

**Idlers, Sham Peasants and Almost- Collectivized Elements:  
Official Norms and Local Practices in the Russian Village, 1945-1953.**

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It is generally agreed that the collective farm system created during the collectivization drive of 1929-1930 was consolidated prior to the Great Patriotic War. Throughout the 1930s, complementary features that had not been developed during the attack on peasants' individual agriculture were progressively introduced, the most important being the adoption in 1935 of the Statutes for Collective Farm *artel'*, which served as a genuine constitution regulating most aspects of the relationship established between the peasantry and the Soviet State. Furthermore, the Stalinist Party-State continued its clampdown on the last remains of peasant individual agriculture by developing methods of sharing kolkhoz income that would force “idlers” to participate actively in the collective farm economic life and an increasingly harsh legislation with individual householders for the purpose of forcing them into collective farms. It is true to argue that, as far as agriculture is concerned, the main focus of the Stalinist attention drawn upon agriculture remained undoubtedly the famous (or rather infamous) grain collection campaigns as created at the turn of the 1920s. These campaigns certainly easily a blueprint for most other subsequent legislative activities<sup>1</sup>, and constituted a virtual civil

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<sup>1</sup> Moshe Lewin, “Taking Grain”: Soviet Policies of Agricultural Procurements Before the War”, The Making of the Soviet System: Essays in the Social History of Interwar Russia, (New York, Pantheon Books, 1985), pp. 142-177.

war between the State and peasants, a war whose purposes were not only strategic and economic but educational ones as well.

However, the other legislative attempts of the post-collectivization period, for instance regulations on private plots, against idlers and individual householders are also worthy of attention, not as much for their economic effectiveness (which was close to zero) but because they help us to understand the contours of kolkhoz peasant society and its shifting boundaries between what the State defined as marginal and what was perceived as such by rural communities. In other words, the study of the margins of rural society can tell a great deal about State efforts to marginalize elements who were not perceived as such by their co-villagers but who happened to represent a threat to collective agriculture by their very behaviour as a *kolkhoznik*, a false one (*lzhekolkhzonik*) and an almost collectivized one (*okolokolkhoznyi element*), all of whom being considered after the war to be variations on the same theme.

The postwar collective farm peasantry presents an interesting new area in which to test the validity of old concepts and to experiment with new ones. We know now mostly from V.F. Zima's<sup>2</sup> and V.P Popov's work that the early postwar period represents perhaps the worst crisis in collective agriculture since 1932-34<sup>3</sup>, and that in this regard peasants had various "weapons of the weak" to cope with the situation and to ensure survival. Yet, considering that archivally-based research on the peasantry after World War II has just begun to appearing and that these works are just a few, it can be hasty to proclaim the victory of the concept of resistance. In her groundbreaking study, Elena Zubkova unearthed fascinating documents that reveal what she calls "widespread expectations of change" in the wake of the Soviet victory in World War II, and that

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<sup>2</sup> V.F. Zima, Golod v SSSR 1946-1947 godov. Proiskhozhdenie i posledstviia, (Moscow, INI-RAN, 1996).

<sup>3</sup> V.Popov, Krest'ianstvo i gosudarstvo (1945-1953). Sbornik dokumentov, (Paris, YMCA Press, 1992); "Gosudarstvennyi rezerv khleba v SSSR i sotsial'naia politika", Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia, no 5 (1998), pp. 24-33. "Khleb kak ob'ekt gosudarstvennoi politiki v SSSR v 1940-e gody", Otechestvennaia istoriia, no 2 (2000), pp. 49-66;

illuminate various acts of resistance to postwar agrarian policies<sup>4</sup>. Yet, the evidence she uses presents two major shortcomings; the first being limited to the years 1946-47 and being recorded by the authorities in preparation for the elections to the Supreme Soviet. The second weakness lies in her over-reliance on a few documents to draw a picture of a rural society that was still, even a few years ago, a *terra incognita* to most scholars. One can also agree with the conclusions of Sheila Fitzpatrick's important work on the collective farm peasantry in the 1930s, but a simple application of her arguments could lead us to hasty conclusions in regard to the postwar collective farm peasantry<sup>5</sup>. After all, the *kolkhozniki* both as frontline soldiers and as agricultural producers virtually saved the regime during the worse times of the war against Germany. Not entirely against the above mentioned interpretations but rather through an alternative method and approach, this study will attempt to show that, seen through the prism of labour policies in the countryside and the measures taken against the "least collectivized" elements, the Soviet State faced strong "de-collectivizing" pressures that were deeply incrustated in peasant communities. By attempting to marginalize these elements, the Stalinist State failed and found instead a grey zone of practices made out of loopholes in the collective farm system. In this regard, even open repression could not be substituted for social control<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> See Elena Zubkova, Russia after the War. Hopes, Illusions and Disappointments, 1945-1957, transl. Hugh Ragsdale, (Armonk (N.Y.), M.E. Sharpe, 1998), pp. 59-67; "Mir mnenii sovetskogo cheloveka, 1945-1948gg. Po materialam TsK VKP(b)", Otechestvennaia istoriia, no 3 (1998), pp. 25-39; no 4 (1998), pp. 99-108.

<sup>5</sup> Sheila Fitzpatrick, Stalin's Peasants. Resistance and Survival in the Russian Village after Collectivization, (New York/Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1994). See also M.A. Beznin and T.M. Dimoni, "Sotsial'nyi protest kolkhoznogo krest'ianstva (vtoraia polovina 1940-x-1960-e gg.)", Otechestvennaia istoriia, no 3 (1999), pp. 81-99.

<sup>6</sup> This study is a part of a larger project on peasant labor in collective farms after World War II which analyses the interaction between State attempts to foster labor discipline in Soviet kolkhozes and peasant strategies of survival that included seasonal work outside farms, family labor patterns and local politics to cope with the repressive nature of work on collective farms. It demonstrates that while labor discipline can be largely seen as a failure for the Soviet regime in its efforts to pressure its peasantry for more collective work, it reveals that *kolkhozniki* coped with the difficulties of postwar reconstruction by developing strategies that made them what the regime used to call "*polukrest'ianie*" (part-time peasants) or worse *okolokolkhoznye elementy* and thus providing what can be understood as a de-collectivizing pressure that can largely explain the tightening of the rules of collective farm life after the victory over Nazi Germany. See Jean Lévesque, "Part-Time Peasants: Agrarian Policies, Peasant Labor and the Fate of Socialist

Within this perspective, this study first analyses State efforts to punish and marginalize violators of labor discipline who were supposedly the least collectivized elements of the Soviet countryside and then assesses the relative effectiveness these measures had on the majority of peasants, especially the 1948 campaign to deport idlers. It demonstrates first that the Stalinist regime could not function without the help of an artificially created class of enemies: once the individual smallholders had been eliminated, it sought to re-create an enemy by targeting violators of labor discipline as a new scapegoat for the failures of Soviet agriculture. By looking specifically at the creation of this new enemy, this study will show that the violators were not those whom the regime first had in mind. Finally, it will provide basic evidence to demonstrate that the behaviour of these artificial marginals created by the regime was in fact shared by rural communities which protected them (or which at least did not intervene against them). Thus, the question of formulating peasant behaviour will be raised.

### **I- Defining the Margins: Soviet Legislation on Labor Discipline and the Making of the Idler, 1939-1948.**

“The minimum of labor-days was established not for all collective farmers, but only for loafers and speculators. For the collective farmers there is no minimum.”  
(Mikhail Kalinin to a correspondent of *Sotsialisticheskoe zemledelie*, late 1945)

The main document defining collective farmers' rights and duties appeared in 1935,<sup>8</sup> but it was not until 1939 that the state-party leadership decided to introduce a compulsory minimum of labor-days for full members of collective farms. Until then

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Agriculture in the Postwar Soviet Union, 1945-1953”, (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Toronto, forthcoming 2002).

<sup>8</sup>The “Statutes” refer to the official “Statute of the Collective Farm artel” issued by the Second Congress of Agricultural Shock-Workers in 1935. For the earlier draft projects discussed during the collectivization drive, see N.A. Ivnitskii, *Kollektivizatsiia i raskulachivanie (nachalo 30-x godov)*, (Moscow: Magistr, 1996), pp. 78-82.

farms had the autonomy to use their own system of distributing kolkhoz' wealth once grain collections were delivered to the State. The 1939 resolution of the Central Committee and the Council of People's Commissars "On the Measures to Protect Collective Lands from Squandering"<sup>9</sup> was meant to fight the illegal enlargement of the private plots at the expense of collective lands, which was considered "a perversion of Party and Government policies in the countryside". At the same time, however, the resolution sought to fight another type of perversion: the practice of living on the collective farms and enjoying guaranteed rights like possession of a private plot while not taking part in collective farm work. The reasons for this decision were explained as follows: "Given the fact that honest peasants earning from 200 to 600 and more labor-days work in the collective farms side by side with a part of the population which earns only from 20 to 30 labor-days. The latter continue to be considered full members and live on the collective farm's back". The resolution thus sought to eradicate the unbearable character of this idle way of life.<sup>10</sup>

Therefore, a compulsory minimum of labor-days (the arbitrary unit defining the amount of work done on the collective farms<sup>11</sup>) was introduced for able-bodied peasants all over the country, according to a classification of three groups of regions. For the first group including the cotton-producing regions, the minimum was established at 100 labor-

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<sup>9</sup> Istoriia kolkhoznogo prava. Sbornik zakonodatel'nykh materialov SSSR i RSFSR, Tom II (Moscow, p. 107.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p.109.

<sup>11</sup> The actual value of a single labor-day is difficult to assess, not only for the researcher but also for the authorities at that time. After the Statutes of Collective Farms were issued, the government provided all collective farms with the "Primernye normy vyrabotki i edinye rastsenki v trudodniakh" which was strongly modified in 1948. For example, earthing up a hectare of potatoes with a horse-driven harrow would give from 1,5-2,0 *trudodniia*', quarrying a *tsentner* of corn would give 6-10 labor-days and sowing a hectare of sugar-beet with a sowing-machine would pay 5,5-7,0 labor-days. More concretely, a ten-person brigade responsible for 89 hectares of grain would receive at the end of the year 4,486 labor-days which brought them 9 tons of grain irrespective of the grain productivity per hectare. GARF, f. 5446, op. 50, d. 2125, ll. 136-146. It is clear that the fulfilment of the labor-day minimum does not imply full-time work on collective farms throughout the year.

days; for the second group<sup>12</sup> composed of some of the central regions and a few regions of the Urals and the Far East 60, and for all remaining regions 80. In order to enforce the minimum of labor-days, the resolution recommended simply the expulsion of peasants for failing to fulfil the compulsory minimum, which meant losing all rights defined by the Statutes, including the right to a private plot. From 1942 to 1953 the number of peasants expelled from their collective farms remained rather low and represented from 70,000 to 260,000 yearly, as shown in the following table:

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<sup>12</sup>This group included the regions of Moscow, Leningrad, Ivanaovo, Iaroslavl', Gor'kii, Vologda, Tula, Riazan', Kirov, Perm, Sverdlovsk, Chitina, Khabovorvsk, and the Primorskii region, and the Autonomous Republics of Komi, Kareliia, Mari and Iakutsk.

**Table 1**  
**Number of peasants expelled from the collective farms, U.S.S.R.,1942-1953.<sup>13</sup>**

Year	Expelled ( persons)	Departed (persons) <sup>14</sup>	Total
1942	70 615	67 882	138 497
1943	104 044	72 726	176 770
1944	121 986	85 928	207 914
1945	122 209	79 601	201 810
1946	259 075	161 371	420 046
1947	219 908	115 936	335 844
1948	241 169	115 158	356 327
1949	239 049	121 293	360 342
1950	154 517	96 530	251 047
1951	166 000	130 200	296 200
1952	161 700	134 200	295 900
1953	178 900	353 200 <sup>15</sup>	532 100

Considering the fact that collective farm chairmen could suggest expulsion for various reasons, not only labor discipline, and that expulsions had still to be confirmed by peasant general assemblies, leniency in implementing labor discipline clearly

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<sup>13</sup>Calculated from RGAE, f. 1562, op. 324, d. 406, l.1; d. 632, l.1; d.884, l.1; d. 1369,l.1; d. 1774 l.1; d.2170, l.1; d. 2568, l.1; d. 3068, l. 3; d. 3594, l. 4; d. 4048, l.1; d. 4630, l.1; d. 5078, ll.1-2.

<sup>14</sup>Departing without fulfilling the labor-day minimum.

<sup>15</sup>Starting from 1953, in the same column where statisticians formerly indicated “departed” (*vybyli*), the category was changed to “released for work by *Orgnabor*’s dispatch”.

predominated. It must also be noted that there were more peasants who left their village in these years than the numbers in the second column show. TsSU statisticians have been careful to add that those peasants who left were not fulfilling the labor-day minimum. Even adding the numbers in both columns does not show a strong will to implement the resolution to the letter . Again, keeping in mind that there were at least 220,000 collective farms in the Soviet Union during this period, leniency was obviously the rule rather than the exception. In comparison to the number of violators *recorded* by the Central Statistical Administration, punishment touched only a small portion of peasants, as shown in the following table:



**Table 2**

**Comparison between the number able-bodied men and women, not fulfilling the compulsory minimum of labor-days and the number of peasants expelled from their collective farms, 1942-1953.**<sup>16</sup>

Year	1. Not fulfilling the minimum	2. Not working a single day	3. (1+2)	4. expelled	4. As a % of 3
1942	1,635, 600	no data	no data	70 615	-----
1943	2 623 853	281 421	2 905 274	104 044	3.6
1944	3 212 401	288 852	3 501 253	121 986	3.5
1945	3 087 800	260 600	3 348 400	122 209	3.6
1946	3 964 700	366 000	4 330 700	259 075	6.0
1947	3 572 600	308 800	3 881 400	219 908	5.7
1948	3 323 400	286 600	3 610 000	241 169	6.7
1949	4 073 400	419 200	4 492 600	239 049	5.3
1950	4 292 600	536 900	4 829 500	154 517	3.2
1951	3 589 000	480 580	4 069 580	166 000	4.1
1952	3 206 070	435 160	3 641 230	161 700	4.4
1953	1 627 260	332 631	1 959 891 <sup>17</sup>	178 900	9.1

<sup>16</sup>Calculated after RGAE, f. 1562, op. 324, d. 883, ll.7-10; d. 632, ll.5-7; d. 884, ll. 5-7; d.1369, ll.5-7; d. 1774, ll.5-7; d. 2170, ll. 14-16; d. 2568, ll. 22- 24; d. 3068, ll. 21-23; d. 3594, ll. 28-30; d. 4048, ll. 25-26; d. 4630, ll.20-24; d. 5078, l. 5-6.

<sup>17</sup>Not including Belorussia, the Ukraine, the Baltic Republics and the Caucasus.

It is quite clear that a small portion of peasants violating the regulations were actually punished, but the state of the statistics on this issue should prevent anybody from coming too quickly to definite conclusions. However, the legislative will to tighten control over peasant labor as shown by the resolution must be seen within the wider context of a criminalizing of the labor infractions of the working class as well as the peasantry. These efforts can be understood first as a form of industrial preparation in the advent of conflict; second, as a delayed response to the demands of industrial managers for means to improve labour productivity; and finally as another step towards the intensification of the struggle between the regime and its reluctant industrial workforce.<sup>18</sup> The same kind of phenomenon also affected the relationship between the regime and its collective farm peasantry, but the immediate objective of the resolutions on labor discipline was to force *kolkhozniki* away from their private plots.<sup>19</sup> Workers started to be punished for leaving their jobs without permission in 1940, but the effectiveness of the law can be questioned since workers continued to leave their jobs and absenteeism marred industrial labor-discipline even during the war.<sup>20</sup> In factories managers largely protected their workers for the sake of production unless leniency threatened to become dangerous for the bosses themselves.<sup>21</sup> Regarding agriculture, the same kind of argument according to which chairmen could protect their peasants from labour discipline prosecution appears sound and there is evidence to support it. To be sure, the State would go on raising the norms; the German scholar Stefan Merl has even argued that there was definitely action taken against the size of the private plot, and the struggle to raise the

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<sup>18</sup>Peter H. Solomon, Soviet Criminal Justice Under Stalin, (Cambridge/ New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 302.

<sup>19</sup>M.N. Denisevich, Individual'noe khoziaistvo na Urale, (Ekaterinburg, AN SSSR- Ural'skoe otdelenie, 1991) p.65-66.

<sup>20</sup>Donald Filtzer, "Labor Discipline, the Use of Work Time, and the Decline of the Soviet System, 1928-1991", International Labor and Working-Class History, no 50, (Fall 1996), p. 11.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*

minimum of labor-days would have probably been continued had the 1941 German invasion not occurred.<sup>22</sup>

The next step toward the tightening of labor discipline in the collective farms was dictated by wartime circumstances, when the disorganization of production and the need to supply the front called for an increase in agricultural production. The State-Party leadership sought to increase peasant productivity by raising the minimum. Hence, the joint resolution of the Central Committee and Council of People's Commissars of April 13, 1942, "On the Increase of the Compulsory Minimum of Labour-days"<sup>23</sup> raised the minimum to 150 labor-days in the cotton-producing farms, 100 for the farms of the second zone, and 120 for most of the Soviet agricultural regions. Also, for the first time village teenagers, aged 12 to 16, were forced to fulfill a minimum of fifty labor-days and, therefore, faced prosecution in case of non-fulfilment. Teenage labor was not new in the pre-war collective farms, as revealed by reports sent to the Politburo in 1939.<sup>24</sup> What was new was the criminalization of teenagers' refusal to work a minimum.

The 1942 resolution was accompanied by a Decree of the Supreme Soviet which defined the judicial procedures to be followed in the prosecution of peasants not fulfilling the compulsory minimum. Members of collective farms charged with "violation of labour discipline" could be forced to fulfill "six months of corrective work in their collective farms, with a 25 % deduction of all their labor-days earnings to the advantage of the kolkhoz."<sup>25</sup> Given the low earnings paid for labor-days before and

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<sup>22</sup>Stephan Merl, Bauern unter Stalin. Die Formierung des sowjetischen Kolchossystems, 1930-1941, (Berlin: In Kommission bei Duncker & Humblot, 1990), p. 475.

<sup>23</sup>Istoriia kolkhoznogo prava. Sbornik zakonodatel'nykh materialov SSSR i RSFSR, Tom II, p. 219.

<sup>24</sup>See on this issue, V.P. Popov, ed., "Melochi kolkhoznnoi zhizni", Otechestvennye arkhivy, no 4 (1995), pp. 81-85.

<sup>25</sup>Istoriia kolkhoznogo prava. Sbornik zakonodatel'nykh materialov SSSR i RSFSR, Tom II, p. 219-220.

especially during the war, the punishment could be rather light. Again, leniency predominated. According to the data provided by the All-Union Prosecutor, from 1942 to 1945 a yearly average of 157,742 peasants were prosecuted under these charges. A partial amnesty was decreed by the Supreme Soviet in July 1945,<sup>26</sup> but the law per se remained in force until Stalin's death (although data are not available after 1948):

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<sup>26</sup>V.P. Popov, ed, Krestianstvo i gosudarstvo v SSSR (1945-1953), ( Paris: YMCA Press, 1992), p. 253.

**Table 3**

**Number of persons brought to trial according to the decree of the Supreme Soviet of 13-4-42.<sup>27</sup>**

Year	Convicted (persons)	Discharged (persons)	Dropped (cases)
1942	204,314	41,825	17,798
1943	148,206	31,663	17,668
1944	144,848	43,153	12,448
1945	133,599	27,764	50,219
1946	190,784	43,411	15,452
1947	136,982	31,148	12,526
1948	117,458	31,159	10,884
Total	1,076,191	250,123	136,995
Average per year	153,741.6	35,731.9	19,570.7

As will be shown later, the number of peasants not fulfilling the minimum numbered every year a few million. Thus, it can be argued that both local powers and Prosecutor's organs did not enforce the existing laws with zeal as the impact of this legislation on peasant labor enthusiasm was not tremendous. For example, the Ukrainian Ministry of Agriculture had no reports to present to the prosecuting organs that could

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<sup>27</sup> GARF, f. 8131, op.24, delo 358, l. 38; Krest'ianstvo i gosudarstvo (1945-1953), p. 253.

explain the “massive refusal to work” among Ukrainian peasants<sup>28</sup>. In order to account for the general slackness surrounding the implementation of the Decree, the Chief of the Nadzor section, in his report to the General Prosecutor, N.P. Gorshenin, pointed out the absence of any reliable local data on labor-day fulfilment, and more importantly, the general attitude of *laissez-faire* from local executive organs, not to speak of collective farm chairmen who “do not want to spoil their relationships with peasants and do not submit to court any material necessary to condemn the evil violators of labor discipline”.<sup>29</sup> Many of them did not even know what they needed and how it should be submitted as evidence. Even the Republican prosecuting organs followed the implementation of the decree sporadically.

Most reports, whether from the Ministry of Agriculture, the Central Committee Section for Agriculture, or the newly formed Council for Collective Farm Affairs, tended to point out that most violators were members of families in which not every member was associated with the collective farm (especially in villages reasonably close to urban centres), members of the chairmen’s or collective farm administrative staff members’ families, or women with children of young age.<sup>30</sup> Usually, officials from the Council for Collective Farm Affairs would target collective farm management as mainly responsible for the bad state of labor discipline, arguing that they did not use the full arsenal of disciplinary measures at their disposal. First, they tended to initiate prosecution for only a small number of the violators and consequently the decree lost most of its impact. Second, when peasants were charged, the corrective labor on the collective farm decreed by People’s courts was often described as pointless since it was neither enforced (by chairmen), nor checked (by organs of Internal Affairs). Therefore peasants charged with verdicts could easily get by. In 1947, 60 % of all sentences of

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<sup>28</sup>GARF, f-r 8131, op. 24, d. 358, l. 112.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid*, l. 115.

<sup>30</sup>RGAE, f. 9476, op. 2, d. 18, l. 1. The same point is made about the 1930s by Sheila Fitzpatrick less the members of chairmen’s families. Cf. Sheila Fitzpatrick, Stalin’s Peasants, p.146.

corrective labour were not enforced<sup>31</sup>. Finally and even more importantly, the possibility of expelling a peasant from the collective farm for non-fulfilment of labor-day minimum, which would imply the loss of right to a private plot, was strongly lessened by the very fact that plots were granted to households (*dvor*). Thus any attempt to deprive a peasant from his private plot was made void because only households -not individuals- enjoyed rights and no provision was made to deprive entire households.

While many chairmen asked for an increase in the labor-day minimum -some of them even suggested to triple it<sup>32</sup>-, no measure of this kind was ever taken after World War II. After an examination of the reasons for the failure of measures to raise labor discipline, inspectors Chuvikov and Ivanitskii from the Council for Collective Farm Affairs suggested to A.A. Andreev a series of measures such as the removal of labor-days, barring violators from using collective farm equipment and pastures, and raising agricultural taxes to the level paid by individual householders,<sup>33</sup> but no action was taken in this direction. Instead, the leadership chose to regulate, by bureaucratic measures, the value of labor-days to make sure that these would retain their significance and by fostering their importance as a means of socialist competition.

After the war, nothing was done in terms of labor-day minimum per se. Rather, the top State-Party leadership chose to fight the phenomenon of peasant absenteeism indirectly as the main resolution issued sought to fight encroachments of private plots on collective lands. According to the logic of the resolution, which attempted to reduce the “uncontrolled size of peasant private plots”, peasants should be forced to spend less time on their private plots and more time on collective farm work in order to meet their needs. Many local officials nonetheless complained about the “slack in labor-day requirements” but no action was taken until 1948. As the chairman of the collective farm

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<sup>31</sup>RGAE, f. 9476, op.2, d. 18, l. 17.

<sup>32</sup>See for example, RGAE, f. 9476, op. 1, d. 866, ll.5-368.

<sup>33</sup>RGAE, f. 9476, op. 2, ll. 21-22.

“Zdobutok Zhovtnia” from the Kiev Region F.U. Dubkovetskii put it bluntly in his letter to Khrushchev then Ukrainian First Secretary in 1946:

The labour-day minimum was introduced to force idlers to work, but the resolution has grown old and has lost any effect. It appears that collective farmers earn now on average 250 labour-days and the compulsory minimum is only 120. [The low labor-day minimum] is into idlers’ hands but the kolkhoz cannot get by on time.<sup>34</sup>

The chairman’s wishes were to be granted an answer in February 1948.

## **II- The Ideological Construction of the Other: Idlers as new Kulaks.**

Besides legislative regulations, attempts to punish and marginalize reluctant elements of collective farms can be found throughout official texts, implementation reports, ministerial correspondence and, of course, in all expressions of official discourse. Prior to the war, the individual householder progressively replaced the kulak as the archetype of evil in the State propaganda directed at the countryside. With their rapid disappearance<sup>7</sup>, their inherent characteristics of “petty-bourgeois” and individualistic attitudes were, so to speak, inherited by the new targets of State propaganda: the idlers using the advantages of the collective farm system without paying their due in sweat and tears. Representing a “yoke on the shoulders of honest peasants”, idlers not only exploited their fellow villagers, they also seduced them by their comfortable lifestyle. That is what made them so intriguing.

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<sup>34</sup>RGAE, f. 9476, op. 2, d. 9, l.4. This letter might have provided Khrushchev the inspiration for handling the “idlers” case in an expeditious way although Dubkovetskii never spoke of deportation but only of raising the labor-day minimum and introducing rewards for over-fulfilment. Nevertheless, the letter was circulated by Khrushchev throughout the Council for Collective Farm Affairs and the Council of Ministers in December 1946. Ibid., l. 7-13.

<sup>7</sup> See for instance, i.E. Zelenin, “Kollektivizatsiia i edinolichnik”, Otechetsvennaia istoriia, no 3 (199), pp. 35-55.



As chairman of the Ukrainian Council of Ministers and First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Republic, N.S. Khrushchev initiated a campaign, little known to scholars before the liberalization of the access to Soviet archives. In accordance with his proposals, the Supreme Soviet granted collective farms general assemblies (*kolkhozyne sobraniia*) first in Ukraine, then in the rest of the Soviet Union the right to deport to camps in Siberia violators of labor discipline. This led to the issuance of two edicts, the first for the Ukrainian Republic in February 1948 (with the exception of Western *oblasti*), the second in June of the same year for the rest of the Soviet Union.<sup>8</sup> Khrushchev used the example of Tsarist laws granting peasant communes the right to exile members “whose presence in their midst presented a threat to the well-being of rural communities” as a precedent to the new measure. Again, Khrushchev’s proposals to use the edict only in a few farms per districts and in a few districts per region was followed and a little more than six percent of all Soviet collective farms were chosen to experiment this new method for fostering labor enthusiasm.

This, however, marked the peak of ferocity in State propaganda towards “false peasants” which was certainly achieved during the 1948 campaign against rural idlers and especially in the documents that convinced the top State-Party leadership of the need for repressive measures. Descriptions of the reactions of the collective farm population can be found in various sources. First, the Party regional committees had to send regular reports on a three month basis during the first year of the campaign, describing the measures they took in order to implement the decree. The Central Committee section for agriculture would then compile these reports and provide surveys addressed to the Party secretariat. The depiction of local mood is, in these reports and surveys, strongly stereotyped with a strong emphasis on the positive reactions of some individual peasants to the issuance of a decree which would help kolkhozes get rid of their idle elements. A

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<sup>8</sup>On the campaign, see V.P. Popov, “Neizvestnaia initsiativa Khrushcheva (o podgotovke ukaza 1948 goda)”, *Otechestvennye arkhivy*, no 2 (1993), pp. 31-38. I have studied in further detail the edict and the campaign in my “Exile and Discipline: The June 1948 Campaign against Collective Farm Idlers” presently under peer review at *Carl Beck Papers in Russian and East European Studies*. Since, I do not wish to repeat the argument made there, I will simply use examples from this campaign in order to strengthen the argument I make here.

widespread cliché presents enthusiastic elderly peasants who condemned “lazy bums” with the harshest comments. For example, the first survey of the implementation in the Northern Caucasus, Crimea, Lower Volga and Central Black Earth Zone was addressed to Malenkov by Kozlov, the head of the Agricultural Section, mentioned the collective farmer Pavlov, 75 years of age, who had by June already fulfilled the labour-day minimum and applauded the deportation campaign with the following words: “Right! We are going to burn with an iron rod the lazy bums and bloodsuckers from our farms as we did in 1930 when the kulak commune-eaters annoyed us building kolkhozes”.<sup>9</sup> In the same document about the women of the kolkhoz Ailibaramov, Divinskii district, in Azerbaidzhan, who, after the official reading of the decree’s text, put down their veils and exclaimed: “May God bless the one who signed this decree!”. The language used to describe the violators of labor discipline, in this context, is usually colourful. They are labelled as “lazy bums (*lodyri*) who are rivetted heart and soul to their private plots”, “spongers”(*tunediatsy*), “parasites using kolkhozes as a screen”<sup>10</sup>, “speculators”, “lazy bones”, “sluggers” (*lentiei*), “vermin” (*gady*), weeds and “typhoid-mongering louses on healthy bodies”. While it is difficult to prove the validity of the examples used in party rhetoric, all these sayings reveal a great deal about the mental world of party officials involved in the preparation of the campaign and fulfil a clear political purpose: convincing implementors of the need for such measures.

The documents that gave birth to the decree show that Khrushchev’s apparatus put tremendous energy into presenting a nicely wrapped package of the measures and their implementation. They also show that the Ukrainian First Secretary succeeded in convincing Stalin of the need for exemplary measures. In the report following the issuance of the decree in Ukraine Khrushchev argues for the effectiveness of the deportation campaign in raising labour discipline by providing a myriad of examples showing that peasants had now started displaying enthusiasm for collective farm work and great political activity during meetings. For example, the First Secretary assessed

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<sup>9</sup> RGASPI, f. 17, op. 138, d. 39, l. 2.

<sup>10</sup> RGASPI, f. 17, op. 121, d. 673, l. 3.

that attendance reached 85-90 % and a dozen peasants spoke out at every meeting.<sup>11</sup> He went so far as to say that these meetings had a tremendous impact not only in the *kolkhozes* but also on industry since many peasants from villages where the decree had been implemented worked in plants and factories. The “desertion” from plants had decreased considerably according to Khrushchev. The same rhetoric associating most of the violators of labour discipline with former collaborators was further reinforced and colourful examples were given to show the sense of hate felt towards “loafers” and “speculators”:

The rank-and-file collective farmer Movchun, from the “Victory” collective farm in Kievo-Sviatoshinskii district of the Kiev region, recalled: “Under the Germans, I asked Bushelenko [accused of parasitism in 1948 and who acted as an elder during the occupation] ‘Give me a small plot of land to save me and my children from hunger’, and he, the cursed scoundrel, replied to me ‘go and ask Stalin for some land for you and your bastards (*baistriuki*). Let him feed you’. Then I went on cursing him and said: ‘Well, just wait, scoundrel. When little-father (*bat’ko*) Stalin will get us out of the Germans’ hands, you will learn how to scoff at us’. Now he [Bushelenko] has to feed some bastards, not mine, but those his daughter got from Germans. We need to deport him, for he won’t stink in our farm any more ”.<sup>12</sup>

This type of evidence of local antipathy for “idlers” can be strongly exaggerated and needs to be compared to the history of the campaign itself as a political event. What Khrushchev considered to be an excellent means to educate the collective farm peasantry and to force rural “parasites” to repent before their own communities turned quickly into one more form of *kampaneishchina* or “spurt-o-mania”. After deporting slightly less than 50,000 *kolkhozniki* in 1948-49, regional Party committees stopped using the measure as pressure from the center for results faded away. As a result, labor discipline infractions did not decrease after the launching of the deportation wave (as shown in table 2).

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, ll. 22-23.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, ll. 28-29.

Moreover, the campaign revealed an important number of “illegal deportations” of certain categories of peasants that central authorities did not wish to see deported- for example elders, single women and veterans. Yet this was done in opposition to the wishes of most collective farmers who simply adopted an attitude of wait and see. They attended gatherings because this was compulsory, but refused to speak out. In fact, deporting idlers was often done in spite of the local will.

It is clear that the State tried to use the figure of such elements in order to solve quickly much deeper problems linked to the nature of the collective farm system. The efforts to use these elements as scapegoats eventually failed because these “enemies” formed what can be defined as a “grey zone” of collective farmers who simply used the loopholes of the collective farm system to ensure survival<sup>13</sup>. As many able-bodied peasants violated rules in a way or another, these efforts failed to marginalize the so-called “almost collectivized elements”.

Although the edict was not removed, very few regional organs used it after 1949. Thereafter any pressure for results from the Party Central Committee disappeared. This failure can be explained in many ways and all these explanations support the argument made in this study. Firstly, at the local level, a significant number of collective farm chairmen used the decree to deport elements against which there was simply no evidence of lawbreaking. In the first six months of the campaign, district executive committees made void from 35 to 45% of all sentences for lack of evidence, and these cases became examples of “illegal deportation”. Secondly, the edict and the campaign that followed did not seem to have any impact on labor discipline, and threats of deportation did not foster labor productivity. Only after 1950, when the economic situation slightly improved in the kolkhozes, were concerns about the state of labor discipline replaced by projects for

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<sup>13</sup> On a more tragic note, we can draw here a parallel with the implementation of the 1947 Supreme Soviet Edict on the Protection of State Property. In the region of Kursk, instead *narsudov o privilechenii k ugolovnoi otvetstvennosti kolkhoznikov po Ukazu 1947 g.*”, ed. by A.P. Chichenkov, *Sovetskie arkhivy*, no 3 (1990), pp. 55-60. of “bands of speculators”, the edict struck especially hard on women, often widows of frontline soldiers.

a new charter. Finally and more importantly, the support for the measures seems to have been timid. Police and Party Committees reports all draw the same picture of these gatherings in collective farms: an overwhelming majority of kolkhoz members attended the meetings but a minority of 5-10 peasants (per farm) spoke out in favor or against deportations. If the wrath of honest peasants against idlers was a factor used by Khrushchev to convince the top State-Party leadership, its expression in 1948 seems to have been minor occurrence.

### **Part III- The Grey Zone of Collective Farm Life: The “Almost Collectivized Elements”.**

With the disappearance of the figure of the kulak prior to the war, the new target of official propaganda in the village was rapidly oriented towards those who collaborated with the German occupier during the war. However, in a majority of those regions that had not experienced occupation, the new enemy was represented by those rural elements who profited from wartime circumstances and enriched themselves in black market and kolkhoze market activities. After the war, they were ideologically merged with those who simply enlarged their plots during the war and offered minimal effort on collective farms as demonstrated by the September 1946 joint resolution attacking “illegal enlargements of private plots at the expense of collective farm lands” which was even considered “exploitation of fellow farmers by a few elements”. At the same time, the government had tremendous difficulty controlling the attribution of private plots which tended to be granted at the level to households (*dvory*) notwithstanding the number of able-bodied farmers<sup>14</sup>. What Soviet agricultural organs considered an illegal and anti-bolshevik practice of levelling down private plots was extremely difficult to combat by central organs. It can also be compared to the efforts launched in 1948 to fight the levelling

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<sup>14</sup> See Krest'ianstvo I gosudarstvo (1945-1953). Sbornik dokumentov, ed. by V.P. Popov, (Paris, YMCA Press, 1992), pp. 275-280.

down of income distributed by labor-days. There is no evidence that such efforts ever succeeded during the period covered by this study<sup>15</sup>.

As it was shown earlier, the number of peasants not fulfilling the minimum numbered every year a few million and it was argued that both local powers and Prosecutor's organs did not enforce the existing laws with zeal as the impact of this legislation on peasant labor enthusiasm was not tremendous. The events of 1948 showed that the situation with labor discipline and false peasants was obviously too complex to be solved by open repression. In the same time as many peasants were deported, inspectors from the Council for Collective Farm Affairs gathered data on members of collective farms who not involved in collective work in 1948 and in 1949 the same organ produced a long report describing the loopholes in the system of membership. The same year the Central Statistical Administration informed Malenkov of important deficiencies in the data collection about the rural population. It must be said first that these reports did not result in major policy reviews and remained largely dead letters. They indicate, however, growing official awareness of the threat posed to overall agricultural performance by rural de-population<sup>16</sup>. For the purpose of this study, they provide meaningful examples of the ways a grey zone was formed on the of the kolkhoz society.

In September 1948, the main official responsible for the implementation of the Statutes N. Diakonov warned the Chairman of the Council for Collective Farm Affairs A.A. Andreev of the proportions taken by the existence in the midst of collective farms of elements in rupture with their former farms (*otoryvshisya*). He made sure to employ the term “almost collectivized elements” and not “de-collectivized”. While Diakonov mentioned that the overall numbers of collectivized households decreased by a million between 1940 and 1947, this situation was made intolerable by the fact that the number of households of “*rabochie i sluzhashchie*” living in rural areas had increased and reached 50 % of all households in “purely agricultural areas” like the regions of Omsk,

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<sup>15</sup> This point is made clearer in the chapter 2 of my dissertation, “Weapons against the Weak: Postwar Agrarian Policies and the Return to Order in the Countryside”.

<sup>16</sup> Compare to *Krest'ianstvo I gosudarstvo (1945-1953)*, ed. By V.P. Popov, pp.111-114.

Stavropol', Penza, Mogilev and the Udmurt autonomous republic. In fact, these households that worried Diakonov that much were formed by "former" collective farmers breaking away with their farms, keeping their private plots in accordance with dishonest strategies, and not fulfilled their obligations before the State as they would be supposed to do as individual householders. Using the example of two peasants living in the same kolhoz in Cheliabinsk, Diakonov provided striking data about the advantage of "breaking away from the collective farm":<sup>17</sup>

	Collective farmer Mel'nikov E.P.	"former" collective farmer Elizarov, G.K.
Dimensions of the private plot	0,15 ha	0,15 ha
Number of cows	1	1
Number of sheep	4	---
Poultry	---	10
Money paid in agricultural taxes	470 rubles	350 rubles
Tax in kind: milk	260 litres	260 litres
Tax in kind: potatoes	320 kg	85 kg
Timber cut for the State	20 cubic meters	0
Days spend on road repairs	6	0
Labor-days earned	647	0

<sup>17</sup> RGAE, f. 9476, op. 1, d. 727.

It is clear that Elizarov would be choked by taxes as an officially registered individual householder and therefore makes both ends meet more easily and with less effort as an inhabitant of that grey zone of “peasants who broke away with their farms”. To avoid any confusion over the terms, it must be noted that Elizarov was simply designed as a “worker living in a rural area” (simply a collective farm). In fact, there were good reasons to avoid being registered as an individual householder<sup>18</sup>. Soviet policies towards individual householders were effective and led to the almost complete disappearance of *edinolichniki* after World War II. V.F. Zima in his book on the famine of 1946-47 suggests that there were close to 200,000 households compared to the 232,000 kolkhozes in the Soviet Union. Their number went on decreasing as supported by the following data published by Soviet scholars:

**Table 5 : Percentage of the sown area occupied by different types of tenure, USSR, 1940-1950<sup>19</sup>**

Type of land tenure	1940	1950
Collective Farms	78,3	82,7
State Farms	8,8	10,9
Private plots	3,5	5,1
Individual households	9,4	1,3

Thus the reasons explaining Elizarov’s behaviour are not too difficult to find. As a proponent of a thought-out strategy for coping with the postwar crisis in collective agriculture, Elizarov did not appear as an extremist. His 0,15 ha private plot was pale in comparison to other “former” collective farmers using a more comfortable position and plots of up to one hectare. Why Elizarov is interesting simply because he is representative of 40-47 % of all peasants in some districts in Khabarovsk, 54,8% in some farms in the

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<sup>18</sup>During the war, for instance, taxes, bonds and collections (*sbory*) made up 31.8% of the income of collective farmers in 1943 while individual households would pay 80.4%. M.A. Vyltsan, *Krest’ianstvo Rossii v gody bol’shoi voyny, 1941-1945. Pirrova pobeda*, (Moscow, Rossiiskii nauchnyi found, 1995), p. 137.

<sup>19</sup>I.M. Volkov, ed., *Sovetskaia derevnia v pervye poslevoennye gody, 1946-1950*, (Moscow : Nauka, 1978), p. 214



Udmurt ASSR and at least half the population of rural inhabitants non-members of collective farms in the entire country<sup>20</sup>. While it is too early in this research to claim that they represent a “mode” or a pattern for most collective farmers, there is at least the possibility of drawing a few preliminary conclusions out of the interesting case people like Elizarov represent. First of all, their appearance clearly represents a blow directed towards the foundations of the collective farm system since it provided an example for those wishing to avoid many of the disadvantages that *kolkhoz* membership usually engendered. Supplementary evidence in the form of schemes of land tenure in the collective farm surveyed by Diakonov’s staff shows clearly that “former” *kolkhozniki* were not in any way expelled from the farms but rather could go on enjoying the benefits of the same private plots they used as full members of the *kolkhozes*<sup>21</sup>. Furthermore, repressing or eliminating these elements required resources the top State-Party leadership could not or did not want to devote to the task as it was the case in the campaign against idlers which was “legally” intended only against *kolkhozniki*. Diakonov may have qualified the appearance of “former collective farmers” as “unnatural” (*nezakonomernoe*), he could only target representatives of local power for the unbearable slack in committing “such mistakes and perversions of Party politics”.<sup>22</sup> What he could not do was to point out all loopholes that permitted such possibilities for peasants and collective farm chairmen

Another possibility for enlarging the grey zone was created by the poor state of local statistics on collective farm population. It is clear that this could be of great economic importance since planning organs used yearly reports from collective farms processed by the Central Statistical Administration in order to assess the amount of work to be extracted from single collective farms and consequently the plan targets to be met. It was not accidental that these organs were interested in such questions since they revealed, for the regions surveyed, a strong tendency to under-report categories of the collective farm population for which labor quotas were set up in regional and national

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<sup>20</sup> RGAE, f. 9476, 1, d. 727, 1-2.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., ll. 16-32. They will be presented on transparent during my presentation.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., ll.11-13.

plans. The survey conducted in the regions of Poltava, Kiev and Dnepropetrovsk in Ukraine and Vologda, Iaroslavl', Molotov Riazan, Kursk and Rostov in the RSFSR showed the following:

**Table 6: Results of a survey conducted by the Central Statistical Administration showing differences in population accounting in 9 regions of the Ukraine and Central Russia<sup>23</sup>, 1948.**

Category of population	According to data from <i>sel'sovet</i>	According to data from yearly reports of collective farms	Difference ( <i>nedouchet</i> )	Difference in percentage
1. Able-bodied men from 16 to 60 and women from 16 to 55	4614	3908	706	15,3%
2. Teenagers from 12 to 16 years	790	637	153	19,4%
3. Elders and disabled	1469	1195	274	18,7%

Without being simply a re-enactment of the *Dead Souls* in the era of collective farms, this type of “careless” accounting was spread enough to represent a problem and to lead to a series of administrative checks and regulations. For the purpose of this study, it is more interesting to note that the unrecorded presence of some peasants on the collective farms constituted one more component of this grey zone because it was difficult to control. Not by accident, as the chairman of the Statistical Administration

<sup>23</sup> GARF, f. 5446, op. 53, d.4415, ll. 38-34.

Starovskii wrote to Malenkov in August 1949, the able-bodied elements have in their majority access to a private plot and half of them works only on this plot while the other half tended to be formed of wage earners. Besides members of the families of the collective farm administration, this group was made up of peasants who had been simply excluded from the farms “on paper” without losing their plots- in most cases brides who had joined their husbands without properly registering their membership. In this case, the deficit comes straight from a family strategy to avoid the burdens of membership for the bride.<sup>24</sup> Clearly, the loose concept of membership was open to interpretation.

Finally, a last source of “marginalized” elements to be included in this study was created by the local implementation of the rules concerning membership in the collective farms. Although the Statutes of Collective Farms of 1935 defined membership as voluntary, the absence of internal passports for peasants greatly reduced peasant mobility and hindered their capacity of working where they wished. Peasants consciously violating important clauses of the Statutes could be expelled, but this occurrence was rare and usually did not lead to the situation where peasants would join a new collective farms. In short, mobility was not supposed to be a feature of the collective farm system.

Thus when reports started appearing in 1948 about the question of *kolkhozniki*’s free choice of a new workplace in a different collective farm the Council for Collective Farm Affairs targeted once more regional and district authorities for their neglectful attitude towards peasant mobility<sup>25</sup>. The main reason evoked for departure was usually linked to better labor-day earnings in the locale but this tended to increase the number of peasants loosely tied to a kolkhoz. While those peasants remained *kolkhozniki de facto* and *de jure*, the practice strongly displeased central agricultural authorities who saw a main cause of disorganization of the production, weakening of labor discipline, and misuse of the workforce in collective farms since these elements were hardly “controlled”. Moreover, there was only one step between this type of migration and the unofficial status of “former” *kolkhoznik* because those peasants would easily break away

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, ll. 35-36.

<sup>25</sup> RGAE, f. 9476, op. 1, d. 730, ll. 15-16

form their farms and simply work as agricultural day-laborers. First noticed in the Republics of Central Asia for reasons of economic inequality between kolkhozes, the migrations between collective farms took there “massive proportions”. The phenomenon eventually appeared in other regions like Kiev, Riazan, Molotov, Stavropol’, Omsk, Grozny and Novosibirsk for instance<sup>26</sup>. Not only disorganizing agricultural production, the problem of uncontrolled labor tended to facilitate illegal recruitment of rural labor for the industrial production which simply worsened the already critical shortage of labor on collective farms.

## Conclusion

It is interesting to note that the August 1953 law modifying the tax system among rural dwellers is entirely free of attempts to demonize individual householders.<sup>27</sup> Stalinist attempts to rule the countryside by creating a succession of imaginary enemies came to a close. While Khrushchev tried to stimulate Soviet agriculture by various non-repressive means, he nevertheless attacked private agriculture, demonstrating thus its importance in the ways Soviet rulers understood the relationship between private and collective in agriculture. *Kolkhozniki* continued their evolution as a social and cultural hybrid, original for some observers, decaying for the others. The harsh postwar period was decisive in this evolution.

Notwithstanding the very preliminary nature of this study, it has at least highlighted the complex relationship between State policies under late Stalinism and peasant strategies of survival and identity. Once the basic features of the collective farm system were introduced, local communities used ingenuity to manipulate these to their own advantage and resisted different attempts to extract labor from them, be they administrative, judicial or openly repressive. The very failure of repression to force peasants to work tells a great deal about the difficulties of launching another Herculean effort after the sacrifices of World War II.

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 17-18.

<sup>27</sup> *Istoriia kolkhoznogo prava*, tom II, pp. 352-357.

Nonetheless this study provided evidence to demonstrate that Stalinist efforts to rule by targeting enemies failed for reasons not obvious to policy-makers at first glance. While loafers were defined as a specific group, they became difficult to punish not only because the definition given to them was wrong, but because they tended to embody a rather important portion of the collective farm population. They were peasants who kept a foot in both the kolkhoz and the margins of it. The fact that rural communities were difficult to mobilize in the struggle against these “not properly collectivized elements” should generate further study of the politics of peasant identity under Stalin.