

DRAFT

## **Soviet Complaints Practices in Modern Russia: Transformations in Legal Relations (beginning in the 1960s)**

### ***Introduction***

In this study citizenship is understood to be a stable legal relationship between the people and the state, the people's membership in the state, expressed in terms of their joint rights and duties. In sociological studies of this subject, the construction of citizenship is usually problematized in the context of a change in citizenship: migration from one state to another, the construction of a new national identity, legal discrimination, and the like. Interaction with state institutions and other social authorities requires that citizens follow certain models of behavior. Moving into a different socio-political context demands a command of unfamiliar customs. This study addresses the ways in which permanent residents of a country construct their behavior as citizens. Citizens who live permanently in one state (non-immigrants) interact with state institutions and other social authorities. Established citizens, like migrants, must master the models of behavior required of citizens and establish and carry out activities associated with citizenship.

The problem addressed in this study arises from the tendency for the activities associated with citizenship to remain unchanged even after an institutional transformation (Pjatnem, 1996).

Legitimate models for the behavior of citizens are determined by external socio-political circumstances. Stable mechanisms controlling the ways in which citizens interact further the formation and reproduction of certain activities associated with citizenship. In the event of an abrupt and significant change in socio-political conditions – as Russia experienced in the early 1990s – activities which were customary in a previous context continue to be carried out for a period of time (Volkov, 1997). The entire population struggles with the need to master new models of behavior associated with citizenship and to construct a new citizenship. The reforms of the 1990s were geared toward the democratization and liberalization of Russian society. Serious reforms took place in the sphere of legal relations. In a broad sense, the structural changes which took place in Russian society changed the conception of citizenship. In order to adapt to these new circumstances, time and an understanding of how democratic values and institutions can be used in practice are needed. Studies carried out in recent years have noted that the majority of Russian citizens are sceptical about democratic participation and interaction with the authorities. Recently this scepticism has increased. The percentage of those who feel that there is no effective way to influence the government in Russia has grown from 42 to 60 per cent (Petukhov, 2003: 516).

In Soviet society making complaints was a stable means of protecting the interests of citizens. After the reformation, the practice of making complaints was nominally preserved. To this day, making complaints remains a universal means of bringing to light violations of citizens' rights and interests. However, the Soviet complaint procedure, in the form that it existed for many years, does not work as effectively in the restructured state.

The fundamental task of this dissertation is to answer the following questions: How did the Soviet complaint procedure and its practice change as a result of the transformation in the

conception of citizenship? Which old activities associated with citizenship remained among Russians and which new activities were established?

The *subject* of this study is the transformation in the Soviet complaint procedure and its practice in contemporary circumstances.

The use of the Soviet complaints system, which was the most widespread means of formal interaction between users of the system and political agents with regard to the violation of citizens' rights and interests in the late Soviet years and in the current period, is the *object* of this study. The sum total of the political agents empowered to resolve the legal conflicts of those who use the system forms the social power structure which protects these users' rights and interests. Social power is understood to be the distribution of power within a society (Hunter, 1953).

The *goal* of this article – which takes the transformation of the use of the Soviet complaints system as an example – is to examine the interrelations between users of the complaints system and the agents of power who protected the rights of these users in the late Soviet years and in the current period, to study the changes taking place in the structure of the political agents who take part in the complaints procedure, and to describe the formation of one aspect of post-Soviet citizenship.

The *empirical data* for this study were obtained from a number of agents of social power which receive complaints and from the written complaints themselves. A basic analysis of the transformation in how complaints are reported in the media will be carried out and described in this dissertation.

It is important to note that the complaints described in this study were not examined in court. In Soviet times, the courts were used principally for punitive purposes. They played an insignificant role in resolving citizens' problems (Petukhov, 2003: 516). The presentation of citizens' complaints in court was not common in Soviet times. In other words, the Soviet system of complaints existed outside the courts. In recent years the role of the courts in investigating matters pertaining to citizens has grown. However, in most cases, court is used only as a last resort when a problem cannot be solved by other political agents.

### ***Operationalisation of the Term “Complaint”***

In the making of the Soviet society there were officially defined several kinds of the “letters to the authority”. People have received a right to write that, and in some terms it was not a right, but obligation. People had to make signals (*signalizirovat'*) in case of anything was “wrong”. There were also genres of claim, denunciation, petitions, etc.

Genre of complaint has got the most powerful ideological encouragement. Among different genres of the “letters to the authority” complaint was the only one genre which had a right-protection connotation, and it was fixed in the Soviet legislation: “*The right of the Soviet citizens to make complaints is the real, ensured right*”; “*It is usual for a complaint if it is a question of the rights- or interests violation of anybody*” (Priim i ressmotrenie zhalob i zaiavlenii trudiashchihsia, 1959 : 10 - 11)

The cause for complaint making is usually a vital (right) problem. A determinate feature of the complaints, which helps to define that with all the other genres, is the position of addresser. The addresser – who is an expert in the field of the right problems - is always out of the problem situation. A complainer has some freedom for the description of facts.

A language of a complaint is always a language of the addresser, so that a power discourse. It is an important peculiarity of complaints. In the process of complaints compilation a complainer

tries to find some imperatives which are clear for the addressees and adequate for his\her problem description. Inasmuch as addressees are powerful agents, complaints are adopted for the power discourse as much as possible. Complainers may use some official recommendation, which is fixed in the legislation, or some equivalents of the non-official, everyday life discourse. In any case complaint is contextual. A fact of a complaint writing, a scenario and praxis of complaints making are the product of social, political, moral and liberal norms in a particular society. Complaint as an application of the “weak” to the “powerless” is result of the power division. Structure of the powerful addressees is a structure of the social power in a society

Some aids recommending the rules of the official complaints writing, suggest a structure of a text which is worth following. According to the research experience, this structure is reproducing in texts and could be used to pick out the structure elements of the text of a complaint: form of address, representation of a problem, representation of the common imperatives or equivalents of justification, representation of a guilty, and self-representation. We can say about the genre of the “Soviet complaint” when wording of these elements is sorted with the Soviet civic scenario, and when the text is addressed to a Soviet political agent, who organizes a work with complaints.

It is possible to mark a “Soviet complaint” as a particular genre which is worth description.

During the Soviet period complaint proved to be the most legitimate and widespread genre among all the other kinds of citizen’s applications. I suggest that it was not accidentally. I have already said that complaint was the one genre which was defined as a mechanism of the right’ protection. Besides, there are some other peculiarities of this genre, especially in the context of the Soviet society.

You can find one interesting nicety paying attention to the etymology of the word “complaint”. In Russian language the word “*zhaloba*” (complaint) is conjugate with such words as “*zhaloko*” (pitifully), “*zhalet*” (to pity, to spare), “*zhalkii*” (pitiable). Usually researchers try to avoid a necessity to differ genres of the letters to the authority. A complaint, denunciation, request are not just genres of application. They are different mechanisms, rules, institutions, agents. Indeed, it is quite difficult to find some bases for differentiation. A text structure, categories, and even the author’s headlines of the letters don’t permit to distinguish a complaint from a denunciation, a denunciation from a request, etc. At the same time, there is an almost inaudible thing helping to define exactly the genre of text when you read that. I suppose, the linguistic analyses allows to disclose this thing, and it is connected with that, the most important purpose of a complaint is to move to pity. Power of complaints is in the same. A complaint functions successfully in case when the author persuades the addresser in a necessity to feel him sorry. As a matter of fact, an application gets a complaint when the addresser begins to feel a complainer sorry. This peculiarity of complaint dominates also some stylistic and text features of a complaint genre. Often complainers included in the texts such phrases as: “*My income is very low<sup>1</sup>*”, or: “*We have to stand in line several hours after the work...<sup>2</sup>*”, or one more example: “*I putted by money every months, and denied myself many things<sup>3</sup>*”.

One topic of a popular soviet satiric movie<sup>4</sup> also illustrates, in a hypertrophied form, how did the soviet people used some methods to move an addresser to pity. The matter concerns a pensioner who is awaiting for the firewood for a long time, and don’t have an opportunity to warm his flat. He comes to the local administration to consult how to solve this problem. Expert, who’s function is to help people in compilation of different applications, help a pensioner to fabricate a

<sup>1</sup> GARF, F. A – 410, op. 1, d. 2130, p. 49

<sup>2</sup> Leningradskaja Pravda, 2 December, 1970, p. 2

<sup>3</sup> CGASPb, F. 7179, op. 56, d. 739, p. 51

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short poem which could move to pity the head of the a municipal economy: *"The fire is still gleam in my stove/ / It is too far to go to the municipal administration/ / I am too old for that/ / My death is near"*.

The topic of the death and doing damage to the health is very popular in the Soviet complaints. This example is already from the "serious" complaint which was sent to the local executive committee of St. Petersburg in 1959. The course of the complaining was an unceasing noise in flats of a house. The phrase from the complaint: *"It is possible to get a nervous breakdown spending two weeks or a month in our flat... Some of us have already achieved the last limit of passion and exhausted their nervous system... We are obliged to spend time out of home not to get sick"*<sup>5</sup>. Also, an example from the complaint to a service in a hospital: *"Service in the hospital is very bad. The food ration is very poor. Patients remain hungry and loose their power..."*. So, a complaint implies the powerfulness of an addresser, and in that very moment, non-competence, and moral- and physical weakness of a complainer.

Complaint as a genre of application stresses hierarchical distribution between a person who apply and the addresser. It is reasonable that in such a condition complainers used some strategies to demonstrate a gap between status of their own and status of addressers. In the other words, in the texts of complaints citizens seek to reduce their own status and increase the status of authority. Citizens tried to convince authority of their incapability to solve a problem, of their incompetence or to produce a compassion of authority. Prolate phrases in the complaints are: *"We hope for you..."* *"Please, look into the situation..."*, *"I ask you to take measures..."*

Complaint is a very emotional genre. It is normally for the complaint to include a request *"to help"*, *"to protect"*, *"to save"* which is presented to that who is more competent and powerful. For instance, the fraise for a complaint: *"Some facts represented in the newspaper "Leningradskaia pravda" № 219 discredit me and my longstanding work. They are wrong. As a consequence a civil death threaten me. Help me please to restore the truth and to save from the persecutors"*<sup>6</sup>. Another fraise from the complaint of the World War II disable, who asks for permission to buy a refrigerator out of turn, leaves strong impression: *"It shames me that I write you, but I can not do otherwise"*<sup>7</sup>.

Tradition of the written applications was widespread in Russia also at the pre-Revolutionary period. For example a genre of *"chelobitnaia"* is well known. People gave *"chelobitnaia's"* to different levels of authority, including the Tzar. The term *"chelobitnaia"* consists of two roots: *"chelo"* (a forehead) and *"bit"* (to strike). Another old Russian phrase *"bit' chelom"* is linguistically very close to *"chelobitnaia"*, and it means "to bow low". To give a *chelobitnaia* means to ask somebody humbly, bowing low, stressing the weakness of that who ask, and the powerful of that who takes the application.

As *chelobitnaia's* as *zhaloba's* are the games of the statuses. Both of this mechanism are based on the differences between the statuses. That is why such forms of applications as complaints (*zhaloba's*) are widespread in the absolutist states where the gap between different statuses is especially significant.

It is a very interesting question about succession of a tradition, but I would not develop this line now. I have just to say that the Soviet complaint institution is just partly a product of the Soviet regime.

### ***The Soviet Model of Legal Relations***

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<sup>6</sup> GARF, F. A-410, op. 1, d. 2130, p. 180

<sup>7</sup> GARF, F. A-410, op. 1, d. 2130, p. 190

Political scientists invented the idea that the communist ideology regarded the distribution of power between the state and the citizens through the prism of the term “care” (Mickailovskaia, 2001). The category of “care” was very important in determining the Soviet concept of the defence of civil rights, ideological interests, and, accordingly, praxis. Case studies of the ways in which the category of “care” was represented, interpreted, and used in practice in the official Soviet discourse will give an idea about the Soviet concept of the correlation between the agents in the sphere of defending human rights.<sup>8</sup>

Analysis of the official Soviet discourse shows that “care” in one sense or another has preserved the position of an actively used category basically throughout the existence of Soviet society. Moreover, it has gained the status of an important ideological component. The Soviet word “care” became a word of the political language - that is, a word which allows interpreting political hierarchies (Sandomirskaia, 2001: 211). The category appears in the official discourse parallel with the idea of socialist paternalism. The period of universal and all-embracing “care” appeared after Stalin’s death, as a result of the humanisation and liberalisation of Soviet society. Later, in the post-war period, “care” became one of the central categories, expressing the very essence of the socialist worldview. In the mid 60s and the 70s the term “care” turned into an official code of interrelations within Soviet society. So, if “care” can not be found in the Soviet constitution of 1936, in the constitution of 1977 the state conception of social relations is expressed in the following way: Soviet society is a society in which the *care* of all for the well-being of the individual and the *care* of the individual for the well-being of all is the law (Soviet Constitution 1977). Practically everyone and everything become therefore the object of “care”. The objects of “care” up until the second half of the 1950s were mainly marginalized and needy groups: invalids, orphans, and the elderly, but from the middle of the 1950s care was directed to all layers of society - to all social, professional, and age groups and, moreover, to various aspects of social life.

The category “care” is taken from the sphere of interpersonal relations: friendships, acquaintances, and family relations. It is vital to note that “care” in Russian is the most important component of parental instincts. (БСЭ (a), 1953: 217), parental rights and responsibilities (БСЭ (b), 1953 : 600).

One can try to explain the introduction of “care” into the political language as social relations, a quote to paternalism which is a long-standing Soviet conception of social relations, in which, together with categories of language, are introduced also into the rules of private sphere. The same word “care” sets a positioning of a subjects and an object of care in a relation of dependence, of power. In the context of a paternalising ideology, the politization of the category seems to be natural. The penetration of the category into the political discourse from the sphere of interpersonal relations draws the depolitisation of the Soviet legal relations.

Soviet “care” in the official discourse was lifted to the level of “duty” or “law”. With the help of “care” one can explain the social concept of Soviet legality and distribution of rights and duties: *the care for preserving historical and other cultural heritage is the obligation and duty of*

*the citizens of the USSR.* (Constitution 1977 p. 68). *Care for the human being is the law of our life* (Care for the Human Being, 1960). *All leaders are held to give people who have partially lost their workability a work adequate work* (State Care, 1987: 41).

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<sup>8</sup> Sources of the empirical material of the analysis of ideological discourse were the Soviet constitution, ideological agitation texts, Soviet newspapers. As material for the analysis of the level of practical use of “care” by Soviet citizens, texts of complains were selected, which had been published in the “Vechernii Leningrad” and “Leningradskaja Pravda” (1960-85). The discursive analysis of texts was used as the main way of analysis. At present, it is not clear yet in how much the present material is necessary for achieving the aim of a dissertation. That is why the present sources have not been included in the main text.

The category “care” defined only very indefinably the legal civil relations. The rights and duties of the citizens appeared to depend on the subjective criteria of “care” which were established by the state. However, except this category, nothing else has practically defined the legal relations. At least in terms of popularity nothing could compete with the category of “care”. In relation with this there have been attempts to define and formalise those aspects of “care” such as direction, form, extent and equivalent and others.

According to Soviet ideological texts, there existed a norm for “care”. “Care” could be estimated in roubles. Often the amount of “care” was equivalent to pensions, benefits and monetary presents.

The “care” could be written down in the code of laws, for example how pensioners have to deal with octobrists: *Be an example and care about your behaviour;- Use the voice as a instrument of education; – do not shout; –instil self confidence;- Do not compare one with other;- Give orders in an affirmative form etc.* (This is our care, 1973:20). However, not the monetary equivalent, nor the rules of “care” did not bring clarity into the legal relation, as the “care” category had aspired. The Soviet “care” was not gratuitous. “Care” for above should be meet the gratitude from below – which was the main and basic formula of the paternalistic system of society and social personality (Simple Soviet Person, 1993: 16). Often this “care” was really answered by: *The book for complaints and ideas in the mother and child room was full of gratitude: everyone who was here wanted to express his gratitude for the “care”, which appeared in our country for children* (Care for the most important, 1958: 19). The form of expressing gratitude could vary: from words to accomplishing a feat at work etc. The amount of gratitude was often not defined just as the amount of “care”. This promoted the appearance of a complex of “unpaid debt” among the citizens before the state, parents, teachers, the collective, the party: that is before those who cared.

Soviet ideologists realised the attempt to create from the category of “care” a concept of legal relations with schematic mutual relations. Yet, the unclarity of the criteria and rules of correlations, depolitisation and deformalisation of legal relations led to the fact that legal violations were interpreted in categories of moral.

Among the peculiarities of the Soviet care one has to note that subject and objects of care are always clearly defined (perhaps the only thing which was defined when speaking about legal relations). The subject is always stronger and higher in the hierarchical structure. The object is always weaker. This is already appeared from the idea of “care”, which in the present case determines the mutual relations of the subject and the object of legal protection; however, it is important to bear this fact in mind. With the help of “care” a great quantity of different modes of social correlations were defined in the Soviet discourse. Hereby, the subject and the object can change roles, can create different combinations which creates “floating hierarchies”. *“The mother cares about the child”, “The state cares about the mother”, “The Octobrists care about the environment”, “Pioneers care about the Octobrists”, “The union cares about the workers”, “The party cares about the pensioners”, “The collective cares about the development of its members” etc.*

This leads to the following peculiarities of Soviet “care”: in the majority of cases the subject and the object of “care” are never congruent in the official Soviet discourse. *“The Communist Party, the Soviet government, our whole country cares constantly about the health of pupils”* (Family care for education of skills, 1975: 20). *“Our medicine cares for the health of Soviet citizens”* (Care for the well-being of the people..., 1964: 23). These quotations can be continued endlessly. When returning to the category of “care”, then it becomes clear, that a similar allocation of roles and division of subject and object is based in one of the interpretation of the ideas (care as devotion to someone).

Based on these observations, the following conclusions can be made: firstly, the care for someone or something is one of the most important moral-ethic rules of Soviet social relations. Following these rules is encouraged; the contrary is strictly punished as a serious moral deed. The Soviet ideology did a lot to make citizens this theory clear. This is proved by the great amount of

quotations, taken from propaganda material. As a result, expecting care as the interference from aside into personal matters became not an expectation of the wanted but as a must.

Secondly, the rules of Soviet social relations allowed the care about everyone and everything except about oneself and personal problems. With other words, according to moral-ethic norms the Soviet citizen can not show any care about others but he can not show care about himself. What concerns personal problems, so it is permissible to care about oneself by attracting the attention of elders to one's problem e.g. in the following way: *We, the workers of the mother and child room, think that the manager of the GUM should care about the enlargement of our location.* (Care about the Important, 1958: 19).

A result of this rule is what can be called "alienation of problems". In most cases the personal problems of a person are outside his sphere of personal competences. This way of receiving, dealing with and solving personal problems of the Soviet society becomes appeared if compared with the Westerns society: "This is my problem" and "this is not my problem". Problems, which are concerning personal interests of a person in a Western society are clearly separated from the others and have a clear priority. In the Soviet society the contrary is the case: "This is our problem: *"Clearing our society from enemies", hooligans, corruption, swindlers – this is the care of everybody and the individual and our general care*" (General Care, 1984: 27). To care about a problem means to take it on you. The question appears: Why should one learn to solve problems if there is someone who cares about all your problems?

The tradition of legal protection, which appeared under Soviet conditions, formed the model of civil conduct. In the framework of this model the sphere of protection of civil interests was depolitized, deformed and washed away in the general ideological discourse. According to these traditions, the role of the citizen is set to be weak, not competent, and helpless. In the decades of existence of Soviet society a conception of legal relations was formed in which the citizen is the object of someone's care. One can suggest that in the present conception of complaints, as a genre of addressing, which gains a legal connotation, in a more organic way produced those type of social relations (in this sense also legal), which existed in Soviet society.

### ***Theoretical – methodological basis***

The main theoretical framework for the analysis is the conception of the American sociologist J. Scott (Scott, 1990)

Scott determines the interaction between the people and the power as a played "performance". According to the conception of Scott, the interplay of the people with agents of power takes a different from that inside of these groups. In the moment of interaction, as well as the people as the power present some legitimate aspects of identity. Scott suggests using the term of "closed transcript" and "public transcript". The public transcript presents a collection of rules or actions from both sides which are done in the open, in public. In the perspective of power relations, all observed interactions between dominating and subordinated objects represent a collision of the public transcript of the dominating with the public transcript of the subordinated (Scott, 1990: 13).

Applied to the analysis, the public transcript of the power is represented by the formal institute of complaints- soviet and post-soviet. The public transcript of the citizens can be regarded at the example of the praxis of complaints. The interaction between the people and the agents of power are represented by a scenario of legal relations which are existing in society.

The complaint is a construct of the civil public transcript. The power creates the structural conditions of legal relations; citizens who are using them one or the other way are realising the interaction between the agents of power.

The experience of the empirical analysis suggests that complaints are a practice of representation of the civil display. For the basis and explanation of this thesis the concept of displays by Goffman (2001) will be used. Goffman understands displays as types of conduct which are based on inner and outer specific ways of giving signs (Goffman, 2001: 308).

For the operational use of the category “civil display” some explanations are needed because the spheres of gender and civil conduct are different in structure. According to Goffman, takes the representation of gender display place in situations of direct contact and are tied to the conduct. Civil conduct is often mediated and in the centre of this analysis stands the communication of citizens with agents of the public power, realised with the help of complaints.

Complaints are a form of official communication, on the rules of which both, the complainant and the addressee are informed to a certain extent. Due to the distinctness of structural conditions of reception of complaints, work with which and possible results, the ways of writing the texts of complaints are bureaucratized and routinised.

Writing complaints implies the existence of a legal problem. That is, the interaction, mediated by the complaint, takes place in the sphere of legal protection. In similar situations the civil parameters are the deciding characteristics of a person. As far as the complaint is translated into the language of the addressee, the form of the representation and self-representation is, if possible, translated from the position of civil identity. Knowledge about norms of civil status and civil conduct are used when compiling a complaint. Constructing a citizenship implies having knowledge about legal norms, scenarios and skills of civil conduct and interaction with agents of social power. The civil display consists of a complex of this knowledge. The successful solution of legal problems depends on the content of civil display and the ability to represent it.

Goffman (2001) permits hypocrisy, the demonstration of profitable identity. “Sometimes it happens that the one, who is feel to be in a difficult situation initiates himself codes of helplessness and the need for intervention and in this way forces the one who is in a better position to serve him.”

Formal norms of civil conduct are determined on the legislative level. However, a mediating contact stimulates the possibility of representing a favorable, opportunistic civic identity. As mentioned in the paragraph on complaints, the addressee of complaints is most often excluded from the conflict situation and holds only limited information about it. All the more, as the ideal image of civic conduct and the power’s expectations from the citizens mostly do not remain secret.

### ***The Bureaucracy that Evolved Around Soviet Complaints***

The Soviet powers had a great interest in establishing a steady flow of information from the basis to the top levels, thus collecting data on how well the system was working. Immediately after the October Revolution, the newly created state witnessed the establishment of an official feedback system which was open to everybody. Right from the first days of the Soviet society, the organization of a complaint letter system was awarded top priority. In the first months after the Revolution, several regulating documents on the reception and analysis of complaints were issued<sup>9</sup>. Lenin himself issued an order stating that every institution had to have a complaint book (Lenin, 1963 : 366-367). The main mission of complaints was defined as the fight against shortcomings in the administrative work. The official ideology clearly acknowledged the need of a high-quality complaint system, and the possibility of Soviet citizens to complain supported important propositions of the Socialist structure of society. One example of the slogans

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<sup>9</sup> cf. appendix 3



legitimizing and stimulating complaints was put as follows: “*A humane approach to the needs of the common people*” (Kozlov, 1959 : 17).

According to the Soviet ideology, the complaint system was created in order to establish and support the principles of a Soviet “*centralized democracy*”. Thus, the complaints were seen as a means to “*let the masses participate in the Soviet work*” (Lenin, 1963 : 170). The complaints were valued as the citizens’ opinion on how well the Soviet system was working in reality and as a possibility to participate in important decisions – and sometimes it really did work.

According to the central body responsible for complaints – the People’s Commissariat of State Control (the NKGK) –, the main function of the newly established institution was to provide first-hand information on how well the system worked. Under the centralized situation of planning and directing, the system could not do without this institution. Studies of complaints dating from a later period (the 1930s) showed that the information extracted from the complaints could be used in several ways: the opinions could be taken into consideration when important decisions had to be made, the person complaining could be supported or it could even happen that the information was used against the author (Fitzpatrick, 2001 : 288 – 289).

In 1919, the Central Bureau of Complaints and Requests was founded at the NKGK. In 1920, the NKGK was transformed into the People’s Commissariat of the Workers and Peasants Inspectorate (RKI). Its tasks included the control of the activities of all administrative bodies, fighting against bureaucracy and checking the law-abidingness. Its special areas of competence were transport, trade and housing. One year later, the Presidium of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee was also given the authorization for dealing with complaints. In the same period of time – in the early 1920s –, the RKI and the Central Control Commission of the Party were united.

An Ukase of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR dating from September 6, 1940 issued the abolition of the RKI which was replaced by the USSR People’s Commissariat of State Control. On August 23, 1957 the Ministry of State Control was replaced by the Commission of Soviet Control at the Council of Ministers of the USSR. Based on a decision of the Central Committee Plenum in November 1962, the “Committee of Party and State Control of the Central Committee and the Council of Ministers” was created which implied the union of party control and state control as well as the creation of a single, permanent control body based on a broad participation of the masses.

The Committee was a body on a union republic level and comprised the leading and the local committee workers, representatives from the trade unions, the Komsomol, the media, the workers and the intelligentsia. On December 6, 1965 the committee was re-structured and termed “Committee of People’s Control at the Council of Ministers of the USSR”. On November 30, 1979 the Act on the People’s Control in the USSR was passed. The permanent staff of the committees was small in number, but many free departments, various commissions and complaint offices worked on a public basis. In 1978, Theodore Friedgut published a study in which he presented the results of his analysis of citizen complaints addressed to the local Soviet administrations. The study reveals that there was such a high number of complaints that the delegates were unable to deal with the incoming requests. In the first four months of 1962, the Executive Committee of the Kirov quarter in Moscow received 11803 complaints (Friedgut, 1978 : 466).

In the Soviet discourse, the abovementioned agents are referred to as the “organs of general competence” due to their broad field of responsibility (Kerimov, 1956 : 102). Those organs of general competence were responsible for a variety of problems. The local soviets received complaints about “power failures, flat renovation, pensions, shortage of bread” etc (ibid). The analysis of the letters required a lot of expenses. The formal requirements stated that each individual complaint had to be answered within one month after reception, and volunteers had to

be recruited to help with the analysis of the complaints. Thus, the system gradually expanded at the expense of the People's Deputies and activists.

In the 1930s, the internal organization of how to deal with complaints developed further. The statute on the collection of taxes and non-tax payments stated that complaints about incorrect behaviour of official persons had to be addressed to the body the persons were subject to (SZ SSSR, 1932, Nr 69, Article 410). The internal structure of power agents turned out to be more stable than the structure of the organs of general competence. The hierarchy of the authorities who accepted complaints within their field was as follows: shop management (department manager, shop manager, director, accountant); trade organization (or the organizational department); the directorate responsible for food and industrial products; the local or municipal chief administration of trade; the ministry of trade of the individual Soviet republic; the ministry of trade of the USSR.

During the Soviet period, the building and refinement of the complaint system was never completed. The last statute of the Central Committee of the Communist Party "on further improvements in the analysis of letters and requests from workers" was passed on March 31, 1981 (KPSS, 1987 T. 13 : 148).

In the early sixties, departments dealing with complaints existed on virtually all levels of the organs of general competence (party committees and executive committees, trade unions, the Komsomol and the press) as well as in the internal hierarchy of the fields. All agents of the power structure responsible for protecting the interests of the consumers were subject to the general state ideology.

The superior bodies defined rules for complaints in general, the addressee, the deadlines for replies and further strategies in case the complaint was rejected or if a wrong decision had been made etc. In the agitation and propaganda literature, guidelines for how to word a complaint were published. Against the background of the increasingly bureaucratic institutional mechanisms, those guidelines also changed. In the early 30s, they defined "how and about what to complain". Sufficient reasons for a possible or even essential complaint could be: *"incorrect decisions, bureaucracy and red tape, alien elements, deviation from the class line, a rude or disdainful attitude, nepotism, suppression of criticism and victimization in case of being unmasked, mismanagement and other professional wrongdoings"*. According to the same guidelines, any complaint about a personal problem had to be also of general significance (Who, about what and how to complain, 1931). Concerning the structure of the text, the following was said: *"A complaint does not need to be put in a special way. The most important thing is to write as clearly and plainly as possible what it is all about..."* (ibid : 26).

It was not necessary to reveal one's identity: *"It is important that you state your name and address, as we might need further information... If, for any reason, you don't want to reveal your name (especially if you unmask wrongdoers or malicious officials), you can say so."* (ibid). The status of the person complaining played an important part in the classification of the priority: *"It is of help if you state your social status in a complaint. This information is important because we sort the complaints in class order. It is one thing if a farmhand complains that he was rudely deprived of his right to vote, but another one if the person complaining is a former merchant."* (ibid : 27). The same class approach to the problems worded in complaints was used in the requirements of textual quality: *"The Soviet authorities are interested in the contents of the complaint as such, and the less literate a person is writing, the more attention is paid to his case... It does not matter if your complaint is worded clumsily. If something remains unclear, we can always ask additional questions."* (ibid).

In the following years the guidelines became more detailed and concrete. In the late 1950s, books were published which taught how to write complaints. They offered a structure which made the complaints fit into the practice of analysing and dealing with them later on. They taught about the required information on the specific problem and about the general structure of a complaint: *"Apart from the main text, any written complaint should desirably contain the following elements: Surname, first*

*name and patronymic of the person complaining, his or her address, a list of the attachments, the date and a signature*". The books also provided an exemplary model of how to arrange the individual items on the page (Examination of Complaints and Requests in Local Soviets, 1959 : 43).

In the Soviet period, many complaint mechanisms existed side by side, some on an internal level, some on the level of the organs of general competence, i. e. the Party, the Executive Committees, the Professional Committees etc. A complaint could be passed from one authority to the next and thus be carried over from one mechanism into the other (e. g. from the internal into the party level). It was also possible that a complaint was handed in simultaneously at several authorities.

The path of a complaint in the internal mechanism was as follows: If a problematic situation arose, the consumer first addressed the management of the shop or the authority (with a complaint letter, an entry in the book of complaints or by word of mouth). If the management did not meet the customer's request, the complaint was passed on to the trade organization and further on to the respective directorate, to the local or municipal chief administration of trade and finally to the ministry of trade of the USSR. A reply from the lower level was required to pass a complaint on to the next level. It happened that a complaint was addressed directly to a comparatively high level, i. e. to the trade organization or to the local or municipal chief administration of trade. In this case, it was handed down to the level in charge of the shop or authority. It had its advantages to hand in a complaint at a high level without letting it pass all the levels below: If a complaint was going downwards, for example from the trade organization to the shop manager, it was awarded a higher priority in comparison to complaints received directly from the customers.

The book of complaints played an important part in the internal complaint system. Interviews revealed that the complaints were dealt with in a certain order of priority. The sorting of the complaints according to their importance or "seriousness" was done in the process of control of the trade organization in selected shops by the inspection of the trade organization or people's inspectors. *"There was a complaint on rudeness. That's an important complaint... rudeness! Other complaints were about cheating or selling short weight – also important. A very important case was the following: If a certain good was not available in the time of depression but was held under cover or if such goods were sold to some customers but did not suffice for everybody and if a person found out that something was sold exclusively to somebody else – that was the most serious complaint of all!"* (No 5)<sup>10</sup>. Complaints of lower importance were dealt with on the level of the shop management. More important complaints in the book of complaints required a broader approach and the information was passed on to the next level.

The process of deciding how to react to a complaint worked on the basis of data accumulation. If the consumers turned to authorities at several levels, if there were repeated complaints on a certain good or if the behaviour of a person gave reason for more than one complaint, the persons in charge of the bad quality or the inadequate behaviour had to fear serious consequences. When a critical number of complaints was reached, it could happen that the production of a certain good was stopped: *"There was some more negative feedback on the product 'Red Triangle', and in this connection the management decided to stop the production of the boots with the article number 118-SFD."*<sup>11</sup>

It could also be the case that a new enterprise was established: *"In reply to the numerous complaints about the lack of a laundrette in their quarter handed in by citizens of Line 3 to Line 9 on Vasilievski Island, the deputy manager of the service department of the Lentorg Executive Committee Mr. Levin states that the*

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<sup>10</sup> The quotations are taken from interviews held for the thesis „Newspaper Complaints as a Strategy for Defending Consumer Interests: The late Soviet Period”.

<sup>11</sup> Unsatisfying reply. Vechernyj Leningrad, November 30, 1964, p.2

*opening of a laundrette at Line 4 Vasilievski Island, Number 62 is scheduled within the next three months*<sup>12</sup>. The complaints entered the organs of general competence according to their territorial origins.

The universal “relay stations” for the different complaint mechanisms were the media and the representatives of the public (State Inspectors, National Deputies, civil activists etc). Every editorial office and every TV and radio committee department had their own departments for consumer feedback. An important aspect of the work of those committees consisted in the regulation of the complaint mechanisms. Letters addressed to the media departments were passed on to the persons with the competence to solve the respective problems. They also made sure that the deadlines were strictly observed.

The integration of the media had a great influence on the further path of the complaint. When it was passed on to the institution in charge, it was printed on a form of the media department. Thus, it received a higher priority and was dealt with quicker – just like a complaint that was handed down to a lower level. Consumer complaints were often addressed to the media because this was a comfortable and efficient way of expressing the problem. The material found in archives proved that complaints were often passed on from the media to the Executive Committees and the trade organization.

The People’s Deputies and the State Inspectors (i. e. persons with a certain governmental trustworthiness) had a similar function.

Apart from the analysis of the complaints (reception, check, reply and further assistance), the media and the deputies were experts in how to write efficient complaints. *“You have to know some rules in order to write an efficient complaint. Those rules were known by the deputies, and they helped the people to write complaints and give specific reasons for their requests.”* (Friedgut, 1978 : 463). The deputies and the media served as mediators: they were the link between the bureaucracy and the common people who often lacked experience with the bureaucratic details.

Every authority that received a complaint tried to prevent it from being passed on to a higher level. If a consumer complained at the next level, sanctions were inevitable for all the lower levels which had been unable to deal with the complaint adequately. *“There was the trade management and the Lentorg. If a consumer was angry enough and didn’t get a reply from Lentorg, he turned to the trade management. This meant that all the Lentorg managers had a bad time because they hadn’t reacted to the first complaint.”* (No 5).

Depending on the importance of the problem, the consequences of a consumer complaint could be:

- a disciplinary punishment of the guilty person or the person in charge, either with or without an entry in the labour book;
- deprivation of material benefits, deprivation of bonuses, the imposition of a fine;
- the dismissal of the guilty person or the person in charge;
- legal consequences for the guilty person or the person in charge.

The guidelines for the complaint procedure and the wording of the text were distributed by various means. In the mid-fourties, the Russian language classes in the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> form included lessons on how to write a complaint: *“...She was a wonderful teacher! She taught Russian and literature*

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<sup>12</sup> Actions taken. Vechernyj Leningrad, February 2, 1970, p.2

*and made us write petitions. Petitions came first; even before we wrote requests, we were writing petitions and complaints...*<sup>13</sup>.

According to the material available at the moment, the early 30s saw the publication of a large number of books and guidelines on complaints. There are some examples of leaflets containing complaint letters and replies which were directly taken from complaint books (Complaints issued by passengers of dining cars, 1934). Starting right from the first days of the Soviet period, “model complaints” were published in newspapers.

It is a complex empirical question to what extent and how the official procedure of complaints was perceived by the Soviet citizens. There is no quantitative study which defines exactly how much the citizens knew about the rules of civic behaviour, and even if there was an ideal way of data collection and a concise analysis of the information, the question of the individual and subjective interpretation of those rules will still remain unanswered.

On the one hand, the Soviet people knew about the bureaucracy connected with complaints. An interesting illustration of this theory is presented by the American scientist Fitzpatrick (Fitzpatrick, 2002 : 536 – 537). She refers to the well-known example of Soviet bureaucracy as it is described in the works of Il’f and Petrov. The mass phenomenon of the “Children of Lieutenant Schmidt” in the real Soviet life of the thirties supports the empirical data collected.

On the other hand, studies state that the Soviet citizens’ knowledge of the complaint procedure was fragmentary. In his study, Friedgut writes that many citizens turned to the People’s Deputies for assistance in writing complaints (Friedgut, 1978). According to the data presented by Friedgut, in 1973 only 5000 out of 15000 complaints written without assistance and handed in at various authorities went any further than the local authorities as they were incomprehensible (Friedgut, 1978).

It is important to consider that the Soviet authorities wanted the citizens to write complaints and also be able to write them. By publishing guidelines or by organizing help for the writing of comprehensible complaints the government contributed to the acquisition and application of the skills needed.

Towards the end of the fifties and the beginning of the sixties, the practice of consumer complaints was developed further and became more complicated in terms of bureaucracy. The interest of the government made sure that the complaints were solidly founded in the ideology. An intricate network of power agents was established and a complex mechanism ensured the communication between the various levels and parts of the network structure. With the help of several special actions, the citizens were instructed in how to use the system of complaints – one of them was the publication and circulation of guidelines explaining how to put a complaint. The sum of those actions turned the consumer complaints into a convenient and effective practice. The strict ideological foundation defined and limited the choice of legitimate practices which were available in the context of complaints.

### ***Practice of the Soviet Complaints***

As a matter of a fact, the Institute for Complaints provided the only means of interacting with the government open to Soviet people. Both written and oral complaints were made, to various bodies and to various ends: “*Everybody complained for every possible reason*” (Interview 4).

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<sup>13</sup> Quotation taken from an interview held for the project “The Russian-Mongolian Border: A Prototype of an Eurasian Region” (2003)

In theory, legislation (for example the Constitution) allowed other means of protest, such as meetings, rallies and demonstrations. However, Soviet democracy did not allow speakers at mass events to raise debatable ideas, thus destroying the whole point of the undertaking.

From the interviews it emerged that the ability to complain and get a result, i.e. to at least receive some kind of response (and at best achieve the aims set out in the complaint) was a skill requiring a specialist knowledge of the rules governing the complaints procedure. This meant knowing "where to complain" and "how to complain".

**Where to complain:** *So, clever people went to the Party Regional Committee. With all their problems. The Committee had to take in and examine complaints.* (Interview no 3). This knowledge covered knowing about institutional structures (which authority to approach) as well as the individuals who embodied these institutions and enjoyed high personal status ("significant people"), with whom it was sometimes possible to form informal relationships. The interviewees named specific people who had the reputation of being "a good person" or "someone who can help". These were often high status civil servants, people's deputies and high profile social activists. *She was helped by Nina Vasilevna Peitser. She was a ballerina at our musical theatre. And Nina Vasilevna was a deputy. A people's deputy. That was what it was called. And Nina Vasilevna got mother a permit...or Sometimes these actors who were also deputies, they...you went to them, and if they were good, responsive people, they could get you something like that...* (Interview no 2) or *There was this deputy, Nyenashev. He helped if you went to him.* (Interview no 1).

The knowledge of **how to complain** meant knowing how to formulate a complaint so that it could not fail to attract attention. It had to be couched in terms acceptable to the censor and critic. *You could only make a complaint within the institutionalised framework set out by the State* (Interview no 4). Special techniques were used for writing the main body of the complaint. As the same interviewee put it *There was a big group of people - professional complainers - who could write complaints, complained about everything and generally achieved quite a lot as a result* (Interview no 4). The interviewee refers to the skill of "writing complaints" which was possessed by a limited number of people, and he elevates this ability to the rank of a "profession".

analysis of the texts revealed that all the complaints published contained elements which allowed a private consumer's problems to be legitimised in the eyes of the State. These included generalising the problem, using the complainer's symbolic capital, appealing to the State's paternalism and denouncing those at fault.

**A strategy of the problem representation.** Consumers used this strategy of generalizing the complaint so as to lend it legitimacy and significance. Pechyorskaya (2000) talks about "the globalization of conflict", suggesting that this helped to strengthen a complaint's legitimacy. Individual problems, such as buying a defective bicycle or poor quality vegetables, or the rudeness of a shop assistant can be interpreted by the consumer as a wider-scale problem, a problems which affects the interests of a whole group of consumers or the interests of the entire State. Examples of this strategy can be found below.

Complaints were generalized not only in relation to the scale of the problem, but also to the number of people suffering and their resulting collective interests (this basis for classification was used by Pechyorskaya in her dissertation (2000)). The number of people putting forward a complaint or included in the group of "sufferers" had an impact on a complaint's successful resolution. The mechanism for resolving complaints took account of the amount of "feedback" generated by a problem. The greater the number of people implicated as "sufferers", the greater chance of a successful outcome.

Two types of generalization can hence be defined : ideological and group. It was characteristic of the ideological generalization that an individual complaint was extended to include either the entire sphere of industry or production, or the whole of society (thus extending the frame of the

problem which had originally led to the complaint). Ideological constructs were used in the argumentation. For a complaint to be legitimate and successful, the consumer had to create constructs which corresponded to the mechanism used for dealing with complaints and the popular ideological theses of a socialist society. For example, a shopper, L I Boitman, who received bad service in a dry-cleaner's, based her complaint on the following argument: *Consumer services are important. Indifferent staff cannot be tolerated. Today, when one of the main tasks facing the Communist Party is to provide Soviet citizens with high quality services, there is no room for indifference in consumer services. (Indifferent staff cannot be tolerated, Leningrad Pravda, 29 March 1963, pp2).*

A further example of ideological generalization can be found in the complaint of L C Bayanova, who was dissatisfied with her purchase of eau de cologne. *The struggle for good quality products is a matter of the highest importance for the State, relating to the honesty of the collective of every enterprise (The buyer waits. Leningrad Pravda, 10 March 1963, p2).* A further quote is provided by L Kuranova's complaint about the difficulty of obtaining good quality appliances: *The struggle for the honour of factory produced brands, for well manufactured products, for the reliability and durability of appliances, is one of the conditions for the successful creation of the material-technical base of Communism and elevation of the standard of living of every Soviet citizen (Responsibility and quality. Leningrad Pravda, 21 November 1964, p2).*

A group generalization resulted from increasing the number of sufferers. This type of generalization covers:

1. *An individual complaint about a collective problem.* This type of complaint was lodged by one consumer on behalf of a group or a community, as in the following example: *The type of photo album costing 2 roubles 80 kopeks enjoyed great demand among shoppers. Unfortunately this kind of album is not on sale now. It turns out that the "Svyetoch" factory has stopped producing them. It's a pity. G Orlov, amateur photographer. (Vyechny Leningrad, 24 April, 1963, p2).* Or else: *People who like sport have noticed with pleasure that there is a fairly wide range of skis available in Leningrad shops today. I didn't imagine there would be great difficulty in buying excellent slalom skis for my son. I bought boots as well however, and now both boots and skis are lying unused in the cupboard. The problem is that it is impossible to buy bindings for slalom skis anywhere in Leningrad. There are none this year, there were none last year. Surely one of the enterprises in Leningrad, perhaps the "Sport" experimental factory, could come to the aid of skiers. H Zabolotkin (Skis in the cupboard. Vyechny Leningrad, 26 February 1963, p2).* In both the first and the second example, the consumer presents a complaint on behalf of a group, in these instances amateur photographers and skiers.

2. *A collective complaint about a collective problem.* This type of complaint was made in the name of a group who were concerned about one particular problem. The number of signatories concerned was always shown. *We, the drivers of the second Leningrad taxi fleet, have been forced to publish a complaint in the newspaper. Up until now, we have eaten in the fleet's canteen. The range of food there always left something to be desired, and there was never enough room for more than one shift. There were often queues and we had to wait for a seat. The management raised our hopes that next year they would turn their attention to staff catering. And what happened? Our canteen has been completely shut down... (107 signatories) (Cramped and offended. Leningrad Pravda. 12 December 1964, p2).* This type of complaint differs from the first in that the sufferers are clearly defined.<sup>14</sup>

**Strategies of the self-representation.** Making use of symbolic capital was the simplest way of strengthening the force of a complaint to a newspaper, and did not require additional effort. It amounted to indicating the complainer's name and their status. We can define three groups of signatures which focused attention on the writer's status. First, there were signatures which highlighted the writer's socially approved status, such as *award-winning economist, engineer or scientist at Leningrad University.* The second group of signatures showed that the writer had rendered

<sup>14</sup> It would be possible theoretically to define one other category of complaint which could be included under the heading "group generalisation", that is, *a collective complaint about an individual problem.* However, this type of complaint is not typical and the empirical material did not yield any examples.

society certain services, for example *veteran of the Second World War*. The third group included people entitled to society's protection, such as *pensioner, invalid (second class)* and *mother of three children*.

**Strategies of the justice equivalents representation.** The concept of "concern" occupied an important place in Soviet ideological discourse. The next group of complainers to be discussed were made up of people counting on this concern.

The paternalistic functions of protecting and monitoring dominated the Soviet system. It was as if a "father" was caring for Soviet subjects. Concern from "above" should meet with gratitude from "below". This formula underpinned the paternalistic construction of society and the socialist personality (The Soviet simple man, 1993:16).

Popular Socialist slogans such as "*Caring for people is the main task of the Party and the government of the Soviet Union*", "*Caring for the welfare of Soviet people is today's most important task*" (Leningrad Pravda, 26 November p1) made the concept of concern fundamental, and legitimized the paternalistic character of the State.

The Soviet State promised concern for citizens in the Constitution : "*the law of life is concern of all for the good of each and concern of each for the good of all*"(Constitution, 1977). In official discourse the citizen was the object of concern: "*Concern for people is the greatest concern*" (Unremitting attention to consumer service. Leningrad Pravda, 28 November 1964, p2).

When formulating complaints, consumers appealed to the "concern promised". This strategy helped them to include the complaint in the ideological discourse, and to make it legitimate and successful. The following are typical quotations in this respect: *Why doesn't the State care about us? (Neither to buy nor to sew, Leningrad Pravda, 24 November 1964, p2). Where is the concern promised by the State for consumer interests? (Why has something been crossed out from the menu? Leningrad Pravda 3 April 1981, p 2).*

**Strategies of the guilty representation.** This consisted of endowing those to blame with negative characteristics. Denunciation was generally a standard element in complaints. Soviet complaints differ from other complaints in the devices and concepts employed.

In order to analyze these concepts, we will use the "model" Soviet citizen (The Soviet simple man, 1993:15). This collection of ideal qualities and characteristics of the Soviet citizen was set out in the moral codex of the builders of Communism (passed at the 22<sup>nd</sup> Party Congress in 1961). According to this ideological construct, the Soviet citizen should possess the following characteristics: he should work conscientiously for the good of society; show concern for the preservation and increase of the achievements of society; maintain humane relationships and mutual respect between people; exhibit honesty and integrity, intolerance of unfairness, parasitism, dishonesty, careerism, greed and so on. (Moral codex of the builders of Communism, 1962, pp5-6).

Characteristics opposite to those outlined in the codex were used in denouncing those at fault. To cite a few examples, *the canteen staff at the Gostiny Dvor and Passazh department stores allow abuses to take place in the sale of juices and mineral water (Measures taken. Vyechny Leningrad, 8 January 1970, p2).*

*In the No2 Lenmebelmorga furniture store, home delivery is organised in a very strange way...A group of moonlighters in State-owned cars offer to deliver your purchases. (Following on from our public speeches, Vyechny Leningrad, 29 December 1964, p2).*

...in order to wrap goods, the assistants use very thick sheets of paper. They shouldn't take such a cavalier attitude to material and use expensive paper in such a wasteful manner...(Those infringing the rules of trade are punished, Vyechny Leningrad, 12 December 1964 p2).



*...I was made very uncomfortable in "Chaika" when I began to choose something I needed. The assistants answered my questions indifferently and it was clear that they did not have the slightest desire to help the customer. The assistants were inattentive and discourteous. I was deeply offended by their attitude. I left without having bought anything. T Abramova (How I bought a dress, Vycherny Leningrad, 4 December 1964, p2).*

A dichotomy emerges between what is desirable and what actually takes place, between conscientious labour for the good of society and "taking a cavalier attitude"; the concern of each for the preservation and increase of the achievements of society and "use...in such a wasteful manner"; humane relations and mutual respect and "inattentive", "discourteous", "indifferent" and so forth.

Strategy of the guilty representation was the demonstration of some features which were different from the ideal soviet person. So that, a complainer could solve some of his/her problems, and at the same time to confirm a legitimacy of the moral codex of the builders of Communism.

In Soviet times, the field of legal relations did not exist on its own: In form and content it was subordinated to the general governmental system of moral and ethical standards. Personal consumer problems were solved with the help of the organs of general competence and the consumer complaints were published in the centralized general-purpose newspapers. The status of a Soviet citizen differed from the status of a Soviet person. The evaluation of the legal problems is based on the general moral and ethical standards; there is no special legal discourse. According to the strategies analyzed in this study, the Soviet complaints were carried out with a constant reference to the official ideology. The reasons used to justify the right to complain and to express consumer problems included the values of collectivism and of the generally accepted and defended status as well as references to the moral and ethical standards.

The paternalistic conception of the legal relations led to a situation in which the consumer occupies a passive, dependent role. The constant promises of governmental care fostered a kind of "preventive protection" of the people's interests by the government. In a certain way, the rights were defended *a priori* and only in rare cases was it possible that they were violated. This marginalized the attempts of anybody trying to defend the rights. Law-abidingness and loyalty towards the ideology counted among the basic qualities of the Soviet people.

### ***A short description of the structural changes***

It is possible to compare a scale transformation of the complaint institution which had place after the October Revolution (1917), with changes in complaint's mechanism which are happening now in Russia.

A nominal transition from the socialistic society to the democratic society has taken place in the political sphere. In real life a contemporary condition of the Russian society is often defined as "transitional". It has taken place a disavowal from the monolithic ideology, and it has appeared a tendency to the multiplication of the authority centers. The Soviet censorship was abolished and there was proclaimed a freedom of speech. It got possible to write everything about anything to anybody. This situation is different in a large scale from the situation in the Soviet society, where the number of "legitimate" problems and "legitimate" methods of representation of that was restricted. I

I look at the administrative changes as at the transformation of the structure of agents which are responsible and powerful in the field of receiving and considering citizen's complaints. It is important for me, for example, that some important Soviet agent, as, for instance, the Communist Party have gone. Some other agents have reserved the function of working with complaints, but have loosened a part of authorities, formal and non-formal resources of influence in

the condition of the complex reorganization. That has happened with the state agents: district and city administrations, committees, deputies. There have appeared some new agents: such as non-governmental organizations. Departmental structure of the agents was also reorganized.

Structural transformation in the economic sphere and trade organization also had an effect on the structure and mission of complaints. The most popular causes for the complaining during the soviet period were deficit of goods and services, low level of quality, rudeness of salesmen and maintenance staff. Now some causes for complaining – as, for example, deficit of goods – have disappeared. At the same time in our days consumers meet some problems which did not exist at the soviet society, as carelessness of realtors, etc.

In the soviet society complaints were, in addition, one of the most significant feedback mechanism, connecting consumers with producers and trade facilities. Complaints delivered information which could be used for the demand investigation, production regulation, planing and managing. Result of a complaint could get opening of a shop or laundry, taking any product out of production, opening a new bus line, etc. Besides, complaints played an important role in the stuff regulating. A complaint could entail serious financial punishment, and also discharge of a guilty. A person who was discharged on account of a complaint had less opportunities to get a new job. So that, complaints had an important regulative function.

Contemporary market mechanisms of the trade organization have resources and principles how to sale commodities and services, which differ from the Soviet mechanisms. Some aspects of regulating, which could accomplish a complaint institution, have loosen the former meaning. Opportunities for choosing of goods and services have increased in advance. It has gotten impossible to influence the nomenclature of products. Necessity of that has gone. Usually salesmen/saleswomen who were discharged don't have any problem to get a new job. Modern marketing researches are much more effective in the trade investigation then the Soviet following the complaints.

Formally, and, in any aspects, really the Russian right policy and legal conditions have changed.

The Soviet proclaimed right was too far from the right which was deliberated by the Soviet citizens. Formally, in the Soviet constitution there were defined common civil rights. Some specific fields of the right were also developing. During the Soviet years there were passed about 20 resolutions and decrees which regulated legal relationships between the consumers and counteragents. There were also a lot of instructions, bureaucratic rules, etc. Usually Soviet normative documents and international legal documents which were ratified by the Soviet state, did not publish in press, violated often and, as a result, and, as a result, were not well known to the Soviet citizens, and even to the state officials.

The Soviet state was always a grantor and guarantor of the rights for a particular Soviet citizen. The main stress in the legal praxis was done on the citizen's orderliness to the state. Some rights of the Soviet people could be complained, and this rights could be protected. Per se, an opportunity to make complaints was the only one deliberated right of the Soviet citizens. Some other rights (for example, freedom of speech, liberty of conscience, privacy of correspondence, etc.) have been violated systematically by the state, and it was ideologically justified (Voronina, 1998).

Now the information about the civil right is full scale accessible. Education of citizenship is allied to the translation of this information.

Another important transformation, which influence a scenario of a civic behavior, is connected with increasing meaning of consumer's status in the Russian society. A consumer in the contemporary Russian society plays more and more significant role.