

## from proletarian internationalism to populist russocentrism: thinking about ideology in the 1930s as more than just a ‘Great Retreat’

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The most characteristic aspect of the newly-forming ideology... is *the downgrading of socialist elements within it*. This doesn't mean that socialist phraseology has disappeared or is disappearing. Not at all. The majority of all slogans still contain this socialist element, but it no longer carries its previous ideological weight, the socialist element having ceased to play a *dynamic role* in the new slogans.... *Props from the historic past* – the people, ethnicity, the motherland, the nation and patriotism – play a large role in the new ideology.

–Vera Aleksandrova, 1937<sup>1</sup>

The shift away from revolutionary proletarian internationalism toward russocentrism in interwar Soviet ideology has long been a source of scholarly controversy. Starting with Nicholas Timasheff in 1946, some have linked this phenomenon to nationalist sympathies within the party hierarchy,<sup>2</sup> while others have attributed it to eroding prospects for world

This article builds upon pieces published in *Left History* and presented at the Midwest Russian History Workshop during the past year. My eagerness to further test, refine and nuance this reading of Soviet ideological trends during the 1930s stems from the fact that two book projects underway at the present time pivot on the thesis advanced in the pages that follow. I'm very grateful to the participants of the "Imagining Russia" conference for their indulgence.

<sup>1</sup> The last line in Russian reads: "Bol'shuiu rol' v novoi ideologii igraiat *rekvizity istoricheskogo proshlogo*: narod, narodnost', rodina, natsiia, patriotizm." V. Aleksandrova, "Ideologicheskie metamorfozy," *Sotsialisticheskii vestnik*, 27 April 1937, 14.

<sup>2</sup> Nicholas Timasheff, *The Great Retreat: The Growth and Decline of Communism in Russia* (New York, 1947), chapter 7; Frederick C. Barghoorn, *Soviet Russian Nationalism* (New York, 1956), 28-34, 148-52, 233-7, 260; *idem*, "Four Faces of Soviet Russian Ethnocentrism," in *Ethnic Russia in the USSR: the Dilemma of Dominance*, edited by Edward Allworth (New York, 1980), 57; *idem*, "Russian Nationalism and Soviet Politics: Official and Unofficial Perspectives," in *The Last Empire: Nationality and the Soviet Future*, edited by Robert Conquest (Stanford, 1986), 35; Ivan Dzyuba, *Internationalism or Russification: A Study of the Soviet Nationalities Problem*, edited by M. Davies (London, 1968), 65; Hans Kohn, "Soviet Communism and Nationalism: Three Stages of a Historical Development," in *Soviet Nationality Problems*, edited by Edward Allworth (New York, 1971), 57; Evg[enii] Anisimov, "Stereotypy

revolution,<sup>3</sup> and the stalinist elite's revision of Marxist principles.<sup>4</sup> Others associate the transformation with increasing threats from the outside world,<sup>5</sup> domestic etatism<sup>6</sup> and administrative pragmatism.<sup>7</sup> Still others contend that the phenomenon really only

imperskogo myshleniia," in *Istoriki otvechaiut na voprosy*, 1st issue (Moscow, 1990), 76-82; Zvi Gitelman, "Development and Ethnicity in the Soviet Union," in *The Post Soviet Nationalities: Perspectives on the Demise of the USSR*, edited by Alexander J. Motyl (New York, 1992), 223; G. Kostyrchenko, *V plenu u krasnogo faraona: politicheskie presledovaniia evreev v SSSR v poslednee stalinskoe desiatiletie – dokumental'noe issledovanie* (Moscow, 1994), 7; Stephen Blank, *The Sorcerer as Apprentice: Stalin as Commissar of Nationalities, 1917-1924* (London, 1994), 211-25.

<sup>3</sup> Klaus Mehnert, *Weltrevolution durch Weltgeschichte: die geschichtslehre des Stalinismus* (Kitzingen-Main, 1950), 11, 72-3.

<sup>4</sup> Roman Szporluk, "History and Russian Ethnocentrism," in *Ethnic Russia in the USSR*, 44-45; *idem*, *Communism and Nationalism: Karl Marx versus Friedrich List* (New York, 1988), esp. 219-220; Dmitry V. Pospelovsky, "Ethnocentrism, Ethnic Tensions, and Marxism/Leninism," in *Ethnic Russia in the USSR*, 127; Yuri Y. Glazov, "Stalin's Legacy: Populism in Literature," in *The Search for Self-Definition in Russian Literature*, edited by Ewa Thompson (Houston, 1991), 93-95, 99; Robert J. Kaiser, *The Geography of Nationalism in the USSR* (Princeton, 1994), 144; E. A. Rees, "Stalin and Russian Nationalism," in *Russian Nationalism Past and Present*, edited by G. Hosking and R. Service (New York, 1998), 77, 97, 101-3.

<sup>5</sup> Mehnert, *Weltrevolution durch Weltgeschichte: die geschichtslehre des Stalinismus*, 12-14; P. K. Urban, *Smena tendentsii v sovetskoi istoriografii* (Munich, 1959), 9-11; John B. Dunlop, *The Faces of Contemporary Russian Nationalism* (Princeton, 1983), 10-12; Iu. N. Amiantov, "Vstupitel'naia stat'ia: Stenogramma soveshchaniia po voprosam istorii SSSR v TsK VKP(b) v 1944 godu," *Voprosy istorii* no. 2 (1996): 48; S. V. Konstantinov, "Dorevoliutsionnaia istoriia Rossii v ideologii VKP(b) 30-kh gg.," in *Istoricheskaia nauka Rossii v XX veke* (Moscow, 1997), 226-7; Ronald Grigor Suny, "Stalin and his Stalinism: Power and Authority in the Soviet Union," in *Stalinism and Nazism: Dictatorships in Comparison*, edited by Ian Kershaw and Moshe Lewin (Cambridge UK, 1997), 39; *idem*, *The Soviet Experiment: Russia, the USSR and the Successor States* (Oxford, 1998), 252-3; Dominic Lieven, *Empire: the Russian Empire and Its Rivals* (London, 2000), 305.

<sup>6</sup> C. E. Black, "History and Politics in the Soviet Union," in *Rewriting Russian History: Soviet Interpretations of Russia's Past* (New York, 1956), 24-25; K. F. Shteppa, *Soviet Historians and the Soviet State* (New Brunswick NJ, 1962), 124, 134-35; Marc Slonim, *Soviet Russian Literature: Writers and Problems, 1917-1977*, 2nd edition (New York, 1977), 268; M. Agurskii, *Ideologiya natsional-bol'shevizma* (Paris, 1980), 140-42; Moshe Lewin, *The Making of the Soviet System: Essays in the Social History of Inter-War Russia* (London, 1985), 272-9; M. Heller and A. Nekrich, *Utopia in Power: the History of the Soviet Union from 1917 to the Present*, translated by Phyllis Carlos (New York, 1986), 269; Mikhail Agursky, "The Prospects for National Bolshevism," in *The Last Empire*, 90; Hugh Seton Watson, "Russian Nationalism in Historical Perspective," in *ibid.*, 25, 28; Alain Besançon, "Nationalism and Bolshevism in the USSR," in *ibid.*, 4; Tucker, *Stalin in Power: The Revolution from Above*, 50-8, 319-28, 479-86; V. B. Kobrin, "Pod pressom ideologii," *Vestnik AN SSSR* no. 12 (1990): 36-7; Gerhard Simon, *Nationalismus und Nationalitätenpolitik in der Sowjetunion: Von der totalitären Diktatur zur nachstalinischen Gesellschaft* (Baden-Baden, 1986), 172-73; Stephen Velychenko, *Shaping Identity in Eastern Europe and Russia: Soviet-Russian and Polish Accounts of Ukrainian History* (New York, 1993), 22; Kaiser, *The Geography of Nationalism in the USSR*, 145; Kostyrchenko, *V plenu u krasnogo faraona: politicheskie presledovaniia evreev v SSSR v poslednee stalinskoe desiatiletie*, 7-8; Suny, "Stalin and his Stalinism: Power and Authority in the Soviet Union," 39; Maureen Perrie, "Nationalism and History: the Cult of Ivan the Terrible in Stalin's Russia," in *Russian Nationalism Past and Present*, 107-28.

<sup>7</sup> Roman Szporluk, "Nationalities and the Russian Problem in the USSR: an Historical Outline," *Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 27, no. 1 (1973): 30-31; Dunlop, *The Faces of Contemporary Russian Nationalism*, 10-12; Terry Martin, "An Affirmative Action Empire: Ethnicity and the Soviet State, 1923-1938" (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1995), esp. chapter 10 (forthcoming later this year from Cornell

matured in the 1940s in connection with the exigencies of the German invasion.<sup>8</sup> A few even deny that it occurred during the Stalin period at all.<sup>9</sup> I have argued elsewhere that russocentric themes were privileged in Soviet ideology during the late 1930s within the context of the decade's increasingly pragmatic ideological orientation. In essence, I contend that during the early 1930s, the party hierarchy came to believe that the utopian proletarian internationalism that had typified Soviet ideology during its first fifteen years was inhibiting the mobilization of Soviet society for industrialization and war. Searching for a more populist rallying call, Stalin and his inner circle eventually settled upon russocentric etatism as the most efficient way to promote state-building and popular loyalty to the regime.<sup>10</sup>

While difficult to dispute in broad terms, many of the above-mentioned explanations for the era's ideological about-face seem rather bloodless and mechanistic, if not teleological. The party's flirtation with Russian nationalism, the Russian national past,

UP); Mark von Hagen, "Stalinism and the Politics of Post-Soviet History," in *Stalinism and Nazism: Dictatorships in Comparison*, 305; Suny, *The Soviet Experiment*, 289-90; Lieven, *Empire: the Russian Empire and Its Rivals*, 292, 305-7.

<sup>8</sup> Harold Swayze, *Political Control of Literature in the USSR, 1946-1959* (Cambridge MA, 1962), 28; Lowell Tillet, *The Great Friendship: Soviet Historians on the Non-Russian Nationalities* (Chapel Hill, 1969), 49-61; Christel Lane, *The Rites of Rulers: Ritual in Industrial Society – the Soviet Case* (Cambridge, 1981), 181; Alexander Werth, *Russia at War, 1941-1945* (New York, 1984), 120, 249-50; Vera S. Dunham, *In Stalin's Time: Middleclass Values in Soviet Fiction*, enlarged and updated edition (Durham and London, 1990), 12, 17, 41, 66; Stephen K. Carter, *Russian Nationalism: Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow* (New York, 1990), 51; John Barber and Mark Harrison, *The Soviet Home Front, 1941-1945: A Social and Economic History of the USSR in World War II* (London, 1991), 69; Nina Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead: The Rise and Fall of the Cult of World War II in Russia* (New York, 1994), 63; Genadii Bordiugov, "Bol'sheviki i natsional'naia khorugv'," *Rodina* no. 5 (1995): 74; Victoria E. Bonnell, *Iconography of Power: Soviet Political Posters under Lenin and Stalin* (Berkeley, 1997), 255-57; E. Iu. Zubkova, "Mir mnenii sovetskogo cheloveka, 1945-1948: po materialam TsK VKP(b)," *Otechestvennaia istoriia* no. 3 (1998): 34.

<sup>9</sup> Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley, 1995), 229-30 (Kotkin seemingly contradicts himself deeper into the volume when he acknowledges the cultivation of Russian nationalist sentiments as a part of a shift from "the task of building socialism to that of defending socialism" – see page 357). Simon Dixon flatly denies the existence of a russocentric mobilization drive in his "The Past in the Present: Contemporary Russian Nationalism in Historical Perspective," in *Russian Nationalism Past and Present*, 158; Yitzhak Brudny dates its to the post-1956 time period in his recent *Reinventing Russia: Russian Nationalism and the Soviet State* (Cambridge, 1998), *passim*.

<sup>10</sup> See D. L. Brandenberger and A. M. Dubrovsky, "'The People Need a Tsar': the Emergence of National Bolshevism as Stalinist Ideology, 1931-1941," *Europe-Asia Studies* vol. 50, no. 5 (1998): 871-90; David Brandenberger, "The 'Short Course' to Modernity: stalinist history textbooks, mass culture and the formation of popular Russian national identity, 1934-1955" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1999).

its heroes, symbols and myths, is characterized as almost inevitable, as if it were the only possible alternative to revolutionary proletarian internationalism. Treated in such a reductionist, schematic fashion, little attention has been given to the ambiguities of the 1930s' ideological transformations, nor to the question of agency during the period in question.

To be sure, empirical investigation of these issues has long been complicated by a lack of access to relevant sources. The fact that the Agitprop archives from the 1930s do not seem to have survived has not improved the situation since 1991.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, it does seem possible to nuance and refine our understanding of the contingent nature of the Stalin-era's interwar ideological *volte-face*. Examining the question of mobilizational propaganda during the 1920s and 1930s, this article illustrates how the celebration of conventional Marxist thematics and Soviet patriotism during the early-to-mid 1930s ultimately contributed to the ascendancy of a more populist, russocentric ideological line late in the decade. Insofar as it was this historical contingency that laid the groundwork for the emergence of a sense of modern Russian national identity during the second half of the twentieth century, these dynamics would seem relevant to the greater question of "Imagining Russia" in the present day and age as well.

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Vera Aleksandrova, an émigré commentator on the USSR for the Parisian *Sotsialisticheskii vestnik*, diagnosed the modulation of the official Soviet propaganda line during 1937 as nothing less than an "ideological metamorphosis."<sup>12</sup> In many senses, she

<sup>11</sup> Little remains of what must have been voluminous paperwork generated by the Central Committee's various propaganda departments (Kul'tprop, Agitprop) and their denizens (A. I. Stetskii, etc.). See pages 6-7 of the *Spravochnik* to op. 125 of f. 17 at RTsKhIDNI for more details.

<sup>12</sup> Note her statement quoted in this article's epigraph. A historian who taught at Kiev State University in the 1930s made the same point about the shift from Soviet patriotism to "Russian great power nationalism"

was right. After all, a shift to ethnic particularism in the 1930s – especially Russian ethnic particularism – would seem to have been utterly incompatible with the party ideology of the 1920s. Over the course of the first fifteen years of Soviet power, M. N. Pokrovskii and other early Soviet historian-ideologists had all tended to vilify russocentrism, painting pre-revolutionary Russian history in exclusively dark colors as the story of a chauvinistic, colonizing nation carrying out the will of an oppressive tsarist system.<sup>13</sup> They proposed as an alternative a propaganda line based on Marxist-Leninism which foregrounded the study of historical materialism, social forces, class antagonism and economic development on an international scale. As if in reference to the line from the *Communist Manifesto* that “the workers do not have a fatherland,”<sup>14</sup> ideological tracts during the 1920s repeatedly emphasized the primacy of class analysis. Even after the inauguration of the “Socialism in One Country” thesis in the mid-1920s, Soviet propagandists continued to stress class as a more fundamental and decisive social category than other paradigms drawn along ethnic or national lines. A well-known NEP-era legal commentator epitomized this approach in 1927, declaring: “in our times, patriotism’s role is that of an extremely reactionary ideology, the task of which is to justify imperialist bestiality and deaden the proletariat’s class consciousness....” Summarizing well the prevailing view in the press, the article continued that although it was reasonable for workers to show loyalty to societies organized in their interest, such an emotion had little to do with “national” or “ethnic” affinities. It was, rather, *internationalist*, proletarian solidarity being at the heart of the emotion and not national

in his postwar memoirs – see Konstantin Shteppa, *Russian Historians and the Soviet State* (New Brunswick NJ, 1962), 136, 134.

<sup>13</sup> Roman Szporluk, “History and Russian Ethnocentrism,” in *Ethnic Russia in the USSR: the Dilemma of Dominance*, edited by Edward Allworth (New York, 1980), 42.

<sup>14</sup> See the academic edition printed in a split-face German-Russian format: K. Marks [Marx] and F. Engels, *Manifest kommunisticheskoi partii* (Moscow, 1937), 108-9.

borders or blood.<sup>15</sup> As a result of such thinking, the class-based Soviet allegiance system during the 1920s did not attempt to rally all segments of society together; indeed, non-laboring elements, *lishentsy* and other tsarist hold-overs were generally considered incapable of loyalty to the workers' state and were even forbidden to bear arms in defense of the USSR!<sup>16</sup> A left-leaning American observer commented at the time that the emerging society was “not handicapped by patriotism” – comparing such beliefs to religiosity, he observed that they were “sentimental idealisms to the materialist Bolsheviks.”<sup>17</sup>

But less than five years later, Stalin was starting to call such militancy into question. Acknowledging at a major conference in 1931 that Marx and Engels had been right that “in the past we didn't have and could not have had a fatherland,” he cautioned against taking such a line of reasoning too far. After all, “now, since we've overthrown capitalism and power belongs to the working class, we *have* a fatherland and will defend its independence.”<sup>18</sup>

What was responsible for this about-face? Apparently, the party hierarchy had become frustrated with the previous decade's ineffective ideological line, particularly its materialist and anti-patriotic aspects.<sup>19</sup> Realizing that such concepts were too arcane and

<sup>15</sup> *Entsiklopediia gosudarstva i prava*, vol. 3 (Moscow, 1927), s.v. “Patriotizm,” by P. Stuchka, 252-54; see also *Malaia Sovetskaia entsiklopediia*, vol. 6 (Moscow, 1931), s.v. “Patriotizm,” by M. Vol'fson, 355-56.

<sup>16</sup> See the resolutions of the fifth and twelfth All-Russian Congresses of Soviets, reprinted in *S"ezdy sovetov RSFSR v postanovleniakh i rezoliutsiakh*, edited by A. Ia. Vyshinskii (Moscow, 1939), 90, 94, 306; S. A. Krasil'nikov, “Tyloopolchentsy,” *Ekho* no. 3 (1994): 176-177.

<sup>17</sup> Samuel Harper, *Making Bolsheviks* (New York, 1931), 18.

<sup>18</sup> Emphasis added. Stalin “O zadachakh khoziaistvennikov: rech' na pervoi Vsesoiuznoi konferentsii rabotnikov sotsialisticheskoi promyshlennosti, 4-go fevralia 1931,” in *Voprosy Leninizma* (Moscow, 1934), 445. The extent of the retreat from class analysis under high stalinism is indicted by a discovery made with Serhy Yekelchuk. During the publication of Stalin's collected works in the early 1950s, the above passage was re-edited to read: “in the past we didn't have and could not have had a fatherland. But now, after we've overthrown capitalism and power belongs to *the people*, we have a fatherland and will defend its independence.” I. V. Stalin, “O zadachakh khoziaistvennikov: rech' na pervoi Vsesoiuznoi konferentsii rabotnikov sotsialisticheskoi promyshlennosti, 4-go fevralia 1931,” reprinted in *Sochineniia*, vol. 13 (Moscow, 1951), 39.

<sup>19</sup> Evidence of this is found in Stalin's 1934 critique of Comintern propaganda as excessively schematic and arcane. See G. Dimitrov's diary entry from April 7, 1934: “St[alin]: People do not like Marxist analysis, big phrases and general statements. This is one more inheritance from Zinoviev' s time.” Georgi

abstract to effectively rally the USSR's poorly educated population, Stalin and his colleagues began to look for a more pragmatic, populist alternative that would focus on the initially iconoclastic idea of a "socialist fatherland." By the mid-1930s, *Pravda* was promoting this view without reservation: "Soviet patriotism is a burning feeling of boundless love, a selfless devotion to one's motherland and a profound responsibility for her fate and defense, which issues forth like mighty spring waters from the depths of our people." Such sloganeering attempted to rally to the proletarian cause people from outside the industrial working class, ranging from peasants like A. S. Molokova to scholars like Academician A. Bogomolets and the Arctic explorer O. Iu. Shmidt.<sup>20</sup> In other words, the 1920s' orthodox view of class-based internationalist loyalty was supplanted during the first half of the 1930s by a new understanding of patriotic loyalty that revolved around the interchangeable concepts of "motherland" and "fatherland." The first propaganda campaign to aspire to unite all segments of the society together since 1917, it received prominent mention in an important article by G. Vasil'kovskii in *Pravda* in May 1934. Echoing Stalin's 1931 commentary, he argued that although Marx and Engels had been correct in 1848 that "the workers do not have a fatherland," the October 1917 revolution had changed things dramatically by producing a workers' state in the midst of a capitalist encirclement.<sup>21</sup> In such a situation, patriotic loyalty to the fatherland was not only possible, but desirable. Moreover, official coverage of the issue in the press indicated that social origin was no longer to limit one's ability to be a Soviet loyalist: not

Dimitroff, *Tagebücher, 1933-1943*, edited by Bernhard Bayerlein (Aufbau-Verlag, 2000), 99. The author is grateful to Terry Martin for this reference.

Generally, see chapters one and two of my thesis "The 'Short Course' to Modernity: stalinist history textbooks, mass culture and the formation of popular Russian national identity, 1934-1956."

<sup>20</sup> "Sovetskii patriotizm," *Pravda*, 19 March 1935, 1; A. S. Molokova, "I ia govoriu synam: zashchishchaite nashu stranu," *ibid.*, 18 June 1934, 2; A. Bogomolets, "Pochva, kotoraiia rozhdaet geroev," *ibid.*, 3; "Za rodinu," *ibid.*, 9 June 1934, 1. See also "Mozhno zavidovat' strane, imeiushchei takikh geroev, i geroiam, imeiushchim takuiu rodinu," *ibid.*, 19 June 1934, 2. Further evidence of the transformation underway is supplied by the fact that the term for those deemed hostile to the Soviet cause shifted during this time from "class enemy" [*klassovyi vrag*] to "enemy of the people" [*vrag naroda*].

<sup>21</sup> G. Vasil'kovskii, "Vysshii zakon zhizni," *Pravda*, 28 May 1934, 4. Exiled Mensheviks received news of the mid-1930s ideological shift with surprise – see "Za rodinu," *Sotsialisticheskii vestnik*, 25 June 1934, 1-2; "Propavshii lozung," *ibid.*, 10 May 1936, 1-2.

only could people from outside the ranks of the industrial proletariat like peasants and scholars now genuinely support Soviet power, but even members of the old nobility like Count Aleksei Tolstoi could be welcomed to the cause!<sup>22</sup> The decisive role of class consciousness in Soviet ideology had given way to a new sense of allegiance based on membership within Soviet society. The entire notion of “Soviet patriotism” would be given a firm theoretical basis by K. B. Radek in 1936,<sup>23</sup> marking the maturation of a major press campaign which expanded the notion of “Soviet” from a party-oriented affinity based on class to a broader understanding which would henceforth encompass geographic and cultural semantics as well.<sup>24</sup>

Populism complemented this departure from class as the sole organizational principle of Soviet society. Such an initiative was launched as early as 1931 by people concerned with propaganda and societal mobilization like A. M. Gor’kii, who contended that heroes could be used to popularize the nascent patriotic line “by example.” As G. K. Ordzhonikidze explained to an editor at *Pravda*,

Bathing individuals from among the people in glory – there’s a critical significance to this sort of thing. In capitalist countries, nothing can compare with the popularity of gangsters like Al Capone. In our country, under socialism, the most famous must be the heroes of labor....<sup>25</sup>

<sup>22</sup> “Rech’ tov. V. M. Molotova o novoi konstitutsii,” *Pravda*, 30 November 1936, 2, reprinted in V. M. Molotov, *Stat’i i rechi, 1935-1936* (Moscow, 1937), 225.

<sup>23</sup> K. Radek, “Sovetskii patriotizm,” *Pravda*, 1 May 1936, 6. See also *idem*, “Moia rodina,” *Izvestiia*, 6 July 1934, 2.

On the articulation of Soviet patriotism, see “Kniga o sotsialisticheskoi rodine [review],” *Sputnik agitatora* no. 19-20 (1937): 73-6; K. Sokolov, “Sovetskie patrioty,” *ibid.* no. 3 (1938): 13-14; *idem*, “My – sovetskie patrioty,” *ibid.* no. 14-16 (1938): 14-16; E. Sitovskii, “O sovetskom patriotizme,” *Pod znamenem marksizma* no. 9 (1938): 39-57; “Patriot” and “Patriotizm,” in *Tolkovyi slovar’ russkogo iazyka*, edited by B. M. Volin and D. N. Ushakov, vol. 3 (Moscow, 1939): 68; Vasetskii, “Moral’no-politicheskoe edinstvo sovetskogo obshchestva,” *Bol’shevik* no. 13 (1940): 35-46; M. Kammari, “O proletarskom internatsionalizme i sovetskom patriotizme,” *ibid.* no. 15-16 (1940): 28-42; “Patriotizm,” in *Politicheskii slovar’*, edited by G. Aleksandrov, V. Gal’ianov and N. Rubinshtein (Moscow, 1940), 410.

<sup>24</sup> While patriotic appeals had been used in party conferences and similar forums, 1934 marks the expansion of the use of this rhetoric in public. See “O rodine,” *Pravda*, 7 August 1934, 4, and other similar articles designed for mass readership.

<sup>25</sup> Ia. Ia. Mushpert’s account, cited in S. R. Gershberg, *Rabota u nas takaia: zapiski zhurnalista-pravdisty tridtsatykh godov* (Moscow, 1971), 321.



A marked contrast to the 1920s' focus on anonymous social forces and class struggle, this led to the prioritizing of what was essentially a new genre of agitational literature. Prominent multi-volumed series like Gor'kii's *History of Plants and Factories* and *The History of the Civil War in the USSR* began to assemble a new pantheon of Soviet heroes, socialist myths and modern-day fables. This "search for a usable past"<sup>26</sup> not only focused on shock workers in industry and agriculture, but also lavished attention on prominent Old Bolshevik revolutionaries, industrial planners, party leaders, komsomol officials, comintern activists, Red Army heroes, non-Russians from the republican party organizations and even famous members of the secret police.<sup>27</sup> Such populist, heroic tales from the recent past were seen as providing a common narrative that the entire society would be able to relate to – a rallying-call with greater social application than the previous decade's narrow and impersonal focus on class and materialism.

Reflecting emergent trends in Socialist Realism<sup>28</sup> as well as Stalin's belief in the traditionalist notion of "the great men of history,"<sup>29</sup> this stress on heroism took center

<sup>26</sup> This phrase stems from a famous 1965 essay reprinted in Henry Steele Commager, *The Search for a Usable Past and Other Essays in Historiography* (New York, 1967), 3-27.

<sup>27</sup> S. V. Zhuravlev, *Fenomen "Istorii fabrik i zavodov"* (Moscow, 1997), 4-5, 153-4, 180-1. Also note A. M. Gor'kii *i sozdanie "Istorii fabrik i zavodov"* (Moscow, 1959), 3-12; A. V. Mitrofanova, I. P. Ostapenko, L. S. Rogachevskaia, "Itogi i perspektivy izucheniia istorii predpriatii SSSR," in *Rabochii klass strany Sovetov* (Minsk, 1980), esp. 365-6; and "Pis'mo Stalinu ot Gor'kogo" (27 November 1929), reprinted in *Izvestiia TsK KPSS* no. 3 (1989): 186; and Jeffrey Brooks, "*Thank You, Comrade Stalin*": *Soviet Public Culture from Revolution to Cold War* (Princeton, 1999), 115. Vera Aleksandrova noticed the new socialist pantheon's role in popularizing the revolution in her "Geroi nashego vremeni," *Sotsialisticheskii vestnik*, 10 October 1931, 8-11.

<sup>28</sup> On the emergence of the hero in Socialist Realism, see Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual* (Chicago, 1980), 34-5, 72, 119, 136-55, 148, 8-10; *idem*, "Little Heroes and Big Deeds: Literature Responds to the First Five-Year Plan," in *Cultural Revolution in Russia, 1928-1931*, edited by Sheila Fitzpatrick (Bloomington, 1978), 205-6. Clark treats the issue slightly differently in her *Petersburg: Crucible of the Cultural Revolution* (Cambridge, 1995), chapter 12 and epilogue, esp. 265-6, 278-9, 288.

<sup>29</sup> Although there was little room for individual actors in the classic Marxist understanding of historical materialism, in 1931 Stalin identified a prominent role for decisive leaders aware of the possibilities and limitations of their historical contexts. See "Beseda s nemetskim pisatelem Emilem Liudvigom," *Bol'shevik* no. 8 (1932): 33. The idea is more fully developed in I. Merzon, "Kak pokazyvat' istoricheskikh deiatelei v shkol'nom prepodavanii istorii," *Bor'ba klassov* no. 5 (1935): 53-59; *Istoriia Vsesoiuznoi kommunisticheskoi partii (bol'shevikov): Kratkii kurs*, 16; F. Gorokhov, "Rol' lichnosti v istorii," *Pod znamenem marksizma* no. 9 (1938): 58-78; L. Il'ichev, "O roli lichnosti v istorii," *Pravda*, 27 November 1938, 2; P. Iudin, "Marksistskoe uchenie o roli lichnosti v istorii," *Pod znamenem marksizma* no. 5 (1939): 44-73. Stalin's view is reminiscent of Hegel's (see G. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, translated by J. Sibree [New York, 1956], 30) and dovetailed with emerging trends in Socialist Realism.

stage at the first conference of the Soviet Writers' Union in 1934.<sup>30</sup> In the wake of this conference, a massive array of literature was commissioned to develop and expand upon the new Soviet Olympus and its pantheon of contemporary heroes. Films like *Counterplan*, *Chapaev*, *The Happy Fellows*, *Circus*, *The Frontier*, *Flyers*, *The Courageous Seven*, *Miners* and *Volga-Volga* complemented the campaign with celluloid agitation. Epitomizing this type of propaganda is one of the final scenes in G. V. Aleksandrov's film *The Radiant Path*, a late example of this genre. Mounting a podium at an industrial exhibition, the heroine, an illiterate maid-turned-engineer and Supreme Soviet Deputy(!), leads her audience in a rousing verse from the film's theme song "The March of the Enthusiasts":

In these days of great construction sites  
In the merry din, the ringing and the lights,  
I send my greetings to this country of heroes  
To this country of scientists, to this country of dreamers!<sup>31</sup>

Both populist and pragmatic, such films aimed to inspire "by example," mobilizing Soviet citizens of different social origins, professional occupations and ethnicities under the common banner of Soviet patriotic heroism.

But it would be incorrect to think that film was the chief vehicle for this propaganda, as much of the content for this new campaign was supplied by a torrential wave of books

<sup>30</sup> A. M. Gor'kii and A. N. Tolstoi led the new interest in heroes, which was confirmed by A. A. Zhdanov – see *Pervyi vsesoiuznyi s"ezd sovetskikh pisatelei, 1934: Stenograficheskii otchet* (Moscow, 1934), 8, 17, 417-19, 4. Vera Aleksandrova noticed this phenomenon in emigration with surprise, as evinced by her article "Individually," *Sotsialisticheskii vestnik*, 10 January 1934, 10-11, as did Klaus Mehnert in his *Weltrevolution durch Weltgeschichte: die geschichtslehre des Stalinismus* (Kitzingen-Main, 1950), 45, 57-9. Note also V. P. Stavskii's mention of this subject in his diary, excerpted in *Intimacy and Terror: Soviet Diaries of the 1930s*, edited by Veronique Garros, Natalia Korenevskaya and Thomas Lahusen (New York, 1995), 225.

<sup>31</sup> A loose translation of "V budniakh velikikh stroek, / V veselom grokhote, v ogniakh i zvonakh, / Zdravstvui, strana geroev, / Strana mechtatelei, strana uchenykh!" On the genre's films, see *Vstrechnyi* (F. Ermler and S. Iutkevich, 1932), *Chapaev* (the Vasil'ev "brothers," 1934), *Veselye rebiata* (G. V. Aleksandrov, 1934), *Tsirk* (Aleksandrov, 1935), *Letchiki* (Iu. Raizman, 1935), *Granitsa* (M. Dubson, 1935), *Semero smelykh* (S. Gerasimov, 1935), *Shakhtery* (Iutkevich, 1937), *Volga-Volga* (Aleksandrov, 1938), and *Svetlyi put'* (Aleksandrov, 1940). See Richard Taylor, "Red Stars, Positive Heroes and Personality Cults," in *Stalinism and Soviet Cinema*, edited by Richard Taylor and Derek Spring (London, 1993), 69-89.

and artwork rolling off the presses. Party history texts and glossy picture albums appearing in massive print runs detailed heroism on the factory floor as well as in construction projects, the non-Russian republics and even such exotic fields as aeronautics and polar exploration.<sup>32</sup> Heroic Old Bolsheviks (e.g. A. S. Enukidze, Ia. E Rudzutak), as well as prominent figures from the ranks of industry (Iu. L. Piatakov), the party (A. I. Rykov), the komsomol (A. V. Kosarev), the comintern (O. A. Piatnitskii), the Red Army (A. I. Egorov), the republican parties (F. Khodzhaev) and the NKVD (Ia. Peters, N. I. Ezhov), received tremendous acclaim and seemed destined to grace the pages of official propaganda tracts for many years to come. As noted above, such books, posters and films were designed to elaborate upon the Soviet “usable past,” complementing Socialist Realism’s fictional heroes with famous and recognizable personalities from the first fifteen years of Soviet power.

But although this Soviet patriotic populism was expected to supply a unifying narrative that would provide for an upswell of social support for the regime, the campaign faltered within only a few years of its inception. The Great Terror, which tore gaping rents in the fabric of the party hierarchy, the bureaucracy, the military high command, and the intelligentsia between 1936 and 1938, was – by its very nature – unable to leave the new Soviet pantheon of heroes unscathed.<sup>33</sup> As S. V. Zhuravlev explains in his monograph on the multi-volumed *History of Plants and Factories* book series, the launching of the purges quickly came to wreak havoc with the new propaganda line. For instance,

<sup>32</sup> The best contemporary treatments of Stakhanovite iconography are Clark, *The Soviet Novel, passim*; Lewis H. Siegelbaum, *Stakhanovism and the Politics of Productivity, 1935-1941* (Cambridge, 1988), 223-46; and Victoria E. Bonnell, “The Iconography of the Worker in Soviet Art,” in *Making Workers Soviet: Power, Class and Identity*, edited by Lewis H. Siegelbaum and Ronald Grigor Suny (Ithaca and London, 1994), 362-4, 373-5. See also John McCannon’s fascinating account of the campaign surrounding the conquering of the far north in his *Red Arctic: Polar Exploration and the Myth of the North in the Soviet Union, 1932-1939* (Oxford, 1998).

<sup>33</sup> I refer here, of course, to the political terror and not to the simultaneous mass operations underway in society. On the latter, see Paul Hagenloh, “‘Socially Harmful Elements’ and the Great Terror,” in *Stalinism: New Directions*, edited by Sheila Fitzpatrick (New York, 2000), 286-308; *idem*, “Police, Crime and Public Order in Stalin’s Russia,” (Ph.D diss., University of Texas at Austin, 2000), esp. chapt. 7.

...work on the book [about the Moscow metro system] was undermined in 1936. Mass repressions, beginning in Metrostroï [the metro construction organization], affected the members of the editorial board under Kosarev as well as the best and most active of the workers, specialists and construction leadership – that is, precisely those people who were supposed to “populate” the fundamental book on the history of the metro....<sup>34</sup>

This same phenomenon would be repeated with histories of the party, the Red Army and the komsomol, as successive waves of purging stripped bare the emerging pantheon of heroes and depopulated the narratives under construction. Similar fates befell projects focusing on industrial zones like Magnitogorsk and Moscow’s Stalin Auto Plant.<sup>35</sup> The infamous 1934 book on the construction of the Belomor Canal had to be hastily withdrawn from circulation late in 1937 when its editorial board and many of its principle characters were arrested.<sup>36</sup> Dovetailing with the Belomor Canal book was the 1934 Russian-language edition of *Uzbekistan at 10 Years*. A glossy photo album designed by the famous graphic artist A. M. Rodchenko, it required extensive airbrushing before appearing in Uzbek during the following year after the fall of Avel’ Enukidze necessitated his removal from group portraits printed in the volume.<sup>37</sup> Even in revised form, however, *Uzbekistan at 10 Years* did not remain in circulation for long due to the widening maw of the party purges. Rodchenko’s own copy of the book reveals preparations for a third edition in a particularly gruesome manner: blacked out in India ink are the pictures of prominent party and state functionaries like Ia. E. Rudzutak and Ia. Peters, as well as luminaries from the Uzbek party organization like F. Khodzhaev, A.

<sup>34</sup> Zhuravlev, *Fenomen “Istorii fabrik i zavodov,”* 113, see also 73-77, 154. The dimensions of arrests among Stakhanovites require quantification: Lewis Siegelbaum, for instance, contends that few were ever purged in his *Stakhanovism and the Politics of Productivity*, 225.

<sup>35</sup> Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization*, 372; Kenneth M. Straus, *Factory and Community in Stalin’s Russia* (Pittsburgh, 1997), 332.

<sup>36</sup> Cynthia Ruder, *Making History for Stalin: the Story of the Belomor Canal* (Gainsville, 1998), 88-9, 207, 43. Generally, see *Belomorsko-Baltiiskii kanal imeni Stalina: istoriia stroitel’sva*, edited by M. Gor’kii, L. Averbakh et al. (Moscow, 1934).

<sup>37</sup> See the juxtaposition of photographs from the two editions of *10 let Uzbekistana* presented in David King, *The Commissar Vanishes: the Falsification of Photographs and Art in Stalin’s Russia* (New York, 1997), 136-37.

Ikramov, A. A. Tsekher, D. Abikova, A. Babaev and T. Khodzhaev, all of whom “disappeared” between 1936 and 1938.<sup>38</sup>

While the sagas surrounding the Belomor and Uzbek books are instructive, perhaps nothing was as dramatic as the fiasco surrounding the first volume of the celebrated *History of the Civil War in the USSR* series. A narrative focusing on the prelude to the revolutionary events of October 1917, this enormous tome required reissuing in 1938 after the pages of its first edition were found to be littered with the names of Old Bolsheviks who had vanished during the on-going purges. Brief consideration of the volume’s contents graphically illustrates how the Great Terror compromised the propaganda value of such texts. Of the sixty-eight individuals who are mentioned in a positive light on the pages of the 1935 edition, fifty-eight were given treatment broad enough to be considered truly “heroic.” During the first stages of the party purges in 1936, nearly half of the members of this pantheon were arrested, requiring the volume to be withdrawn from circulation. When the second edition appeared in 1938, it had been stripped of numerous pictures, illustrations and some 27 pages of text, not to mention all passing references to fallen heroes like Piatakov, Rykov and Piatnitskii.<sup>39</sup> The next volume in the series – a 600-page book concerning the single month of October 1917 – did not appear until 1943(!), the five-year delay apparently stemming from the difficulty involved in drafting a detailed narrative about the revolution without mentioning dozens of individuals now considered enemies of the people.<sup>40</sup> The third volume in the series would not appear until 1957.

<sup>38</sup> The relevant pages from Rodchenko’s copies of both editions of the volume are reproduced in *ibid.*, 126-33, 136-37.

<sup>39</sup> Twenty-six were recast as traitors or purged from the narrative entirely: Ia. A. Berzin, A. A. Bitsenko, G. I. Bokii, M. P. Bronskii, N. P. Briukhanov, A. S. Bubnov, N. I. Bukharin, Iu. P. Gaven, P. F. Kodetskii, A. L. Kolegaev, S. V. Kossior, N. N. Krestinskii, G. I. Lomov (Oppokov), V. I. Miliutin, N. Osinskii (V. V. Obolenskii), A. N. Paderin, Ia. Ia. Peche, N. A. Pozharov, G. L. Piatakov, O. A. Piatnitskii, F. F. Raskol’nikov, A. I. Rykov, I. T. Smigla, G. Ia. Sokol’nikov, G. F. Fedorov and K. K. Iurenev. Generally, compare the 1935 and 1938 editions of *Istoriia grazhdanskoi voiny v SSSR*, vol. 1, *Podgotovka Velikoi proletarskoi revoliutsii (ot nachala voiny do nachala Oktiabria 1917 g.)*.

<sup>40</sup> *Istoriia grazhdanskoi voiny v SSSR*, vol. 2, *Velikaia proletarskaia revoliutsiia* (Moscow, 1943).

But the purges' fall-out was not limited to commemorative albums and picture books. A. P. Dovzhenko's film *Shchors*, a civil war epic about a Ukrainian revolutionary commissioned in 1935, had to be reshot after Shchors' right-hand man fell victim to the purges and had to be removed from the screenplay.<sup>41</sup> (Such complications seem to have delayed the completion of many of the films slated for release in the mid-to-late 1930s.<sup>42</sup>) Prominent mention of fallen Red Army heroes like A. I. Egorov required excision from public school history texts between 1937 and 1941.<sup>43</sup> The release of the seminal *Short Course on the History of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks)* was repeatedly postponed as the purges' bloodletting necessitated the removal of numerous names – not only from the narrative, but from the book's editorial board as well. Finally released in the fall of 1938, the *Short Course* required additional revisions two years later in order to eliminate all mention of N. I. Ezhov, who had been arrested and shot during the intervening period.<sup>44</sup> Rumors of further purges even endangered the small library of

<sup>41</sup> For more on the purges' hamstringing of *Shchors*, commissioned at the height of the "Soviet patriotism" campaign but released only in 1939, see George Liber's *Triple Exposure: Alexander Dovzhenko's Ukrainian Visions, Soviet Illusions and Stalinist Realities*, unpublished m.s., 2000, chapter 8; Paul Babitsky and Martin Lutich, *The Soviet Movie Industry: Two Case Studies*, No. 31, *Research Program on the USSR Mimeograph Series* (New York, 1953), 62, 27, 7; and Paul Babitsky and John Rimberg, *The Soviet Film Industry* (New York, 1955), 161.

<sup>42</sup> According to one source, of some 102 films due to be completed by November 1, 1936, only fifteen (15%) were delivered. RSFSR studios managed to deliver 22.5% of their orders, while studios in Belorussia managed 20%, Ukraine 10% and Georgia 8%. Studios in Azerbaidzhdan and Armenia failed to release a single film. See "Kak realizuetsia plan vypuska fil'mov," *Iskusstvo kino* no. 11 (1936): 36-40. On failures in cinematic propaganda for children, see "Nad chem rabotaet Soiuzdetkino," *ibid.*, no. 10 (1936): 24-6.

Two Soviet film industry insiders illustrate the difficulty of shooting films with contemporary subject matter even more clearly in their memoirs. Despite party directives that called for the majority of films shot in 1935 to concern the Soviet present, 75% ended up focusing on historical subjects because of difficulties encountered with the former genre. See Babitsky and Lutich, *The Soviet Movie Industry: Two Case Studies*, 51-52, who apparently refer to D. Nikol'skii, "Siuzhety 1936 goda," *Iskusstvo kino* no. 5 (1936): 21-26.

<sup>43</sup> Compare page 178 of the 1937 edition of *Kratkii kurs istorii SSSR*, edited by A. V. Shestakov, with the same page in the 1941 edition.

<sup>44</sup> Generally, see Appendix C to "The 'Short Course' to Modernity." On the removal of Ezhov's name from pages 197, 234 and 313 of the 1938 edition of *Istoriia Vsesoiuznoi kommunisticheskoi partii (bol'shevikov)*, see "Tovarishchu I. V. Stalinu ot Aleksandrova" (7 November 1940), *Rossiiskii tsentr khraneniia i izucheniiia dokumentov noveishei istorii* (hereafter RTsKhIDNI), f. 17, op. 125, d. 10, l. 111. The author is grateful to Peter Blitstein for this reference.

publications revolving around the *Cheliuskintsy*, O. Iu. Shmidt and other hero-explorers of the far north.<sup>45</sup>

Such turmoil in state publishing and cinematography quickly spread to affect mobilization efforts throughout society. Uncertainty on the ground level over what to read (and what to teach) panicked officials and propagandists alike, bringing political agitation efforts to a standstill.<sup>46</sup> Years later, an only marginally-literate peasant described the effect that the collapse of the Soviet heroic Olympus had on him:

...in the 6th and 7th grade, we see the portraits of Stalin and his closest associates, Blucher [sic, Bliukher] and Egorov. We learn their biography [sic] by heart and repeat it over and over again. Then, two weeks pass, and everyone of us is told that these people are the enemies of the people. They don't tell us what they've done, but they simply affix this label to them and tell us that they are enemies who have had contact with foreign agents. Now, even 14 or 15 year olds begin to wonder how the closest associates of Stalin who have been associated with him for 20 years suddenly turn out to be enemies of the people. He begins to have distrust and suspicion. For instance, as a child I picked Voroshilov as my personal hero. But, say, another boy picked Tukhachevski. All the boy's fantasies are destroyed. What should he think now, this boy, who believed so blindly before?

Such emotions of dismay and anxiety seem to have been widespread in the USSR as successive waves of purging compromised individuals who had only the day before defined valor and patriotism in the society. Additional detail is supplied by the reminiscences of a veteran of the Soviet merchant marine, who recalled after the war that the problems had come to the fore for him in the mid-1930s, "let's say from 1933 to 1937." Specifically, it was the exposure of enemies among the ranks of USSR's heroic pantheon,

the shootings, the trials, people like Tukhachevsky, Bukharin and Sinoviev [sic, Zinov'ev]. But how would one believe that? One day, their pictures was on the walls in school and in the text-books [sic]. The next day, all of a sudden we were told that they're enemies of the people. Now, with Tukhachevsky, for instance, I remember coming to school and someone was taking off the portrait [from the wall]. Then all of the boys would scratch out his picture in the text-books [and] scribble derogatory phrases about him. Now that made me think how could that happen, how could that be?"<sup>47</sup>

<sup>45</sup> On the purges' chilling effect on those involved with arctic exploration, see McCannon, *Red Arctic: Polar Exploration and the Myth of the North in the Soviet Union*, 149-68.

<sup>46</sup> For instance, in late 1937 or early 1938, I. Sorokin, the city procurator of Magnitogorsk, alerted the city's party organization to the fact that local libraries were lending out copies of the *History of the Civil War in the USSR* which contained portraits of traitors including Bukharin, Zinov'ev and "even Trotsky." See Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization*, 583-84. See also Appendix B note 15.

<sup>47</sup> The idiosyncratic syntax stems from the telegraphic translation of the interviews in the 1950 Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System. See HP, no. 27, schedule A, vol. 3, 36-7; no. 7, schedule A, vol. 1,

As clear from such accounts, propaganda revolving around Soviet patriotism was virtually hamstrung by the events of 1936-1938 due to the fact that this campaign had been predicated on the ability to wax rhapsodic about specific heroes from the recent past. Unable to even publish a tenable Stalin biography for much of the 1930s due to the purges' effect on the General Secretary's entourage,<sup>48</sup> the rallying of popular support for the regime "by example" became almost prohibitively difficult. This state of affairs ultimately forced the party hierarchy to resume its now increasingly frantic "search for a usable past" according to an entirely different strategy.

\* \* \* \* \*

On the eve of the meltdown of the Soviet pantheon of heroes, another campaign – "the Friendship of the Peoples" – was maturing under the same patriotic rubric. Designed to aid in the mobilization of the diverse Soviet nations, it had been inaugurated by Stalin in December 1935<sup>49</sup> and revolved around the interethnic cooperation and racial harmony purportedly made possible by socialism.<sup>50</sup> That being said, it also contained another dimension that had first surfaced (interestingly enough) in the 1934 article by Vasil'kovskii referred to above: the valorization of the *Russian* proletariat "who gave the world the October revolution." Taboo since 1917, this Russian ethnic particularism was supported by references to a then little-known fragment of Leniniana entitled "On the

24. For further accounts, see HP, no. 11, schedule A, vol. 2, 36; no. 41, schedule A, vol. 4, 24, etc. See also Amir Weiner, *Making Sense of War: the Second World War and the Fate of the Bolshevik Revolution* (Princeton, 2001), 64-5.

<sup>48</sup> See D. L. Brandenberger, "Sostavlenie i publikatsiia ofitsial'noi biografii vozhdia – katekhizisa stalinizma," *Voprosy istorii* no. 12 (1997): 141-50.

<sup>49</sup> "Rech' tov. Stalina na soveshchanii peredovykh kolkhoznikov i kolkhoznits Tadzhikistana i Turkmenistana," *Pravda*, 5 December 1935, 3. Parts of this speech remind the reader of the colonial syndrome identified by Edward Said in *Orientalism* (New York, 1978).

<sup>50</sup> Martin, "An Affirmative Action Empire: Ethnicity and the Soviet State, 1923-1938," 919-81.



National Pride of the Great Russians.”<sup>51</sup> An integral, if not officially-acknowledged element of the “Friendship of the Peoples” campaign, this russocentric undercurrent resurfaced again in a *Pravda* editorial in early 1936:

All the peoples – participants in the great socialist construction – may be proud of the results of their labor; every one of them – from the smallest to the largest – are Soviet patriots enjoying a full array of rights. First among these equals is the Russian people, the Russian workers and the Russian toilers, whose role throughout the whole Great Proletarian Revolution, from the first victories to the present day’s brilliant period of development, is exceptionally large.

Why was this russocentrism such an central component of the “Friendship of the Peoples” sloganeering? Apparently, the purges’ paralysis of campaigns revolving around individual Soviet heroes had left few alternatives to the rehabilitation of an ethnically-organized “usable past.” Stalin’s praise of the dexterous “revolutionary Russian sweep-of-the-hand,” repeated several times in the text of the editorial, was not accidentally juxtaposed against the under-development of the non-Russian Soviet peoples. In the wake of this article, the parenthetical expression “first among equals” would be used with increasing frequency in reference to the Russian people’s place in Soviet society,<sup>52</sup> foreshadowing the later emergence of an explicit ethnic hierarchy.

Although the press initially limited its Russian ethnic particularism to contributions during the revolution, with time, Civil War victories and the Stakhanovite movement also assumed Russian characteristics.<sup>53</sup> Then, in January 1937, this cultural sphere of influence was expanded beyond the parameters of the Soviet experience itself, when the figurehead President of the USSR, M. I. Kalinin, proclaimed at a major conference that:

The Russian people have drawn out of their midst no few people who, by means of their talent, have raised the world’s cultural level – Lomonosov, Pushkin, Belinskii, Dobroliubov, Chernyshevskii, Nekrasov, Shchedrin, Chekhov, Tolstoi, Gor’kii, Surikov, Repin, Glinka, Tchaikovsky, Rimskii-Korsakov,

<sup>51</sup> Vasil’kovskii, “Vysshii zakon zhizni,” 4; V. I. Lenin, “O natsional’noi gordosti velikorossov,” reprinted in his *Sochineniia*, vol. 18 (Moscow, 1936), 80-83, esp. 81. Stalin associated 1917 specifically with the Russian working class in his 1923 essay “K voprosu o strategii i taktike russkikh kommunistov,” reprinted in his *Sochineniia*, vol. 5 (Moscow, 1952), 178-180.

<sup>52</sup> “RSFSR,” *Pravda*, 1 February 1936, 1. The article obliquely quoted Stalin’s 1924 essay “Ob osnovakh leninizma,” reprinted in *Sochineniia*, 6: 186-88.

<sup>53</sup> “RSFSR,” 1.

Mendeleev, Timiriachev, Pavlov, Michurin, Tsiolkovskii.... All of this speaks to the Russian people's role in the development of world culture.<sup>54</sup>

Triumphant recognition of such an array of cultural figures from the *ancien régime* – and their specific identification as ethnic Russians – signaled the scope and direction of the new line. The transformation of A. S. Pushkin into an icon of official Soviet literature during January and February of 1937 catalyzed this revival of prominent names and heroes from the pre-revolutionary Russian past. Tsarist-era political and military figures like Aleksandr Nevskii, Peter the Great, Aleksandr Suvorov and Mikhail Kutuzov were even rehabilitated later that fall.<sup>55</sup> Shortly thereafter, *Bol'shevik*, the party's main theoretical journal, would wax rhapsodic that “the history of the Russian people is the history of their heroic fight for independence and freedom against numerous enemies, conquerors and interventionists....”<sup>56</sup> Placing the Russians at the head of the multiethnic Soviet family of peoples, the *Minor Soviet Encyclopedia* would argue on the eve of the war that “the culture of the USSR's peoples is historically tied to the culture of the Russian people. It has always experienced and will continue to experience the benevolent influence of the advanced Russian culture.”<sup>57</sup> Unmistakable here is a shift in emphasis in Soviet ideology from the workers as the vanguard *class* of the Soviet experiment to the Russian people as its vanguard *nation*.<sup>58</sup> Russocentrism and the celebration of the

<sup>54</sup> M. N. Kalinin, “O proekte konstitutsii RSFSR: nasha prekrasnaia rodina,” *Pravda*, 16 January 1937, 2. See also “Velikii russkii narod,” *ibid.*, 15 January 1937, 1; “Konstitutsiia geroicheskogo naroda,” *ibid.*, 16 January 1937, 1.

<sup>55</sup> Synchronized with the revival of tsarist-era political history was the suppression of leftist holdovers who had criticized or satirized the old regime in historiography (the Pokrovskii school) the arts (Dem'ian Bednyi), etc. See “The ‘Short Course’ to Modernity,” chapters three, five and six; A. M. Dubrovskii, “Kak Dem'ian Bednyi ideologicheskuiu oshibku sovershil,” in *Otechestvennaia kul'tura i istoricheskaia nauka XVIII-XX vekov: sbornik statei* (Briansk, 1996): 143-51; Kevin Platt and David Brandenberger, “Terribly Romantic, Terribly Progressive or Terribly Tragic? Rehabilitating Ivan IV Under I.V. Stalin, 1937-1953,” *Russian Review* vol. 58, no. 4 (1999): 635-54.

<sup>56</sup> B. Volin, “Velikii russkii narod,” *Bol'shevik* no. 9 (1938): 26-37, cite on 28. See also A. Kazakov, “Iz istorii nashei rodiny: ‘Ledovoe poboishche’,” *Pravda*, 27 August 1937, 4.

<sup>57</sup> *Malaia Sovetskaia Entsiklopediia*, vol. 9 (Moscow, 1941), s.v. “Russkie,” by B. Volin, 319-26, cite on 326.

<sup>58</sup> This is a paraphrase of Sheila Fitzpatrick's memorable statement on the shift at the University of Chicago's “Empire and Nation in the Soviet Union” Conference, October 26, 1997.

Russian historical past would form an important part of official propaganda campaigns until after Stalin's death in 1953.

But why such an about-face from proletarian internationalism to something perilously close to full-blown nationalism? What can explain such heresy? As alluded to above, a pragmatic and urgent need for mobilization predicated this sea-change in party ideology. By the early 1930s, the propaganda of the previous decade was increasingly seen as being excessively abstract, inaccessibly arcane and insufficiently populist. Importantly, the new campaigns surrounding Soviet-era heroes were quickly complemented by the revival of historical personalities from the national past. Instructive is one of the first major challenges to the historical materialist line of the 1920s, which occurred during a Politburo discussion of public school history textbooks in March 1934. Objecting to the presentations of several distinguished Bolshevik pedagogues, Stalin launched into a vicious critique of their advocacy of textbooks that privileged materialism and class analysis over a more traditional historical narrative.<sup>59</sup> A leading ideologist present at the meeting paraphrased Stalin's remarks several days later:

These textbooks and the instruction [of history] itself is far from what is needed, and Comrade Stalin talked about this at the Politburo meeting. The textbooks and the instruction [of history in the schools] itself is done in such a way that sociology is substituted for history.... What generally results is some kind of odd scenario [*neponiatnaia kartina*] for Marxists – a sort of bashful relationship – [in which] they attempt not to mention tsars and attempt not to mention prominent representatives of the bourgeoisie.... We cannot write history in this way! Peter was Peter, Catherine was Catherine. They relied on specific classes and represented their mood and interests, but all the same they took action – these were historic individuals – they were not ours, but we must give an impression of this epoch, about the events which took place at that

Serhy Yekelchik has recently argued that the Ukrainians were elevated to the status of a “great people” as well between 1939 and 1941. My impression is that this rehabilitation was a subordinate component of the campaign to justify the Sovietization of Eastern Poland rather than a more independent ideological development bent on valorizing the Ukrainian people, per se. Not only does the timing of the campaign point directly to the 1939 partitioning of Poland, but the historical parables that received the most publicity (e.g. 1654, Bogdan Khmel'nitskii and the Polish Yoke) seem a little too convenient to be merely coincidental. Of course, regardless of the reasons behind the promotion of “the great Ukrainian people” between 1939 and 1941, this campaign should not be seen as contradicting the emerging line which labeled the Russian people as “the first among equals.” See Serguei Ekelchik [Serhy Yekelchik], “History, Culture and Nationhood Under High Stalinism: Soviet Ukraine, 1939-1954” (Ph.D. diss., University of Alberta, 2000), esp. 21-33.

<sup>59</sup> This “schematic” view of history, in decline since early in the decade, was thoroughly renounced during M. N. Pokrovskii's posthumous denunciation in January 1936. See my “Who Killed Pokrovskii? (the second time): the Prelude to the Denunciation of the Father of Soviet Marxist Historiography, January 1936,” *Revolutionary Russia* vol. 11, no. 1 (1998): 67-73.

time, who ruled, what sort of a government there was, what sort of policies were carried out, and how events transpired. Without this, we won't have any sort of civil history.<sup>60</sup>

Stalin's commentary was understood by insiders as a call for the revival of conventional state- and personality-based narratives in historically-oriented propaganda. A. S. Bubnov, the Commissar of Education, followed up on Stalin's prescriptions at a historians' conference later that month. Focusing on the excessively schematic (or "sociological") approach to history reflected in the historiography of the 1920s, Bubnov complained that theory was dominating the discussion of history in the schools, leaving events, personalities, and their interconnection to play only a secondary role. As a result, he noted, "an entire array of the most important historical figures, events, wars, etc. slips past [our students] unnoticed . . . . Under such conditions, we have a very large over-encumbrance of what can be referred to as the sociological component, and a major lack, even a complete absence in some places, of what can be referred to as pragmatic history."<sup>61</sup> Such calls for "pragmatic history" (essentially the "usable past" discussed above) echoed throughout such forums during the mid 1930s. Synchronized with the above-mentioned explosion of patriotic rhetoric in the press, "pragmatic history" was to catch people's imaginations and promote a unified sense of identity that the previous decade's materialism had failed to stimulate.

Aside from the changes in tone and content, however, we see in Stalin's recommendations something else as well: the endorsement of what was essentially an etatist interpretation of the pre-revolutionary history of the USSR. Such redirection of historiographic priorities to highlight statehood – particularly Russian statehood – is

<sup>60</sup> "Stenogramma zasedaniia Prezidiuma Komakademii o zadachakh nauchnoi issledovatel'skoi raboty v oblasti izucheniia istorii i o rabote nad izdaniem 'Istorii SSSR'" (13 March 1934), Arkhiv Rossiiskoi Akademii Nauk (hereafter Arkhiv RAN), f. 350, op. 1, d. 906, ll. 1-3ob. See also A. M. Dubrovskii and D. L. Brandenberger, "Grazhdanskoi istorii u nas net' (ob odnom vystuplenii I. V. Stalina vesnoi 1934 goda)," in *Problemy otechestvennoi i vseмирnoi istorii* (Briansk, 1998), 96-100.

<sup>61</sup> "Stenogramma soveshchaniia istorikov i geografov pri Narkome tov. Bubnove A. S." (8 March 1934), Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi federatsii (formerly known as TsGA, hereafter GARF), f. 2306, op. 69, d. 2177, ll. 1-2, 3.

significant, as we see here the outline of an agenda to replace the 1920s' broad multicultural materialist focus on the history of classes and peoples with a single, linear, nation-based narrative.<sup>62</sup> Such an impression is confirmed by an account of another Politburo discussion from March 1934 in which Bubnov proposed that the official historical line ought to concern not just the linear pre-revolutionary "history of the USSR," but a broader and more inclusive "history of the peoples of Russia." Interrupting him, Stalin disagreed, implying that such a focus was excessively diffuse. Asserting that a single thousand-year political narrative ought to be at the center of the new curriculum, he noted simplistically that "the Russian people in the past gathered the other peoples together and have begun that sort of gathering again now."<sup>63</sup> Although terse, Stalin was visibly rejecting a "multicultural" history of the region in favor of a historical narrative which would implicitly focus on the Russian people's state-building across time. When the next generation of history textbooks rolled off the presses in 1937, they dovetailed perfectly with this vision of the "usable past,"<sup>64</sup> as did some of the biggest films of the day which also valorized pre-revolutionary princes, monarchs and generals, e.g. *Peter the First*, *Aleksandr Nevskii*, *Minin and Pozharskii*, *Suvorov*, etc.<sup>65</sup> The same idea also reverberates throughout a toast that Stalin gave at K. E. Voroshilov's dacha after

<sup>62</sup> According to S. A. Piontkovskii, Stalin attacked the same feature of the textbooks two weeks later at a Politburo meeting, cursing that "These textbooks aren't good for anything [*nikuda ne godiatsia*]... What[,] he] said, [']the heck is 'the feudal epoch,' 'the epoch of industrial capitalism,' 'the epoch of formations' – it's all epochs and no facts, no events, no people, no concrete information, not a name, not a title, and not even any content itself. It isn't any good for anything.['] Stalin repeated several times that the texts weren't good for anything. Stalin said that what we need are textbooks with facts, events and names. History must be history." The diary of Piontkovskii, which is held in the inaccessible archives of the former NKVD (TsA FSB RF, d. R-8214), is excerpted in Aleksei Litvin, *Bez prava na mysl': istorik v epokhu Bol'shogo terrora – ocherk sudeb* (Kazan', 1994), 55-57.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 56. Stalin's comment on the Russian people's historic consolidation of non-Russian minorities during the tsarist era echoes a similar statement in his famous 1913 essay on the national question. Striking is his expansion of the analysis in 1934 to identify a leading role for Russians in *Soviet* construction. See "Marksizm i natsional'nyi vopros," reprinted in *Sochineniia*, 2: 304.

<sup>64</sup> See "The 'Short Course' to Modernity," chapter three.

<sup>65</sup> *Petr Pervyi* (V. Petrov, 1937, 1939), *Aleksandr Nevskii* (S. Eisenstein, 1938), *Minin i Pozharskii* (V. Pudovkin, 1939), *Suvorov* (Pudovkin, M. Doller, 1941),

reviewing the Red Square parade commemorating the twentieth anniversary of the revolution in 1937:

I want to say a few words which may not seem too festive. The Russian tsars did much that was bad. They robbed and enslaved the people. They led wars and seized territory in the interests of the landowners. But they did do one good thing – they put together an enormous state [stretching] out to Kamchatka. We inherited this state. We Bolsheviks were the first to put together and strengthen this state not in the interests of the landowners and capitalists, but for the toilers and for all the great peoples who make up this state.<sup>66</sup>

Etatist sympathies, then, in conjunction with a strong current of populism and frustration with the purges' paralysis of propaganda revolving around Soviet heroes, led the party hierarchy to conclude that the most effective historical narrative for the diverse Soviet population would be a Russian-centered one stressing old-fashioned values like state-building and national defense.<sup>67</sup> Late in the decade, Stalin would even call for adjustments to be made to the official conceptualization of "Soviet patriotism" in order to account for the shift.<sup>68</sup> M. I. Kalinin responded to Stalin's calls to "develop and cultivate" the concept in 1940 with the announcement that patriotism was at its core a

<sup>66</sup> Stalin's toast is recorded in the diary of G. M. Dimitrov – see A. Latyshev, "Kak Stalin Engel'sa svergal," *Rossiiskaia gazeta*, 22 December 1992, 4.

According to an account of K. E. Voroshilov's adjutlieutenant, R. P. Khmel'nitskii, this scene repeated itself the following day in the Kremlin in a more elaborate form. There, Stalin noted that "Old Russia has been transformed into today's USSR where all peoples are identical.... Among the equal nations, states and countries of the USSR, the most Soviet and the most revolutionary is the Russian nation." Robert C. Tucker published an English translation of this speech in his *Stalin in Power: The Revolution from Above, 1928–1941* (New York, 1990), 482-85, 660. The author is grateful for the latter's willingness to share the original Russian transcript.

<sup>67</sup> For a related discussion, see G. D. Burdei, *Istoriia i voina, 1941-1945* (Saratov, 1991), 170.

<sup>68</sup> "Doklad tov. Stalina," in *XVIII s"ezd vsesoiuznoi kommunisticheskoi partii(b), 10-21 marta 1939: Stenograficheskiĭ otchet* (Moscow, 1939), 26-7.

A year later, Stalin added that steps should be taken to tone down of "the cult of the civil war." Propaganda surrounding the 1918-1921 time period was apparently precluding a more promising line revolving around imperial military traditions. Stalin had apparently first attacked hagiography revolving around the civil war in late March 1940 at a Central Committee plenum and then again on the final day of the Main Military Council's conference in mid-April. See "O voennoi ideologii" ([May 1940]), RGVA, f. 9, op. 36s, d. 4252, l. 116 (published in D. L. Brandenberger, "'Lozhnye ustanovki v dele vospitaniia i propagandy: doklad nachal'nika Glavnogo politicheskogo upravleniia RKKa L. Z. Mekhlisa o voennoi ideologii, 1940 g.," *Istoriicheskii arkhiv* no. 5-6 [1997]: 92, 85); V. Malyshev, "Proidet desiatok let, i eti vstrechi ne vosstanovish' uzhe v pamiatii," *Istochnik* no. 5 (1997): 110; *Zimniaia voina 1939-1940*, vol. 2, *Stalin i finskaia kampaniia (Stenogramma soveshchaniia pri TsK VKP(b))*, edited by E. N. Kul'kov and O. A. Rzheshesvskii (Moscow, 1999), 274-78; "Zapis' ukazanii tovarishcha Stalina na zasedanii Komissii Glavnogo voennogo soveta 21 apreliia 1940 goda v Kremle," RGVA, f. 4, op. 14, d. 2768, ll. 64-5; *Istoriia Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny Sovetskogo Soiuzna*, vol. 1, edited by P. N. Pospelov (Moscow, 1960), 277; Carl Van Dyke, *The Soviet Invasion of Finland, 1939-1940* (London and Portland, 1997), 202.

sense of pride and loyalty which had united both Russians and the “most conscious elements of the oppressed nationalities” since the mid-nineteenth century under the progressive banner of Russian “national culture”!<sup>69</sup> Such a russocentric vision was the end result of the “ideological metamorphosis” that Aleksandrova had identified in 1937. In the words of another exile writing at about the same time, Soviet patriotism during the second half of the 1930s had become “simply Russian patriotism.”<sup>70</sup>

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It should come as no surprise that some in the Soviet society of the 1930s were horrified by the ideological shift that this article has surveyed over the course of the preceding pages. In early 1939, a veteran leftist literary critic named V. I. Blium even had the audacity to complain directly to Stalin in a personal letter about how “Soviet patriotism has been distorted and is sometimes nowadays beginning to display all the characteristics of racial nationalism.” But the party hierarchy remained committed to the new line,<sup>71</sup> even amplifying it somewhat between 1941 and 1945. Little else of substance changed until the mid-1950s.

This article has traced the changing semantics of Soviet mobilizational ideology during the 1930s, focusing on the wane of internationalism, the emergence of Soviet patriotism and the remodulation of this concept away from a focus on a Soviet heroic

<sup>69</sup> M. I. Kalinin, “O kommunisticheskom vospitanii /doklad na sobranii partiinogo aktiva gor. Moskvy/” (2 October 1940), Tsentr khraneniia dokumentov molodezhnykh organizatsii (hereafter TsKhDMO), f. 1, op. 23, d. 1389, ll. 27-32; printed in M. I. Kalinin, *Izbrannie proizvedeniia*, vol. 3 (Moscow, 1962), 396-418 (cites on pages 30-32 and 410-412 respectively).

<sup>70</sup> Nicolas Berdyaev, *The Origins of Russian Communism*, translated by R. M. French (London, 1937), 171-77.

<sup>71</sup> See “Glubokouvazhaemyi Iosif Vissarionovich” (31 January 1939), RTsKhIDNI, f. 17, op. 120, d. 348, l. 63. N. K. Krupskaiia expressed similar fears in a 1938 letter to Stalin which is published in *Izvestiia TsK* no. 3 (1989): 179. The party hierarchy responded with a Central Committee resolution scolding *literators* and other contributors to official “thick journals” for their reluctance to join the patriotic campaign, something detailed in “O nekotorykh literaturno-khudozhestvennykh zhurnalakh,” *Bol'shevik* no. 17 (1939): 51-7. Generally, see my “‘Vse cherty rasovogo natsionalizma...’: internatsionalist zhaluetsia Stalinu (ianvar' 1939 g.)” (co-authored with Karen Petrone), *Voprosy istorii* no. 1 (2000): 128-33.

Olympus toward a pantheon of heroes drawn chiefly from the pre-revolutionary Russian historical past. Of critical interest has been the contingency of this shift, something that in many senses should be seen as symptomatic of the purges' hamstringing of parallel propaganda campaigns revolving around "Soviet patriotism" and the heroes of the revolution and socialist construction. Because the party hierarchs' interest in the tsarist past was so instrumental, they seem to have expected, c.a. 1935, that themes, imagery and other elements drawn from the "pragmatic history" of the pre-revolutionary time period could co-exist with other more "Soviet" aspects of the official propaganda line. The USSR's Olympus was to be an integrated one, with Peter the Great, Aleksandr Nevskii and A. S. Pushkin joining Chapaev, Dzerzhinskii, Frunze, Shchors, Enukidze, Rykov, Kosarev, Khodzhaev, Egorov and numerous Stakhanovites in a heroic pantheon styled according to the reigning aesthetics of Socialist Realism.

However, as manic purging in the mid-to-late 1930s destabilized industry, the Red Army command, and the party itself, many Soviet members of the party's nascent pantheon of heroes were swept into the deluge as well. Mobilization "by example" was greatly complicated by the sudden arrest or disappearance of celebrated workers, managers, party officials and military commanders, something which in the short term required the reissuing of many canonical propaganda texts and in the long term threatened to compromise the entire pantheon itself. At times, it must have seemed as if only Socialist Realism's *fictional* heroes – Pavel Korchagin, Gleb Chumalov and others – did not risk arrest.<sup>72</sup>

So if the new line's emphasis on russocentric themes and leaders from the tsarist past had been initially off-set (or even over-shadowed) by the popularization of Soviet heroes from the civil war era and on-going socialist construction, the purges' destruction of

<sup>72</sup> In a sense, of course, they did. Although they remained in print, virtually all the classics of Socialist Realism were savaged by the censor during the period – see Herman Ermolaev, *Censorship in Soviet Literature, 1917-1991* (New York, 1997), 51-140. Korchagin and Chumalov, incidentally, were the heroes of Ostrovskii's *How the Steel was Forged* and Gladkov's *Cement*, respectively.



many of these prominent personalities between 1936 and 1938 complicated such propaganda efforts and contributed to a shift toward an increasing emphasis on heroes from the distant past. Attrition within the ranks of the “Soviet patriots” (Enukidze, Rykov, Kosarev, Khodzhaev, Egorov, etc.) left the pantheon composed principally of traditional Russian national heroes (Nevskii, Peter, Pushkin) and a handful of remaining revolutionaries (Lenin, Stalin, Frunze, Dzerzhinskii, Shchors, etc.). Consequently, increased reliance on traditional Russian heroes must have seemed quite natural: not only were the Peters and Nevskiis at least as recognizable as the Frunzes and Shchors’, but they were also often more heroic (at least according to traditional aesthetics) and less likely to be compromised by the purges.<sup>73</sup> In this sense, the faltering of the Soviet patriotism campaign during the Great Terror contributed to the ascendancy of a russocentric vision of the USSR’s “usable past” which would prove to be durable and dynamic enough to script Soviet propaganda campaigns over the course of the next twenty years. In the long run, this transformation would encourage Russian-speaking society to begin to think about itself in unprecedented ways, “imagining Russia” in more articulate, consistent and coherent terms than had ever been possible before.

<sup>73</sup> Linda Colley makes a similar point about the political usefulness of long-dead heroes in her *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (New Haven, 1992), 168-69. Curiously, the promotion of a pantheon of revolutionary heroes drawn from the likes of Robespierre, Marat, the martyrs of the Paris Commune, Kautsky and Luxembourg seems to have been precluded by the xenophobia of the mid-to-late 1930s.