

“Power, Control, and Criminal Activity: The Peasantry and the Soviet
Revolutionary Tribunal in Viatka Province, 1918-1921”

Recently, many scholars have discussed the ambiguity of the concept of resistance.¹ They have disagreed on what constitutes resistance, how to find it in documents, and its relationship to agency. The legal system, and especially the courtroom, provides an excellent mechanism to explore the relationship among resistance, power, control, and deviance. The courtroom is an arena of social control in which the lawmakers and enforcers reinforce their power over the population. At the same time, it may also serve as a space where those traditionally without social and political power can at least partially achieve limited victories over the dominant elites.² In the early years of the Soviet regime, the Revolutionary Tribunal was a crucial nexus between state control over social and political norms and peasant resistance and accommodation to the new elite.

The Bolsheviks established the Revolutionary Tribunal in November 1917.³ The Tribunal's initial purpose was to have Russia's working people try bourgeois enemies according to proletarian justice. According to Lenin, this proletarian law was to be flexible

¹ See for example, Michael David-Fox, “Whither Resistance?” *Kritika* 1 (Winter 2000): 161-166. The guru of resistance is James C. Scott. See his classics Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance (New Haven: Yale University Press, 85), and Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

² Those struggling for civil rights in the United States also used successfully the courtroom as a space to empower the otherwise powerless segments of the population (namely African-Americans). See Harold Berman, Law and Revolution (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983). On the courtroom in rural society as a social laboratory, see Allen Wells and Gilbert M. Joseph, Summer of Discontent, Seasons of Upheaval: Elite Politics and Rural Insurgency in Yucatan, 1876-1915 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 14-17. On the role of the court in Russian peasant society see Peter Czap, Jr. “Peasant-Class Courts and Peasant Customary Justice in Russia, 1861-1912,” Journal of Social History (vol. 1, no. 2, Winter 1967): 149-178. Christine Worobec Peasant Russia: Family and Community in the Post-Emancipation Period (DeKalb, Northern Illinois University Press, 1995).

³ Decree on the Revolutionary Tribunals, The Bolshevik Revolution 1917-1918: Documents and Materials, compiled by James Bunyan and H. H. Fisher, Hoover War Library Publications, no. 3 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1965), 293-295.

and able to evolve.⁴ Through the legal process, the proletariat was supposed to gain legal consciousness while exacting justice upon their former masters.

The Revolutionary Tribunal, styled upon the tribunals of the French Revolution, was to serve as one of the central judiciary organs to the Soviet legal system. A judge, aided by a group of literate commoners, directed political justice. The Bolsheviks also established an accompanying people's court which was to administer civil and non-political criminal cases.⁵ The Revolutionary Tribunal was not a court for arbitration among peasants. Unlike the *volost'* court from the late-Imperial and Provisional Government eras, the Tribunal was largely a top-down prosecutorial court that judged cases that the state brought upon its population. The Bolsheviks established the Tribunal in order to suppress the bourgeois enemies of the people. In 1918, after the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly and the beginning of the Civil War, the Revolutionary Tribunal transformed into an instrument to punish anti-Soviet activity, irregardless of the defendant's class origins.

Conservative scholars and critics of the Soviet regime have long associated the Revolutionary Tribunal with the mass terror of the early Bolshevik regime (also known as the Red Terror). With the Bolsheviks' show trials, pre-determined verdicts, and summary executions, some historians have even argued that the Soviet reliance on terror created an atmosphere of "legalized lawlessness" in which the people had no rights.⁶ The Revolutionary Tribunal was the legal arm of the Bolshevik political repression and the

⁴ There has been much written on Lenin's conflicting and ambiguous views on law. For a summary of the scholarly debate, see Jane Burbank, "Lenin and the Law in Revolutionary Russia," *Slavic Review* 54 (Spring 1995): 23-44.

⁵ The structure of early Soviet courts was complex. The Revolutionary Tribunals and people's courts each had hierarchical systems, from local up to a supreme court. There were also several branches within each arm of the court system. See John N. Hazard, *Settling Disputes in Soviet Society: The Formative Years of Legal Institutions* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960). The most insightful work on the Revolutionary Tribunals is Christy Jean Story, "In a Court of Law: The Revolutionary Tribunals in the Russian Civil War, 1917-1921" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Santa Cruz, 1998).

Cheka (the political police) the military arm. The Tribunal was part and parcel of the Bolshevik repression, and acted as the policeman and enforcer of Soviet norms and power relations. It played a central role in controlling the population. The Tribunal categorized, defined, and punished subjects deemed to have participated in deviant behavior. But it is important to see the Revolutionary Tribunal as more than a policing unit of a 'lawless' state. The Tribunals transcended their stated purpose of dictating punishment upon those deemed deviant.

This paper studies the relationship between peasant deviants and the state in the early years of the Soviet regime. It examines cases from the Viatka Province Revolutionary Tribunal to show what extra-legal activities peasants engaged in and how the provincial Bolshevik government understood these actions and categorized them as deviant behavior. I argue that the peasantry's challenges to the legal and social order reveal the diverging views on social norms and justice between state and peasant. At the same time, Revolutionary Tribunal cases also show one of the few methods of direct communication between state and society, since the state was willing to listen to the testimony of the peasant criminals. Peasants testified that they supported the Soviet regime but acted against it to uphold peasant social norms. Such contradictory rhetoric is significant because it blurs the line between deviance and submission.

Law was the "state's emissary," in the Viatka countryside.⁷ It helped extend the Soviet state and its worldview into the village and create a hegemonic society through

⁶ Richard Pipes, A Concise History of the Russian Revolution (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995), 217. See also Pipes, Legalised Lawlessness: Soviet Revolutionary Justice (London: The Institute for European Defence, 1986).

⁷ The metaphor of law as an emissary comes from Ranajit Guha, "Chandra's Death," Subaltern Studies V. Writings on South Asian History and Society, ed. by Ranajit Guha (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987), 135-165. I have been influenced by the cogent analysis of law in colonial rule of Upendra Baxi, "'The State's Emissary': The Place of Law in Subaltern Studies," Subaltern Studies VII. Writings on South Asian

peasant participation and acceptance of its decrees. As Ranajit Guha, a leading figure in Subaltern Studies (a group of scholars of South Asian and Indian historiography), has argued, the legal process took historical experiences, such as peasant rebellion, and transformed them “into a matrix of abstract legality, so that the will of the state could be made to penetrate, reorganize part by part and eventually control the will of a subject population.” It is important to emphasize that it is the state that creates deviants by defining the terms of deviation, and controlling the medium in which the narrative of social norms and deviation are discussed.

The Order of Things

The Revolutionary Tribunal was quite active in Viatka from 1918 to 1921. Judging from the archival files, tribunals in the province heard over 5000 cases.⁸ The court system as a whole in Viatka was quickly overwhelmed by its caseload. The province’s first commissar of justice, A. A. Vepiakov, complained that the Bolsheviks had inherited over a thousand unheard cases. More were added to this every day from complaints from prisoners hoping to be released.⁹ Many of these cases were passed along to the Revolutionary Tribunal. So, rather than trying enemies of the people, the original aim of the Tribunals, the Tribunals’ first focus was those who had violated laws of the “bourgeois” Provisional Government.¹⁰ The early Soviet state showed its obsession with order, regardless of class status, in these early cases.

In April 1918, The Revolutionary Tribunal heard a case from 1916 in which a village policeman (*uriadnik*) was accused of striking a peasant and failing to do his job.

History and Society, ed. by Partha Chatterjee and Gyanendra Pandey (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992), 245-264.

⁸ These cases can be found in Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Kirovskoi Oblasti (hereafter GAKO), f. R-1322, op. 1, 1a, 2, and 3. My conclusions are based on a sampling of the *fond*.

⁹ K. Palkin, “Komissary iustitsii,” Sovetskaia iustitsiia 21 (November 1967): 18.

Peasants had already decided many such cases themselves in 1917 by ousting corrupt and domineering administrators. Yet the Revolutionary Tribunal failed to convict the policeman on the grounds that the victimized peasant could not prove that the policeman had hit him.¹¹ A more telling case concerned a peasant uprising during a local market in March 1917, in the early days of Provisional Government rule. According to the regional inspector's report, a group of soldiers provoked peasants at the market to demand that the merchants sell their goods at non-fixed prices. This demand was in reaction to the government's policy of fixed prices on food and basic goods.¹² The soldiers ran through the market yelling "Hooray! Sale!" while scattering merchants' goods. Local peasants joined the uprising. The merchants called the hamlet elder (*volost' starshina*), but when he arrived the crowd grabbed his revolver and began to beat him. The crowd turned on the hamlet administration building, knocking down its doors.¹³

The Provisional Government inspector interviewed the merchants about the uprising and the Soviet Revolutionary Tribunal used their testimony to bring seventeen peasants to trial. The Tribunal's acceptance of merchant testimony as the master narrative, the account of the story held by the court to be true, is significant. The proletarian court found the bourgeois merchants' memory more credible than peasant memory and the natural Bolshevik allies, the soldiers. The Soviets thereby denied class solidarity and peasant consciousness of their own exploitation. The master narrative accepts the soldiers as the instigators of the rebellion, even though it was the peasantry

¹⁰ This does not include the amnesty of opposition party members in 1918 and those earlier convicted of "agitation, counter-revolution, crime of office, sabotage, and anti-Soviet activity." See Story, 124.

¹¹ GAKO, f. R-1322, op. 1a, d. 1. The court sided with the policeman even though the peasant had made a statement in 1916 that he had been struck by the defendant. The court also found the policeman's actions justified since the victimized peasant was drunk.

¹² On the Provisional Government's grain monopoly and policy of fixed prices, see Lars Lih, Bread and Authority in Russia, 1914-1921 (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), ch. 3.

¹³ GAKO, f. R-1322, op. 1a, d. 30.

who was hurt most by the Provisional Government's policy on fixed prices for agricultural goods. Peasants acted against the merchants and the *starshina* as symbols of unjust state policy. The peasantry saw the Provisional Government's food policy as violating an established moral economy in which the State takes care of its people in times of need.¹⁴

All of the accused were found guilty of disorder, but specifically not "organized disorder," and had to pay fines ranging from 100 to 300 rubles. Peasants were tried even though they had not acted against the Soviet State. They had rebelled against a larger philosophical foundation; they had created disorder, threatened the nation's food supply, and in doing so acted against state power. These transitional cases during the early months of Soviet rule show how the new rulers categorized crimes and criminals based on general deviance against state interests.

Crime and Punishment

The Revolutionary Tribunal heard most of its cases during the Civil War (1918-1921). Every act was political during the Civil War, and the Revolutionary Tribunal cases were products of such politicization. Every peasant act was therefore either in support of the Soviet regime and its ideology, or deviating from it. Politicization imposed a false consciousness onto the peasantry, based on class and loosely defined Soviet norms. The Soviets denied peasant consciousness and peasant norms, instead inscribing their own worldview.

The Soviet Tribunal categorized criminal activities based on ideology and realities of the day. Eleven types of crime are denoted in statistical reports for cases brought to the Tribunal in 1919: counter-revolutionary activity, sabotage, speculation, pogrom, bribery, illegal use of soviet documents, spying, crime of office, violations of decrees, hooliganism,

¹⁴ On the moral economy, see James C. Scott, The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence

and other. Peasant activity, irregardless of the agent's motive, was defined by the soviet state and placed within these boundaries. Although the statistics are inconsistent and fraught with mathematical errors, it can still be determined that the most frequent offense brought to trial was crime of office, followed by counter-revolutionary activity.¹⁵ The frequency of officials brought to trial is presumably due to the sheer number of new, untrained personnel who had used the Bolshevik Revolution as an opportunity for personal power. As well as the Soviet government's shift in late 1918 from supporting the Committees of the Poor Peasant (*kombedy*), to encouraging peasants to denounce them as being filled with counter-revolutionary opportunists.

The Revolutionary Tribunal was unique. Unlike liberal and colonial state adjudication, the Tribunal was not a "formally rational" court that applied a systematic routine of administrative justice irregardless of the crime.¹⁶ Instead, the Tribunal took peasant action as distinctly political acts. But the Tribunals categorized peasant violence as anti-Soviet or counter-revolutionary, rather than collective action by conscious individuals. In doing so, it still deprived peasants of their legitimacy as historical actors.

In August 1918, the Revolutionary Tribunal brought two peasants before the court on charges of actions against soviet power. Igant'ie Antonov Akulov and his son Fedor had resisted requisitioning of their grain in July. The village provisions committee had searched for excess grain and had focused on the Akulov household because they were known in the village to be wealthy. According to the court report, the Akulovs heard about the committee's intent and locked his gate. When the committee arrived to take the grain,

in *Southeast Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976).

¹⁵ Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii (hereafter GARF), f. 1240, op. 1, d. 125, ll. 22-33.

¹⁶ Issac D. Balbus, *The Dialectics of Legal Repression: Black Rebels before the American Criminal Courts* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1973), 12. Balbus notes that the United States criminal court and courts in other liberal states use formal rationality "to repress collective violence" and depoliticize political

a gunfight ensued. The court report defines the Akulovs as kulaks (rich peasants). It notes that the Akulovs owned more land and sold items to poor peasants. The kulak family was against the redistribution of land and had denounced soviet power. The court sentenced Ignat'ie to ten years in prison and deprivation of all rights as a citizen. It sentenced his son to execution.¹⁷

The Revolutionary Tribunal tried the Akulovs as kulaks, denying the accused their own political consciousness. The court record described the Akulovs through commonly-held images of the kulak--the village strong-man, "the agent of manipulation and exploitation within the peasant community," "the embodiment of evil," and "an expression of the features of a money economy."¹⁸ The Akulovs supposedly owned a lot of land and "made a fortune from buying and selling to all the unfortunate poor peasants." They were also ignorant (*temnyi*) and closed off from society.¹⁹ There was indeed an element of intra-village class difference, since the Akulov household was clearly wealthier than its neighbors. But the Tribunal defined the concealment of grain as a counter-revolutionary act, an ignorant kulak reaction to the proletariat state's needs, thereby denying the accused their ability to act as peasants. The Akulovs, like many other villagers in Viatka, presumably resisted state attempts at grain requisitioning because they feared starvation and refused to sacrifice an unjust amount of grain to the state.

Peasants understood the emphasis Soviets put on class and used this to their own advantage. In several cases, accused peasants emphasized their poverty. One peasant

solidarity and acts of violence. Burbank argues that Lenin saw law "as a manipulable instrument of politics," which deprived law of its "aura of 'justice'" enjoyed in English law, 43-44.

¹⁷ It should be mentioned that the Revolutionary Tribunals very rarely punished criminals with the death penalty. Even Richard Pipes admits that in statistics on the Revolutionary Tribunal sentences only 14 out of 4483 resulted in the death penalty. Pipes, *Legalised Lawlessness*, 10.

¹⁸ Cathy A. Frierson, *Peasant Icons: Representations of Rural People in Late Nineteenth-Century Russia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 139. For more on the image of the kulak, see ch. 7.

¹⁹ GAKO, f. R-1322, op. 1a, d. 41.

accused of siding with the Whites during their invasion of the province in the spring of 1919, stressed that he was a poor peasant (*bedniak*) and only paid 1300 rubles in extraordinary taxes (*chreznalogy*).²⁰ He therefore could not be an enemy of the working people. The Tribunal agreed and gave him a light sentence.²¹ Another peasant brought before the Tribunal for inactivity as the head of the local committee for the poor peasant asked to be freed since there were only two workers in his family of eleven.²² By confessing to deviating from social norms while adopting Soviet definitions of self-identity based on class, the accused became natural allies to the hegemonic state who had merely been temporarily tempted by bourgeois enemies and could be rehabilitated with ease.

Mediating Deviance

The Tribunal was more than an agent of terror and punishment. The court's interrogation of suspects shows a fascinating creation of the anti-Soviet criminal and the mediation between the state and its people. In May and June 1919, the Bolsheviks were barely in control in Viatka province. Kolchak's troops were advancing from the East and were threatening the city of Viatka. In the southern part of the province, the government had recently suppressed a renegade provision's brigade that had run amuck, shooting many peasants, and rousing other peasants to rise up against the soviet regime. Amidst this turmoil, the Revolutionary Tribunal heard a case of nineteen peasants accused of being members of an anti-Soviet band who engaged in speculation.

Judges have to decide what is fact and what is the pre-history, the causes, to the crime. The story of the "crime" (as defined by law) that the court assumes to be true becomes the master narrative in the legal process. This may come in the form of an

²⁰ Extraordinary taxes were usually one-time assessments by the Soviets based on a household's class status. Moscow gave the province a sum, which in turn distributed quotas to the regions and then *volosti*. Often, the province could only collect a small portion of their intended sum.

accomplice who testifies against fellow ‘criminals,’ a state witness, an inspector’s report, and so forth. In this instance, the narrative of events surrounding the band of outlaw peasants came from a regional Cheka official. According to his report, “a mass of armed deserters and various counter-revolutionary elements” were hiding in the forest of Verkhotul’sk and Arbazhsk *volosti*, Kotel’nich region. The surrounding peasants helped the band, supplying them with all necessary supplies and money. According to the report, the band had connections to white guards in Kazan’, Sarapul, Simbirsk, and other cities. It took an armed detachment of sixty people to drive “the deserters” from the forest and arrest them.²³ This was the master narrative, the thesis, of the case against counter-revolutionary deviance.

The Cheka conducted a number of detailed interrogations of witnesses and the accused. Reflecting the seriousness of the crime, the state actually transcribed many of the interrogations verbatim. The testimonies of the accused constructed a narrative of peasant insurgency, representing an antithesis to the state’s master narrative of the deviant behavior. The peasants’ responses reflected peasant consciousness and their own social norms. Moreover, the interrogation transcripts present peasants in their own voices, describing village life.²⁴ However, the Cheka interrogators created and shaped the discourse of the accused. Without the interrogation, the peasant insurgents would have been silent and remained simply deviants. The Cheka also directed and guided the insurgent testimony through its questions. The interrogation process provided the peasantry with an arena, albeit restricted, to present their own worldviews.

²¹ GAKO, f. R-1322, op. 1a, d. 652, ll. 63, 69.

²² GAKO, f. R-1322, op. 1a, d. 1113, l. 8.

²³ GAKO, f. R-1322, op. 1a, d. 1579, l. 29.

²⁴ William B. Taylor describes the advantages and disadvantages of court transcripts in Drinking, Homicide and Rebellion in Colonial Mexican Villages (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1979), espec. ch. 3

*Model Interrogation:*²⁵

Question: State your personal information.

Question: Do you recognize and support soviet power?

Answer: Yes, I recognize soviet power and believe it to be legitimate, but I find local soviet officials to act in an unjust manner.

Question: Why did you not defend Soviet power? Why did you not answer the state's call to arms?

Answer: My household needs me in the village.

Question: Why did you not use the soviet administration to help solve your problems?

Answer: Local administrative services do not work.

The interrogators began by defining and classifying the deviants by age, residency, gender, level of education, family situation, party membership, occupation, and class. All of the categories except class and party overlap with police reports and census categories from the tsarist and Provisional Government era. They are presumable continuities of the modern state's control of their population. The Soviet regime could not rationalize the peasants' counter-revolutionary activity through class status, traditionalism from old age, or adherence to the Party of the Socialist Revolutionaries and other bourgeois political allegiance. Out of fourteen peasants who the Cheka interrogated, the average age was 24. Most of the accused were lower-middle peasants and none of them belonged to a political organization.

The dual rhetoric of Soviet inquisitor and peasant respondent show that the state tried to understand, and thus control, why the population wanted to act against Soviet society. The Cheka's line of questioning centered on the accused's relationship to Soviet State interests, while the peasantry's answers revealed how they believed the State had violated peasant law. The inquisitors' first question was always, "do you recognize soviet power and find its actions legitimate?" Every peasant answered that they recognized the legitimacy of soviet power. Most of the accused, however, added that, while they

²⁵ Compiled from GAKO, f. R-1322, op. 1a, d. 1579.

supported soviet rule, they believed that local officials were corrupt. As one peasant said, “I believe that central power is legitimate, but I find the actions of many soviet workers in the localities who levy extraordinary taxes and carry out confiscations illegitimate.”²⁶ In this way, the peasantry continued the popular Russian tradition of criticizing the regime by defending the ruler against the local bureaucrats. Daniel Field has described this scenario in the post-emancipation Russian countryside, in which the peasantry used their supposed naive monarchism to justify resistance to local officials. Field argues that peasant petitions to the tsar and officials in St. Petersburg claiming that ‘the tsar is good, but the nobles (*boyars*) are bad.’ were discursive tools to criticize state policies while showing their loyalty.²⁷ Orlando Figes has shown that peasants in the lower Volga region used similar strategies in petitions during the Civil War. Peasants wrote to Moscow, stating that they supported the Soviets but were against the Bolsheviks.²⁸ In Viatka, peasants testified that they supported the Soviet regime but acted against it to uphold peasant social norms. Such contradictory rhetoric is significant because it blurs the line between deviance and submission.

The very nature of the testimony blurred the line between deviance and submission. Under the presumed threat of physical punishment and the promise of a reduced sentence, all of the accused peasants voluntarily confessed to the activity that the court deemed to be a crime. Through such an admission, the accused “took part in producing penal truth.”²⁹ The defendant admitted that he was a deviant and submitted himself to the mercy of the court. But the peasant testimony shows that the insurgents only partially confessed. They

²⁶ GAKO, f. R-1322, op. 1a, d. 1579, l. 86ob.

²⁷ Daniel Field, Rebels in the Name of the Tsar (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1976).

²⁸ Orlando Figes, Peasant Russia, Civil War: The Volga Countryside in Revolution (1917-1921) (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 330.

admitted to the specific action and acknowledged the legitimacy of the state, but denied that their act constituted a crime. Instead, the rebels argued that it was the state that had failed them; the Bolshevik government had themselves deviated from their moral responsibility as the elite to their population.

The Cheka asked questions not only to build a case against the deviants. Their questions suggest a conversation between inquisitor and peasant about the reality of the soviet state in the countryside. When asked why they acted against soviet power, the peasantry answered that the state had failed them. One peasant complained that local officials conducted several searches of his home that took almost all of his and his fellow villagers' goods and money, but he did not even know to where the money was going.³⁰ The peasant believed that there was an acceptable amount that he could sacrifice to the state, but the government exceeded the norm. Moreover, the peasant did not see benefits from his sacrifice. Similar conflicts over the peasant-state relationship can be seen from the Cheka's queries on state services. The new soviet state was supposed to be participatory, emancipatory, and supply social services to the masses. When the Cheka asked the peasants why they did not use formal services to act on or complain about the local officials' illegal activities, the defendant answered, "I did not know where to turn" and re-elections and gatherings didn't do a thing anyway.³¹ The Cheka also asked peasants whether they knew about Soviet aid to families of Red Army soldiers. While peasants knew of and pointed out that they supported the program, they argued that they didn't see any money from it.³²

²⁹ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), 38. On the court's creation of legal truth through testimony see Shahid Amin, "Approver's Testimony, Judicial Discourse: The Case of Chauri Chaura," *Subaltern Studies V*, 166-202.

³⁰ GAKO, f. R-1322, op. 1a, d. 1579, l. 47ob.

³¹ Ibid., l. 86ob.

³² Ibid., ll. 47ob, 54ob.

State Deviance

While most Revolutionary Tribunal cases concerned popular acts of political crimes, there was a significant number of litigation of official crimes. The Bolsheviks tried to reign in officials who did not comply with Soviet political norms. The Revolutionary Tribunal convicted many rogue officials for engaging in anti-Soviet behavior such as drinking, brewing and selling moonshine, and incest. However, officials tried for excess violence in their duties are especially interesting in the larger discussion of norms and deviant behavior. These representatives of state power enforced state control, but in such an egregious manner that the court found them deviant.

In November 1919, the case of Mikhail Ivanovich Mochalov and Georgii Stepanovich Moriakhin came before the Tribunal. In October 1918, Mochalov was the secretary of the Kadamsk *volost'* government and Moriakhin the leader of a Red Army detachment. Both were well educated and willingly fulfilled their duties in office. When the local peasants refused to pay a revolutionary tax, the Kadamsk *volost'* commission resolved to take harsh measures, including punishing persistent non-payers with execution. A Red Army regiment came to the *volost'* and joined representatives from the committee for the poor peasant (*kombed*). Mochalov illegally seized command of the detachment and along with Moriakhin disregarded the regional instructions on conducting tax collection. According to the report, "in every village they beat up non-payers, including women and elders." They instructed the detachment to kill every non-payer and the troops complied. The leaders themselves also killed several people, including some women. When some members of the *kombed* refused to kill detained non-payers, Mochalov and Moriakhin executed the *kombed* member along with the prisoner. Moreover, the leaders confiscated goods, such as honey, and kept them for their own use. In the course of ten days, "several

tens of people were killed, making the *volost*' uneasy. As a result of such barbaric and illegal activity on the part of Mochalov and Moriakhin, the peasants were furious and against Soviet power." The leaders were arrested and kept under guard.³³

It is significant that the Revolutionary Tribunal brought the leaders of the brigade to task, rather than the whole regiment. Both leader and soldier committed violent offenses, the latter against fellow villagers. The court apologized for the soldiers' actions by arguing that they were simply following orders, "Since the orders came from learned (*soznatel'nye*) people, for example Mochalov is a teacher, [the soldiers]... submitted blindly."³⁴ In this case, the court forgave the ordinary men because they did not have the intellectual ability to question the orders. Mochalov and Moriakhin, however, were politically conscious and had the duty to act according to soviet norms of behavior. Like the soldiers under their command, Mochalov and Moriakhin were clearly trying to fulfill orders from above to meet tax quotas. The leaders became responsible for the deviant acts committed by both themselves and their troops since they fit into the state's category of conscious, intellectual elite.

Contemporary Narratives on Deviance

The Soviet government abolished the Revolutionary Tribunal in 1921. The end of the Civil War and the establishment of the conciliatory New Economic Policy (NEP) as well as the implementation of a new legal code made the Tribunal obsolete. Nevertheless, the larger issues of popular deviance and Bolshevik social control during the Civil War continues to have political relevance.

³³ GAKO, f. R-1322, op. 1a, d. 1574, ll.1-2, 345.

³⁴ Ibid, l. 1ob.

In October 1991, The Soviet government issued a decree to rehabilitate victims of political terror.³⁵ In this landmark act of conscious reappraisal of what was socially acceptable and deviant behavior, cases of the Revolutionary Tribunal were re-examined, re-judged, and re-sentenced. A new master narrative was imposed upon the legal cases as the new faceless judge reconstructed past events and laid judgement upon them through new social norms and political aims. The rehabilitator focused on those who had been the most overt deviants--the counter-revolutionary peasants who sided with the Whites, the embodiment of anti-Soviet values.

For example, a case was reviewed in which a peasant of Glazov district sided with the Whites and even gave out names of twenty-six of his fellow villagers who sympathized with Soviet power, resulting in their execution by White Guards. The Revolutionary Tribunal had found him guilty as an “enemy of the working people.” In their judgment, the Soviets prescribed and identity and adjoining deviance upon the guilty party of a bourgeois kulak. The defendant appealed the decision by adopting Soviet rhetoric of class. Not denying that he turned in his fellow villagers, he argued that they were killed as thieves, rather than as communists. More over, the defendant asserted that he was not a kulak, but rather a *bedniak*, since he was assigned a small tax during the extraordinary tax campaign. The Soviet government accepted his class-based argument, and deferred his sentence from execution down to a five year imprisonment. The new judgement post-homonously rehabilitated the peasant as a victim of political terror.

Irregardless of the political validity in any of the sides during the Civil War, it is striking that the new judgement subverted the master narrative’s focus on class, and the unspoken subaltern narrative of the defendant as the treasonous deviant who sided with

³⁵ Decree number 1337, “O khode realizatsii Zakona RSFSR ‘o reabilitatsii repressirovannykh narodov,’”

outsiders over his fellow villagers. The new narrative reshaped the deviant, who before had committed a conscious political act, into a victim, overwhelmed by the political forces. Yet the modern day judge allowed the more everyday peasant political acts, such as refusing to sacrifice grain and brewing moonshine, to remain as deviant behavior since they did not actively side with elite groups which composed the anti-Soviet political forces.

In the end, the Revolutionary Tribunals marked a failed hegemonic process. Russia's historically weak administrative structure in the countryside and the desperate political and economic situation stemming from eight years of war created a situation in which the judicial process was incomplete. While the Bolsheviks tried many people, several more were never brought to court. Moreover, political necessity often led the Soviet government to reduce and even nullify punishment. For example, in 1920, the Party freed an Udmurt convicted of sabotage because they needed people able to help agitate among the Udmurt population.³⁶ The Revolutionary Tribunal did not have the power to drive class warfare and commit unfettered terror during the Civil War. Instead, the Tribunal gained its power through its legacy as a symbol of Bolshevik terror.

Vedomosti s'ezda narodnykh deputatov RSFSR i Verkhovnogo Soveta RSFSR 42 (17 October 1991): 1595.

³⁶ GARF, f. 1318, op. 5, d. 3, l. 748. The Bolsheviks freed another person convicted of desertion to work among the "dark masses" of the Udmurt population, l. 604.