); Idem, *Soren Seiji Chitsujo to Seinen Soshiki* [Soviet Political Order and the Youth Organization](Fukuoka, 1999), ch.4.

8 Karl B. Ladek, in his article, emphasized that the NEP had been accepted by the Komsomol members as “a retreat from the Revolution without a direction to go.” See *Komsomol’skaia pravda* (27 June 1926), p.2. And at a conference dedicated to the “eseninshchina” held in the Communist Academy in February and March 1927, Evgenii A. Preobrazhenskii, a renowned economist who belonged to the Left Opposition, said that many young workers found relief in hooligan behavior because of the lack of alternative ways to display their energy. Preobrazhenskii proposed “to direct their energy to the struggle against the real class enemies” and away from hooliganism. See *Upadochnoe nastroyenie sredi molodezhi: eseninshchina* (Moscow, 1927), pp.56-58. For a detailed discussion of anti-NEP sentiment among youth, see Anne E. Gorsuch, “NEP Be Damned!: Young Militants in the 1920s and the Culture of Civil War,” *The Russian Review* 56:4 (1997).

9 See, for example, TsKhDMO, f.1, op.23, d.506, ll.111-111ob.

10 The Komsomol leadership dealt with this issue at meetings of the Bureau and the Secretariat in 1926 and set up a special committee in order to prepare a report addressed to the Party Central Committee. A resolution adopted by the Bureau of the Komsomol Central Committee dated 2 June 1926 and sent to local Komsomol organizations defined signs of anti-Semitism among youth as a negative phenomenon related to the NEP, as well as to remnants of the old regime. See TsKhDMO, f.1, op.4, d.22, l.89; TsGAIPD (Tsentral’nyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv istoriko-politicheskikh dokumentov Sankt-Peterburga), f.K-601 [Leningradskii gubernskii komitet VLKSM], op.1, d.679, l.125. *Komsomol’skaia pravda* in 1926-1927, in accordance with the directive of the Komsomol Central Committee, launched a campaign against anti-Semitism. See, for example, *Komsomol’skaia pravda* (25 September 1926), p.2; (22 February 1927), p.3; (8 September 1927), p.1. Contemporary citizens’ letters expressing apprehensions about rising anti-Semitism in the late NEP period can be found in: *Istochnik* 4 (1995), pp.92-93; A.Ia. Livshin and I.B. Orlov, eds., *Pis’ma vo vlast’, 1917-1927* (Moscow, 1998), pp.580-581.

is worth quoting, since it exemplifies typical ties between anti-NEP feelings and anti-Semitism.

This letter was entitled "The oppressor and the oppressed." According to its writer, ten years after the proletarian revolution a society of "ruler and slave," "exploiter and exploited" emerged, and the gap between "the rich and poor," "the bourgeoisie and proletariat" was becoming more and more acute. Soviet society was splitting into two hostile camps: one of them consisted of poor and middle peasants, unemployed, unskilled and semiskilled workers and people in misfortune, while the other camp incorporated Jewish NEP bourgeoisie, highly-skilled workers, foremen, directors, specialists and all civilized "aristocrats" who lived in cities (Leningrad, Moscow and others) and were accustomed to drive cars, drink, amuse themselves, and embezzle the fruits produced by the toiling people and peasantry. This writer referred to "the evolvement of capitalism under the proletarian dictatorship," and particularly emphasized "the fact of the embourgeoisement of Jewish people." He continued,

Recently *Komsomol'skaia pravda* very often talks about anti-Semitism in the Komsomol. But it does not explain real and objective reasons for anti-Semitism. Nor does it explain what is the cause of anti-Semitism. Actually anti-Semitism derives from the fact that Jews, the most cunning people, have grabbed the leading positions everywhere and push out Russians through cunning, intentional, and careerist activity. Under the slogan of "freedom to the peoples" they filled all the Soviet organs and institutions in Belorussia.<sup>11</sup>

Besides this kind of letter with its anti-NEP bitterness, in 1927, letter writers addressed themselves to Komsomol and Party leaders with the desire to change their lives drastically. Some hoped to go abroad, especially to China, in order to participate in revolutionary activities. One letter justified this desire on the ground that "we could not participate in the Civil War in our country because of our young age."<sup>12</sup> A twenty-year old Komsomol member wrote the following:

Comrade Chaplin. I don't doubt that you will smile as you read these passages, at the same time having some negative thoughts. But in spite of this, I consider it necessary to try to realize my sincere dream... My unshakable hope is to take part in the national liberation movement in China, which is growing stronger every day, every hour and every minute.<sup>13</sup>

These letters might have been affected by the flood of official news reports about the "revolutionary situation" in China and the "war scare" after the severance of diplomatic relations with Britain. Judging from the Komsomol leaders' restrained response to these letters, however, we cannot assume that the letters were only the product of manipulation from above. Rather, they

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<sup>11</sup> TsGAIPD, f.K-601, op.1, d.824, ll.8-8ob.

<sup>12</sup> TsKhDMO, f.1, op.23, d.678, l.18.

<sup>13</sup> TsKhDMO, f.1, op.23, d.678, l.24.

should be interpreted as an expression of the feelings which prevailed among many Komsomol activists. As well, a romantic desire, characteristic of youth, to break with the present, "boring" life might have motivated them to write these letters.

The Soviet authorities attributed the grain crisis at the end of 1927 and the Shakhty affair, which was announced in March 1928, to the so-called "sharpening class struggle" within Soviet society. Paradoxically, this provided an outlet for the youth's potential discontent with the regime. For example, when Lazar' Shatskin, a famous Komsomol leader, received a letter from a Komsomol member who desired to participate in revolutionary activities in capitalist countries, saying that "it is not interesting to keep sitting at home," he responded to it by suggesting the need to turn such emotions against "the class enemy" in the countryside.<sup>14</sup> Implicitly, Shatskin aimed at transforming "voices" against the NEP into "loyalty" to the regime for the benefit of the new policy which would soon be officially titled the "revolution from above."

### URBAN YOUTH'S ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE FOOD CRISIS

The Party leadership's attempt to mobilize urban youth for revolutionary change achieved considerable success. Actually a great number of young people and Komsomol members played an important role in the collectivization of agriculture, socialist competitions for rapid industrialization, construction of new industrial towns, and the Cultural Revolution.<sup>15</sup> It is understandable that historians emphasized youth's enthusiastic, "loyal" participation in the revolution from above. However, various difficulties of daily life, in particular food crises, caused disappointment and grievances even among those groups of urban youth that had been looking forward to the end of NEP. By the beginning of the 1930s, their loyalty to the regime and its policies had been considerably undermined. Not only urban youth in general, but also many Komsomol members, "voiced" their accumulating discontent and sometimes even protested openly.

It is possible to infer youth's opinions and attitudes to the Stalinist regime and policies from letters. In a letter to his mother, which was intercepted by the authorities at the end of 1929, a Leningrad Komsomol member stated:

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14 *Komsomol'skaia pravda* (27 April 1928), p.2.

15 Sheila Fitzpatrick, ed., *Cultural Revolution in Russia, 1928-1931* (Bloomington, 1978); Lynne Viola, *The Best Sons of the Fatherland: Workers in the Vanguard of Soviet Collectivization* (New York, 1987); Hiroaki Kuromiya, *Stalin's Industrial Revolution: Politics and Workers, 1928-1932* (Cambridge: UK, 1988); Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley, 1995), ch.2. For a detailed analysis of the multifarious aspects of socialist competition, see Nobuaki Shiokawa, *'Shakaishugi Kokka' to Roudousha Kaikyū* [*"The Socialist State" and the Working Class*](Tokyo, 1984), ch.1. On some special roles of peasant youth in the process of collectivization, see also Hiroshi Okuda, *Voruga no Kakumei* [*The Revolution on the Volga*](Tokyo, 1996), pp.681-682.

I was disillusioned because I fully realized that everything happened in ways that other people and I had not imagined. If I had known in advance that all would end up this way, I would not have joined the Komsomol... In addition, this country is going in such a direction that things will get worse... The party's old guard and workers, and many Komsomol members, are returning their membership cards. I have already thought about doing that, too.

This disillusioned youth even began to cherish the dream of leaving his country for America:

Let all have their own way! It is necessary to think about myself, you, our life, and our happiness alone. And I don't want to go hungry. The first thing that I would do abroad is to buy bread, especially white bread, without a ration book.<sup>16</sup>

Judging from this letter, the author used to cherish a certain loyalty to Soviet goals at least until the disastrous results of the revolution from above became manifest. When he felt betrayed and unexpected hardships befell him, he decided to consider only his own and his family's happiness, and even began to dream of leaving his country. Although his hope to "exit" abroad might be peculiar to him - he said he had mastered English -, it is possible that many young people were on the verge of losing their loyalty to the regime and became concerned only about their own survival.

With the deepening food crisis, from the end of the 1920s Soviet people began not only to complain of predicaments in daily life, but also to criticize openly the Stalinist regime and its policies.<sup>17</sup> A number of Komsomol members wrote to the authorities to protest against the government food policy and against the regime in general. Nine worker-delegates sent a letter to the editor of *Izvestiia* (or *Komsomol'skaia pravda*) after their participation in the Seventh All-Union Komsomol Conference in July 1932. They wrote:

First, let us state our impressions of the Congress... Comrade Kosarev talked a lot, agitated a lot... A proverb says, "Starving people are not friends with well-fed ones. Well-fed people don't think about starving ones." ... We came from factories. Our families are starving there... Our agricultural policies led the country to disastrous poverty... You are all parasites, worse than the tsarist bureaucrats and greedy people. You led workers to this. We are starving and cannot work, so we declare that we will not work while we are not given bread, meat, housing and cloth... We refuse to work.<sup>18</sup>

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16 TsGAIPD, f.K-598 [Leningradskii oblastnoi komitet VLKSM], op.1, d.5483, l.3. This part of the letter was not cited from the original, but from an excerpt of the letter that the Arbitration Commission of the Leningrad Komsomol organization included in its report dedicated to this *komsomolets's* "incident."

17 On the spread of popular discontent with the food crisis, especially among women in 1929-30, see E.A. Osokina, *Za fasadom «stalinskogo izobiliia»: Raspredelenie i rynek v snabzhenii naseleniia v gody industrializatsii, 1927-41* (Moscow, 1998), part 1, ch.4.

18 TsKhDMO, f.1, op.23, d.1008, l.37.

Thus, even selected delegates to the Komsomol Conference openly criticized the regime's agricultural policy and its result, the desperate food shortage. Remarkably, these delegates used the framework of "us" against "them" in such a way to conclude that "you are all parasites."<sup>19</sup> Possibly, the fact that these delegates came from a small town, the food situation in which was supposed to be much worse than in large cities, may explain the harshness of their criticism. But even in large cities, such as Moscow and Leningrad, where the food supply was comparatively guaranteed, ordinary people did not hide their grievances. In 1932, seventeen "veteran" Komsomol members, who began to work in the Moscow Komsomol organization as early as 1923-25, sent a letter to the Komsomol general secretary, Aleksandr Kosarev. The pungent tone of this letter suggests how widespread it was to criticize the Stalinist regime openly.

We almost withdrew from Komsomol automatically... We believed in the general Party line until the last year. But seeing how our children and workers' children are dying from eating nothing but black bread without milk and butter, we decided to sever our relations with Stalin's line decisively and forever... [We] hope to become active warriors to change the present turbulence... Workers are in a counterrevolutionary mood, but they are silent because there is no freedom of speech. Komsomol members (in particular older ones) are leaving Komsomol... In our opinion, Stalin is not Leninist... We, seventeen Komsomol members, have struggled for the construction of socialism for eight years and have been Leninists and Stalinists. But at present we are not Stalinists, because Stalin is not on the Leninist path.<sup>20</sup>

Disappointed with the result of the revolution from above, these Komsomol members had lost their loyalty to the Stalinist regime. In addition to their criticism, they proposed policy changes to overcome the tragic situation; concretely, to curtail grain exports in order to increase the grain supply to workers. Even suffering from the shortage of information, these *komsomolets* clearly saw one of the main reasons for the food shortage.<sup>21</sup>

The last letter in this section came from Vladimir Aref'ev, a sixteen-year-old worker at the Krasnyi Proletarii factory in Moscow. Addressed in 1934 to the Komsomol general secretary Kosarev, this letter was filed in the Komsomol Central Committee's archive together with a letter written by Aref'ev's father to the same Kosarev earlier than Aref'ev's own letter. Vladimir's father, a party member since 1918, asked Kosarev to direct the Komsomol committee at Krasnyi Proletarii so that it would encourage Vladimir to join Komsomol. Accord-

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19 On the framework of "us" and "them," see Davies, *Popular Opinion*, ch.8.

20 TsKhDMO, f.1, op.23, d.1008, ll.11-12.

21 A letter written by a local youth criticizing the ration priority given to large central cities as well as grain exports is filed in TsKhDMO, f.1, op.23, d.1032, ll.10-12. This letter added that "Starving and poor workers and socialism are not compatible." On the people's perception of grain exports, see Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, p.169; Osokina, *Za fasadom "stalinskogo izobiliia,"* pp.49, 61, 69, 82-83.

ing to his father, Vladimir was a skilled and educated worker despite of his age, but he had not joined Komsomol, did not engage in any social work, and was likely to keep bad company, which might lead to hooliganism, crime and other antisocial behavior.<sup>22</sup> Knowing that his father had sent the letter, Vladimir also wrote to Kosarev.

A written explanation on the reason why I am not in the Party.

You and my father cannot persuade me. Therefore, please accept the following explanation.

1. The Party led the Russian people into slavery and deprived them of will, freedom and life.
  2. You destroyed the Russian people's human life.
  3. People are dying of hunger in every district, in every region. Starvation is everywhere throughout the territory of Russia.
  4. Only 15% of livestock remains. Within the next three years, there will be nothing and people will have nothing to live on. And future generations will die of starvation.
  5. You liquidated as many as 20 million peasants, exiled almost all, all the children died and there are no families whose children remained alive...
  6. Stalin is the second Napoleon. I hold him guilty for ruining Russia.
  7. Comrade Voroshilov opposed Stalin's policy, but he alone couldn't do anything.
  8. The Party will survive until a war breaks out. When the war begins, people will rise in revolt because they will find themselves in danger of death from hunger.
  9. We have only beautiful phrases, but phrases are not food and drink.
  10. You are neither willing nor able to satisfy the people's demands. Accordingly, it is possible to conclude that you are incompetent as a top leader.
- You are the enemies of the people and great criminals, and Comrade Stalin is a completely foolish person. Therefore, my father's and your attempts to persuade me will not work. I take a position of justice and conviction, and regard the title of communist as disgraceful. My father knows my conviction. So why did he write [you]? I propose to discuss the issue of Comrade Stalin's dismissal by reason of his incompetent rule. Otherwise, Russia will perish within three years.<sup>23</sup>

The sharp observations and fierce attacks on Stalin in Vladimir Aref'ev's letter cannot but impress anyone who reads it. He criticized "them" by using official terms, such as "enemies of the people."<sup>24</sup> What is more impressive is his ag-

22 TsKhDMO, f.1, op.23, d.1072, ll.105-107.

23 TsKhDMO, f.1, op.23, d.1072, ll.108-109.

24 On the usage of official terms, see Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*, ch.5; Davies, *Popular Opinion*, pp.7, 183-184. Kuromiya suggests that the concept of "enemies of the people" as a class-neutral term began to emerge in official discourse in 1932-33. See Hiroaki Kuromiya, *Freedom and Terror in the Donbas: A Ukrainian-Russian Borderland, 1870s-1990s* (Cambridge, 1998), p.183.

gressive style of writing, fearless belief, and the lack of any skepticism and hesitation. Probably these characteristics derived from his youth.

The revolution from above and the tragedy that followed caused grievances and criticism among ordinary people and youth. Obviously the Komsomol organization and the majority of its members managed to retain their loyalty to the regime, as was exemplified by the case of the Teikovo cotton workers' strike over food shortages which occurred in April 1932 in Ivanovo Industrial Region.<sup>25</sup> However, others voiced their discontent and refused to join Komsomol or left it. Such a rise in criticism might possibly have influenced the party and government, which decided to slow down industrialization in the Second Five-Year Plan. Of course, the causal relationship between popular discontent and the change of government course, as well as the extent of disloyalty among youth and Komsomol members, remains to be studied in the future. The further question of whether these disloyal youths continued to be critical to the regime even later in life also remains unsolved in this paper. When the food shortage eased and "life had become better" (from Stalin's famous speech at the meeting of leading male and female combine-drivers on 1 December 1935), the young generation's criticism of the party and the government may also have softened. The study of popular opinion in the USSR during the 1930s requires concreteness based on an appropriate periodization of political history.

### YOUNG MEN'S IDENTITY UNDER THE STALINIST REGIME

This section examines diaries kept by several students. Most of them, with the exception of Man'kov's, were written during the period of the Second Five-Year Plan, which is widely accepted as a relatively "better" period than before in terms of ordinary people's living standards.

In the past several years historians studying the USSR in the 1930s have begun to pay attention to the issue of identity construction, on the premise that "the strength of Stalinism should be sought not solely in terror, nor even in the regime, but also in ordinary people's identities."<sup>26</sup> From this point of view, diaries are legitimately considered to be extremely important sources. Jochen Hellbeck, a leading researcher of this trend, worked on Stepan Podlubnyi's diary. Stepan was born in 1914 into a family of wealthy peasants and was a student in Moscow in the 1930s. Hellbeck analyzed the painful process of the identity construction of Podlubnyi who was born as a son of kulaks and, precisely because of this, earnestly hoped to become a loyal follower of Stalinist values. Podlubnyi even felt that his self-realization depended on whether he

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25 Jeffrey J. Rossman, "The Teikovo Cotton Workers' Strike of April 1932: Class, Gender and Identity Politics in Stalin's Russia," *The Russian Review* 56:1 (1997).

26 Stephen Kotkin, "1991 and the Russian Revolution: Sources, Conceptual Categories, Analytical Frameworks," *The Journal of Modern History* 70:2 (1998), p.418.

could become a real Stalinist. According to Hellbeck, Podlubnyi's case was not at all exceptional in the 1930s.<sup>27</sup>

As Hellbeck has pointed out, we can assume that many young people kept diaries in those days.<sup>28</sup> One of them, Leonid A. Potemkin, born in the same year as Podlubnyi (1914), was the son of a postal employee in the village of Poisava, Kama basin, and was matriculated in the Sverdlovsk Mining Institute. Written in 1934-35, his diary impressively reveals how devoted Potemkin was as a student-*Komsomolets* and social activist. In his diary Potemkin dedicated much space to describing his successful attempts to organize students in a dance course and his endeavors to give correct answers to lecturers' questions in classes in philosophy and dialectical materialism. In childhood he was mocked and scorned for his poverty and did not believe in his own strength. In contrast, his success in student days gave him satisfaction and pleasure. "I fulfilled the imperative I set myself three years before I enrolled in the institute - to be a leader in the society of students. I hear people say that I am 'a wholesome and handsome youth.' Life! I have triumphed." He continues:

No, it's not just by sheer chance that I'm in the institute, it's the necessary consequence of the socialist revolution, which raised us up from below and elevated us up above their [the rich and privileged people - Y.M.] heads. It is our mission, we children of poverty, to change society for only we can change it and be equal masters in a classless society. Our will is triumphant. What seemed and was impossible, what we only could dream about is becoming a reality. In the society of workers I arrived at the conviction that not only are we not incapable, not deprived of the possibility of being valuable and advanced people, but on the contrary only we children of poverty and incredible hardships must and can create the new society. It is our mission not only to play an active role in building the new society, but to direct the work of construction. Only we are granted the mission of educating all the rest of mankind and giving mankind a chance to really bloom.

Potemkin's identity construction based on his optimistic belief in socialist ideals and loyalty to the regime differs significantly from that of Podlubnyi, motivated by the sense of atonement. Potemkin advanced his career after graduation from the institute in 1937 and eventually became the vice minister of geology of the USSR.<sup>29</sup>

V. Kataev, whose date of birth is unknown, was a student at a teachers' training college in Moscow in 1934. He kept a diary for only several months in 1934, and this has been preserved up to the present in archives.<sup>30</sup> According to

27 Jochen Hellbeck, "Fashioning the Stalinist Soul: The Diary of Stepan Podlubnyi (1931-1939)," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 44:3 (1996), p.347.

28 Ibid, p.348.

29 Véronique Garros, Natalia Korenevskaya and Thomas Lahusen, eds., *Intimacy and Terror: Soviet Diaries of the 1930s* (New York, 1995), pp.251-290.

30 TsKhDMO, f.1, op.23, d.1088, ll.89-109.

this diary, after finishing nine years of school, he worked "as a teacher at a school in the distant taiga." He came to Moscow from this remote rural area to study at the college. However, Kataev wrote repeatedly that he had not intended to study, but "was persuaded" to do so and could not refuse this proposal. Since he lacked a strong motivation, his diary is full of gloomy descriptions of reluctant study and unsatisfactory results of examinations. In this respect, he was yet another type of student, entirely different from both Potemkin and Podlubnyi. This reluctant attitude explains why Kataev began to keep a diary. When he failed to attend a class for some reason, it was regarded as intentional. After this event, Kataev began to feel that the leaders of the Komsomol college bureau, as well as his "comrades" in the same Komsomol cell, suspected his loyalty. This made him behave more cautiously. "What is important, as I have understood, is the principle that I must neither be frank nor exchange my opinion with other people." For this reason he started to keep a diary, in which he "can write everything." Kataev kept his diary to record his real inner world and to describe school life and the situation of Soviet society.

Judging from the content of his diary, Kataev was not so much critical of the regime as a whole as of the difficulties in his daily life and of the strict discipline in the college. Nevertheless, he never expressed loyalty to the regime. He continued to avoid studying seriously despite the college's requirements, failed examinations, and was eventually expelled from the college. In the last paragraph of his diary Kataev wrote: "The first attempt to get a passport to go abroad completely ended in failure." Thus, by all appearances, Kataev regarded his admission to a college in Moscow as the first step towards a future opportunity to leave the Soviet Union.

The diary of P. Afanas'ev, a second-year student at the veterinary faculty in 1935, demonstrates the writer's critical attitude towards the social situation under the Stalinist regime and his "exit" from its value system. It is full of gloomy descriptions about his daily life, study in school, and his surroundings: small stipends, lack of money, his own hunger, and the plight of other starving people. In particular, he describes the tragic devastation of a collective farm in his home region, which he visited during summer vacation, and the serious mental problems this pitiful experience caused him. From then on, Afanas'ev not only strengthened his cynical attitude to the regime, but also suffered from psychological illness. His diary includes fragments of Esenin's poems which seem to expose Afanas'ev's own yearning for suicide.

According to the diary, Afanas'ev had become an orphan in 1922, and became one of the first members and the organizer of a collective farm in 1929. Subsequently, he worked as a miner and was allowed to study at an institute. He was a young peasant of unprivileged background, who wagered on the revolution from above but was betrayed by its results.<sup>31</sup>

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31 TsKhDMO, f.1, op.23, d.1106, ll.118-123. This part of Afanas'ev's diary was not cited from the original, but from an excerpt of the diary cited by the authority of the institute in its report concerning his "incident."

The last diary in this section is Man'kov's.<sup>32</sup> Arkadii Georgievich Man'kov was born in 1913 into the family of a tsarist officer, the chief secretary of the Senate. In the 1930s his father worked as an accountant for the rental housing association (*Zhilishchno-arendnoe kooperativnoe tovarishchestvo*). After finishing nine years of schooling, Man'kov began to work as a white-collar worker in the factory Krasnyi Treugol'nik, and afterwards was matriculated in Leningrad University. Throughout this period he kept a diary, a part of which has survived up to the present. In contrast to the previously mentioned students, Man'kov's diary demonstrates the writer's extensive vocabulary and expressiveness, which testifies to his outstanding intellect.<sup>33</sup>

The most interesting point in Man'kov's diary is that he described the events he experienced independently, ignoring the Stalinist ideology and value system. However, Man'kov showed neither political apathy nor desire to leave the country ("exit"), in contrast to Kataev and Afanas'ev. Instead, Man'kov faced the real world and observed what was taking place in the Soviet Union. Not surprisingly, his "observation" was based on his own experiences in the factory where he worked, the university where he studied, and the family he belonged to. He also suffered from many difficulties in daily life. His mind, however, is open to everything, including incidents in foreign countries. In difficult circumstances, he quoted an epigram from Spinoza in his diary dated 5 February 1941: "Don't cry, don't laugh, don't despise, but understand."<sup>34</sup> For Man'kov, writing a diary was "a better means to objectify impressions and experiences," since a diary is "a bolt hole (*lazeika*), through which an unsettled subject acquires equilibrium of heart and body."<sup>35</sup> His keen power of observation is demonstrated in his description of the end of the Great Terror in 1938:

9 Dec. 1938: On the last page of the newspapers, in the column of chronicles, indistinguishably mixed with other information, it is reported that Ezhov was moved to another position at his request...

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32 I became aware of the existence of this diary through Fitzpatrick's book, *Everyday Stalinism*. Besides Fitzpatrick, to my knowledge, Hellbeck and Lebina referred to Man'kov's diary. Hellbeck introduced it as one of the "especially noteworthy diaries from the younger generation, roughly Podlubnyi's age." See Hellbeck, "Fashioning the Stalinist Soul," p.349. Lebina used it to describe some aspects of daily life of the 1930s. See Lebina, *Povsednevnaia zhizn' sovetskogo goroda*, pp.137, 219, 225, 253. It seems, however, that the importance of Man'kov's diary has not been fully recognized by historians, in spite of the fact that it includes a contemporary youth's valuable analysis of the Stalinist regime, as mentioned below.

33 Afterwards he became a well-known historian on seventeenth century Russia. Dmitrii Likhachev, who had also survived the 1930s, sent a letter to Man'kov after he read the first part of his diary published in *Zvezda* in 1994. Likhachev applauded the diary, saying that "we don't know of a better description of the spirit of the times." This letter was attached to the subsequent publication of Man'kov's diary. See A.G. Man'kov, "Iz dnevnika 1938-1941 gg.," *Zvezda* 11 (1995), p.167.

34 Ibid, p.198.

35 A.G. Man'kov, "Iz dnevnika riadovogo cheloveka (1933-1934 gg.)," *Zvezda* 5 (1994), p.147.

22 Dec. 1938: An associate professor and two students returned from the NKVD to the history faculty. It is very possible that Beria is beginning to exert influence. (Of course, what matters is not Beria.) In any case, this fact is impressive.<sup>36</sup>

Man'kov's observant eye is most evident in his analysis of the Stalinist regime:

- 1) In Russia the present social structure is purely capitalist, only at the worse stage of development - the stage of impoverishment and decline.
- 2) The state belongs to a small group of fanatical "socialists." Behind Marx's mask, the state makes its own policy, ignoring the interests of the people... The latter are buried in poverty and starvation.
- 3) The central nail [keystone - Y.M.] of the state's policy - the absolute development of heavy machine technology under the absolute decline of light (food) industries in this country - is a rusty nail of pseudo-Marxism. Uneven development of various sectors of the national economy is peculiar to capitalism only.
- 4) If one pays attention to the history of capitalism, it is clear that the so-called "primitive accumulation" of capital requires the sweat and blood of tens of millions people.  
Isn't the same process in fact taking place in our country? The literal physical destruction of all the strata of peasants, forced exploitation of petty owners and their forced consolidation into collectives. Impoverishment. Starvation.  
Aren't both capitalism and socialism in fact being created in the same way - by way of violence and arbitrariness???
- 5) Apparently this is not the case. But if this is the case, it is necessary to struggle, struggle against all the violence against the masses, regardless of its form.<sup>37</sup>

Considering that he wrote this as a twenty-year-old man in 1933, no doubt Man'kov had a surprising analytical ability. In addition, it is noticeable that he analyzed the situation relying upon his original concepts. For instance, he observed that in Soviet society "people are separated from one another and shattered into pieces and atoms" (quotation from 20 April 1933). Later - on 12 December 1939 and 4 November 1940, after reading D. Jackson's book titled "The Post-War World"<sup>38</sup> - he compared the Stalinist and the Italian fascist regimes:

12 Dec. 1939: ...The fascist order in Italy extraordinarily resembles ours. There exists only one ruling party, only one youth organization. As a matter of fact, there exists a dictatorship of the party... and dictatorship by one man in the party. All the constitutional constructs are no more than a fig leaf. People

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36 Man'kov, "Iz dnevnika 1938-1941 gg.," p.173.

37 Man'kov, "Iz dnevnika riadovogo cheloveka (1933-1934 gg.)," pp.134-135.

38 Unfortunately I have been unable to identify this book and its author in Western publications. Its Russian translation was titled "Poslevoennyi mir."

obey the incessant agitation that takes place every hour and every minute in schools, factories and institutions of higher education...

4 Nov. 1940: There is no society in our country. It dissolved into atoms, units that clash with each other in chaotic movements... There is no family, i.e. an elementary network of human relations. Things common to all discords and impurities intrude also into every sphere of family life, ... and distort it. Official relations have lost vitality, ending up in dissolution. Everyone [is thinking] of himself, for himself and in himself. Everyone envies and is afraid of others. *Homo homini lupus est.*<sup>39</sup>

Obviously, nothing but Man'kov's own contemplation led him to the conclusion that the Soviet state was totalitarian, although he did not use this term.

Man'kov grew up in post-revolutionary circumstances and was educated in Soviet schools. However, as he was brought up in an intellectual family with pre-revolutionary traditions, Man'kov could distance himself from Bolshevik culture and semantics, and accordingly from the way in which the regime expected him to think. Aspiration for objectiveness and extensive reading raised him to the intellectual eminence that enabled him to compare political regimes internationally. As a result, Man'kov devised an original paradigm contributory to understanding the Stalinist regime - a paradigm similar to the totalitarian model which would be produced in the post-war West. It seems legitimate to number Man'kov among the first people who applied the totalitarian model to the Stalinist regime.<sup>40</sup>

## CONCLUSION

As mentioned in the introduction, recent studies of Soviet society in the 1930s have elucidated the diversity and complexity of popular opinion. These

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39 Man'kov, "Iz dnevnika 1938-1941 gg.," pp.182,193-194.

40 Was Man'kov exceptional among the youth of the 1930s, or did he represent one type of behavior of his contemporaries? This question is crucial in order to judge the extent to which "observant" attitude prevailed among Soviet youth. Although this article does not provide a definite answer to this question, I would like to introduce a well-known dissident, Alexandr Zinoviev, as another example of "observation." Zinoviev writes in his recollection that by observing Soviet society and reading many books, he reached the conclusion that Soviet Russia was a centralized bureaucratic state, the making of which was an inevitable result of Russia's historical process since the tsarist era. Zinoviev became anti-Stalinist at the age of seventeen. He recalls that sometimes he discussed these subjects with friends who shared his opinion. See Alexandre Zinoviev, *Les confessions d'un homme en trop* (Paris, 1991), pp.141-192. Man'kov also described similar conversations with one of his friends. Carried out behind closed doors, these conversations cannot be regarded as "open voice." Nevertheless, the presence of these conversations suggests that a number of young people were able to "observe" as Man'kov did. These conversations might be called "horizontal voices" which, according to Guillermo O'Donnell, a political scientist, is a prerequisite for the exercise of "vertical voice." See Guillermo O'Donnell, *Counterpoints: Selected Essays on Authoritarianism and Democratization* (Notre Dame, 1999), p.65.

studies have highlighted ordinary people's tactics and compromises in relations with the authorities and also their skills in using the regime's discourse selectively to their own advantage. Along with this development in historiography, different views have appeared in regard to the characteristics of public opinion under Stalin. On the one hand, Steven Kotkin and Jochen Hellbeck emphasize close interactions between individual/social identity construction and the regime's value system, with the assumption that ordinary people could not imagine any alternatives to the existing regime.<sup>41</sup> On the other hand, Sarah Davies suggests the presence of "rival discourse" as a tacit form of popular resistance, with the help of which ordinary people could imagine alternatives. In opposition to the "subjectivist school" exemplified by Kotkin and Hellbeck, Hiroaki Kuromiya echoes Davies, noting that "Even at the height of the Great Terror, individuals no doubt imagined political alternatives."<sup>42</sup>

This paper has examined cases of "open voice" and "exit," and has concluded by suggesting the existence of another type of youth, i.e. "observant attitude," represented by Man'kov. Although he belonged to the post-revolutionary generation, Mankov's discourse differed from the regime's. Eager to break with contemporary narratives, Man'kov tried to observe the regime as objectively as possible. His "totalitarian model," which derived from a comparison between the USSR and fascist Italy, did not propose a liberal democratic alternative to the existing regimes. However, Man'kov took at least a first step in envisioning such an alternative.

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41 Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*, p.358; Hellbeck, "Fashioning the Stalinist Soul," pp.371-373.

42 Davies, *Popular Opinion*, p.7; Kuromiya, *Freedom and Terror*, pp.7-8. In regard to "rival discourses," see also Tomita, *Sutârinizumu no touchi kouzou*, ch.4. Criticizing Kotkin's *Magnetic Mountain*, Rossman insists that scholars should "devote serious attention to the phenomenon of working-class resistance under Stalin." See Rossman, "The Teikovo Cotton Workers' Strike," pp.68-69. On ordinary citizens' protests against the Great Terror, see O.V. Khlevniuk, *1937-i: Stalin, NKVD i sovetskoe obshchestvo* (Moscow, 1992), pp.242-249.