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The Soviet Regime and Soviet Society in the Postwar Years: Innovations and Conservatism, 1945–1953

In the last ten years the focus of research in Soviet history in general and history of Stalinism in particular has gradually shifted from the traditionally «popular» 1920s–1930s to the postwar period. The concept of «late Stalinism» appeared, and along with it natural questions are being raised about the criteria for its conceptual and chronological identification, as well as the place of the postwar period, from the point of view of continuity and dynamics, compared to the preceding years and the developmental perspectives of the country. Answers to these and many other questions have become possible now that historians have received access to new archival materials, first and foremost to the collections of the Central Committee of the Party, the Council of Ministers of the USSR and other central organs, as well as regional materials.

Studies of these sources have shown that attempts to extrapolate for the postwar years the evaluations and interpretations of the Soviet system significant for the 1920s–1930s do not appear as incontrovertible as before. Despite the preservation of principal continuities from the prewar period, changes in the Soviet Union after the war affected the state, but first and foremost society. The Second World War brought serious corrections into the system of international relations and the distribution of power on the world arena, which also impacted the development of internal political processes. These changes do not fit into the framework of just one concept – «liberalization» or «conservation», «strengthening» or «weakening», «apogee» or «decline». They are internally contradictory, frequently expressed incompletely, and when it comes to the relationship between the state and society, quite conflict-ridden. Finally, this relatively short period of time (1945–1953) from the end of the war to the death of Stalin, was not united, but had its breaking points, marking new political tendencies, changes in the ruling «team» or the beginning of the next campaign.

Peculiarities of the development of the Soviet regime and Soviet society in the

1 Incorrectness of such extrapolation was noted, for example, by Sh. Fitzpatrick in her *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s* (New York, 1999), 13.
first postwar decade have already been described in sufficient detail in the secondary literature.\(^2\) The goal of this article is to attempt to present the most characteristic tendencies of the country’s development in the postwar years – the institutions of state and power, social processes, and ideological markers – on the basis of these studies and new sources. Most of the changes affecting these areas, in one way or another were connected with the war, its political results, economic challenges and socio-psychological consequences.

After the war the Soviet Union had to go through its own form of «stages of conversion» just as all combatant states – a return to the norms and values of peacetime life, normalization of the economic situation, and adaptation to the new realities of world politics. «Conversion» could be accomplished both through a restoration of the prewar system of power, economic model, ideological constructs, etc., but also through a renewal, by taking into account those tendencies that manifested themselves in the conditions during the war and immediate postwar years.

1. War and Soviet Society

The Soviet society that emerged from the war represented a complex socio-psychological phenomenon. War changed its composition and demographic balance, brought corrections into the system of values and norms of people’s behavior. War losses did not only result in the reduction in the size of the population. The war’s aftermath put the country on the brink of a demographic catastrophe, the impact of which was noticeable for decades after the victory (the so-called demographic «echo» of the war). At the same time, despite war losses, Soviet society looked towards the future with hope and optimism.

War gave rise to a new agent of social relations – the frontline soldier (frontovik), who was less susceptible to the manipulations by the state. Frontoviki-victors brought into Soviet society the «spirit of freedom» – a result of what they experienced and saw during the war. The comparison between the alternative models of life and the situation in the country were not in favor of the latter, leading to the formation of a critical attitude towards the internal order. These moods did not have sufficient

time to take the shape of a set of concrete demands, and instead should be viewed as delayed expectations. It was not only the nature of postwar life, with its daily struggle for survival, or the position of the state, which prevented the unification of «the generation of victors» and formed obstacles to realization of the expectations. A certain conservative tendency of socio-psychological character also had the same origin – the war. And the frontline soldiers carried with them the regimentation and strict hierarchy of relations, command mentality and militarized consciousness.

After the war everyone waited for changes. Expectations and optimistic hopes were the main feelings, determining the post-victory atmosphere. In the palette of social moods forming the image of postwar life, among the abstract aspiration towards something better, were various and quite concrete expectations and demands. Illusions about the possibility of a wider contact with the West, the relaxation of censorship and in general a liberal transformation of the regime appeared among the members of the intelligentsia. Part of the peasantry hoped for the reorganization of the collective farm system, including its liquidation, abolition of the practice of grain deliveries to the state and the easing of the tax burden. Suggestions about decentralization of the economy, legalization of the private sector, and development of joint-stock companies in the industry were also put forward.

Moods in favor of democratization of the internal life found their supporters even in party circles, and among parts of the state, party and military elites. The moods of the youth, first and foremost students, were distinguished by their particular radicalism. Notably, the youth frond was rather apolitical. Its anti-establishment essence was expressed primarily through fashion and musical and literary interests, although anti-Stalinist circles and groups did appear among them. This protest on the level of everyday life was a phenomenon, sufficiently new for Soviet reality.

People really expected changes, but that does not mean that they were ready to fight for them. The war was fought at the emotional and physical limit; afterwards this exhaustion made itself felt. The paternalistic basis of these expectations and a certain infantilism of consciousness were just some of the causes for their groundlessness. It was not the society, but the state that appeared in mass perception as the active force, the initiator and bearer of future changes. Characteristically, even in those cases, when the ability of the state to meet popular wishes halfway was placed in doubt, as was the case, for example, on the question of the liquidation of the collective farm system, the role of the factor that would initiate changes or even

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«force» the Soviet state to make changes was reserved not to society, but to an intermediary, most often an external force (England, USA, «the West»).

Military victory raised the authority of the regime inside the country to an unprecedented level. Not only in popular consciousness but also in the minds of a significant section of intellectuals, the victory was a sort of «redemption» of past mistakes and even crimes of the regime.

Equally ambivalent was the impact of the war on the Soviet system as a whole. War brought to life tendencies and processes, which could be judged as signs of liberalism, but at the same time created mechanisms, which blocked the development of these tendencies and processes. Because of the victory of the anti-Hitler coalition, the Soviet Union entered the circle of leading states determining world politics. At the same time, acquisition of this status was one of the preconditions for the future confrontations of the Cold War period. The «Great-Power Complex» in its own way affected the development of internal processes and determined the priorities of economic politics (with the emphasis on the military-industrial complex to the detriment of social programs) and ideological innovations (such as the revival of the imperial idea under communist camouflage, propaganda of patriotism instead of «proletarian internationalism»). The government sphere, meaning the basic organization of state institutions, was less affected by the war. But even here quite symptomatic changes took place in the postwar years, which determined, at the very least, the centers of influence and distribution of strengths in the struggle for power after Stalin’s death.

2. Changes in the Power Structures and Administration

War introduced inevitable corrections into the pre-war system of decision-making both in the upper structures of the government and on the local level, and changed the nature of the relations between the center and the regions, between party and state organs, and between Stalin and his circle. Already in the pre-war years a tendency towards the diminishing importance of the Politburo of the Central Committee as a center of decision-making took place. Its role was fulfilled by a narrow group of those closest to Stalin – «the nine», «the eight», or «the seven», the composition of which was determined by Stalin himself depending on the nature of the question under consideration and his personal preferences. The established bureaucratic hierarchy was disrupted during the war. Decisions were taken informally, in the process of executive discussion, often without formalities. The nature of relations between Stalin and his closest associates changed as well – they became more trusting and business-like, and the representatives of the «inner circle» received greater freedom of action than before. After the war Stalin tried to

4 Anastas Mikoian wrote about these changes in Stalin’s relationship with his closest associates and about the creation of the «system of trust» in his memoirs. A. I. Mikoian, Tak bylo: Razmyshe-
niia o minuvshem (Moscow, 1999), 465.
return everything to how it had been before, carrying out what Oleg Khlevniuk has described as a distinctive «conversion of the upper-echelons of power», trying to reduce members of the Politburo to the level of mere executors of his will.\footnote{Politbiuro TsK VKP(b) i Sovet Ministrov SSSR. 1945–1953 (Moscow, 2002), 7.} Internal conflicts and cadre shifts in the upper-echelons of administration, for example, were related to this.

During the war the task of executive administration demanded a certain degree of decentralization, resulting in the transfer of some important administrative functions directly to the local state and party organizations. The procedure of multi-level coordination of decisions, as practiced before the war, in wartime conditions became not only ruinous but often simply impossible. Along with decentralization of administration and the acquisition of greater independence by local organs, the process of merging party and state structures with parallel functions that already began before the war, particularly in defense and economic areas, continued. After the war in the interest of the same administrative effectiveness, regional party leaders for whom economic work now emerged to the forefront, preferred to establish direct contacts with the corresponding departments, bypassing Councils of Ministers of the Union republics, Council of Ministers of the USSR and sometimes even the Central Committee of the Party.

In the Central Committee this arrangement was regarded as a sign of weakening of party organs’ control over the activity of ministries and departments.\footnote{Party functionaries expressed particular concern over cases involving ministries and other economic organs awarding prizes (premii) to party workers. A special Central Committee resolution from 18 May 1946 forbade party workers from receiving prizes from ministry representatives in order to «not become pawns in the hands of departments to the detriment of state interest». (Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial'no-politicheskoi istorii (hereafter, RGASPI), fond 17, opis’ 131, delo 284, list 152.)} As a result over the course of 1946 a series of decisions were passed, aiming to return control functions over the state apparatus to the party apparatus, and first of all to the Central Committee. Since cadre politics were traditionally used as the main channel for such control, the key role in realizing these decisions was assigned to the Cadre Administration Department of the Central Committee. From April 1946 it was headed by a Secretary of the Central Committee, A. A. Kuznetsov. Two months after his appointment, Kuznetsov presented a plan of measures for improving work with cadres. In this document he suggested a strict delineation of the range of positions (in party, state and economic organs), appointment to which would be in the exclusive purview of the Central Committee – its so-called nomenclature.\footnote{RGASPI, f. 17, op. 116, d. 264, ll.104–105.} In Kuznetsov’s opinion, which he expressed at one of the conferences in March 1948, under the control of the Central Committee’s Cadre Administration Department should be cadres not only of the party structures, but also of all the ministries and departments, including even the Ministry of State Security (MGB) of the USSR.\footnote{Ibid., f. 17, op. 121, d. 640, l. 97.} Thus, the
discussion was not about strengthening control functions of the party apparatus in
general, but about the exclusive role of the highest party level of authority – the
Central Committee – and its special structural subdivision – Cadre Administration
Department (and later a few other departments) in guaranteeing this control.

This is an important point against the backdrop of the continuing discussion
about the role of the party and state (or more precisely, party and state structures)
in the system of administration in the postwar years. Leonard Shapiro, for exam-
ple, talked about the «decline in the influence of the party» in the postwar years,
citing the special role of Stalin, who «was powerful enough to go outside the nor-
mal party channels when he thought it necessary and ignore[ed] the formal party
organs when he chose».

Other researchers, who supported the thesis about the
decline of the party’s influence, cite the Soviet periodical press, where during the
years of war «the leading and guiding role of the communist party» was mentioned
less and less often, while priorities clearly shifted in favor of the state.

A natural question arises – how do these conclusions and observations about
the decline of the role of the party or even Stalin’s «disregard» for the «normal
party channels» correspond with the decisions about strengthening the control
functions of the party apparatus over state structures? In reality, one should talk
not about the decline of party influence in general, but about the weakening of the
party’s role as a mass organization, which was not suitable for fulfilling adminis-
trative functions that were instead placed on the party apparatus, created especially
for these purposes.

On the other hand, the postwar years were in fact characterized by the strength-
ening of state principles in the life of the country. This tendency was noted at the
end of the 1930s, when the state – Council of People’s Commissars (SNK) – began
to play a role no less important in the processes of governing than the Central Com-
mittee. The fact that in May 1941, that is immediately before the war, Stalin became
the head of the SNK (from 1946 – Council of Ministers), replacing V. M. Molotov in
that post, speaks to the increasing influence of that body. After the war a series of
reorganizations in the structure of the SNK took place on Stalin’s initiative, which
resulted in the concentration of the main operative administrative functions of the
national economy within it. A series of small leading groups – branch offices, com-
missions, and committees – were created within the system of the Council of Minis-
ters. At the same time, the Central Committee and its apparatus were relieved of
the many small economic questions, and its «specialized» sectors (industrial, agri-
cultural, etc.) began to concern themselves primarily with cadre questions and the
supervision of the corresponding branches and departments. Therefore, it would be
more precise to talk not about the displacement of priorities in fulfilling administrative functions between state and party structures, but about the redistribution of these functions with the goal of ensuring greater administrative effectiveness.\footnote{12}

One of the most serious reorganizations in the Council of Ministers’ system was carried out on 8 February 1947, when eight branch offices were formed – in agriculture, metallurgy and chemistry, machine-building, transport and communication, fuel and electro-stations, food industry, retail and light industry, and culture and public health. At the same time, international relations and trade, state security, and finance and defense were left under the jurisdiction of the Politburo.\footnote{13} It became common practice for heads of the Council of Ministers’ branch offices to become members of the Politburo. Among those with membership in both governing structures – Politburo and Bureau of the Council of Ministers – almost all had double responsibilities (through the Central Committee and through the government apparatus), and only a small group were connected in their activity only with one or the other.\footnote{14}

At the same time, the tendency towards a clearer division of functions between party and state apparatus eventually touched the leaders of the highest echelons. On 10 November 1952 the Bureau of the Presidium of the Central Committee\footnote{15} passed a resolution on the creation of two «troikas», one of which (Malenkov, Khrushchev, Bulganin) was charged with supervising the work of the Bureau of the Presidium of the Central Committee, and the other (Beria, Pervukhin, Saburov) – the Bureau of the Presidium of the Council of Ministers. Members of the first «troika» were then removed from the Bureau of the Presidium of the Council of Ministers.\footnote{16}

Simultaneously with the division of spheres of influence between the state and party functionaries (which, it should be noted, was not established definitively), the balance of power between representatives of the various ruling groups in the upper echelons of power – «the old guard», «the core», and «the reserves» – changed.

«The Old Guard» – Andreev, Voroshilov, Kaganovich, Molotov, Mikoian were a group of Stalin’s associates with revolutionary experience, who started near him

\footnote{12} The authors and compilers of the document collection, devoted to the activities of the Politburo and the Council of Ministers in the postwar years, consider that the many apparatus reorganizations undertaken during this time were tied to the «attempts to increase the effectiveness of the big and cumbersome party-state machine». \textit{Politbiuro TsK VKP(b) i Sovet Ministrov SSSR. 1945–1953}, 6.

\footnote{13} Ibid., 42.

\footnote{14} For example, the member of the Politburo and the Secretary of the Central Committee A. A. Zhdanov did not have a leading post in the Council of Ministers. A member of the Politburo N. S. Khrushchev was only a member of the Bureau of the Presidium of the Council of Ministers for a few days in the fall of 1952 (though up to 1947 when he was the first secretary of the Ukrainian Party’s Central Committee, he simultaneously headed the Ukrainian government as well.) M. Z. Saburov held key posts in the government, but was only included in the Politburo of the Central Committee in October 1952.

\footnote{15} Both the Presidium and the Bureau of the Presidium of the Central Committee were created after the 19th Party Congress on 16 October 1952. The Bureau of the Presidium consisted of nine people and basically fulfilled the functions of the Politburo.

\footnote{16} \textit{Politbiuro TsK VKP(b) i Sovet Ministrov SSSR. 1945–1953}, 99–100.
already in the 1920s, contributed to his ascent and knew his past, before he became the leader (vözhd’). In the new configuration of power, established in the 1930s, they became «superfluous», but Stalin needed these «old men» as symbols of continuity of his power and as living witnesses of its revolutionary legitimacy. After the war «the old guard» gradually resinded to secondary roles, and the strongest figures in this group – Molotov and Mikoian – fell in disfavor. In the relations between Stalin and his closest associates in these years, the element of patriarchy strengthened. Not only the representatives of the middle generation deferred to him as «father» and «boss», but the Kremlin’s «old men» changed the tone of their relations in this way as well.¹⁷

Stalin depended the most on the «core», that is, those functionaries, whose rise began in the second half of the 1930s. Beria, Bulganin, Voznesenskii, Zhdanov, Kuznetsov, Malenkov, Khrushchev – they entered the leader’s inner circle already after the regime of Stalin’s personal power took shape. In the postwar years, they held key posts in the party and government. To prevent this group from excessively strengthening its position, Stalin incited or supported competition and conflicts within it, including the physical elimination of one of the opposing sides.¹⁸

As a counterweight to the authority of the «old guard» and the influence of the «core», Stalin used the cadre «reserve», which he began to form immediately after the end of the war. This reserve consisted of two groups – «secretaries» (party workers) and «technocrats» (managers – khoziaistvenniki). Aristov, Brezhnev, Suslov, Pegov, Shepilov and others achieved their positions in the Central Committee through party work. Among the technocrats in the postwar years, the standouts were Malyshev, Kosygin, Pervukhin, and Saburov.

For the members of the «reserve» and the «core», the positions of those with ties to military projects and the military-industrial complex strengthened considerably (Beria, Bulganin, Malenkov, Pervukhin, Saburov).¹⁹ After the war Stalin devoted particular attention to defense projects. Thus, association with them, in addition to possibilities in career growth, guaranteed for this group of leaders relative security in cases of cadre purges, though it did not insure completely against the possibility of falling into disgrace, as the examples of Malenkov and Beria prove.

On the other hand, those people with actual military achievements from the war fell into disfavor after its conclusion and were subject to repressions. Stalin feared

¹⁷ Ibid., 9‒10.
¹⁸ Zhdanov, Voznesenskii and Kuznetsov belonged to the so-called «Leningrad group», which was opposed by the Beria-Malenkov bloc. Zhdanov died under not fully explained circumstances in August 1948. Voznesenskii and Kuznetsov were repressed in the course of the «Leningrad Affair» and «Gosplan Affair» of 1951. In order not to allow the strengthening of Beria and Malenkov’s positions, Stalin started to elevate Bulganin, who was supported by Khrushchev, as a counterweight. As a result, two new blocs formed within the «core»: Beria-Malenkov and Bulganin-Khrushchev.
¹⁹ Beria headed Special Committee (Spetskomitet) no.1, which supervised all work on the atomic project. Malenkov and Pervukhin were also members of this committee. Through the years Malenkov supervised the aviation industry, production of jet propulsion technology and
the strengthening of military men’s influence, whose popularity could create a threat to his personal power. That is how Marshal G.K. Zhukov, one of the most recognized heroes of the war, became effectively marginalized: he was sent to command the Odessa and then the Ural military districts. Some other prominent leaders of military industry and military commanders suffered as well. (They were repressed in the course of fabricated cases – «Affair of the Aviators», «Affair of Workers of Artillery Industry» etc.)

Repressions against the military cadres did not reach a mass character, but a few measures were sufficient to suppress the «syndrome of victors» and not to admit influential military men to key positions in the government.

As a result of administrative reorganizations, cadre re-arrangements and repressions, the strictly centralized vertical administration system was wholly restored in a few postwar years. At the same time, a regulation of spheres of influence within the party and state apparatus took place, with the central party apparatus preserving important control functions. A distinctive feature of the first post-war years was the strengthening of the Council of Ministers’ influence as a center of power and administration. But on the whole the configuration of power did not noticeably change: Stalin remained the main center of decision-making: he relied on a small group of close associates (changes occurred in the composition of this group, first of all by the pushing aside of the «old guard»), who in turn controlled various spheres of party and state government, through the apparatus of the Central Committee and Council of Ministers.

3. Ideological Innovations

Stalin’s policies in the first postwar years were built under the influence of two opposing factors – ideology and pragmatism. The pragmatism carried out from the war to some extent temporarily overshadowed the ideological directives. This was particularly felt in the sphere of foreign policy, for example in the relations between Soviet leadership and leaders of the Eastern European countries. Approximately until 1947, despite the presence of conflicts, Stalin demonstrated tolerance and readiness for compromise, including on ideological questions (for example, the question about the diversity of forms of transition to socialism, about the creation of the united democratic front).

In domestic politics, the influence of pragmatism was not as noticeable, but...
even here certain ideological relaxations occurred: during the years of the war and for a period after its end Soviet people received access to foreign literature; exchange of scientific knowledge began to develop. In the same vein, one should look at the change in Stalin’s attitude towards the Russian Orthodox Church, whose mobilizing potential and authority the state actively used.

The revival of the Russian Orthodox Church and the support for it from the state were connected with another tendency, carried out of the war – the Great Power idea and the return in connection with this to imperial values and traditions. The borrowing took place, of course, not directly, but under the cover of communist phraseology. For example, when in March 1946 a decision was taken to rename the People’s Commissars to Ministers (analogous to pre-revolutionary Russia), Stalin justified it by pointing to the stabilization of Soviet social order.\footnote{Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv noveishei istorii (hereafter, RGANI), f. 2, op. 1, d. 7, l. 23.} Already during the war, epaulettes returned to the army and Suvorovite and Nakhimovite schools were created, continuing the traditions of the cadet corps. Science, literature and cinematography were supposed to glorify Russian statesmen, whose names were associated with the strengthening of state power and military victories. The image of the «brutal, but fair sovereign» (Ivan the Terrible or Peter the Great) was created, in which one could easily guess the qualities of the Soviet dictator.

Reanimation of imperial ideology went hand in hand with the propaganda of the idea of patriotism. War really did stir up in people natural patriotic feelings. After the war Stalin used this patriotic upsurge as a counter-weight to those moods, which arose in Soviet society due to acquaintance with examples of western life. Official «Soviet patriotism» was cultivated. New ideology possessed one peculiarity: despite the attempts by the leader to play «the Russian card», this ideology was not ethnic, but statist by its nature, that is, possessing the familiar state-paternalistic essence.

Authorities treated with suspicion anyone who had been beyond the boundaries of the Soviet Union, and this suspicion grew in regards to the people, who for some period of time were completely out from under the control of the Soviet ideological machine. Soviet citizens who had been in captivity, under occupation, or taken out of the country as Ostarbeiter were included in this category. Distrust of repatriates by authorities, just as of those returning from the front, was based on the fear that they could become sources of unfiltered information for their fellow countrymen. Therefore, despite official proclamations about loyalty, in real practice there was a tendency for isolation and discrimination towards those returning to the motherland.\footnote{On the fate of the repatriated people, see B. Bonwetsch, «Sowjetische Zwangsarbeiter vor und nach 1945. Ein doppelter Leidensweg», Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas 41 (1993), 532–541; V. N. Zemskov, «Repatriatsiia sovetskih grazhdan i ikh dalneishaia sud’ba. 1944–1956 gg.», Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia (1995), 5, 3–13; P. Polian, Zhertyv doukh diktatur. «Ostarbeitery» i voennoplennye v tret’em reike i ikh repatriatsiia (Moscow, 1996).} Of course, this could not be a mass process, since it was
impossible to isolate from society all those who had been to the other side of the border. Otherwise one would have had to isolate the entire demobilized army.

Instead, a wide-scale ideological campaign to discredit the Western way of life, based on the propaganda of Soviet patriotism, was designed. It was carried out under the banner of «the battle against servility (nizkopoklonstvo) before the West». One of the organizational forms of this anti-Western campaign became the so-called «honor courts», which were created in the ministries and central departments after the special decision from 28 March 1947 by the Central Committee and the Council of Ministers of the USSR. «Honor courts» were elected organs, and their authority was limited to administering a public reprimand or censure, but with the possibility of handing the case over to investigative organs.\(^{24}\)

The preventive effect of «honor courts» was strengthened as a result of the changes, starting approximately in early 1947, in the general tone of the materials in the press and public statements of the national leaders. Motifs reminiscent of the time of the «Great Terror» of the 1930s sounded more and more persistently in them.\(^{25}\) The Central Committee’s letters of instructions from 1935 and 1936, that originally appeared in connection to the murder of Kirov and called for vigilance against «machinations of enemies»\(^{26}\) were cited; Stalin’s speech at the February-March 1937 Party Plenum that became the starting point for the organization of mass repressions was remembered. All these campaigns and pronouncements followed one goal – fear, somewhat lost during the years of the war, had to be returned to society, in order to dispel the liberal illusions of 1945.

4. Crisis of Expectations and the «Tightening of the Screws»

But things did not stop with just allusions to 1937. On 26 October 1948 a joint directive was issued by the Ministry of State Security (MGB) and the Procuracy, which ordered the arrest of former Trotskyites, rightists, Mensheviks, SRs, white émigrés, and the so-called nationalists, who already served their sentences and were freed. In this way, people were re-arrested for the same crime, hence the name «repeaters» (povtorniki). Such actions contradicted Soviet penal law. Therefore, the arrest and exile of the «repeaters» was carried out on the decisions of an extra-judicial body – Special Conference at the Ministry of State Security. Alto-

\(^{24}\) The history of the «honor courts» is discussed in greater detail in V. D. Esakov and E. S. Levina, Delo KR. Sudy chesti v ideologii i praktike poslevoennogo stalinizma (Moscow, 2001).

\(^{25}\) See, for example, the stenogram of the plenum of the Vladimir regional party committee from 31 January 1947 in RGASPI, f. 17, op. 121, d. 572, l. 14; and the report by the Central Committee Secretary A. A. Kuznetsov at the meeting about the elections to honor courts for the staff of the Central Committee apparatus from 29 September 1947 in Istochnik (1947). 6, 74; Romanovskii, Liki stalinizma. 1945–1953 gg., 27.

\(^{26}\) This is a reference to the secret letters of the Central Committee «Lessons of events connected to the villainous murder of Comrade Kirov» from 18 January 1935 and «On terrorist activity of the trotskite-zinovievite counter-revolutionary bloc» from 29 July 1936.
gether 20,267 people were arrested and exiled for indefinite periods of time in the period 1949–1953 on the directive from 26 October 1948.27

This was the first signal that the state, not satisfied with the «preventive work», once again transferred the weight of its policies to repressive methods. The year 1948 became critical in this sense, both for international and domestic reasons. Among the former were the crisis in the relations between the USSR and the countries of Eastern Europe (the creation of the Cominform, the conflict with Tito), defeat of communists in the elections in a number of European countries, and the growing confrontation with the West, most clearly illustrated by the events connected with the Berlin blockade of 1948.

Failures of the Soviet Union on the international arena coincided with the worsening of the internal political situation, conditioned by the crisis of postwar expectations. In 1948, the achievement of the prewar volume of industrial production was officially announced. A year earlier, the ration-card system – a distinctive symbol of wartime – was abolished. Demobilization of those who took part in the war ended. Against the backdrop of these events, which were taken generally by contemporaries as evidence of the final transition from war to peace, the daily life of the majority of the people and their real life standard compared to wartime changed very insignificantly, which led to a natural dissatisfaction and demands for changes in the situation. To these challenges, the regime responded by a renewed «tightening of the screws».

Corrections in ideological landmarks corresponded to the hardening of the political course. Imperial ideology, built first on two components – patriotism and anti-patriotism («servility before the West») – was supplemented by a re-conceptualization of the image of the enemy, with «local nationalists» and «bourgeois cosmopolites» now serving in this capacity. Under the conditions of the crisis of post-victory expectations combined with the dissatisfaction over the low standard of living, the idea of struggle against «the common enemy» was supposed to play the role of the compensating factor in the process of consolidating society and power.

Under the banner of struggle with manifestations of local nationalism, a purge of republican elites took place in 1950–1952. The so-called «Estonian» and «Mingrelian» processes were among the most notorious on this level. Repressions against the leaders of one of the «old» republics (Georgia) and one of the «new» ones (Estonia) were supposed to serve as instructive examples for other regional leaders who after the war tried to demonstrate relative independence and a tendency to fight for the interests of their region in the face of demands from the center. At the same time, the trials organized along the lines of the Estonian and Mingrelian ones, had one ideological «defect»: remaining limited to their respective


In this sense, it is safe to assume that Stalin’s choice fell to Soviet Jewry not by accident. Jews were not only spread throughout the territory of the Soviet Union, but many of them belonged to the Soviet scientific and cultural elite and held responsible government positions. Furthermore, Soviet Jews had their own voluntary organization – the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, to which, if necessary, the role of a «nationalist center» could be assigned. Organizers of the anti-Semitic campaign also took into consideration the factor of latent popular anti-Semitism, present in various strata of Soviet society.28

The anti-Semitic campaign was carried out under the banner of the battle against the so-called «cosmopolitanism». Accusations of «cosmopolitanism» replaced the campaign against «servility before the West». From the state’s point of view, that campaign was not totally successful, but this modification in a way «concretized» it. «Cosmopolitanism» served as a kind of «highest form of servility» – a full break with the interests of the fatherland. The struggle against «servility» did not have a clearly defined object of attack – just about anyone could be accused of the sin of «servility before foreignness». The circle of «cosmopolites», on the other hand, was quite clearly defined. Though it was never officially stated, contemporaries understood perfectly well that it was the Soviet Jews who fit the role of «rootless cosmopolites».

Starting in 1949, mass firings of Jews from all ministries and departments, scientific organizations, and editorial boards of newspapers and journals began. Even the Ministry of State Security (MGB) was subjected to cleansing based on nationality. By spring 1952 the investigation on the case of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee was completed. In the period of 1948–1952, 110 people were repressed (sentenced to be shot or to sentences of various lengths) in connection to this case.29

The anti-Semitic campaign culminated in the «Doctors’ Plot», intended to demonstrate an uncovered conspiracy on the part of the Kremlin medics against state and party leaders. In the series of postwar repressive campaigns, the «Doctors’ Plot» was the only one that was made public. Manipulating mass sentiments, the authorities were able to give the punitive campaign an aura of «popular support». The Central Committee and the central press received hundreds of

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letters, individual and collective, in which authors demanded the harshest punishment for the arrested doctors.\textsuperscript{30}

Using the instrument of terror, the regime was able to solve two problems simultaneously: to keep society in check and to guarantee an outlet for negative emotions. The negative energy, brought about by shortages in postwar daily life, was channeled from justified claims towards the state into the search for and punishment of the «guilty». At the same time, the viability of the Stalinist system held not only on fear and loyalty, but also such factors as enthusiasm, optimism, and consensus between society and the state. For satisfaction of this consensus, the possibilities of the repressive mechanism were clearly insufficient. Here, different positive methods of influencing public opinion and the skillful work of the propaganda machine were needed.

5. Social Programs and Military Ambitions

Not all expectations connected to the end of the war could be ignored, by declaring them to be results of enemy influence and «bourgeois propaganda». Some of these hopes, such as improving life conditions and raising living standards after the war, were quite legitimate and demanded responses from the government. In his speech before the voters on 9 February 1946, Stalin made a number of promises of this sort, announcing the impending repeal of the ration-card system, development of the production of consumer goods, and expansion of retail volume. At the same time, the leader strictly outlined priorities in economic development for the next few years – steel, pig iron, coal, and oil. In reality, the war-ravaged country simply could not solve both of these problems simultaneously – developing social programs and building up its industrial base. The incompatibility of these priorities became particularly obvious, if the needs of the development of the military-industrial complex were taken into account as well, as it was gradually becoming the main sphere of state interest.

Demilitarization of the economy lasted approximately until 1948. Immediately after the war many military enterprises switched to civilian production. Over the course of 1946–1950 the pace of growth of military-industrial production fell not only relative to the period of the war, but even to the pre-war 1940.\textsuperscript{31} However, this proved to be insufficient, in order to satisfy even the immediate, quite modest needs of the population. In the early 1950s, the technical re-armament of the army and fleet began. In the military branches of industry, the plan of the development of the economy for 1951–1955 anticipated significant and annually increasing volume of deliveries for all types of military technology.\textsuperscript{32} Even according to the incomplete

\textsuperscript{30} Information on the reaction to the «Doctors’ Plot» can be found, for example, in the compilation of letters-responsive to the TASS announcement about the arrest of the «group of doctor-wreckers» for 1953 in RGANI, f. 5, op. 16, d. 602, ll. 14–34.


\textsuperscript{32} On average the volume of military production was supposed to increase by two and a half
times over the course of the five years, and for some types of military technology—even more; for example, by four and a half times for radar and armor technology. I. V. Bystrova, Voennopromyshlenny kompleks SSSR v gody kholodnoi voiny. Vtoraia polovina 40–kh–nachalo 60–kh gg. (Moscow, 2000), 33–34.

The main source of income for the state budget in the postwar years, just as before the war, was from the turnover tax, which constituted more than 50 percent of the income. This tax could be considered as one of the forms of the removal of resources from the population, since price setting on industrial goods and food items was also in the hands of the government.

The state used this tool to carry out populist campaigns that were the postwar price reductions. The first lowering of prices took place in February 1946—two weeks after Stalin’s speech before the voters, timed to demonstrate clearly that the words of the leader about impending improvement of life corresponded with real developments. This was precisely the response, judging by monitors of public opinion, that this state action elicited from the population. Also popular among the people was the subsequent lowering of prices, which became an annual event starting in December 1947 (the last one took place in April 1954). Hidden behind the scenes of the propaganda campaigns was the fact that despite the multiple reductions, postwar prices never reached the pre-war level: in April 1953 they were 33.5 percent higher than in 1940 and 59 percent higher than in 1937. The rural population received no benefit from the price decreases. Moreover, they were in many ways carried out at the expense of the peasantry, using the difference between procurement and retail prices for agricultural production, as well as the increase in taxes.


The lowering of prices in 1946 affected only the system of the so-called commercial retail. There, goods were not rationed, but prices were considerably lower than in the system of rationed retail, through which the majority of the urban population was supplied.

This is evidenced by the informational reports about the moods of the population. RGASPI, f. 17, op. 88, d. 684, ll. 54–56.

RGAE, f. 1562, op. 33, d. 1482, ll. 12–27.

Popov, Ekonomicheskaya politika sovetskogo gosudarstva, 99–100.
On the whole the structure and consumption level for the majority of the population of the country changed very little compared to the prewar period. Bread and potatoes remained the foundations of the diets for both urban and rural inhabitants. In fact, the use of potatoes, which often substituted for the non-existent bread, actually increased.\textsuperscript{41} This situation was a consequence not only of the war, but a result of the politics of total collectivization, begun in 1929. In 1940 the production of a number of food products – grain, meat, milk, and vegetables – were lower per capita than in 1928.\textsuperscript{42}

In 1946–1947 the population of a number of regions of the USSR suffered form a severe draught and famine. The food crisis touched not only those living within the directly affected areas. By a special state decree, prices on rationed food items were raised everywhere, and a significant portion of the population (26.5 million), first of all in rural areas, were totally taken off the rationed, i.e. guaranteed food supply.\textsuperscript{43} The language and general direction of the propaganda changed to match the situation. Virtually gone were the promises of the approaching «good life», with mentions of unavoidable new sacrifices and «temporary difficulties» taking their place.

The food crisis of 1946–1947 became a sort of test for the relationship between the people and the government, demonstrated by the mass reaction to the news about the price increases. Despite the sufficiently stormy outburst of negative emotions, the positive opinions in the end carried the day, justifying state policies and accepting the official explanation about the inevitability of «temporary difficulties». The main argument came down to the belief that «since the decision was made by Comrade Stalin, then it must have been the only way».\textsuperscript{44} The blame for the crisis was most often placed either on internal «wreckers» or on the «imperialists», who threatened the Soviet Union with a new war.\textsuperscript{45} The threat of war became a justification for any state policy.

The constant fear of war was a characteristic feature of Soviet mentality. It was through the prism of a military threat that the population saw not only the unpopular state decrees, but also different, often totally unrelated events: Churchill’s speech at Fulton, creation of the Cominform, beginning of military action in Korea, collection of signatures for the Stockholm petition for a ban on atomic weapons, and so on.

In popular consciousness, thoughts about the possibility of a new military conflict were closely tied to their experiences during the past war. Those who survived the calamity of wartime formed a peculiar attitude towards life and its problems. That was the origin of the words-incantations – «if only there would be no war» – and the willingness to «forgive» the state any unpopular decision, as long as it was justified by the desire to avoid a new military conflict.

\textsuperscript{41} RGAE, f. 1562, op. 33, d. 2313, l. 167.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., l. 166.
\textsuperscript{43} See the decree of the Council of Ministers and the Central Committee from 27 September 1946 «Ob ekonomii v raskhodovanii khleba», in RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 1062, ll. 21–23.
\textsuperscript{44} The informational materials of the Central Committee attest the fact that these types of statements were fairly typical. RGASPI, f. 17, op. 121, d. 524, ll.57–62.
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., ll.12–14.
This mood of the people was actively used by the state and its propaganda. From recent allies, the image of the enemy was formed, whose aggressive intentions allegedly prevented the realization of social programs and full assistance to the population that suffered from the war. The myth about hostile encirclement was supplemented by the myth about the existence of a «fifth column» inside the country. As a result, the negative energy was transferred to internal «enemies». The illusion of a joint opposition to external and internal enemies worked for the idea of a unity between the state and the people. This illusion, despite the presence of widespread critical sentiments, did not allow them to grow into an open conflict between the people and the state.

At the same time, this position of the state cannot be considered to be merely a propaganda trick or an example of skillful manipulation of popular opinion. The psychology of hostile encirclement was part of Soviet mentality, a feature characteristic not only for the population, but for the leaders as well. The environment of the Cold War, which changed the international climate and upset the hopes for peaceful collaboration between military allies, actively «worked» towards reinforcing this psychology.

The specter of a military threat kept Soviet society in a state of constant mobilizational readiness, and to a certain extent, guaranteed the viability of the political system. Aimed at survival under the conditions of «hostile encirclement», this system could only successfully function under conditions of confrontation – real or imaginary. The threat of war cemented society and gave the necessary tone to social processes. These moods were used not only by the state, but also by the rapidly growing military-industrial complex, which demanded greater and greater expenses for its needs.

6. Vision of the Future and «the Great Construction-Sites of Communism»

At the same time, in addition to inculcating into the public consciousness the idea of the inevitability of postwar sacrifices and «temporary difficulties», the state also had to worry about charging society with positive emotions. Victory in the war was already insufficient, and promises of «a better life» were too vague and pushed back for an indefinite period of time. The future had to develop some concrete outline and an image of a common goal. Kremlin ideologists presented this future as a communist society.

According to the draft of the party program for 1947, «the All-Union Communist (Bolshevik) Party made its goal the building of a communist society in the USSR in the nearest 20–30 years». In this way, quite concrete terms were determined – not too soon, so as not to stimulate current expectations, but calculated so that the «bright future» would be seen by representatives of the already living generations. This ideological construction had little to do with economic and political realities, except for its compensating effect: the grandeur of the projected

RGASPI, f. 17, op. 125, d. 476, l. 190.
future in a way covered up and leveled the not-so attractive present. To quote Klaus Gestwa, the vision of communism was called upon to «change the landscape» of public consciousness – from ruins to dreams.47

The new party program was not adopted under Stalin, (even the prepared draft was not published), but this idea of «the landscape of tomorrow» soon took on quite a concrete outline: «the great construction-sites of communism» became its embodiment.48 Ambitious plans for «great constructions» – hydro-electric stations on the Don and Volga, Volga-Don and Great Turkmen canals, and other large-scale structures – were supposed to fulfill the role of «visual propaganda», and serve as symbols of the new victories of the Soviet system replacing the symbol of military victory. «Great construction-sites of communism», the idea for which appeared and began to be implemented in 1948, were one of the ways in which the system attempted to reaffirm itself in the conditions of postwar expectations and international failures.

Enormous investments and propaganda campaigns made them appear quite attractive for people, who attempted to realize their potential or to improve their material situation. But real life on these sites turned out to be too far from the propagated communist ideal: inconveniences in daily life, bad organization, corruption, and finally the very contingent of «builders of communism», a substantial proportion of which were prisoners. Economic expediency of such expensive projects also evoked serious doubts, especially taking in consideration accompanying factors: the flooding of large territories, re-settlement of people, and disruption of the ecological balance. But as long as Stalin was alive, no one dared to criticize these «great construction-sites», named after him. Work on them was stopped almost immediately after the death of the dictator, though the idea of the «great construction-sites» itself – «the conquest of space and expanse» to quote a popular Soviet song – continued to live on the state level, finding its incarnation in the projects of Khrushchev’s time: the mastery of the virgin lands, Siberian constructions, and finally the space program.

Conceived as symbols of the future, «great construction-sites of communism» in actuality became symbols of the end of Stalin’s empire, and proved to be just as ambitious and ineffective. Suppressing the positive impulses born by the war, the system reestablished the pre-war status quo, but the problems remained – impoverished countryside, low level of life for the majority of the population, cumbersome administrative structure, and a conservative economic model, receptive to technical innovations only in one sphere – the military. The consensus of society and the state was guaranteed not on the basis of positive values, but at the expense of total control,

suppression of any kind of opposition and consolidation on the basis of the idea of «common threat». The state’s authority among the population largely held on the credit of trust towards the highest power, personified in the figure of Stalin. Any crisis in the upper echelons, and especially the departure of the «vozhd’» himself threatened immediate disruption in the established balance. At the same time, the experience of the war and hopes of the postwar years were not totally lost – some of them were realized in the set of reforms that began already after Stalin’s death.

**ABSTRACTS**

**Das sowjetische Regime und die sowjetische Gesellschaft in der Nachkriegszeit: Innovation und Konservatismus 1945–1953**

Der Beitrag untersucht die grundlegenden Entwicklungen der Sowjetordnung vom Ende des Zweiten Weltkriegs bis zum Tod Stalins: Änderungen in der Herrschaftsstruktur und Administration, der gesellschaftlichen Meinungen, der staatlichen Ideologie und der politischen Praxis. Besondere Aufmerksamkeit widmet er dem Widerspruch zwischen den vom Weltkrieg ausgelösten Impulsen zur Erneuerung und den beharrenden Kräften, die versuchten, die Einrichtungen und Strukturen der Vorkriegszeit wiederherzustellen.


**Le régime et la société soviétiques dans l’après-guerre: innovation et conservatisme, 1945-1953**

L’article étudie les développements fondamentaux qui ont affecté l’ordre soviétique entre la fin de la Seconde guerre mondiale et la mort de Staline, que ce soit au niveau des structures de pouvoir, de l’administration, de l’idéologie étatique ou de la pratique politique. Il se penche en particulier sur la contradiction entre l’aspiration à un renouveau engendrée par la guerre mondiale et les forces conservatrices qui s’efforçaient de rétablir les orientations et les structures de l’avant-guerre.


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