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Growing Up Soviet? The Orphans of Stalin's Revolution and
Understanding the Soviet Self

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Abstract

Growing Up Soviet? The Orphans of Stalin's Revolution
and Understanding the Soviet Self

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This dissertation explores the history of the “orphans of Stalin’s revolution”: the hundreds of thousands of children who grew up under the care (or neglect) of the Soviet state after losing their parents to Stalin’s harsh policies of forced collectivization, breakneck industrialization, and political repression. Beginning with the huge wave of orphaned children that followed Stalin’s “revolution from above,” it traces Soviet efforts to house, manage, and, in particular, “remake” these children to be loyal, collectivist, Soviet subjects. Drawing on both archival documents and children’s writings, it unveils how Soviet institutions sought to transform how these children thought and spoke about their lives by encouraging them to script new, Soviet identities for themselves, and the outcomes of this process. In particular, it reveals the large contrast between efforts to form Soviet subjects or “New Soviet People” in model institutions versus the wider system of children’s homes. It then turns its attention to another cohort of orphaned children whose parents were arrested during Stalin’s political repressions, investigating how these children experienced and later remembered the devastating loss of their parents and the difficult transition to life in a collective environment. In doing so, it broadens our understanding of the place of childhood in the Soviet project, and explores the still mostly unanswered question of how young people subjectively experienced the Soviet system. It also reveals and analyzes previously unexamined emotional dimensions of Soviet subjectivity, investigating how the Soviet state sought to manage and shape the emotions of its citizens, and how emotional memories and narratives (on the part of children of “enemies of the people,” for example) challenged this process.

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GLOSSARY

aktiv – activist group. The core of the “collective” (see *kollektiv*).

besprizornyi, pl. *besprizornye*, colloq. *besprizornik(i)* – homeless children, homeless youth

besprizornost' – child homelessness, the overall phenomenon of children living on the street. The Soviet Union experienced three distinct “waves” of child homelessness: 1) during the revolution and Civil War, appx. 1917-1922 2) during the years of the First Five-Year Plan, collectivization, and famine (1929-1933) 3) during the Second World War

beznadzornost' – neglect of children. Numerous Soviet articles and officials, including Lenin’s widow Nadezhda Krupskaya, worried that neglected children would possibly become street children or *besprizornye*

dekulakization – the expropriation and deportation of those accused of being “kulaks” (rich peasants) during the forced collectivization of the countryside

detdom, *detskii dom* pl. *detdoma* – children’s home, orphanage. Most children’s homes were administered by the Commissariat of Education. Children’s homes in turn were divided into different types for “normal” children, for “difficult” children who had run away or violated the rules multiple times at other homes, and so on.

detposelok / detgorodok – children’s village, children’s town. An amalgamation of several children’s homes that were supposed to share resources. After numerous problems in many of these institutions, the Soviet government began to phase them out.

detdomovets, pl. *detdomovtsy* – resident of a children’s home or other children’s institution.

FZU – factory school that provided industrial training. Many children’s home graduates would be sent to FZUs.

kollektiv – collective.

Komsomol – the Communist Youth League. Communist youth organization for ages 14-23.

Narkompros – the Commissariat of Education. Responsible for administering most children’s homes.

NKVD – the Soviet state security police (1934-46). See also OGPU.

oblast' – region. A Soviet administrative division that replaced the provinces of the Russian empire.

OGPU – the Soviet state security police (1928-34). See also NKVD.

Otdel Narodnogo Obrazovaniia (ONO) – a the local divisions of the Commissariat of Education, responsible for the financing and administration of children’s homes. ONO were divided into city ONO (GorONO), district ONO (RaiONO), and regional ONO (OblONO).

perevospitanie – reeducation.

priemnik-raspredelitel' – receiving and distribution center. Homeless children rounded up on the streets were processed here and sent on to children’s homes or other institutions. In 1935, the administration of all receiving centers was transferred to the NKVD. Children whose parents were arrested by the NKVD would also be processed here.

Pioneers – Communist organization for the 10-14 age group.

raion – district. A local Soviet administrative division.

RSFSR – Russian Socialist Federal Soviet Republic, the largest republic of the USSR.

Sovnarkom (*Sovet narodnykh kommissarov*) – Council of People’s Commissars. The highest administrative council in the Soviet government.

sotsial’no-zapushchennost’ / sotsial’no-zapushchennyi – social neglect, socially neglected.

Stakhanovites – workers and peasants recognized for outstanding production and over-fulfilling their work “norms.” Movement named for Andrei Stakhanov, a record-breaking coal miner, launched in 1935.

Trotskyite – political supporter of Leon Trotsky, a rival to Stalin expelled from Communist Party in 1927 and subsequently deported. Popular insult applied to children whose parents had been arrested as “enemies of the people.”

trudovaia kommuna – labor commune. An institution, usually for juvenile delinquents or “difficult children,” that featured workshops or factories and required residents to work as part of the “reeducational” process. Many were administered by the OGPU/NKVD. The Dzerzhinskii and Bolshevo communes were two of the most famous examples.

trudovaia koloniia – labor colony. Similar to a labor commune, but sometimes with an even stricter regime. “Closed” labor colonies administered by the NKVD were similar to prisons for juvenile criminals, as they featured guards and did not allow inmates to leave.

vospitatel’ / vospitatelnitsa – educators that worked in children’s homes, responsible for the reeducation and “communist upbringing” of residents.

vospitatel’naia rabota – educational work in children’s homes

vospitannik / vospitannitsa, pl. *vospitanniki* – pupil, ward, resident of a children’s home

zavuch (zaveduiushchii ucheboi chast’iu) – head of the educational section. The most senior educator in the children’s home, usually second in importance to the director.

A NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

I have used the standard Library of Congress system for Russian, with some minor exceptions. For names that have an accepted English spelling, such as Trotsky or Gorky, I have used the English spelling. For the ease of the reader, I have also omitted diacritical marks from proper names in the text. For citations in footnotes and the bibliography, I have used the full Library of Congress system.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The origins of this project can be traced to my own first encounter with Russia, at a time when the professional study of either Russian or history had barely entered the mind of a nineteen-year-old student at a small college in Minnesota. Intrigued by the sudden opportunity to travel to a wholly unfamiliar country, I made the snap decision to join a dozen other students on a three-week service trip to a Russian orphanage. Though it was our short time in Moscow and St. Petersburg that likely sparked my fascination with Russian history, it was the weeks spent at the Children's Home of Hope in Staraiia Russa that introduced me to the warmth and hospitality of the Russian people. I would therefore like to offer my gratitude first and foremost to the staff and children of this institution, who made a naive young student, knowing not a word of Russian, somehow feel at home. Although I have returned to Russia many times in the years since, this remains among my fondest memories. When it came time to choose a topic for my dissertation, I did not hesitate in deciding to write about the history and plight of orphaned children. It is my hope that someday all will be able to enjoy the happy childhood they deserve.

I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to all the various individuals and institutions that helped to bring this project to fruition. Marc Robinson, Irina Walter, and Robert Nichols at St. Olaf College helped me to turn my fascination with Russia and its history into the first beginnings of a career. At the University of Washington, I am particularly indebted to Glennys Young, Simon Werrett, and Elena Campbell for their guidance over the years and their insightful comments on the draft of this dissertation. Any remaining errors are, of course, my own.

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The stories of Soviet orphans are often difficult to read, and perhaps more so to write. Becoming a father in the past year, and attempting to finish this dissertation while simultaneously experiencing the joys and challenges of being a new parent, has only brought home the vital importance of family and the tragedy of its loss. Most of all, then, I would like to thank my parents, Bradford and Colleen Stone, for their support throughout the years, Valia, for her love and patience, and Misha, for making our lives a little brighter every day.

For Valia and Misha

Introduction

Like a scene from any number of films about the Soviet countryside, Stalin's "great break" (*velikii perelom*) was symbolized for Polina Stepanovna Pakhomova (b. 1924) by a tractor. For Pakhomova and her family, however, the collectivization campaign that delivered the first tractor to their village in 1929 brought with it not prosperity and modernity, but persecution. Like so many other children in the Soviet Union and elsewhere in the past century, Pakhomova became the victim of state ambitions to reshape the world in a radical and often violent manner. Pakhomova's father was arrested as a "kulak" (rich peasant) and her remaining family deported to a "special settlement" in Kazakhstan, where her mother and younger brother soon succumbed to cold and hunger. Reduced to begging for food, and with no family to take care of her, Pakhomova found herself placed in a children's home (*detdom*). Upon her arrival with a trunk containing the few family possessions she still retained, Pakhomova was teased by the other children for bringing her "dowry" to the children's home.¹ This cruel joke, however, prompted the intervention of one of the caregivers, Tatiana Vasilevna Ponomareva. As Pakhomova recalled, Tatiana Vasilevna silenced the other children's laughter with a single command: "This girl will be your little sister." Later, after receiving the first full meal she had enjoyed in years, Polina remembered the manners her mother had taught her and bowed in gratitude. This gesture prompted Tatiana Vasilevna to laugh, "Only beggars in church bow like

¹ A reference to the peasant custom of providing a bride with a chest to contain her dowry – usually a collection of bedding, embroidery, and clothing – on her wedding day.

that. And we don't have a church here, and you are no longer a beggar like before. Now you are a *detdomovka* [member of the children's home], is that clear? You should say 'thank you!'"²

In the years after her arrival, Pakhomova declared, she did indeed become a *detdomovka*, making friends and enjoying the fact that the other, older children tended to treat her like a favorite younger sister. Tatiana Vasilevna also became, in Pakhomova's words, a "mother-caregiver" (*mama-niania*) and source of constant support. Relations between the children's home residents (*detdomovtsy*) and the nearby collective farm, however, were poor, and fights with local children were common. After one boy died from injuries suffered during these fights, the Soviet authorities intervened, sending two "higher-ups" to deliver a short, threatening speech to the local populace:

The Motherland (*rodina*) has entrusted us with the upbringing of the growing generation – the young Stalinist tribe (*iunoe stalinskoe plemia*). And anyone who stands in the way...anyone who offends, beats up, or injures a children's home resident, will face punishment. Yes, he'll be sent to Siberia – is that clear?³

After this naked threat from the representatives of the Soviet state, Pakhomova recalled, relations between the children's home and the surrounding populace, though never quite friendly, were at least not fraught with violence.

Pakhomova and the other children's home residents, however, faced something of a paradox, as the very state that had subjected their families to arrest and deportation had now come to their defense. Stalin's 1930 article "Dizzy with Success" suddenly seemed to offer an answer. As Pakhomova recalled, "this explained everything to us clearly in a childish way (*po-detskii*). Comrade Stalin had not known about these mistakes, about these violations of the party

² Polina Stepanovna Pakhomova, "Moe raznoe detstvo: Vospominaniia," in *Dorogi za koliuchuiu provoloku: Sbornik vospominanii, ocherkov o liudiakh Gulaga i o pravozashchitnom dvizhenii v Odesse*, ed. V.M. Gridin (Odessa: Astroprint, 1996), 16.

³ *Ibid.*, 18.

line, and when he found out, he had declared ‘children do not answer for their parents.’”⁴

Moreover, Stalin seemed to promise that those who worked and studied well would become full Soviet citizens, “and be able to live where they wanted.” This dream of returning to the Soviet fold motivated Pakhomova and others to dedicate themselves to study and work. For Pakhomova, education indeed provided a path to success (and eventually a career as a teacher). Yet one final step remained: “in order to ‘correct myself’ (*ispravit’sia*), I had to join the Komsomol. This became my dream.”⁵ For the application, Pakhomova was advised to omit her father’s arrest and state that she was a “full orphan,” which she did. This lie, however, was discovered, and Pakhomova’s application was denied. Finally, Pakhomova recalled, she came to understand what “children do not answer for their parents” really meant, and that her past as a daughter of “kulaks” would always follow her.

Reflecting back on her life in the early 1990s, Pakhomova expressed her gratitude again to Tatiana Vasilevna and to the children’s home as a whole, which had “brought me back to life.”⁶ Indeed, this long story of Pakhomova’s life might be considered in some sense a “success story” for Soviet children’s homes, as Pakhomova went from being a homeless beggar to a model student, found something resembling a new family with the children’s home, and went on to achieve a respectable career within the wider Soviet society. Yet Pakhomova made an important distinction in her memoir between the Stalinist state and those who had worked in her children’s home. The former had been responsible for the violence that deprived Pakhomova and millions of other innocent victims of their rightful families, a crime that could never be

⁴ Ibid., 18. Here Pakhomova seems to be conflating Stalin’s impromptu comment after a 1935 speech (by the son of a kulak who claimed he had been denied his due recognition as a Stakhanovite) with Stalin’s earlier article. On this statement (the “son does not answer for the father”), which was seized on in the Soviet press and presented as a “directive” from Stalin, see Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 130-131.

⁵ Pakhomova, 21.

⁶ Ibid., 16.

forgotten. While the Stalinist state may have claimed that it was also responsible for “the upbringing of the growing generation,” Pakhomova credited her “new life” to the individual workers of her children’s home and to the Soviet people as a whole: “and so, the children of the victims of Stalinist repression were not allowed to perish and be lost...the whole country came to their aid...all the wonderful people who surrounded us.”⁷ Pakhomova therefore declared that her story was a commemoration of two groups of people: the innocent victims of Stalinism, like her mother, and those who had saved their children, like Tatiana Vasilevna Ponomareva.

Pakhomova was just one of many “orphans of Stalin’s revolution”: the millions of children who lost or were separated from their parents by the violence that accompanied Stalin’s policies of forced collectivization, breakneck industrialization, and political repression.⁸ Hundreds of thousands of these children grew up under the care (or neglect) of the Soviet state, experiencing the same suspicions, opportunities, and pressures to “correct oneself” as Pakhomova. This dissertation traces the history of these orphans through the system of Soviet children’s institutions and afterwards. Beginning with the wave of homeless and orphaned children that emerged in the late 1920s and early 1930s as Stalin launched his “revolution from above,” it explores Soviet efforts to manage, house, educate, and “remake” these children. Drawing on the models provided by celebrated institutions like the Dzerzhinskii and Bolshevo

⁷ Ibid., 20.

⁸ By “Stalin’s revolution,” I mean broadly the dramatic, violent events that brought about the Stalinist order in the Soviet Union. These include both the revolutionary efforts undertaken to “build socialism” (collectivization and heavy industrialization, often called Stalin’s “revolution from above”) and the political purges, mass arrests, and deportations seen as necessary for defending, consolidating, and purifying this socialist order. On the “revolution from above,” see Robert C. Tucker, *Stalin in Power: The Revolution from Above 1928-1941* (New York: Norton, 1990). On the Stalin period as the fulfillment of socialist revolution in Russia (rather than its antithesis), see Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); and Martin Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy* (New York: The Free Press, 1994). On arrests, purges, and repressions as perceived tools for engineering and defending Soviet socialism, see David Shearer, *Policing Stalin’s Socialism: Repression and Social Order in the Soviet Union, 1924-1953* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009); and Amir Weiner, ed., *Landscaping the Human Garden: Twentieth-Century Population Management in a Comparative Framework* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003).

communes, the system of Soviet children's homes sought to transform its charges into disciplined, loyal, and collectivist Soviet subjects – the “New Soviet People.” This dissertation examines the practices and outcomes of this process, paying particular attention to the ways in which these institutions sought to transform how these children thought about themselves and spoke about their lives. Finally, it examines how children whose parents were arrested as “enemies of the people” remembered and reflected on their time in a Soviet children's home, and assessed its lasting effects. Through understanding how these individuals subjectively experienced and remembered their childhood in Soviet institutions, it seeks to illuminate further both the place of children in the wider Soviet project, and how ideology, institutions, and narrative practices interacted in encouraging a particular type of Soviet subjectivity or “Soviet self.”

Childhood, Orphans, and the Soviet Project

The Soviet Union was at its heart an experiment, an ongoing project that aimed not just at the transformation of social relations, economics, culture, and politics, but at the transformation of individuals. This ideological project tried to encourage Soviet citizens to think about themselves in new ways, as “new people” participating in a revolutionary effort to build a new society. Youth, with its promises and challenges, had always been a focus of this project.⁹ Even leading Soviet officials and ideologues imagined that it would be the younger generation that would truly build and live under communism. Commissar of Education Anatolii Lunacharskii, in a 1928 speech titled “On the Education of the New Man,” argued that in many ways the older

⁹ On youth in the early Soviet Union, see Anne Gorsuch, *Youth in Revolutionary Russia* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2000); and Eric Naiman, *Sex in Public: The Incarnation of Early Soviet Ideology* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997).

generation of communists had already been surpassed by their younger comrades. The current generation, that of dedicated “proletarians,” was transitional at best; having grown up in opposition to bourgeois society, they were also inescapably tainted by it. It was the younger, rising generation that had the potential to become “New Soviet People” – ideologically pure, collectivist, politically conscious, and disciplined.¹⁰ On the other hand, youth, with its undisciplined, unrefined, and “incomplete” nature represented a potential danger for this project as well, as it was precisely the youth who were imagined to be most susceptible to the seductions of the remnants of capitalism (such as the consumerism and “frivolous” diversions of the NEP period).¹¹ In this way, youth represented both the greatest promise and the greatest threat for ambitions to bring about a new, communist society.

Orphaned, abandoned, and homeless children (*besprizornnye*) thus represented an interesting “test case” for this project, as they had always possessed something of a dual nature for Soviet ideologues and officials. The violence and famine of the Civil War years left the new Soviet state with millions of destitute, orphaned, and homeless children, a population that it would struggle to house and rehabilitate for years to come. Children and particularly teenagers living on the street often turned to petty crime to survive. It is no surprise, then, that homeless children were widely viewed as potential sources of social disorder, petty thieves, and “hooligans,” undisciplined and uncontrollable youths who not only broke Soviet laws, but served as symbols of the Soviet Union’s ongoing poverty and unsolved social problems.¹² On the other hand, these homeless children were also sometimes imagined to be “naturally” collectivist in

¹⁰ Anatoli Lunacharsky, “On the Education of the New Man,” in A. Lunacharsky, *On Education: Selected Articles and Speeches*, trans. Ruth English (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1981), 226-229

¹¹ On fears about undisciplined youth being seduced by capitalism, consumerism, and undesirable behaviors like “hooliganism,” see Gorsuch, especially 116-138; and Naiman, *Sex in Public*, especially 250-288.

¹² For the best work on orphaned and homeless children in the 1920s, including an analysis of this “dual nature,” see Alan Ball, *And Now My Soul is Hardened: Abandoned Children in Soviet Russia, 1918-1930* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

their social relations and free from the corrupting influence of bourgeois society and the bourgeois family. Underneath their uncouth habits and rough veneer were qualities, cultivated by life on the street, that a skilled pedagogue could bring to the fore, including self-reliance, boldness (*bodrost*), a disdain for bourgeois conventions, and a tendency to band together. While this last tendency had led to the formation of gangs and criminal “bands” (*shaiky*) on the street, it could, when properly directed, also lead formerly homeless children to form strong collectives within Soviet institutions.¹³ Thus, homeless children, while constituting a potential “social threat” as long as they remained on the street, were also in a sense prime candidates to become “New Soviet People,” if they could be raised properly.

The case of orphaned, abandoned, and homeless children in the 1930s in thus part of the larger history of childhood in the Soviet Union, efforts to raise children in a “revolutionary” manner, and Soviet ambitions to bring about a total transformation of both society and individuals. The specific status of children in the Soviet Union has begun to receive some welcome scholarly attention in recent years. Catriona Kelly, in particular, has explored the cultural world inhabited by Soviet children, the general history of Soviet childhood, and the ways in which the Soviet Union placed children’s welfare at the heart of its claims to legitimacy.¹⁴ Other works have examined how the Soviet state sought to revolutionize childhood and children’s education.¹⁵ These works have shown that, in contrast to the notion of an all-out “great retreat” in matters of childhood and family policy, Soviet policies and discourse regarding

¹³ The famed Soviet pedagogue Anton Semenovitch Makarenko’s system for forming a healthy collective (*kollektiv*), for example, described this tendency and how a Soviet pedagogue should make use of it. See Chapter Three of this dissertation.

¹⁴ Catriona Kelly, *Children’s World: Growing Up in Russia 1890-1991* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007).

¹⁵ Lisa A. Kirschenbaum, *Small Comrades: Revolutionizing Childhood in Soviet Russia 1917-1932* (New York: Routledge Farmer, 2001); E. Thomas Ewing, *The Teachers of Stalinism: Policy, Practice, and Power in Soviet Schools of the 1930s* (New York: Peter Lang, 2002); and Jacqueline Olich, “Competing Ideologies and Children’s Books” (Ph.D. Dissertation, UNC Chapel Hill, 2000).

childhood in the 1930s became a complex mixture of “revolutionary” and “conservative” or “traditional” elements. The family, for example, became increasingly tolerated during the Stalin period, viewed as a source of social stability and potential ally in raising properly “Soviet” children. At the same time, however, children were still encouraged, particularly during the first Five-Year Plan, to take a politically activist role, to work to reform their “backward” parents, and, following the celebrated example of Pavlik Morozov, to denounce them if necessary.¹⁶

The plight of orphaned children, children of deported “special settlers,” children whose parents were arrested as “enemies of the people,” and other young victims of Stalinism has also begun to be addressed by both Russian and Western scholars.¹⁷ As of yet, however, there is still no work in English that examines the status of homeless children, children’s institutions, and orphans in the 1930s with the same degree of thoroughness as Alan Ball’s work on orphaned and abandoned children in the 1920s.¹⁸ The case of orphans from the Second World War in the Soviet Union is also somewhat better documented, in part because these orphans became something of a symbol of postwar reconstruction and, thus, a more acceptable topic for Soviet researchers.¹⁹ In examining the history of orphaned and homeless children from the 1930s, and efforts to reeducate these children within Soviet institutions, this dissertation therefore provides

¹⁶ As Kirschenbaum points out, these sometimes contradictory positions have led scholars to label the Stalinist state both “pro” and “anti” family. Kirshchenbaum, 133-153. On the legend of Pavlik Morozov, see Catriona Kelly, *Comrade Pavlik: The Rise and Fall of a Soviet Boy Hero* (London: Granta Books, 2005).

¹⁷ Major works that address orphaned and homeless children and children of “repressed” parents include S.S. Vilenskii et al., eds., *Deti Gulaga* (Moskva: Mezhdunarodnyi Fond “Demokratia,” 2002); A.A. Slavko, *Bor’ba s detskoï besprizornostiu i beznadzornostiu v Sovetskoi Rossii 1917-1952* (Syktyvkar: KRAGSiU, 2009); A.M. Nechaeva, *Okhrana detei-sirot v Rossii: Istoriia i sovremenost’* (Moscow: Dom, 1994); Dorena Caroli, *L’enfants abandonnes et delinquante dans la Russie sovietique* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2004); Judith Harwin, *Children of the Russian State 1917-1995* (Brookfield, VT: Ashgate, 1996); Cathy A. Frierson and Semyon S. Vilensky, *Children of the Gulag* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010); and Orlando Figes, *The Whisperers* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2007). Catriona Kelly also includes several chapters devoted specifically to orphaned and homeless children in the 1920s and 1930s: see Kelly, *Children’s World*, 193-257.

¹⁸ Ball, *And Now My Soul is Hardened*.

¹⁹ See Rachel Faircloth Green, “‘There Will Not Be Orphans Among Us:’ Soviet Orphanages, Foster Care, and Adoption 1941-1956” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Chicago, 2006); and Svetlana Aleksievich, *Poslednie svideteli: kniga nedetskikh rasskazov* (Moscow: Molodaia Gvardiia, 1985).

an important perspective on a less well-understood period in the history of childhood and institutionalized childcare in the Soviet Union. As we shall see, while some of the same concerns about homeless children and chronic problems within the system of children's institutions continued from the 1920s to the 1930s, the latter period saw its own particular developments related to the Stalinist regime's efforts to remake both society and individuals.

This dissertation, however, seeks to go far beyond simply documenting the experiences of these orphaned children or the institutions they inhabited. Many works that have addressed the subject of children as victims of Stalinist repressions have remained focused on documenting their experiences, often through gathering archival documents or conducting oral histories with surviving children of those persecuted by the Stalinist state.²⁰ While the results of these efforts have been very useful, these works have not, in the main, examined these experiences in light of the broader historiography of the Soviet period. That is, they have not sought to use the experiences and memories of these orphans to comment on the larger, pressing historiographical and theoretical questions that have driven much of the most recent and provocative scholarship in the Soviet field, including debates about the role of ideology and the nature of subjectivity in the Soviet Union.²¹ There has therefore been a missed opportunity to move beyond collecting and retelling the stories of Stalinism's numerous victims, as crucial as this task may be, and to begin using these stories to understand better how Soviet citizens lived and understood their lives under Stalinism, how the Soviet state tried to mold its own "subjects," and other debates over

²⁰ The most thorough document collection on young victims of Soviet state violence, which addresses more than just the Stalin period, is Vilenskii et al., eds., *Deti Gulaga*. Cathy Frierson has combined an English translation of this work with her own collection of oral histories in Frierson and Vilensky, *Children of the Gulag*. Orlando Figes, in turn, has drawn on an extensive collection of oral history interviews conducted by the Memorial society for *The Whisperers*.

²¹ For a useful summary of how understandings of "Soviet man" or the Soviet subject have developed over time, see Anna Krylova, "The Tenacious Liberal Subject in Soviet Studies," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 1, no. 1 (Winter 2002): 119-46.

how a Stalinist “civilization,” with its own particular culture, rituals, language, and guiding vision, became peopled with its own type of citizens as well.²²

The history of orphaned children, and the Soviet institutions tasked with raising and reeducating them, illuminates in particular what I call the “twin impulses” of Stalinism. Stalin’s announcement of a “great break” and demand for an increase in the tempo of the “construction of socialism” after the retreat of NEP had signaled a new phase in the Soviet project to bring about a total transformation of society. As this construction of socialism unfolded during the first Five-Year Plan, and particularly after it was declared complete, the Stalinist system placed an increasing emphasis on ideological purity, social order, and other attributes of the imagined harmonious, revolutionary society that was believed to be emerging. The Stalinist state’s efforts to engineer this society followed two general impulses: the “productive” and the exclusionary. Among the productive impulses were efforts to produce new social cohorts through the promotion of “proletarians” in education and industry (the *vydvizhentsy*)²³, the promotion of “culturedness” (*kulturnost*) and “working on oneself” in public culture,²⁴ and the possibilities for self-fashioning, formulating a new identity, or even transforming one’s “inner self” provided by Soviet ideology.²⁵ All these impulses, however, were accompanied by exclusionary

²² Figes’ *The Whisperers*, for example, draws on one of the most extensive collections of oral histories from the Stalin period available, but seems mostly uninterested or dismissive of larger interpretive and theoretical questions. Instead, it is content to use these histories to tell a narrative of the Stalin years that, while often compelling and eminently readable, provides little that is new or challenging for scholars of the Stalin period. On Stalinism as its own type of modern, anti-capitalist “civilization” with its own culture, rituals, and language, see Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*. For a useful summary of some of these new approaches to the history of Stalinism, in many cases influenced by theory and questions from outside the Soviet field, see Sheila Fitzpatrick, ed., *Stalinism: New Directions* (New York: Routledge, 2000).

²³ Sheila Fitzpatrick, “Stalin and the Making of a New Elite 1928-1939,” *Slavic Review* 38, no. 3 (Sep. 1979): 377-402.

²⁴ David Hoffmann, *Stalinist Values: the Cultural Norms of Soviet Modernity 1917-1941* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003); Vera Dunham, *In Stalin’s Time: Middleclass Values in Soviet Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

²⁵ Christina Kiaer and Eric Naiman, eds., *Everyday Life in Early Soviet Russia* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006); Jochen Hellbeck, “Fashioning the Stalinist Soul: the Diary of Stepan Podlubnyi, 1931-39,” in *Stalinism: New Directions*, 77-116; Hellbeck, *Revolution on My Mind* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press,

counterparts: efforts to determine who indeed could be transformed and who was irredeemable, efforts to uncover, classify, and destroy hidden enemies, and purges of those who were deemed ideologically impure or, worse, consciously and willfully opposed to the single truth offered by Stalinism.²⁶ The ideal, harmonious society would thus emerge, in the Stalinist imagination, both through the efforts of individuals to reshape their lives and themselves, to align themselves more closely with the broader “collective” of Soviet society and its historical mission, and through the expulsion and even destruction of those who seemed incapable or unwilling of making these changes.

The case of orphaned and homeless children (*besprizornye*) in the 1930s reveals that, while these twin impulses may have stemmed from the same desire to engineer a perfect, harmonious society, in practice they played out in often contradictory and even counterproductive ways. Orphans and formerly homeless children in Soviet institutions were considered prime candidates for reeducation and transformation into full Soviet citizens, and some institutions, like the Dzerzhinskii Labor Commune, boasted of numerous successes in this endeavor. At the same time, however, the increasing emphasis on discipline in these institutions allowed those perceived as being disruptive or incapable of changing to be expelled, transferred to “closed” labor colonies (essentially juvenile prisons), or even arrested – thus becoming permanently deprived of a chance of transforming oneself. The case of children whose parents were arrested as “enemies of the people,” explored in Chapters Five and Six, also demonstrates

2006); Igal Halfin, *From Darkness to Light: Class, Consciousness, and Salvation in Revolutionary Russia* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000); Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*.

²⁶ Amir Weiner, ed., *Landscaping the Human Garden: Twentieth-Century Population Management in a Comparative Framework* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003); Golfo Alexopoulos, *Stalin's Outcasts: Aliens, Citizens, and the Soviet State 1926-1936* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003); Igal Halfin, *Terror in my Soul: Communist Autobiographies on Trial* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003); Paul Hagenloh, *Stalin's Police: Public Order and Mass Repression in the USSR 1926-1941* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009); David R. Shearer, *Policing Stalin's Socialism: Repression and Social Order in the Soviet Union 1924-1953* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009); Shearer, “Crime and Social Disorder in Stalin's Russia,” *Cahiers du Monde Russe* 39, no. 1-2 (1998): 119-148.

the often contradictory results of these twin impulses in practice. For most, the loss of their parents and their placement in a Soviet children's home was remembered as a profound disruption of their previously Soviet identity. Many spoke of struggling for most of their lives to deal with the pain of their parents' arrest, and the shame of being labeled children of "enemies of the people." For many, this struggle would eventually lead to a condemnation of the Stalinist past and a commitment to documenting and commemorating its victims, beginning with their own parents. Thus, the Stalinist state's persecution of its supposed "enemies" in the name of building a harmonious society not only disrupted its own "productive" impulse to encourage a Soviet identity among its citizens, but left a legacy that would actually, for some, begin to call into question the legitimacy of the entire Soviet system.²⁷

The Soviet Self

This dissertation is also a study of the Soviet self: how the Stalinist system sought to form its own subjects, specifically among the residents of children's institutions, and how these young people subjectively experienced these efforts. In addressing the subjectivity of Soviet orphans in the 1930s, it draws on and contributes to a growing body of literature on Soviet subjectivity, Stalinist "civilization," and the inner worlds, self-understandings, and mental and cultural frameworks of Soviet citizens. One of the major contributions of these studies has been to draw attention to Soviet citizens as being ideological actors in their own right. Soviet citizens were not just the recipients or victims of ideology, but variously struggled to master, modify, subvert,

²⁷ On the role of the Stalinist past, efforts to commemorate its victims, and anti-Stalinism in undermining support for the ruling Communist Party in the late Soviet Union, see Kathleen Smith, *Remembering Stalin's Victims: Popular Memory and the End of the USSR* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996).

reject, internalize, and otherwise utilize ideology in their lives.²⁸ They learned to master ideological language (“speak Bolshevik”) or sought to align their own lives with Soviet ideology and recreate themselves as revolutionary actors within texts.²⁹ Other studies in the same vein have highlighted the various practices that were intended to shape and produce these Soviet subjects, including efforts to bring individuals under the control of the collective (*kollektiv*), or the ubiquitous autobiographies in which Soviet citizens were tasked with creating and presenting a sufficiently “Soviet” identity.³⁰ Many of these approaches are useful for understanding the subjective experiences of Soviet orphans. Not only did these children grow up in institutions saturated with Soviet ideology, but Soviet children’s institutions utilized many of these same practices, such as the writing of autobiographies or the authority of the collective, to encourage residents to construct a new, more Soviet self.

This study of the “Soviet self” thus emphasizes the importance of the stories people tell about themselves, and how these narratives shape one’s self-understanding. Recent work on the self in both the Soviet and broader contexts has highlighted the ways in which individuals

²⁸ By “ideology,” I mean the general body of ideas that provided the guiding vision for what Soviet socialism, and its citizens, should be. This was not necessarily always a fixed corpus of official tenets, but a set of core principles that were sometimes fluid and adaptable, and at other times hardened into the “Party line.” As Kotkin notes, the Bolsheviks were deliberately ideological, in that they believed it necessary to possess a universal, singular vision. Kotkin argues that this singular vision was the definition of Soviet socialism as anti-capitalism: see *Magnetic Mountain*, 151-53. Halfin notes that in the typical Bolshevik usage, “ideology” was a positive term, used to denote an understanding of the course of History that was guiding the revolution: see Halfin, *From Darkness to Light*, 396. Hellbeck in turn sees revolutionary ideology as a guiding vision for individual “selves” as well, which called on individuals to struggle against their “bourgeois,” private selves and align their lives with the revolutionary movement. This ideology was a “living tissue of meaning” that was reflected on and personalized in various ways: see Hellbeck, *Revolution on My Mind*, 11-13. Drawing on these works, I use “Soviet ideology” to denote these core ideas which together formed a “blueprint” or master narrative of the Soviet Union as the culmination of the laws of historical progression: a modern, socialist alternative to capitalism, inhabited by a collectivist and harmonious “New Soviet People” who would no longer face the troublesome divisions of between public and private, or individual and collective. Candidates to become these “new Soviet people,” in turn, were expected to strive to align their lives with these principles.

²⁹ On “speaking Bolshevik,” see Kotkin, 198-237. On texts as vehicles for self-construction, see Hellbeck, “Fashioning the Stalinist Soul,” and *Revolution on my Mind*, particularly 53-114; and Halfin, *Terror in my Soul*, 43-95.

³⁰ Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Tear off the Masks: Identity and Imposture in Twentieth-Century Russia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 91-152; Halfin, *Terror in my Soul*; and Oleg Kharkhordin, *The Collective and the Individual in Russia: a Study of Practices* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

construct a sense of self through practices of self-narration; that is, through the act of describing and writing about their selves.³¹ Soviet children's institutions often made this process explicit, as Soviet orphans were encouraged to adopt a narrative of transformation and a "new life" within these institutions, and to reproduce this narrative in relating their own autobiographies. Part of becoming or growing up Soviet was thus learning to tell "Soviet" stories about oneself, frame one's life in terms of Soviet ideology, and utilize Soviet language. Previous work on Soviet subjectivity, with its emphasis on the ways in which Soviet citizens formed a sense of themselves in relation to Soviet ideology, can therefore help us to understand this project. This study will therefore pay particular attention to the ways in which orphaned children, both within and after their time in a children's institution, utilized official Soviet discourse or adopted a prescribed narrative, framed their personal stories in relation to the Soviet regime and its ideology, or otherwise constructed a particular "Soviet" narrative about themselves and their lives.

At the same time, however, there are certain points of caution that must be kept in mind. For one, Hellbeck and Halfin's work has been criticized for drawing extensive conclusions from a compelling but limited number of sources, for privileging the Soviet ideological narrative at the expense of other possibilities, and oversimplifying the complexity of individuals and the texts they have produced in favor of a subject overly defined by ideology.³² As will become clear,

³¹ Questions of the self, of course, have an extremely broad and lengthy history in scholarship. Recent scholarship that has proven useful for thinking about the self as in part produced through self-narration are Paul John Eakin, *How Our Lives Become Stories: Making Selves* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), particularly 99-141; and Mary Jo Maynes, Jennifer L. Pierce, and Barbara Laslett, *Telling Stories: The Use of Personal Narratives in the Social Sciences and History* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), particularly 15-42, 70-97. On self-narration and subjectivity in the Soviet context, Hellbeck's "Fashioning the Stalinist Soul" and *Revolution on my Mind*, and Halfin's *Terror in my Soul* and *From Darkness to Light*, remain the most important works.

³² For criticisms and comments on this work on Soviet subjectivity, see Eric Naiman, "On Soviet Subjects and the Scholars Who Make Them," *Russian Review* 60, no. 3 (July 2001): 307-315; Aleksandr Etkind, "Soviet Subjectivity: Torture for the Sake of Salvation?" *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 6, no. 1 (2005): 171-186; John Keep, "Sergei Sergeevich Dmitriev and His Diary," *Kritika* 4, no. 3 (2003): 709-734; Choi Chatterjee and Karen Petrone, "Models of Selfhood and Subjectivity: The Soviet Case in Historical Perspective," *Slavic Review* 67, no. 4 (Winter 2008): 967-986; and the forum on Soviet subjectivity organized in *Ab Imperio*, "Forum: analiz praktik sub'ektivizatsii v rannestalinskom obshchestve," *Ab Imperio* no. 3 (2002): 209-413.

subjectivity among the Soviet orphans addressed here was not exclusively formed in relation to or defined by the Soviet regime and its ideology. While Soviet ideology was certainly ever-present in children's homes, and exerted a powerful influence on these orphans' lives, it was never the only point of reference for understanding themselves. While many of these orphaned children do seem to have embraced the Soviet revolutionary narrative, or at least learned to describe themselves in appropriately Soviet language, others turned to different narratives and discourses, told very different stories about their lives than those desired by the regime, or altered and adjusted these stories at different points in their lives. This was particularly true for those individuals who, having lost one or both parents to state violence, spoke of a lifelong sense of emotional trauma stemming from this loss. In reflecting on and retelling their life stories, these authors often framed their childhood specifically in terms of this loss, presenting their lives and selves as having been crushed, deformed, or broken by state violence.

Along with exploring this intersection of self-narration and self-understanding, this is the first study of Soviet childhood to draw on and contribute to scholarship on the history of emotions. This growing field offers many tools to better understand the many emotional dimensions of these orphans' experience, and the still under-researched emotional lives of Soviet citizens. The history of emotions in Russia and the Soviet Union has begun to receive some productive scholarly attention, including studies of emotional discourse, the "cultural codes" that governed expressions of certain emotions, and public worries over emotions like melancholy that were viewed as symptomatic of larger social problems.³³ While this field is still early in its

³³ Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Happiness and *Toska*: an Essay in the History of Emotions in pre-war Soviet Russia," *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 50, no. 3 (2004): 357-371; Mark D. Steinberg, "Melancholy and Modernity: Emotions and Social Life in Russia Between the Revolutions," *Journal of Social History* 41, no. 4 (Summer 2008): 813-841; Mark D. Steinberg and Valeria Sobol, eds. *Interpreting Emotions in Russia and Eastern Europe* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2011); Jan Plamper, ed., *Rossiiskaia imperiia chuvstv: Podkhody k kul'turnoi istorii emotsii* (Moscow: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie, 2010).

development, it has added another lens for examining the lives and subjectivity of Russian and Soviet citizens, and the roles that emotions and emotional language played in forming this subjectivity.

For one, examining the emotional lives of these orphans illuminates the ways in which modern states, like the Soviet Union, have sought to place emotions in the service of state goals (such as forging “New Soviet People”) that involve the suppression of some emotional expressions, but also the encouragement and utilization of others. Drawing on William Reddy’s work, this study analyzes the “emotional regime” of Soviet children’s homes: the ways that these institutions sought to manage their charges’ emotional lives, encourage and discourage certain emotions, and utilize or appeal to others.³⁴ Soviet pedagogues like Anton Makarenko recognized the potential utility of emotions, discussing, for example, how feelings of shame before the wider collective could be used to control behavior. Soviet children’s institutions also sought to encourage some emotions, like boldness (*bodrost*) and feelings of “comradely affection,” while voicing concern over others, such as anger, excessive introspection, and love, that, in certain contexts, were believed to disrupt the collective. Understanding the emotional regime of these children’s institutions, therefore, gives insight into the ways in which the Soviet system sought to manage the emotional lives of its citizens, and the ways in which cultivating certain emotions was seen as part of forming properly “Soviet” subjects.

The emotional lives and emotional discourses of these Soviet orphans also allow us to understand better the relationship between emotion and self-understanding in the Soviet context.

Previous examinations of Soviet subjectivity have often downplayed the importance of this

³⁴ William Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). Reddy defines emotional regimes as a “normative order for emotions” established in various political regimes and institutions, in which certain normative emotions are encouraged (and often modeled in ceremonies or official art forms) and other deviant emotions proscribed. These regimes may be comparatively strict or “loose,” but all aim at habituating certain emotions and discouraging others: see pp. 124-126.

emotional dimension.³⁵ Yet many of the personal narratives examined in this dissertation, including those written within children's institutions and afterwards, were infused with particular emotions. Within children's institutions, orphans were encouraged to speak of their "happy childhood," of the "joy" they had found in labor, of the "love" they possessed for the children's home and the wider Soviet society. In writing memoirs years later, however, children whose parents had been arrested would use a very different emotional discourse, describing a life-long sadness or yearning (*toska*) brought on by the loss of their parents. It was often this sense of a shared emotional experience and lasting trauma that helped to bring these memoirists together in the late Soviet Union to form an "emotional community," to borrow Barbara Rosenwein's term.³⁶ This community was defined by a feeling of shared emotions, a certain emotional orientation toward the past, and a shared emotional discourse for discussing one's history. The narratives of these memoirists, and the sense of self that they expressed, were therefore intimately tied both to one's own emotions regarding the past, and the feeling that these emotions were shared with others. In examining Soviet subjectivity, or the idea of a Soviet self, then, we must also consider the emotional side of this self.

Though this study is firmly grounded in the field of Soviet history, it has wider implications for our understanding of childhood and children's subjectivity in the twentieth century as well. This century saw an unprecedented concern for children and effort to create a "modern" childhood free of obligations to work, adult responsibilities, and, above all, deprivation and danger. The sad reality, however, was that the twentieth century also saw an equally unprecedented millions of children become the victims of war, violence, and

³⁵ Glennys Young, "Bolsheviks and Emotional Hermeneutics: The Great Purges, Bukharin, and the February-March Plenum of 1937," in *Interpreting Emotions in Russia and Eastern Europe*, 129.

³⁶ Barbara H. Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006).

exploitation.³⁷ While the Soviet government certainly saw itself as engaged in a specifically “Soviet” project of institutional childcare and raising a “new Soviet generation,” the Soviet Union was far from the only modern state in which childhood was particularly politicized, or where state and non-state actors experimented with raising children in collective institutions and sought to formulate a particular sense of self among their charges.³⁸ Much of what the Soviet orphans discussed here experienced and remembered, including the social dynamics of the children’s home, the disruption in their sense of self brought about by the loss of their parents, the difficult transition from a family to a collective, and the lasting effects of their institutional upbringing, was arguably shared with millions of other orphaned children who grew up in institutions around the world. Other children who lost their parents to state violence, such as children of Argentina’s “disappeared,” faced some of the same questions of identity and struggles to come to terms with a violent past as children of Soviet “enemies of the people.”³⁹

Deported or displaced children, such as orphans from the Spanish Civil War who were evacuated

³⁷ For a brief overview of childhood and violence in the modern world, see Peter Stearns, *Childhood in World History* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 110-119. There are countless examples of children’s lives touched by war in the twentieth century. See, among many others, Irina Grudzinska-Gross and Jan Tomasz Gross, eds., *War Through Children’s Eyes: The Soviet Occupation of Poland and the Deportations, 1939-41* (Stanford: Hoover Institute Press, 1981); and Emmy E. Werner, *Through the Eyes of Innocents: Children Witness World War II* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000).

³⁸ The history of children and orphans in modern China would seem to offer a clear, potentially illuminating comparison with the Soviet Union, particularly in that childhood was often equally politicized and political activism among children particularly encouraged. On childhood, orphans, and political activism among youth in China, see Anita Chan, *Children of Mao* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1985); Sing Lau, ed. *Growing Up the Chinese Way* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1996); William Kessen, *Childhood in China* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1975); and M. Collette Plum, “Unlikely Heirs: War Orphans during the Second Sino-Japanese War, 1937-1945 (Ph.D. Dissertation, Stanford University, 2006). Communist states, however, were not the only actors to experiment with collectivist childcare: see also Laura Lee Downs, *Childhood in the Promised Land: Working Class Movements and the Colonies de Vacances in France 1880-1960* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002). Politicization of childhood also existed across the political spectrum: see Nicholas Stargardt, *Witnesses of War: Children’s Lives Under the Nazis* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2005); and Tahra Zara, *Kidnapped Souls: National Indifference and the Battle for Children in the Bohemian Lands, 1900-1948* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008).

³⁹ Many children of the “disappeared” grew up in adoptive families with ties to the regime and did not know the fates of their parents. On the “disappeared” and efforts to reunite children with their families, see Marguerite Feitlowitz, *A Lexicon of Terror* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); and Rita Arditti, *Searching for Life: the Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo and the Disappeared Children of Argentina* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

to the Soviet Union and other countries, often experienced similar institutions from a different perspective as they built new lives in their adopted “homeland.”⁴⁰ While a truly comparative perspective is beyond the scope of this study, the history of Soviet orphans offers a potential starting point for a broader understanding of childhood in the twentieth century, a century in which, sadly, so many children’s lives have been marked by violence.

Finally, the case of Soviet orphans serves as a reminder that the formation of Soviet subjects was not a wholly abstract or discursive process, but took place within specific institutions. Soviet ideology and discourse may have encouraged these orphans to think of themselves as part of a wider collective and as “builders of socialism,” but it did so within children’s homes that possessed their own social structures, organization, and daily life that could support or undermine these efforts. Similarly, the “collective” with which these children were encouraged to identify was not simply an abstract entity, but a real social group within the children’s home that did not always behave in the ways expected of a proper Soviet *kollektiv*. While numerous studies have pointed out the often limited reach or dysfunctional nature of Soviet institutions under Stalinism, this question has not often entered into discussions of Soviet subjectivity or the formation of Soviet subjects. Instead, the functioning of institutions has often been put aside in favor of a focus solely on a hegemonic Soviet discourse, which has been imbued with overwhelming (dare one say, totalitarian?) power.⁴¹ This is not to deny the pervasiveness or the important influence of this discourse, though one should also recognize that

⁴⁰ On Spanish orphans in the Soviet Union, see Immaculada Colomina Limonero, *Dos Patrias, Tres Mil Destinos* (Madrid: Ediciones CINCA, 2010); and the memoir by one of the “*niños de Rusia*,” Virkhilio de los Llanos Mas (Virgilio de los Llanos Mas), *Ty pomnish’ tovarishch?* (Moscow: LKI, 2008). On displaced children after the Second World War, see Tahra Zara, *The Lost Children: Reconstructing Europe’s Families after World War II* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011); and Milan Ristovic, *A Long Journey Home: Greek Refugee Children in Yugoslavia, 1948-1960* (Thessaloniki: Institute for Balkan Studies, 2000).

⁴¹ Naiman, “On Soviet Subjects,” 311-312. Naiman cautions that previous studies of Soviet subjectivity, despite their merits, have overly privileged the official, Soviet ideological narrative when discussing how authors could “write themselves” into various narratives.

alternatives to the dominant Soviet discourse (religious narratives, for example) existed as well. Rather, it is to suggest that understanding how the Soviet system formed its own subjects requires attention to the functioning and power of both discourse and institutions. Discourse could influence individuals' narratives of their selves but could also be "misunderstood," repurposed, or manipulated, while institutions could impose on and seek to control people's lives, but also could be dysfunctional, incompetent, and ineffective. This study will therefore draw attention both to the ideological discourse that pervaded the lives of Soviet orphans and the real institutions in which they lived, worked, and grew up.

Detdoma and the New Man

Understanding this relationship between ideology and institutions therefore requires a brief detour into the history of children's homes (*detdoma*) in the Soviet Union, as the Stalinist state inherited an existing system of children's institutions that had been shaped both by dreams of raising children in a more collectivist manner and by the struggle to care for the early Soviet Union's massive population of homeless children. From its beginning, the Soviet system of institutional childcare had been tied to the dream of bringing about a revolutionary socialist society and the "new people" that would inhabit it. Radical Bolsheviks like Nadezhda Krupskaya and Aleksandra Kollontai had envisioned children's homes as a cornerstone of revolutionary society, in which the influence of the bourgeois family would be ended and all children would be raised collectively. By freeing children from the influence of their parents, and women in particular from the labor of child-rearing, institutional childcare would both transform society and raise a new, genuinely socialist generation.

The harsh realities of the early Soviet Union, however, soon intervened. The Soviet state, with its limited financial resources, often struggled simply to house and feed its massive population of orphaned and homeless children. Reformers and advocates for children's welfare threw themselves into this work, but continually lamented the limited finances and other resources devoted to children's homes, and the consequently poor state of many of these institutions. Local officials in turn complained of the strain placed by children's homes on their budgets. Life in children's homes themselves could also often be harsh. Many homes struggled to provide adequate food and clothing for their charges; others struggled to prevent their charges, many of whom had spent years on the street, from continuing to engage in criminal activity. Despite all these challenges, there were successes as the 1920s rolled on, with the Soviet population of homeless children gradually shrinking, and the conditions of children's homes somewhat improving as well.⁴² The sheer size of this social problem, however, and the limited resources that could be brought to bear, ensured that throughout the 1920s, the Soviet system of children's homes was devoted almost exclusively simply to housing and raising the massive population of orphaned and homeless children (*besprizornye*).

The dream of using children's homes to raise a new, more collectivist generation did not die, however. In a 1930 article titled "The Children's Home for Waifs" (*Besprizornyi detskii dom*), Lenin's widow, Nadezhda Krupskaya, acknowledged that the struggle to address the Soviet Union's massive problem of child homelessness had resulted in a system of children's homes that was exclusively for orphaned and homeless "waifs," characterized by numerous deficiencies in material conditions and educational resources, and often inadequately supported by local

⁴² For a much more thorough discussion of homeless children and children's homes in the 1920s in the Soviet Union, see Ball, *And Now My Soul is Hardened*; and Kelly, *Children's World*, 193-220.

budgets.⁴³ Nevertheless, Krupskaiia revealed herself to be optimistic about the future. Perhaps caught up with the enthusiasm of the Five-Year Plan and its promise to “build socialism” after the compromises of NEP, Krupskaiia declared that it would soon be possible to talk again about the dream of a truly collectivist upbringing (*obshchestvennoe vospitanie*). While the current problems in Soviet children’s homes would still need to be solved, Krupskaiia believed that the changing social conditions and greater material prosperity brought on by the twin drives for collectivization and industrialization would increasingly allow children’s homes to begin to fulfill their original intention of raising all Soviet children to be New Soviet People. In keeping with the spirit of the times, Krupskaiia declared that “in this area [children’s homes], as in all others, we need a decisive break (*reshitel’nyi perelom*).”⁴⁴

In one of Soviet history’s many tragic ironies, it was precisely the “decisive break” declared by Stalin at the onset of the ruthless drive for collectivization and industrialization that would ensure that Soviet children’s homes remained almost exclusively institutions for orphaned, homeless, and abandoned children. Nevertheless, these institutions continued to be shaped in part in the 1930s by the long-standing dream of forging the New Man (*novyi chelovek*).⁴⁵ Government directives and reports on children’s homes frequently carried reminders, alongside more mundane instructions, that the highest task of children’s homes remained “bringing up new, Soviet people.”⁴⁶ The intellectual heritage of this New Man (or New Soviet Person, as the Bolsheviks dreamed of “new women” as well) in the Soviet Union stretched back to Marx’s early writings, if not earlier, and is largely beyond the scope of this

⁴³ Russian State Archive for Social and Political History (RGASPI), f. 12. op. 1 d. 252 ll. 16-21.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁴⁵ The word *chelovek* (person) in Russian can apply to either gender. I use the term “New Man” in its original connotation here, to denote the revolutionary dream, not exclusive to Russia, of an improved version of humanity that would emerge under socialism. When discussing the subjects that were to be produced under Soviet rule in general and in Soviet children’s homes specifically, I use “New Soviet Person” or “New Soviet People.”

⁴⁶ See, for example, the NKVD order no. 071 “On the Organization of Work to Liquidate Child Homelessness,” in *Deti Gulaga*, 187.

study.⁴⁷ Several aspects of this heritage, however, are particularly relevant for understanding how this goal influenced the structure and practices of Soviet children's homes and therefore deserve specific attention here. Marx had imagined the New Man as a unified, harmonious, and complete individual that would bring together the various dimensions of human existence that had so often been alienated from each other: mental and physical labor, reason and emotion, individual and collective life.⁴⁸ In discussing the goals of Soviet education and institutional childcare, ideologues like Commissar of Education Anatoli Lunacharskii took up this idea of the unified and harmonious individual as their goal, advocating for practices of polytechnical or labor education (a combination of classroom study and manual labor) that were intended to overcome the alienation of mental and physical labor and produce, variously, "harmonious," "well-rounded," and "real" people (*nastoiashchie liudi*).⁴⁹ As Igal Halfin has suggested, the New Man was conceived of as a project-in-progress: just as the Soviet Union was building a socialist society, a new type of humanity was being created by this new socialist environment.⁵⁰ Such ideas became particularly prominent during the years of the first Five-Year Plan, as declarations that socialism was finally being built led to renewed anticipation that a generation of New Soviet People was concurrently emerging.

As the Stalin period wore on, ideas about the nature and production of this New Soviet Person began to shift subtly, reflecting a larger trend in Stalinist culture. The emphasis on the

⁴⁷ On the New Man in Marxist thought, see Halfin, *From Darkness to Light*. On Nietzschean aspects of the Soviet New Man, see Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal, *New Myth, New World: From Nietzsche to Stalinism* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002), particularly 183-208. For a brief discussion of the Enlightenment heritage of ideas of the New Man, see Yinghong Cheng, *Creating the "New Man": from Enlightenment Ideals to Socialist Realities* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009), 8-20.

⁴⁸ On Marxist ideas about the alienation of mental and physical labor and the unified individual, see Halfin, *From Darkness to Light*, particularly 44-52, 115-121.

⁴⁹ Lunacharskii, "On the Education of the New Man," 244-246; Mikhail Kalinin, "Bud'te vsestoronne razvitymi liud'mi," [Be Well-Developed People] in *O Kommunisticheskoi vospitanii* (Moscow: Molodaia Gvardiia, 1947), 15-21. Makarenko also frequently described his task as producing "real people" from juvenile delinquents: see, for example, A.S. Makarenko, *His Life and Work in Education*, trans. Katharina Judelson (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976), 88-91.

⁵⁰ Halfin, *Terror in my Soul*, 233-234.

individual as the product of her environment began to give way increasingly to the idea that individuals could alter and create their environment, and more importantly their selves, through acts of will. In the realm of developmental psychology and education, this ongoing shift culminated in the official denunciation of pedology in 1936. Pedology, which had viewed humans as purely social beings and attempted to theorize and measure the influence of social environment on children's personality, was condemned for supposedly supporting "inexorable laws of environment" that limited the individual's ability to create and remake himself.⁵¹ This broad shift from environment to individual will was also reflected in attitudes to deviant or undesirable behavior. Just as the desired New Soviet Person or Soviet subject was imagined to be the product of his own willful self-transformation, guided by Soviet ideology and the Party, those who persisted in undesirable behavior (including, as we shall see in Chapter One, homeless youth) were believed to have willfully chosen to do so. Whereas those who committed crimes or expressed deviant political views might have once been excused as the products of their environment, Stalinist discourse and practice increasingly saw such deviations as the results of a corrupt individual will; that is, as intentional and therefore inexcusable.⁵²

Soviet children's homes and other forms of institutional childcare in turn reflected these ideas about what the New Soviet Person should be and how he could be raised or "forged" in Soviet institutions. Children's institutions sought to foster an explicitly collectivist environment and use the collective (*kollektiv*) to influence individual behavior. At a time when Soviet schools were returning to a more traditional curriculum, children's homes retained labor education.

⁵¹ Ibid., 235-243. Soviet psychology as a whole also shifted during the Stalin years from seeing humans as Pavlovian, mechanical beings reacting to environmental stimuli, to a focus on individual consciousness, will, and the conscious ability to determine one's behavior: see Raymond Bauer, *The New Man in Soviet Psychology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952). On the notion of "man the machine" in early Soviet literature and culture, see Richard Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 145-164

⁵² Halfin, *Terror in my Soul*, 30-42.

There were, of course, practical reasons for this, as most children's home residents would be given jobs in industry or agriculture that required work training more than formal education. Nevertheless, this commitment to labor education, along with efforts to manage the emotional lives of their charges, reflected the idea that children's institutions should develop "complete" and "well-rounded" individuals. Finally, children's institutions in the 1930s, despite their emphasis on forming a proper *kollektiv*, were ultimately committed to the idea of individual transformation and that notion that each individual resident needed to forge a more Soviet self. At its heart, this dissertation is an exploration of this process, with all its various discursive and practical dimensions, and how this process played out in texts written by these orphans, in the institutions they inhabited, and, at times, in the relations between the two.

These institutions were mostly inherited from the "struggle against child homelessness" (*bor'ba s besprizornostiu*) of the 1920s, and comprised a hodgepodge of agencies tasked with the collection and placement of homeless children in Soviet institutions, the everyday administration and financing of this wide network of various institutions, and the establishment of general policies and oversight. The basic unit that housed orphaned and homeless children was the children's home (*detdom*), which were also known by a myriad of other names, including Pioneer homes, labor communes (a term also used by the OGPU/NKVD, see below), and children's villages (*detgorodki* and *detposelki*- a short-lived experiment in creating larger amalgamations of several children's homes that would share resources). The confusion of names for these institutions, and the tendency at times to place children in any institution with available space, often meant that these institutions in practice did not wholly conform to the divisions described here, a fact that the Soviet government itself tried to address in the 1930s. Nevertheless, in theory the administrative responsibilities for various children's homes were split

mainly among the Commissariat of Education (Narkompros) and the Commissariat of Health (Narkomzdrav). Narkompros handled the vast majority of children's homes, including those for "normal" children aged 3-14, those for mentally challenged children, and some special institutions for "difficult" (*trudnovospituemye*) children, while Narkomzdrav administered homes for infants and the physically disabled. This study limits itself to those children's homes for older children administered by Narkompros, as the history of infants within Soviet children's homes falls outside this study's focus on subjectivity and the formation of a "Soviet self."

This study will also examine the smaller network of labor communes (*trudkommuny*) and labor colonies (*trudkoloniia*) operated by the OGPU/NKVD that existed in parallel with the larger system of children's homes. These institutions were usually reserved for "difficult" children, including convicted juvenile delinquents, children who had run away several times from children's homes, or children who had systematically committed disciplinary infractions. Among these institutions were the experimental Dzerzhinskii and Bolshevo communes, celebrated for their successes in rehabilitating street children and juvenile criminals and held up as models for other children's institutions (see Chapter Three). After 1935, the NKVD was also given sole responsibility for the Soviet network of receiving and distribution centers (*priemniki-raspredeliteli*) that first processed homeless children collected from the street and determined where they would be placed. Later, these receiving centers would also process the children of arrested "enemies of the people."

Responsibility for oversight was borne by the Children's Commission (*detkommissiia*), an interagency body established by Cheka founder Felix Dzerzhinskii and composed of Soviet officials from Narkompros, the Cheka/OGPU/NKVD, and other branches of the Soviet government. The Children's Commission established branches attached to Soviet executive

committees (including the main Children's Commission attached to the All-Union Central Executive Committee, VTsIK) throughout the Soviet Union. These commissions provided policy recommendations, conducted inspections of various children's homes, and issued reports to the executive committees and directives to Narkompros. They also helped administer the supplemental funds provided by the Lenin Fund for the Assistance of Homeless Children, a fund established to provide budgetary assistance to various children's homes in need.⁵³ In this way, the Children's Commission had an important role in serving as a "watchdog" and influencing policies regarding children's homes, but was limited in its ability to affect directly the operations of children's homes beyond issuing critical reports or recommending the provision of additional funds. This role, as we shall see in Chapter One and Chapter Two, at times produced tensions with Narkompros officials, who had to deal with the more mundane and day-to-day difficulties of running a system of children's homes with limited financial support.

Sources and Methodology

This dissertation draws on a wide variety of sources to address the history of Soviet children's institutions during the 1930s and children's subjective experiences within them. Documents from the major Russian state archives, including the State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF), and the Russian State Archive of Social and Political History (RGASPI), provide an understanding of overall Soviet policies regarding homeless children and children's

⁵³ This fund was initially established by the Soviet government after Lenin's death in 1924 with a 100 million ruble principal, with instructions that only the interest was to be spent in assisting various children's homes in need. The Children's Commission in turn supplemented this fund with its own financial resources, gained primarily from the administration of lotteries and taxes on sales of alcohol. In 1928, these activities were prohibited as being inappropriate for Soviet agencies, and various local children's commissions often struggled to find additional financial resources. Ball, 151-154.

institutions, the bureaucratic squabbles and financial problems that often hampered their effectiveness, and the often poor state of many children's homes. In particular, the various inspection reports, policy recommendations, and directives found in the files of the Children's Commission (GARF f. R5207) and Narkompros (GARF f. A2306) provide a key window into the operations and conditions of these institutions. Numerous documents from two regional level archives, the Central State Archive of the Moscow Region (TsGAMO) and the State Archive of the Novgorod Region (GANO) are used to provide a more rounded and "ground-level" picture of the Soviet system of children's homes, and in particular to reveal some of their day to day operations and concerns in providing the desired "communist upbringing" for their charges. Finally, this study has benefitted from several excellent document collections that have reprinted both government documents and personal materials from national archives, Western Siberia, the Altai territory, Nizhnyi Novgorod, and the Komi Republic.⁵⁴ These materials from the Komi Republic have been particularly valuable, as they address a region that housed a large number of "special settlements" for deported peasants, and hence saw a large problem with child homelessness among these "special settlers."⁵⁵ This collection therefore provides an interesting counterpart to the more well-known example of orphaned children whose parents were arrested in the terror.

In order to understand children's homes and communes as sites for producing Soviet subjects, this study examines as many texts produced by the residents of these institutions as

⁵⁴ Vilenskii et al., eds., *Deti Gulaga*; M. Iu. Guseva, "Spasibo tovarishchu Stalinu za nashe schastlivoe detstvo!" *Russkoe proshloe: Istoriko-dokumental'nyi almanakh kn. 10* (Sankt-Peterburg: FilFak Sankt Peterburgskii Gosudarstvennyi Universitet, 2006), 120-150; F.A. Sysenko, ed., *Zhertvy NKVD- deti. Deti repressirovannykh roditeli, deti vragi naroda. Zapadnosibirskii krai 1934-1937 gg. Altaiskii krai 1937-1949 gg. Sbornik dokumentov* (Barnaul: 2008); G.F. Dobronozhenko and L.S. Shabalova, eds., *Krest'ianskie deti v detskikh domakh Komi Oblasti v 1930-e gody: issledovaniia, dokumenty, vospominaniia* (Syktyvkar: GOU VPO Syktyvkar'skii Gosudarstvennyi Universitet, 2008).

⁵⁵ On the "special settlers," see Lynne Viola, *The Unknown Gulag: The Lost World of Stalin's Special Settlements* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

possible. These include the autobiographies, letters, and other materials from the celebrated Dzerzhinskii Commune (contained in Makarenko's personal folder in the Russian State Archive for Literature and Art, RGALI f. 332) and autobiographies written at the Bolshevo Commune (GARF f. 7952). Drawing on previous studies of Soviet subjectivity, I read these texts not as straightforward expressions of an author's "inner self" or, conversely, as dissimulations, but as an arena in which these authors developed and constructed a sense of self in dialogue with Soviet discourse, existing narratives or "identity blueprints," and other cultural models. By illuminating the general "script" that these texts tended to follow, and the ways in which individual authors personalized, adapted, or departed from this script, we can gain a better understanding of how Soviet children's institutions encouraged their charges to construct a sense of themselves as transformed, newly Soviet individuals, and the ways in which this process did not always proceed as expected.

Finally, the memories and stories later told by the various orphans of Stalin's revolution offer another important means to understand the subjective dimensions of their experiences, how their childhood was later remembered and reevaluated, and how, in the case of children of "enemies of the people" in particular, the exclusionary, destructive aspects of Stalinism worked to undermine the "productive" possibilities of Soviet discourse. This study draws on a selection of published and unpublished memoirs from the library and archives of the Moscow chapter of the Memorial Society, and the archives of the Moscow Historical-Literary Society "the Return" (*Vozvrashchenie*). These particular memoirs were selected from the wider corpus of memoirs of those whose young lives were touched by Stalinist violence because their authors spent a significant time in a Soviet children's institution, discussed this experience at length in their memoirs, or otherwise reflected on their childhood in a way that contributes to our understanding

of efforts to promote a particular self or Soviet subjectivity among these orphans, the effects of this process, and how this sense of self changed over time. In reading these personal narratives, I seek to analyze how these authors constructed a sense of self and attributed meaning to their remembered childhood, while taking these authors' own assessments and desire to "speak the truth" seriously.⁵⁶ I therefore aim both to allow these authors' own voices to emerge from these memoirs, and to provide a scholarly analysis of the shared narratives, constructed meanings, and "selves" that shape their writing. To help the reader place these memoirs in context, biographical sketches of the major memoirists are provided in the Appendix.

Chapter Outline

This dissertation is divided into three sections. The first discusses how the Soviet government and the existing system of children's homes struggled to respond to the new wave of homeless children in the early 1930s. The second examines Soviet efforts to reeducate these children in both the model Dzerzhinskii and Bolshevo communes, and the wider system of children's homes. Finally, the third section focuses on the experiences and memories of children whose parents were arrested as "enemies of the people," examining how they remembered and later reevaluated their years in Soviet children's homes.

Chapter One ("We Are Children of the Five-Year Plan") argues that Soviet efforts to address the problem of child homelessness during the 1930s were hampered both by bureaucratic

⁵⁶ As Maynes, Pierce, and Lassett have pointed out, the value of memoirs and other personal narratives lies precisely in their subjective dimensions, in the way that allow access to realms of meaning, emotion, imagination, and "narrative truth" (as Donald Spence termed it). At the same time, the researcher or analyst needs to be respectful and attentive to the narrator's desire to tell the truth as he or she understands it, allowing for the narrator's voice to be present as well, and making the act of interpretation as transparent as possible. Maynes, Pierce, and Lassett, 132-149.

conflicts between various branches of the Soviet government, including local and national authorities, and by the conviction that child homelessness was a problem of the past. This insistence that the “victory of socialism” in the Soviet Union had solved such social problems in turn contributed to a more hostile attitude to *besprizornye* as the decade went on, culminating in the essential criminalization of child homelessness in 1935. From this point, the only future offered to *besprizornye* lay in Soviet institutions.

Chapter Two (“the *Detdom*”) examines this system of Soviet children’s institutions in the 1930s, paying particular attention to the administrative conflicts, problems with finances and supplies, and difficulty in attracting qualified personnel that continued to plague many children’s homes. This chapter also demonstrates the wide variance in living conditions, facilities, and the quality of staff across the system of children’s homes that sometimes supported, but more often undermined, the widely promoted idea that all children in Stalin’s Soviet Union enjoyed a “happy childhood.”

Chapter Three (“Factories of the New Soviet People”) turns its attention to the discursive projects carried out in Soviet children’s institutions, focusing on the examples provided by the Dzerzhinskii and Bolshevo communes. Through an examination of the pedagogical system of these communes and autobiographical texts produced by communards, it argues that these institutions served as “models” in two respects. They provided both a system for reeducating *besprizornye* and juvenile delinquents to be emulated in other institutions, and a narrative of transformation that defined how all children’s home residents were supposed to talk about their lives.

Chapter Four (“The Road to Life?”) examines these efforts to produce Soviet subjects within the wider system of children’s homes. Following the example provided by “model”

institutions and Soviet dreams of building the harmonious New Soviet Person, children's homes were to combine political education, labor training, and a specific emotional environment in their efforts to "remake" their charges. This chapter documents how many children's homes fell short of these goals in practice, while suggesting that Soviet ideological discourse nevertheless had some role in shaping the worldview of these orphans, as even those orphans who voiced complaints about poor conditions tended to do so in "Soviet" language and terms.

Chapter Five ("The Strange Orphans") focuses on another cohort of Soviet orphans: children whose parents were arrested as "enemies of the people" in the second half of the 1930s. It examines how these children experienced and remembered the emotional shock of being torn from their families and suddenly thrust into a "collective" environment, and their struggles to adjust to this new environment. This chapter also investigates how these children remembered and evaluated their years in Soviet children's homes, arguing that for the vast majority of these children, the children's home was remembered as a profound disruption of what had previously been a comfortably "Soviet" identity.

Chapter Six ("How Things Had Really Been") in turn focuses on the years after the children's home, in which these orphans experienced the challenges of joining the wider Soviet society and often began to reevaluate their childhood experiences. In particular, as the years went on, many children of "enemies of the people" began to reconsider their childhood faith in the Soviet system, and composed narratives of their lives that gave central importance to the memories of their parents' arrest and the lasting effects of this trauma. In doing so, they formed connections with others who expressed similar memories, in the process creating a sense of participating in a wider community of victims of Stalinism. This chapter therefore ends with a

discussion of this perceived community, and the shared emotional discourse, memories, and sense of having lived through historically significant times that helped to bind it together.

Chapter One: “We Are Children of the Five Year Plan”

During Stalin’s breakneck industrialization drive, the Soviet government was never modest in lauding the achievements of the first Five-Year Plan. The Five-Year Plan, as a deluge of propaganda reminded Soviet citizens, had transformed backwards Russia forever and built the foundation for a bright, socialist future for all citizens. These transformative powers extended not only to the country’s economy but to its people as well: finally, it was promised, the New Soviet People anticipated by the architects of the October Revolution would emerge. These ideologues of the Five-Year Plan would therefore have been delighted by a letter that appeared at the Sevastopol Children’s Commission (*Detkomissii*), apparently in response to a 1933 newspaper article on formerly homeless children (*besprizornye*). The letter, written by an orphan raised in a Soviet children’s home, declared:

We [orphans] seemingly did not have fathers and mothers, and never saw a mother’s care (*laska*), but it, the FIVE-YEAR PLAN, cared for us...not only I, but many of us were raised by the Five-Year Plan. I fought, stole, smoked, swore, drank, but now look, I have become an absolutely different person.¹

Many such letters appeared in various Soviet publications at this time, celebrating the stories of those former waifs who had now been transformed into productive, adjusted members of society and builders of a new socialist world.²

The sobering reality of these years, however, was that rapid industrialization, forced collectivization and its accompanying dekulakization produced a very different contingent of “children of the Five-Year Plan”: the millions of Soviet orphans whose parents were

¹ Unpublished and undated letter to Sevastopol Children’s Commission, signed simply “Andriushenko.” State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF) f. R5207 op. 1 d. 920 ll. 20-21.

² See, for example, the article “Byvshie besprizorniki,” GARF f. R5207 op. 1 d. 920 ll. 13-15.

dekulakized, deported, arrested for “wrecking,” perished in unsafe working conditions, or starved during the 1932-33 famine. At the same time as the “victory of socialism” was being declared, hundreds of thousands of destitute children flooded into the Soviet Union’s major cities. Even as this new wave of homeless children began to overwhelm the limited resources of the Commissariat of Education (Narkompros) and the various branches of the Children’s Commission, Soviet officials largely refused to acknowledge either the true extent of this problem or the complicity of Soviet policies in its creation. According to the confident declarations of the Five-Year Plan, the building of socialism had already made such problems a thing of the past.³

This chapter will explore the ways in which this insistence that child homelessness was a problem of the past, that the construction of socialism had eliminated its root social causes and that its demise was therefore imminent, clashed throughout the early and mid-1930s with the reality of the Soviet streets and children’s homes. After declaring child homelessness (*besprizornost’*) to be a thing of the past, the Soviet government proved rather sensitive to the continued presence of homeless children and employed a series of campaigns to remove these children from the streets, insisting that they were merely the “remnants” of an earlier cohort. Soviet authorities were therefore ill-prepared to deal with the rising tide of homeless children that accompanied forced collectivization, dekulakization, and the 1932-33 famine. As a new “wave” of homeless children flooded into Soviet cities and children’s institutions, Soviet

³ A resolution from the Central Executive Committee (VTsIK) Presidium, for example, declared that the “victory of socialism in our country granted the opportunity to eliminate child homelessness as a mass phenomenon, and to create all the conditions for the proper communist upbringing of formerly homeless children in children’s homes.” GARF f. R5207 op. 1 d. 1107 l. 233. Other Soviet reports and resolutions on child homelessness almost invariably began with a declaration that this problem had been eliminated “in the main” or would soon disappear entirely: see, for example, the Central Executive Committee and Councils of People’s Commissars (Sovnarkom) order “On the Liquidation of Child Homelessness and Improvement of Children’s Institutions”, 20 November 1930, GARF f. R5207 op. 1 d. 471 ll. 3-5; GARF f. A2306 op. 70 d. 5306 l. 1; GARF f. R5207 op. 1 d. 329 l. 237; and Children’s Commission reports on child homelessness, 1935, in *Deti Gulaga*, 176.

authorities scrambled to house these children. This was not a coordinated state effort, however, but rather a series of reactive measures in which various Soviet organs and authorities often failed to cooperate and worked at cross-purposes. Finally, this chapter will examine how the Soviet government's attitudes and policies toward homeless children shifted at this time, increasingly viewing these *besprizornye* as a potential source of social disorder that needed to be contained, either in Soviet children's institutions or, failing this, through police measures.

The “Victory of Socialism” and Child Homelessness

The human costs of Stalin's relentless drive to collectivize and modernize the Soviet countryside are still staggering. Soviet officials had always assumed that violence would be necessary to bring about this transformation; after all, collectivization was imagined as a campaign, a “storming” of the countryside that would end in the “victory of socialism.” Collectivization was consequently implemented with a particular disregard for the lives of its victims. Those declared to be “rich peasants” (*kulaks*), along with their entire families, were subject to arrest and deportation to remote “special settlements.” By the end of 1930 alone, as many as 115,231 families (559,532 people) had been “dekulakized” and exiled.⁴ Packed onto trains or barges and shipped to some of the most isolated parts of the Northern Territory, the Urals, Kazakhstan, Siberia, and elsewhere, these “special settlers” (*spetspereselentsy*) were required to scrape out an existence in the harshest conditions. Hundreds of thousands perished from cold, disease, and hunger, particularly during the early 1930s due to limited supplies and the difficulties of transporting food to these remote settlements. Peasants who remained in their villages faced the specter of hunger as well. The insistence that recalcitrant peasants were

⁴ Viola, *The Unknown Gulag*, 30.

“hoarding” grain, and the Soviet government’s ruthless determination to finance its dreams of industrialization on the basis of grain procurements from the peasantry, made Soviet officials push to seize all available grain (including seed grain) throughout the Soviet Union’s most productive agricultural regions, particularly the Ukraine. The result was a devastating, and preventable, famine that cost the lives of, in a recent estimate, 3.3 million people in the Soviet Ukraine and 5.5 million people in the Soviet Union as a whole.⁵

Collectivization, dekulakization, and the ensuing famine were particularly hard on children.⁶ Reports poured in from special settlements on the terrible conditions in which exiled families lived, and the especially high mortality rates among the young and the elderly.⁷ Those who did not perish themselves sometimes watched as other family members starved or disappeared. Some children were left orphaned as their parents starved; others were abandoned as their parents fled from special settlements.⁸ The number of orphaned and abandoned children among special settlements in the Northern Territory became so dire that in 1933, a representative of the Children’s Commission wrote to the central Soviet authorities pleading for extra assistance to help alleviate hunger among orphaned children of “special settlers.”⁹ Stepanida Semenovna Paleeva, whose family was dekulakized and exiled from their village in the Omsk region, remembered the terrible hunger among the “special settlements.” In the summer, the settlers survived by gathering berries, mushrooms, and edible grasses, and by hunting and fishing. “Everything that grew, crawled, flew, swam, croaked and died (*dokhlo*) became our food. I ate frogs roasted on a campfire with pleasure,” Paleeva recalled, “but in the winter there was terrible

⁵ Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 53.

⁶ For more on children as victims of the collectivization and dekulakization campaigns, see Frierson and Vilensky, *Children of the Gulag*, 87-135.

⁷ Viola, *Unknown Gulag*, 87-88.

⁸ Special settlements were hardly impermeable, and escapes from special settlements (usually by adult males) were not uncommon. *Ibid.*, 87, 115-123.

⁹ Letter from Northern Territory Children’s Commission on the urgent provision of food for the orphaned children of special settlers, 16 May 1933, in *Deti Gulaga*, 123-124.

hunger and a sea of [dead] people, and we simply did not have the strength to bury them.”¹⁰ After the death of her siblings and mother, Paleeva was fortunate to be placed in a children’s home where, although conditions were at first fairly grim, the staff was kind. As Paleeva remembered, the food was meager and many of the children suffered from skin diseases and scabies (*chesotka*), but after the horror of the special settlements, “even this life for me was paradise.”¹¹

Children in rural areas affected by the 1932-33 famine also faced starvation and a desperate bid for survival. Whole villages became deserted as families wandered in search of food. Starving parents, in an act of desperation, sometimes left their children at train stations or other transportation points in the hopes that the government would take them in. Older children in particular were sometimes left to fend for themselves or encouraged to leave for distant destinations (like Moscow) to try to survive on their own. Some were taken in by relatives or placed in Soviet children’s homes. Maria Belskaia remembered wandering with her mother and siblings through the Soviet countryside after her father had been arrested and her family kicked out of their home as “kulaks.” Forced to rely on begging for food and near starvation, Belskaia’s mother finally left Maria and her sister on the steps of a children’s home. Local Soviet officials, however, would not allow them into the home until these officials were convinced that they did not have living parents. Fortunately for Maria and her sister, theirs was a happy ending: after convincingly lying that their mother was dead, they were allowed to live at the children’s home for six months until their father was released from prison and both parents arrived to collect their

¹⁰ Stepanida Semenova Paleeva, “Tak pogibla nasha sem’ia,” in *Zabveniiu ne podlezhit: Kniga pamiati zhertv politicheskikh repressii Omskoi oblasti t. 11* (Omsk: Omskoe Knizhnoe Izdatel’stvo, 2004), 210.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 211.

children.¹² Hundreds of thousands of other children, with no one else to take care of them, became wandering, homeless “waifs” (*besprizornye*). Making their way to Soviet cities, they lived on the streets and congregated in train stations, markets, and other public places to survive by begging, selling cigarettes or other small goods, or, often, by petty theft.¹³

The years of the first Five-Year Plan and early Stalinism, however, also established an ideological climate in which acknowledging the true extent of child homelessness in the Soviet Union, and its causes, was exceedingly difficult. In its propagandistic imagery of workers confidently building socialism, and of rational, industrial labor finally conquering the “backward” countryside, Stalin’s regime promoted the notion that the Soviet revolution was once again moving forward after the strategic retreat of NEP. To admit, then, that child homelessness had not been eliminated but was actually increasing, would not just have introduced uncomfortable questions about the sources of this increase, namely collectivization, dekulakization, and famine (which was officially denied by the Soviet government). It would also have been tantamount to admitting that the Soviet Union had not overcome its past, was not progressing forward by leaps and bounds, and had instead, at least as far as child homelessness was concerned, taken a step backward. After repeated declarations that child homelessness was a problem of the past, a condition “inherited from Tsarist Russia and the difficult years of civil

¹² Frierson and Vilensky, *Children of the Gulag*, 120-121. Mariia Bel’skaia’s story is related more extensively in her memoir, *Deti Ariny* (Barnaul: Altaiskoe Knizhnoe Izdatel’stvo, 1991).

¹³ The category *besprizornye* or *besprizorniki* encompassed a variety of homeless juveniles, not all of them orphans. The Russian word for orphan, *sirota*, makes a further distinction between “full orphans” (*kruglye siroty*), who have lost both parents, and “half-orphans” (*polusiroty*) who have lost one. *Besprizornye* were in turn distinguished primarily by the fact that they were living on the street and did not have any active parental supervision. This did not mean, however, that they were necessarily orphans (though many were), as some had been abandoned by their parents, others had run away from their families (often after the death of one parent and the remarriage of another), and many others had been separated from their living family members by war, arrests, or hunger. On the variety of circumstances that led to youths becoming *besprizornye*, see Ball, 1-17.

war and foreign intervention,” such an admission was quite problematic.¹⁴ Therefore, in contrast to an earlier tendency to discuss openly the problem of orphaned and homeless children, including the difficulties in addressing this problem, Soviet publications remained largely silent as the number of homeless children grew during the early 1930s.¹⁵

Indeed, when such homeless and orphaned children did appear in Soviet newspapers or publications at this time, it was almost exclusively as further examples of the transformative power of Soviet socialism. As with the letter presented above, Soviet newspaper articles and published letters largely adhered to a narrative of radical transformation. This transformation, however, was presented for the most part not as the result of individual effort. Rather, it was an achievement of the Soviet state which, in its wisdom, had given these former street children a chance to become useful members of society. The 1933 newspaper article “I Was a Waif, but Became an Engineer,” which told the story of an orphan who spent years living on the streets before receiving an education in a Soviet children’s home, offered a prime example of this narrative:

The children’s homes gave me a ‘road to life’ only thanks to the correct upbringing (*vospitanie*) and attention to children on the part of Soviet power (*sovetskaia vlast’*). I became a full citizen, a useful person for society. If there had not been these children’s homes, with their dedicated caregivers, I and thousands like me, children who ended up on the street, would have remained criminals...Only Soviet power, only labor education made me into a needed and useful person for socialist society.¹⁶

The opportunity to leave life on the streets, to receive an education, and to become a full and productive member of society was presented as a gift, given to orphaned children by the Soviet state. As Jeffrey Brooks has shown, this “economy of the gift” was present in much of Stalinist

¹⁴ See, for example, the speech by Children’s Commission representative Nazarov to the All-Russian Conference of Pioneers, 1929. GARF f. R5207 op. 1 d. 373 l. 6.

¹⁵ Ball, 192-195. This silence was increased even more when the Friend of Children Society, a volunteer society to help homeless children, was liquidated in 1934, and when the journals *Detdom* (Children’s Home) and *Drug detei* (Friend of Children) ceased publication in 1931 and 1933, respectively.

¹⁶ “Byl besprizornym, stal inzhenerom” [I Was a Waif, but Became an Engineer], *Zavod i- rabochii* 1933, GARF f. R5207 op. 1 d. 920 ll. 1-2.

public culture. In this version of a moral economy, the Soviet state and Stalin personally were presented as beneficent providers of needed goods and services, as well as more intangible “goods” (such as the ubiquitous “happy childhood”). In return, Soviet citizens were obligated to provide not only their labor, but enthusiastic public expressions of gratitude.¹⁷ Published letters from orphaned children and newspaper articles from this time both abounded with these expressions of gratitude to the Soviet state for saving them from the life of homeless wandering and petty crime.¹⁸ As these homeless and orphaned children later moved through the system of Soviet children’s homes, they would be constantly reminded of the debt of gratitude they owed to the Soviet state for this “road to life.”

Similarly, Soviet discourse regarding child homelessness emphasized two other key themes in the general discourse of Stalin’s “great break”: the stark contrast with Tsarist Russia and the clear superiority of Soviet socialism to capitalism. Orphans in Soviet children’s homes were constantly reminded that their only possible fate in either Tsarist Russia or the unforgiving capitalist world would have been a life of crime and eventually prison. Newspaper articles on children’s homes and orphans rarely failed to mention this contrast as well, continuing a long-established narrative.¹⁹ Sympathetic visitors to the USSR were often given tours of one of the model institutions for former street children, such as the Bolshevo Commune. Letters from impressed visitors were in turn reprinted as further evidence of Soviet socialism’s more humane, progressive, and promising nature. A letter from J.B. Askew, the head of Britain’s Communist

¹⁷ Jeffrey Brooks, *Thank You Comrade Stalin!: Soviet Public Culture from Revolution to Cold War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), especially 83-105. Brooks uses the term “public culture” to encompass the art, music, literature, film, drama, public lectures, and particularly newspapers that conveyed the Stalinist government’s message that its citizens were beholden to the state: see pp. xiv-xv. I use the term “public culture” throughout this dissertation to encompass the same sense of a discourse and message conveyed through newspapers, films, public lectures, official resolutions, and other public sources.

¹⁸ See the newspaper articles collected in the Central State Archive of the Moscow Region (TsGAMO) f. 916, op. 1 d. 322, 323.

¹⁹ See, for example, “V detskom dome” [In the Children’s Home], *Golos rabochego*, 2 July 1937, TsGAMO f. 916 op. 1 d. 322 l. 16.

Party, for example, praised the cleanliness and “humane atmosphere” of the Moscow children’s home he visited, which in the capitalist world “could only be obtained by strict military discipline- the dictatorship of officials.”²⁰ Only in the Soviet Union, these newspaper articles reminded readers, were these orphaned and destitute children given the possibility of a brighter future.

This discourse, in which the care of children (*zabota o detiakh*), particularly orphaned children, was declared “a key task of the Soviet state” and another marker of the superiority of Soviet socialism, conversely made Soviet officials particularly sensitive to the continued visibility of child homelessness in the Soviet Union.²¹ The crowds of homeless children that once again began to populate major Soviet cities in the early 1930s not only seemed to contradict the repeated declarations that the “building of socialism” had eliminated the social roots of this problem, but also potentially called into question the transformative power of Soviet socialism. In 1931, the German psychiatrist Hans Henning published an article titled “Waifs: How Russia Tries to ‘Treat’ its Underage Criminals” after attending a conference in which the Soviet film *The Road to Life* (1931) had been shown. This film told the fictionalized story of a Soviet children’s colony, heavily reminiscent of the famous pedagogue Anton Makarenko’s Gorky Colony, and its efforts to reeducate (*perevospytyvat*) juvenile delinquents in the Soviet Union, with its accompanying difficulties and eventual triumphs. Henning, however, argued that this film was nothing more than a “pleasant fantasy.” The film, Henning declared, was clearly not shot at a real children’s colony, in which children were much dirtier, more confined, and had less food; moreover, there were not enough pedagogues, teachers, and particularly psychiatrists in the colony to “control this army of psychopaths and defectives.” Soviet reformers might believe that

²⁰ GARF f. R5207 op. 1 d. 332 ll. 38-40.

²¹ Such a declaration was made in a letter from the annual meeting of the Central Executive Committee (VTsIK) Children’s Commission, 28 May 1932, GARF f. R5207 op. 1 d. 542 l. 32.

everyone, even these young criminals, was fundamentally good and could be redeemed, but this was a “Confucian fantasy.” In reality, according to Henning, 90 percent of these children “would never join society” and, at best, would live out the rest of their lives in the colony. The existence of this article was brought to the attention of the Children’s Commission by the Soviet Trade Union Commission for International Relations, which recommended that the Children’s Commission enlist Soviet orphans and former street children to answer Henning. In particular, these letters should address the theme of “who I was and who I am now” and should “describe in detail the process of reeducation of former homeless children into active builders of socialism.”²² Although there is no indication of whether Henning indeed received an answer, this theme of transformation, of becoming a completely different person, would remain a central component of the autobiographical narrative that Soviet orphans were encouraged to adopt.²³

This sensitivity to the continued presence of homeless children also manifested itself in the Soviet government’s tendency to engage in periodic campaigns to sweep these children from the streets. Such campaigns were most often presented as the final step to eliminate child homelessness in the Soviet Union once and for all, particularly after the “social roots” of this problem had supposedly been eliminated.²⁴ Other Soviet documents, however, suggest that such campaigns were also motivated by a sense of embarrassment about the very visible groups of homeless children that still existed in major Soviet cities, particularly Moscow. In a 1930 letter to the Central Executive Committee’s (VTsIK) Children’s Commission, the state tourist agency Intourist argued for the need to round up street children before the summer, when 80 percent of foreign tourists visited Moscow. Such measures, the letter stated, were necessary to avoid giving foreign visitors the “wrong” impression of child homelessness in the Soviet Union:

²² GARF f. R5207 op. 3 d. 11 ll. 148-158.

²³ See Chapter Three and Chapter Four of this dissertation.

²⁴ GARF f. R5207 op. 1 d. 329 ll. 237, 257; op. 1 d. 1107 l. 233; op. 3 d. 11 l. 52.

One encounters [homeless children] with every step in the city center...in general, in all the places that foreigners will visit...It seems to me that it is absolutely not in our interests that child homelessness, which in the last few years has ceased to be a mass phenomenon, might again become a reason for foreign visitors to criticize the Soviet Union...We consider it necessary to ask you to adopt the swiftest measures possible to rid Moscow's streets of homeless children.²⁵

For further emphasis, the letter reminded the Children's Commission that widespread child homelessness was one reason that foreigners "looked down" on the Soviet Union and were skeptical about the ability of Soviet institutions to solve this problem. A similar letter from Narkompros in the Komi region (*Oblast'*) reminded its local divisions that "class enemies" often used child homelessness "to agitate against Soviet power."²⁶ Campaigns to round up homeless children also often coincided with major Soviet holidays. This pattern was not unusual for Soviet campaigns; however, the potential dissonance between the visible presence of homeless children in Moscow at the same time as Soviet celebrations declared the coming "victory of socialism" provided another motivation to remove these children. Instructions from the Central Executive Committee, for example, explicitly stated in 1933 that another sweep to remove street children was necessary "in connection with the October holidays."²⁷ As with the Intourist letter, the Soviet government displayed here an apparent anxiety over the symbolic implications of its (growing) population of homeless children.

"One Encounters Homeless Children with Every Step..."

The ideological climate of the early 1930s, as well as efforts to minimize the visibility of child homelessness, means that determining the true extent of this problem during the early

²⁵ GARF f. R5207 op. 3 d. 11 ll. 56-58.

²⁶ Letter from the Komi regional Narkompros on the struggle with child homelessness, 1933, in *Krest'ianskie deti*, 248-249. The Komi Oblast' became the Komi Autonomous Republic (ASSR) in 1936.

²⁷ GARF f. R5207 op. 3 d. 23 l. 84.

1930s is no simple task. For one, due to the ideological discomfort surrounding the new wave of homeless children, such data was no longer publicized in the same way as it had been during the 1920s. Secondly, the usual reliance on various local authorities to self-report the number of homeless children in their area of administration introduced the potential for a number of inaccuracies, such as the widespread tendency simply to estimate the number of homeless children based on minimal data. Local authorities were also under constant pressure to reduce the number of homeless children and even eliminate child homelessness altogether, usually before some rather arbitrarily imposed deadline.²⁸ This pressure encouraged a tendency to under-report the number of homeless children in order to show “progress” in the “struggle against child homelessness.” Finally, the limited budgets of local authorities and the extremely limited numbers of Children’s Commission and Narkompros inspectors meant that obtaining an accurate count of the number of homeless children would have been difficult even in the best of circumstances.²⁹

Even when taking into account these potential inaccuracies, the available data indicate that child homelessness rapidly increased during the early 1930s. Nowhere was this more apparent than in Moscow. Data on the number of homeless children processed by the Moscow police for the years 1931-1933 show a distinct “wave” of homeless children cresting in 1932 and 1933:

²⁸ An order from the Cheliabinsk regional Soviet’s Organizational Committee on Aug. 28, 1934, for example, ordered that all homeless children be removed from the streets by Nov. 7, 1934 (the anniversary of the October Revolution) and all children’s homes be “functioning normally” by Jan. 1, 1935. GARF f. R5207, op. 1 d. 713, l. 28.

²⁹ Financial records from Narkompros in 1928, for example, show only three inspectors employed in full-time positions. GARF f. R5207 op. 1 d. 329 l. 416.

Table 1: Homeless Children Processed By Moscow Police, 1931-1934

1931	1932	1933	1934 (4 months)
4613	13430	28184	4490

Source: Report on the Movement of Homeless Children Through the Processing Center of the Moscow Police GARF f. R5207 op. 3 d. 27 l. 128.

Similarly, in two months (January and February 1933) 4500 homeless children passed through the Danilov receiving center (*priemnik*) in Moscow, the city's main processing and distribution hub for homeless children.³⁰ The numbers of homeless children picked up by the police and sent to processing centers tended to increase in the summer months, when warmer weather made travel feasible and escapes from children's institutions common. A report to the VTsIK Children's Commission in 1934 from Smolensk and Briansk acknowledged that despite efforts, child homelessness had actually gotten worse over the past year, with 5000 homeless children being processed in the first half of July alone (and 15,000 in the first six months of 1934).³¹

The sight of homeless children riding the Soviet Union's rails once again became common in the early 1930s, particularly as newly homeless children from the countryside made their way to cities. In response, the number of processing centers at train stations, as well as roaming train-car processing centers, was increased. During the first half of 1931, four of these mobile train-car centers in the Moscow region reported processing 4654 homeless children (only about half of whom had previously been in children's homes).³² Soviet railways became a major source of homeless children for various processing centers and eventually children's institutions: railway guards reported detaining 45,000 children on transport in the RSFSR in 10 months of 1930. This report concluded that given Narkompros' current figures of 8,000 *besprizornye* in the

³⁰ GARF f. R5207 op. 3 d. 23 l. 41.

³¹ GARF f. R5207 op. 3 d. 34 l. 60.

³² TsGAMO, f. 916 op. 1 d. 14 l. 10.

RSFSR, each must have been arrested an average of over five times.³³ Another more likely explanation, however, was simply that the number of homeless children had already begun to increase dramatically as a result of forced collectivization and its accompanying dekulakization. Similar data can be found for other regions of the country: a single train-car received near Rostov reportedly processed 600 to 800 children per month in 1930-31, and the Children's Friend Society reported assisting in removing 21,985 homeless children from seven railroad lines in 1933.³⁴

Although there are few comprehensive figures available on the total number of homeless children in the Soviet Union during these years, the extent of this problem can also be illustrated by examining the number of orphaned children in Soviet children's homes from the late 1920s and the mid-1930s. In 1928-29, the Russian Republic (RSFSR) housed 129,344 children in various children's institutions, according to data from the Children's Commission.³⁵ As of 1931, this figure had fallen slightly to 105,561. By 1932-33, however, the number of children housed in Soviet children's institutions in the RSFSR was 241,744. From this peak, the number of orphaned children in the RSFSR's children's homes was still 201,591 in 1934 and had risen again to 233,500 by 1936.³⁶ Although this data tells us little about the actual number of children living on the street in the Soviet Union, it does clearly illustrate a "wave" of homeless children that began in the early 1930s and crested around 1932-33 as these children were absorbed into Soviet institutions, then swelled again as the famine of 1932-33 resulted in even more orphaned and destitute children.

³³ GARF f. R5208 op. 1 d. 471 l. 58.

³⁴ Ball, 196.

³⁵ Ibid., 156; Children's Commission reports (*spravki*) on Child Homelessness, in *Deti Gulaga*, 176-177.

³⁶ GARF f. R5207 op. 1 d. 1107 ll. 147-148.

The Soviet government's response to these alarming figures, however, was usually to downplay their significance by denying that these homeless children were anything but the "remnants" of the post-revolutionary wave of child homelessness. As discussed previously, the ideological insistence that the "victory of socialism" had eliminated the social basis of *besprizornost'* meant that any remaining homeless children were labeled as either runaways from unsatisfactory children's homes, or "socially neglected" (*sotsial'no-zapushchennye*) children who already felt more at home on the streets.³⁷ The clear increase in the number of *besprizornye* being removed from the streets at this time was attributed to greater vigilance at train stations and other areas where these waifs gathered, more cooperation between social organizations like the Children's Friend Society and the militia, and the vaunted campaigns to "eliminate child homelessness." Regarding the above data from Moscow, for example, the police report explained this apparent rise in the number of homeless children by pointing to increased enforcement and the fact that many *besprizornye* had been picked up three or four times in a single year.³⁸ Similarly, another report declared that among Moscow's homeless youth, the majority were "remnants" of the endemic child homelessness of the early post-revolutionary years and that 80 percent were runaways from children's homes.³⁹

The very same data contained in these reports, however, often clearly contradicted these conclusions. In the same Moscow police report described above, it was noted that of the children processed in 1933, 73 percent were being processed by the militia for the very first time, 69 percent had been living on the streets for less than six months, and 65 percent had never been in a children's home.⁴⁰ For 1931-32, 91 percent of the processed *besprizornye* had been homeless

³⁷ GARF f. R5207 op. 1 d. 373 l. 6; op. 1 d. 1107 l. 233; op. 3 d. 11 l. 52.

³⁸ GARF f. R5207 op. 3 d. 27 ll. 125-129.

³⁹ GARF f. R5207 op. 3 d. 23 ll. 67-68.

⁴⁰ GARF f. R5207 op. 3 d. 27 l. 129

for only 1-6 months.⁴¹ Far from being hardened street children or runaways, the majority of these children had only recently ended up on the streets and had never experienced a Soviet children's home. Information collected by the Moscow militia on the geographical origins of homeless children in Moscow also shows a distinct trend in the early 1930s:

Table 2: Geographic Origins of Homeless Youth Processed in Moscow, 1931-33

	Moscow	Moscow Region	Ukraine	Other Places
1931	16%	26%	7.9%	50.1%
1932	12%	24.1%	17.5%	46.4%
1933	11%	15.23%	27%	46.67%

Source: GARF f. R5207 op. 3 d. 27 ll. 128-126.

Furthermore, in May and August of 1933, fully 39 percent of homeless children picked up in Moscow were originally from the Ukraine. As these numbers suggest, a major source of the wave of child homelessness in the Soviet Union in the early 1930s was the 1932-33 famine in the Ukraine (along with the Kuban, Volga, and Western Siberia). Given that the Soviet government officially denied “anti-Soviet rumors about a famine,” the closest this report came to acknowledging this fact was a comment that the growing percentage of Ukrainian *besprizornye* could be explained by the “poor harvest in the Ukraine and the Volga region.”⁴² Available information from the Ukraine itself also hints at the true extent of this problem. A letter from the Ukrainian Central Executive Committee to the Leningrad Soviet asking to transfer children to

⁴¹ GARF f. R5207 op. 3 d. 23 l. 69.

⁴² GARF f. R5207 op. 3 d. 27 l. 129. See also a letter from the Western Region Party Committee on how “class enemies spread rumors of a famine” regarding groups of homeless children at train stations, GARF f. R5207 op. 3 d. 34 l. 60.

Leningrad's children's homes alarmingly declared that rather than their usual contingent of 60,000 children, the Ukraine's children's homes were now packed with 128,219.⁴³

Reports from all over the Soviet Union also spoke of terrible overcrowding in processing centers and children's homes. Although these reports did not often acknowledge the true source of this overcrowding (the flood of homeless children produced mostly by forced collectivization, dekulakization, and famine), they clearly showed a rising tide of homeless children throughout the Soviet Union. Areas that were hit hard by collectivization and famine, or were the recipients of deported "special settlers," saw their existing children's institutions overwhelmed by a huge influx of newly homeless children.⁴⁴ In the Komi region, for example, four new children's homes (in addition to the eight existing homes) had to be constructed in 1932 specifically for the orphaned children of special settlers; by the end of 1936 this would grow to twenty-four children's homes (excluding special institutions for the deaf and blind).⁴⁵ As early as 1928 the North Caucasus, always a popular region with homeless youth due to its relatively milder weather, reported that over two thousand homeless youth had been processed but were still living on the streets because there were no places for them in children's homes.⁴⁶ By 1933, overcrowding in children's institutions was endemic in most areas of the Soviet Union. The Danilov receiving center in Moscow, for example, held 1250 children in "inhumane conditions" in a space made for 500.⁴⁷ Similar reports flowed in to the Children's Commission from Gorky (Nizhnyi Novgorod), Smolensk, the Moscow region, and other areas.⁴⁸ Among the most heartbreaking was a report from Kursk that overcrowding and lack of adequate supplies (such as

⁴³ GARF f. R5207 op. 3 d. 23 l. 32.

⁴⁴ See Lynne Viola, et al., eds., *The War Against the Peasantry* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005), 264-318.

⁴⁵ Dobronozhenko and Shabalova, *Krest'ianskie deti*, 30-35.

⁴⁶ GARF f. R5207 op. 1 d. 329 ll. 329-332.

⁴⁷ GARF f. R5207 op. 3 d. 23 l. 42.

⁴⁸ GARF f. R5207 op. 3 d. 34 ll. 45, 76; op. 3 d. 22 l. 96; op. 3 d. 23 l. 81.

soap) in 1933 had produced a typhus epidemic that took the lives of almost 500 children in various children's homes.⁴⁹ Sadly, this was not the only instance in which overcrowding and unsanitary conditions in Soviet children's institutions had deadly consequences.

This overcrowding was in turn exacerbated the previously mentioned series of campaigns that conducted mass "sweeps" to remove homeless children from the streets. Such sweeps brought large numbers of children into already overcrowded receiving centers, while doing little to improve the actual institutions charged with housing these children. The repeated insistence that child homelessness had been eliminated "in the main," and that any remaining homeless youth were simply the last remains of an earlier cohort, however, encouraged a mentality that one final campaign could rid the Soviet Union of its homeless youth forever. This mentality had very real consequences for Soviet efforts to deal with the new wave of homeless children in the early 1930s. At a meeting of the VTsIK Children's Commission in February of 1930, one Soviet official declared that expanding and building new children's homes was entirely unnecessary, as the majority of the remaining homeless children were runaways from existing children's homes. Instead, efforts should be focused on improving existing children's homes to discourage children from running away. Other speeches supported this notion, declaring that at least 50-60 percent of children in Soviet receiving and distribution centers were runaways from other children's institutions, usually those in poor condition.⁵⁰ While such speeches showed a genuine and admirable concern for the fate of the Soviet Union's homeless children, they also helped ensure that the Soviet government found itself ill-prepared to deal with another massive wave of homeless children in the early 1930s. Officials at the local and regional level often proved reluctant to build new children's institutions, as doing so would be tantamount to admitting that

⁴⁹ GARF f. R5207 op. 3 d. 23 ll. 85-56.

⁵⁰ GARF f. R5207 op. 3 d. 11 l. 52.

not only did the Soviet Union have a growing problem with child homelessness, but that existing institutions could not adequately address this problem. The result was a tendency to engage in periodic, heavily celebrated “mass removals” of homeless children that temporarily swelled the population of various children’s institutions, particularly the already overcrowded distribution centers. Such distribution centers in turn often became “revolving doors” for homeless children: one report noted that 300 children sent from the Danilov receiving center in Moscow to other children’s institutions in October 1932 ended back up at Danilov in the very same month.⁵¹

It should be noted that none of these difficulties was particularly new for the Soviet Union; in fact, many were the same problems faced by the Children’s Commission, Narkompros, and other Soviet organizations in the immediate post-revolutionary years.⁵² It is no surprise, then, that this tendency to engage in periodic campaigns that temporarily removed children from the street but showed only slow progress over time came under criticism, particularly from the Children’s Commission. Protocols from a meeting of the VTsIK Children’s Commission’s inspection brigade in 1930, for example, took to task Narkompros’ proposed plan to “liquidate child homelessness”:

According to this plan, 3000 children will be removed from the street and placed in 25 newly-organized institutions, and 10,000 children of school age will be removed from labor homes and placed in 30 new institutions. However, this plan DOES NOT SAY WHERE, IN WHICH REGIONS, THESE 13000 CHILDREN WILL BE COLLECTED, WHAT BASIS THERE IS FOR THIS NUMBER ITSELF, WHAT TYPE AND WHERE THESE INSTITUTIONS WILL BE BUILT...in short, there are a whole series of concrete questions that do not appear in this draft.⁵³

Such questions arguably did not appear in this draft precisely because Narkompros was being buffeted by apparently contradictory demands, both ultimately stemming from the assertion that child homelessness would soon be eliminated in the Soviet Union. At the same time as it was

⁵¹ GARF f. R5207 op. 3 d. 23 ll. 41-42.

⁵² Ball, 151-175.

⁵³ GARF f. R5207 op. 1 d. 471 ll. 3-5. Emphasis in original.

expected to gather up and house the “remnants” of the Soviet Union’s (growing) population of homeless youth, Narkompros was under pressure to reduce the number of children’s homes. This pressure derived from both the conviction that many children’s homes would soon no longer be necessary and from simple financial realities. A significant portion of the Narkompros budget was taken up by children’s homes, particularly after responsibility for their administration had been transferred to local (city and district) authorities.⁵⁴ When the opportunity arose, these local authorities often sought to relieve this financial burden by closing children’s homes and transferring children to other institutions. As a result, many local authorities both did not have adequate space to house the growing numbers of homeless children in the early 1930s and proved reluctant to open new children’s homes until they were absolutely necessary. This reluctance to open new children’s homes, and the simple difficulty in finding adequate financing, also contributed to widespread overcrowding.

Finally, efforts to deal with the widespread problem of child homelessness were hampered by the refusal to acknowledge the true scale of this problem and a lack of cooperation between various Soviet authorities in different areas (despite frequent claims to the contrary). Indeed, archival materials from this time suggest that various Soviet organs not only had difficulty collaborating in the “struggle against *besprizornost*,” but at times came into outright conflict. Far from a coordinated state response to the growing population *besprizornye*, this “struggle” was characterized more by *ad hoc* measures taken by various local authorities and continuous demands from central Soviet organs (like the VTsIK Children’s Commission) that local officials more closely adhere to directives from the center. Numerous documents from the Children’s Commission accused other Soviet organs of not devoting enough attention and effort

⁵⁴ Ball, 139-141, 151-152, 168-173.

to dealing with the problem of homeless children. A report from 1933, for example, accused the police of indifference to the fight against child homelessness:

The police do not particularly concern themselves with child thieves and hooligans, because they do not have their own organization to conduct educational work with children. If a policeman happens to catch a child thief, he simply takes away the stolen property and lets the child go. Thus, the child is once again left on his own.⁵⁵

Given the lack of available space in many receiving centers and other children's institutions, however, it may not be surprising that the police at times chose not to detain and process individual *besprizornye*.

A similar accusation was leveled against the Soviet railway administration. The VTsIK Children's Commission complained that various transport authorities often ignored government directives that homeless youth should be processed and turned over to the care of the local sections of Narkompros (the Division of Education, or ONO). The railway administration, for its part, countered that it was not ignoring these directives, but that it often received no assistance or cooperation from local ONO (many of whom were already struggling to deal with overcrowded receiving centers and children's homes).⁵⁶ The result was that children ended up being held in various mobile processing centers, which were never designed for long-term care, or simply dropped off at any area that would agree to accept them. Transport authorities also came under fire for continuing to transport homeless children between various cities and regions after they had been ordered to "make transport absolutely inaccessible to *besprizornye*."⁵⁷ This very same report, however, demonstrates the degree to which "*besprizornye*" was a broad term

⁵⁵ GARF f. R5207 op. 3. d. 23 l. 85. A similar newspaper article from the Moscow region in 1936 called the police a "blunt instrument" for dealing with street children. This was because their only real option, short of arrest, was to tell children to "go home." TsGAMO f. 916 op. 1 d. 262 l. 10.

⁵⁶ One railway receiving center on the Moscow-Kazan line even complained that the Moscow Oblast ONO not only would not accept *besprizornye* picked up on the railways, but would sometimes send *besprizornye* to their center with a request that they be "temporarily" housed there. TsGAMO f. 916 op. 1 d. 14 l. 45.

⁵⁷ GARF f. R5207 op. 1 d. 471 l. 60-62.

encompassing children in a wide range of circumstances. Among the *besprizornye* picked up by the transport authorities were

...children who have run away from children's homes, children from villages who lived in adopted or *kulak* families, children who [due to age] are not served by [Narkompros] and need to travel to find employment or continue their studies, children without supervision who have been left alone by working parents who cannot have someone watch them...⁵⁸

In theory, all such children were supposed to be turned over to the local ONO for care. In practice, the report noted, it was often the local ONO who either refused to accept such new charges (particularly if they had living parents), or even pressured the transport authorities to take these children to another region or city.

In turn, the Children's Commission seems to have drawn equal ire at times from other Soviet organs, particularly for its "watchdog" role. In a report criticizing the Commissariat of Health (Narkomzdrav) for not devoting enough effort to improving sanitary conditions in children's homes, a Children's Commission inspector also noted that his face-to-face meeting with a Narkomzdrav official was hardly conducive to cooperation between the two agencies:

Comrade Bogat had clearly just returned from somewhere else, and did not allow [the inspection brigade] to explain our purpose before asking in a raised tone, 'What is the problem? What do you need? Tell me!' He spent the whole time looking at his watch, not hiding his annoyance. After we explained the reason for our arrival, he became even more agitated.⁵⁹

Another official complained that frequent inspections from the Children's Commission were "preventing me from doing my work," while several Narkompros officials simply refused to meet with inspectors for a second time.⁶⁰ While the Children's Commission presented all these instances as further evidence that various Soviet organs were not taking the "struggle with child homelessness" seriously, they also demonstrate the degree to which various Soviet officials

⁵⁸ Ibid., l. 62.

⁵⁹ GARF f. R5207 op. 1 d. 471 l. 49.

⁶⁰ Ibid., ll. 7, 194.

resented the presence of the Children's Commission.⁶¹ As will become clear in the next chapter, conflicts between the Children's Commission and other Soviet organs, particularly Narkompros, extended into the administration and financing of children's homes as well. The Children's Commission throughout the 1930s continued to criticize local Narkompros officials for a wide range of deficiencies in Soviet children's homes and for not adhering to directives from the central government and the Commission itself. In turn, some Narkompros officials responded that the Children's Commission, with its nature as an advisory and oversight organization, had the luxury of making such criticisms, while local Narkompros officials had to deal with the difficult administrative realities of limited budgets, poorly qualified staff, and other challenges.

Documents from this time also reveal a frequent lack of cooperation between Soviet authorities in different administrative areas, particularly between Moscow and the surrounding regions, and between urban and rural officials. This lack of coordination and cooperation was sometimes seemingly intentional, as various local authorities tried desperately to deal with overcrowded receiving centers and children's homes by simply sending any newly-picked up *besprizornye* to other areas, sometimes without even informing the receiving authorities. For example, an entire group of homeless children sent from Arkhangelsk to Murmansk was not allowed to exit the train at their destination, due to the fact that the Murmansk ONO had never agreed to accept these children.⁶² Such incidents were apparently so common that Mikhail Kalinin, as head of the Central Executive Committee, was forced to remind all executive committee chairs that it was prohibited to transfer *besprizornye*, whether individually or in groups, to another administrative area without the agreement of both the sending and receiving

⁶¹ See the heated accusations between representatives of the Moscow regional ONO and the Moscow Children's Commission, TsGAMO f. 916 op. 1 d. 67 ll. 2-10.

⁶² GARF f. R5207 op. 1 d. 343 ll. 5-6.

parties. Exceptions were to be made only when the central Sovnarkom had ordered the transfer, or when these children were being returned to their relatives.⁶³

Some Soviet authorities, however, seem to have still taken advantage of the “loophole” presented by this latter condition. A letter from the Tula ONO, for example, complained that a group of three homeless children had been sent from Moscow to Tula, despite the fact that they had no relatives in Tula and there were no available spaces in children’s homes. These children had been living in Moscow for years after the death of their parents, but one apparently remembered that he “might have” originally been from Tula. This was enough for the Moscow ONO, which sent all three children to Tula without confirming the presence of relatives there or receiving permission from the Tula ONO.⁶⁴ Finally, a meeting of the Presidium of the VTsIK Children’s Commission noted in 1930 that many children’s homes were so desperate to reduce overcrowding that they did little to prevent children from running away, and, more disturbingly, refused to take these children back if they were later caught in other areas.⁶⁵ Nor did this trend necessarily improve in many places as the decade went on. A letter from the Komi regional ONO in 1936, for example, still accused local authorities of “apathy” toward runaways, of transferring children between institutions without supervision (and showing little care when they occasionally disappeared), and of sending children “home” without bothering to confirm the presence of relatives able to take them in.⁶⁶

Indeed, a kind of struggle over *besprizornye* took place during the years of the first Five-Year Plan between Moscow and its surrounding regions. In a speech to the All-Russian

⁶³ GARF f. R5207 op. 1 d. 343 ll. 30-32.

⁶⁴ GARF f. R5207 op. 1 d. 341 l. 488. A very similar case is discussed in a letter from the Komi regional ONO, 19 October 1933, in *Krest’ianskie deti*, 240.

⁶⁵ GARF f. R5207 op. 3 d. 11 l. 51.

⁶⁶ Letter from Komi regional ONO on runaways from children’s homes, 17 February 1935, in *Krest’ianskie deti*, 338-339.

Conference of Pioneers in 1929, representative Pervukhina from the Moscow ONO complained that Moscow was being overwhelmed by *besprizornye* from other regions, who continued to travel unimpeded to the capital. Along with homeless children and runaways taking advantage of Moscow's central railway location, or simply passing through, the city also saw a number of older youth who had "graduated" from children's homes in other areas and been sent to Moscow to find work or continue their studies. When these youths could not find work or gain entrance to higher education, they often ended up back on the streets. Thus, Pervukhina concluded, if the Moscow ONO was not allowed to transfer groups of *besprizornye* to other regions, its own resources would soon be exhausted.⁶⁷ As shown by the statistics collected by the Moscow police, however, the number of homeless children in Moscow, including those from areas as far away as the Ukraine, continued to rise. In response, the Moscow authorities took drastic measures to try to prevent more homeless children from entering the city's already overcrowded receiving centers and children's homes, often in clear violation of existing government directives. A Children's Commission report, for example, noted in 1931 that the Moscow ONO had stopped accepting any children from the various mobile processing centers at train stations, claiming that there was absolutely no available space in the city's children's homes.⁶⁸ In other cases, Moscow authorities simply transferred homeless children to other areas, a practice that drew criticism both from the receiving regions (who often faced their own problems with overcrowding) and the Children's Commission.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ GARF f. R5207 op. 1 d. 373 ll. 191-195.

⁶⁸ GARF f. R5207 op. 3 d. 11 l. 221. A later NKVD order from 1938 would "categorically forbid" the transfer of any children to Moscow, even if they claimed to have been born or live there, without explicit confirmation that they indeed had living parents in Moscow or the Moscow region. See NKVD order No. 03, 9 January 1938, in *Deti Gulaga*, 278.

⁶⁹ See the Children's Commission's comments on the Moscow Soviet's plan to transfer 800 newly processed homeless children from the Danilov receiving center to another region, GARF f. R5207 op. 3 d. 32 l. 84.

The conflict between Moscow and its surrounding regions over where to house the new wave of homeless children was just one example of a larger lack of cooperation and even outright conflict at this time between various Soviet authorities in urban versus rural areas. This conflict was partly driven by the fact that due to forced collectivization, dekulakization, and the ensuing famine, rural areas had become one of the major sources of homeless children for many areas of the Soviet Union.⁷⁰ With their limited budgets, however, most rural Soviet authorities were ill-equipped to deal with large numbers of homeless children. Indeed, there is little evidence that rural Soviet authorities made particular efforts to prevent homeless children from traveling to other areas. In 1932, a letter from the RSFSR Narkompros to all regional ONO accused the latter of not doing enough to combat child homelessness in their own administrations, and specifically asked “why the FLOOD of homeless children into major industrial centers and newly constructed cities HAS NOT ENDED?”⁷¹ Various regulations designed to make it more difficult for children to travel on the railways were also not entirely effective, as the number of homeless children in major cities continued to grow in the early 1930s.⁷² Under pressure to reduce the number of homeless children migrating to the cities, some regional authorities began to place greater emphasis on dealing with *besprizornost'* in rural areas, or at least preventing these children from leaving. An order from the Eastern Siberia Regional Executive Committee in 1934, for example, directed all local executive committees and collective farm administrations to find adoptive parents on collective farms for orphaned rural

⁷⁰ Many Soviet documents spoke of “difficulties” for dekulakized and exiled families without explicitly acknowledging that Soviet policies were leading to an increase in the number of homeless children. See GARF f. R5207 op. 3 d. 11 l. 68; op. 1 d. 1591 l. 3; and TsGAMO f. 916 op. 1 d. 108 l. 98.

⁷¹ GARF f. R5207 op. 3 d. 11 l. 289. Emphasis in original.

⁷² See the previously mentioned statistics on the number of homeless children from the Ukraine in Moscow. Reports from the Moscow Children’s Commission also declared that child homelessness in Moscow was a growing problem and that railway guards had not been able to halt the flow of homeless children into Moscow. GARF f. R5207 op. 3 d. 11 ll. 107, 135; op. 3 d. 27 ll. 128-126.

children, and to “categorically forbid” these children from traveling to urban areas.⁷³ The results of these measures, however, were limited, and by 1933-34 the Soviet Union once again had a significant problem with child homelessness, though the true extent of this problem was rarely publicly acknowledged.

Besprizornye: from Victims of Social Circumstances to “Socially Dangerous Elements”

At the same time as Soviet authorities struggled to deal with this rising tide of homeless children, an important change in the discursive representation of *besprizornye* was also taking place, one that would have lasting consequences for Soviet orphans in the 1930s and beyond. The repeated insistence that the social conditions that fed childhood homelessness had now been eliminated in the Soviet Union, and the general unease with these “remnants of capitalist society,” contributed to a shift in attitudes to street children, and by extension all orphans. Increasingly, homeless and street children were seen not as victims of social circumstances to be pitied, or even delinquents to be rehabilitated, but as “socially harmful elements” that represented a potential threat to Soviet society. Soviet documents increasingly spoke of the danger of “disorder,” hooliganism, and even counterrevolutionary activities on the part of street children, many of whom were increasingly considered professional criminals-in-training. The construction of socialism had supposedly eliminated any legitimate reasons for child homelessness; therefore, in the Stalinist logic that had already begun to dominate government policy, the only remaining explanation was that these children were homeless largely *by*

⁷³ GARF f. R5207 op. 1 d. 713 l. 2; op. 3 d. 27 ll. 128-126.

choice.⁷⁴ Although well-intentioned reformers in Narkompros, the Children’s Commission, and other agencies continued to advocate for homeless children, policy makers in the Soviet government increasingly saw these children a potential source of “disorder” that needed to be contained. This tendency culminated in a series of legislation in the mid-1930s that essentially criminalized child homelessness, along with massive police sweeps to round up the remaining street children. Far from the willful, uncultured, but “correctable” and even “naturally collectivist” *besprizornye* of the 1920s, homeless youth were now seen as one of many groups that undermined the harmony and stability of Soviet society.⁷⁵

This shift in attitudes and policy toward street children began with the onset of the Five-Year Plan, but accelerated after the declared “victory of socialism” in 1932. As discussed previously, the conviction that the construction of socialism had eliminated any valid social causes of *besprizornost’* led to a search for other explanations. As time went on, it became increasingly difficult to insist that the remaining *besprizornye* were the same “remnants” of the post-revolutionary wave of homeless children, particularly as periodic campaigns regularly rounded up street children. One particularly favored explanation, therefore, was that the homeless youth observed on the streets of many major Soviet cities during the first Five-Year Plan were runaways from children’s homes, who had been compelled to return to street life

⁷⁴ On the similar moral logic that began to dominate discussions of criminal behavior, political opposition, and other “deviance” under the Stalin regime: see Halfin, *Terror in My Soul*, 30-42.

⁷⁵ It should be noted that this general debate between those who saw street children primarily as the victims of circumstances, and those who saw them as “morally defective” from the beginning, had existed throughout the 1920s as well. However, whereas the former view had been ascendant among earlier reformers and policymakers, by the mid-1930s the latter had become much more influential. Ball, 127-133; and Kelly, *Children’s World*, 193-220. On the increasing harshness of juvenile crime laws in the 1930s, see Shearer, *Policing Stalin’s Socialism*, 219-242; and Peter H. Solomon, Jr. *Soviet Criminal Justice under Stalin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). On the cases of “marginals” and efforts to engineer a harmonious society through exclusion and repression, see Shearer, *Policing Stalin’s Socialism*, 4-18; and Golfo Alexopoulos, *Stalin’s Outcasts*.

either due to poor conditions in children's homes, or simply from the "pull of the street."⁷⁶ Advocates for the former could certainly point to numerous examples of poorly functioning children's homes, which often did lead children to flee these homes. An inspection by the Moscow Children's Commission, for example, reported that of the 4654 children who were processed through receiving centers at four of Moscow's railway stations in 1931, 2569 were runaways from children's homes. Of these, 1699 reported "dissatisfaction with children's homes" as the reason that they had run away.⁷⁷

Advocates for the latter view, in turn, usually pointed to specific, often spectacular cases of children with a long history of escapes from children's homes and colonies. The fourteen-year-old street youth Liakhovskii, for example, had been processed through various receiving centers eight times over a two-year span. Each time, he immediately ran away and reformed his "band" of pickpockets to commit thefts in Moscow, Nizhnyi Novgorod, and other cities.⁷⁸ Such cases of serial escapes from Soviet children's institutions were often seen as evidence that some children had already been so "corrupted" by street life that they could not, or did not want to escape the "pull of the street." Escapes were also rather common among the "hard cases" and juvenile delinquents who inhabited the children's labor colonies (*trudkoloniia*) run by the OGPU/NKVD. One NKVD report noted that in three such colonies for the year 1930, there were 3,364 escapes for only 2000 residents.⁷⁹ Such data were seen as further evidence that for a certain contingent of street children, much more serious measures were needed to keep them off the street. Thus, one NKVD report argued that the existing Soviet laws limiting the amount of

⁷⁶ Speech given by Children's Commission representative at All-Russian Conference of Pioneers, 1929, GARF f. R5207 op. 1 d. 373 l. 10.

⁷⁷ GARF f. R5207 op. 3 d. 11 l. 221.

⁷⁸ GARF f. R5207 op. 3 d. 23 l. 58. This same report also mentioned several other street youth who had fled from Soviet children's institutions more than seven times.

⁷⁹ GARF f. R5207 op. 1 d. 417 l. 12.

time juveniles could be detained were interfering with the process of reeducation, and that juvenile criminals should be allowed to be sentenced to Soviet institutions “until rehabilitation.”⁸⁰

The perceived connection between *besprizornye* and juvenile crime was also nothing new, and had a strong basis in reality.⁸¹ In order to survive on the streets of Soviet cities, many *besprizornye* did indeed turn to petty crime, particularly theft. A report by the Soviet researcher V.I. Kufaev on child homelessness in Moscow (1932-34) estimated that 40 percent of homeless children “systematically commit crimes.”⁸² A report on juvenile crime in Leningrad for the years 1930-32 in turn suggested that roughly half of all juvenile crime had been committed by *besprizornye*, with theft being the most common (50-80 percent of the total, depending on the year), followed by hooliganism.⁸³ Still another report from the Moscow region in 1931 estimated that 65 percent of prostitutes in the capital were juveniles.⁸⁴ Though the vast majority of crime committed by *besprizornye* was of the petty variety, some of these homeless children were implicated in crime much more serious than the typical petty theft. These incidents received an arguably disproportionate amount of attention, again contributing to the increasing perception that many *besprizornye* were already on a direct path to a dangerous life of violent crime. Kufaev’s report, for example, described several serious crimes committed by homeless youth in Moscow from January to March 1933. In one incident, a children’s home resident was beaten to death by several other residents who tried to rob him, and then threw the body in an open latrine. In another, the body of a street youth, Poloskovyi, was found in a drain pipe under a Moscow train station, where groups of 30-40 homeless children had been residing. A police

⁸⁰ GARF f. R5207 op. 1 d. 410 l. 7.

⁸¹ For examples of crime among homeless children, see Ball, 44-83.

⁸² GARF f. R5207 op. 3 d. 23 l. 41.

⁸³ GARF f. A2306 op. 70 d. 5272 ll. 1-3.

⁸⁴ TsGAMO f. 916 op. 1 d. 11 l. 8.

investigation revealed that Poloskovyi had quarreled over money with another homeless youth, nicknamed “Freckles.” During the fight that broke out, “Freckles” stabbed the other boy eighteen times with a screwdriver. This incident was listed among several in which disagreements over money between *besprizornye* had turned violent.⁸⁵

Finally, Kufaev described the case of the fourteen-year-old Bespalovyi, a homeless youth who had recently been arrested for possessing forged documents claiming he was the son of the legendary Civil War hero Vasilii Ivanovich Chapaev. The enterprising Bespalovyi had apparently used these documents to claim state aid in Samara, Chapaevsk, Ryazan, Ulianovsk, Kazan, Gorkii, Kahavino, Saratov, Poltava, and other places.⁸⁶ After describing these incidents, Kufaev stated that the type of “especially difficult children (*osobo-trudnye rebiata*)” who could commit such crimes made up 28-30 percent of all *besprizornye*. It should be noted, however, that such particularly disturbing crimes were only a small percentage of all youth crime. The same statistics from Leningrad described above state that of the 2846 juveniles implicated in crimes between January and September 1931, only three were involved in murder, six in rape, and thirty-four in assault (compared to 305 in “hooliganism” and 841 in theft).⁸⁷ Nevertheless, there was a widespread perception during the late 1920s and early 1930s that juvenile crime, particularly violent juvenile crime, was on the rise, and that *besprizornye* were among its main perpetrators.⁸⁸

Even more potentially troubling for the Soviet authorities, however, were reports that being placed in Soviet institutions did not always lead to an end to criminal behavior. Reports

⁸⁵ GARF f. R5207 op. 3 d. 23 ll. 53-54.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁸⁷ GARF f. A2306 op. 70 d. 5272 ll. 27-28.

⁸⁸ A rather hyperbolic speech on the need to open a new OGPU labor colony in Georgia claimed that “seventy percent of all crime is committed by *besprizornye*.” GARF f. R5207 op. 3 d. 34 l. 75. On perceptions of juvenile crime and policy shifts during the 1930s, see Shearer, *Policing Stalin’s Socialism*, 219-242.

were common of former street children, now housed in Soviet receiving centers or children's homes, who nevertheless continued to commit crimes. At the Rybinsk receiving center in the Ivanov region, for example, groups of children spent their days committing petty theft and even robbery in the marketplace, only returning to the receiving center to sleep at night.⁸⁹ Another report called the Troitsk children's home "a kind of bandit hideout" and described how several twenty-year-olds, who should have been removed long ago, systematically robbed the younger children or organized them into gangs to commit thefts.⁹⁰ This second example also illustrates another common fear of Soviet authorities regarding *besprizornye*: that they were not only particularly susceptible to falling under the influence of older, professional criminals, but would in turn attract or coerce other children into a life of crime. The same report compiled by V.I. Kufaev above presented the case of T.V. Melnikova-Borisova-Golisheva (apparently aliases) as a cautionary example. After being released from Taganskaia prison in 1931, the thirty-eight-year-old Melnikova set up a sort of "thieves' circle" in her apartment, inviting several homeless youth to live with her and instructing them how to commit thefts at the marketplace. Melnikova's fourteen-year-old daughter also participated in these activities, recruiting street children to join their group.⁹¹

Arguments that such "hard cases" would be disruptive and dangerous if placed in typical Soviet children's homes could also point to real problems as justification. Many reports and letters to the Children's Commission mentioned incidents in which "difficult" (*trudnye*) children—usually older and with more street experience—robbed or beat other children in receiving centers or children's homes.⁹² Often, these reports were accompanied by demands that more labor

⁸⁹ GARF f. R5207 op. 3 d. 27 l. 137.

⁹⁰ GARF f. R5207 op. 3 d. 34 ll. 45-49.

⁹¹ GARF f. R5207 op. 3 d. 23 ll. 65-66.

⁹² See, for example, GARF f. R5207 op. 3 d. 34 ll. 1, 31.

colonies, “closed” colonies (colonies for juvenile delinquents that featured guards and did not allow children to leave), or children’s homes with “special regimes” for those officially labeled “difficult cases” (*trudnovospituemye*) be created to isolate these youths from the general population in children’s homes.⁹³

Some of the most serious incidents, however, were cases of mass “uprisings” in various children’s homes. One such “uprising” in the Kleimenovo children’s home in the Moscow region in 1934 prompted a criminal investigation. The report from this investigation described how this children’s home had suffered from a lack of supplies, unsanitary conditions, and indifferent or criminal staff. At the same time as the children’s home director and the head of the supply section were embezzling money and supplies, the children were left mainly to their own devices and used the home’s workshop to construct knives and home-made guns, until almost 100 children were armed. The children then began to destroy their school, torment other children by “cutting up their clothes and shoes,” destroy portraits of the Soviet leaders, and “destroy the Pioneer room.” As a last straw, this large group of children attacked the local storehouse with guns, clubs, and knives, chased off the guards, beat up the warehouse manager, carried off all the supplies within, and, for good measure, destroyed the portraits of Lenin and removed the red star from the warehouse.⁹⁴ As a result of the investigation, the director and head of the supply section were brought up on criminal charges. This report, however, does not mention whether any disciplinary actions were taken against the children who participated in this “uprising.”

⁹³ A 1928 report to the VTsIK Children’s Commission, for example, argued that Narkompros’ children’s homes were failing in their task of “reeducating” former street children precisely because the “difficult” children could not be separated from the “normal” children. GARF f. R5207 op. 1 d. 337 l. 34. See also the discussion of the turn towards more “discipline” in children’s homes and the increase in labor colonies for “difficult” children in Chapter Four of this dissertation.

⁹⁴ GARF f. R5207 op. 3 d. 34 ll. 52-53.

Although reports to the Children’s Commission commonly blamed these incidents on “inadequate educational (*vospitatel’naia*) work” and called for the removal of various staff, the fact that the disgruntled children had targeted symbols of Soviet authority clearly made some officials nervous. The fact that so many had managed to arm themselves most likely did not help.⁹⁵ A 1934 report on the Ivanovo region, for example, declared a series of similar incidents “counterrevolutionary” and blamed them on a lack of adequate political education.⁹⁶ It also reported a disturbing rumor circulating among *besprizornye* in the Rybinskii receiving center that Stalin, far from being the caring father depicted in propaganda, was “an Armenian (*armashka*) who gave the order to execute underage criminals and wanted to sell *besprizornye* abroad for two train cars full of gold, but Voroshilov stopped him.”⁹⁷ While this report did not discuss where or how this rumor got started, or why it was Voroshilov who appeared in the role of the savior of *besprizornye*, the existence of such a rumor about the “Great Stalin” no doubt led some officials to question the potential loyalty of these *besprizornye* – or at the very least, the quality of their political education.

By the mid-1930s, therefore, Soviet discourse and, increasingly, Soviet policies began to show a sharp dichotomy in their treatment of *besprizornye*, orphans, and children of the streets. Former *besprizornye* in Soviet children’s homes, particularly those who had “graduated” to enter industry or further education, were held up as examples of the transformative power of Soviet socialism.⁹⁸ These wards of the state were also incorporated into the celebration of a “happy childhood” that defined much of the public culture surrounding children during the Stalin period.

⁹⁵ See also a similar report on protests and “uprisings” among juvenile delinquents that included “anti-Soviet” messages, in *Deti Gulaga*, 103-104.

⁹⁶ GARF f. R5207 op. 3 d. 27 l. 137.

⁹⁷ GARF f. R5207 op. 3 d. 27 l. 136.

⁹⁸ The Children’s Commission sometimes gathered information on children’s home graduates for these purposes: see GARF f. R5207 op. 1 d. 1107 ll. 245-253.

Soviet newspaper articles regularly depicted children's home residents enjoying sports, leisure activities, trips to the theater, or summers at Pioneer camps and other travel.⁹⁹ Far from a simple celebration, however, these children were often explicitly encouraged to express their thanks to the children's home and Soviet government for giving them a "road to life" and the chance to be a productive member of Soviet society. Questionnaires distributed for graduates from the Krasnaia Presna children's home in Moscow, for example, directly asked respondents "what did the children's home give you?"¹⁰⁰ These "children of the Five-Year Plan" were therefore reminded that, in the end, they owed their "happy childhood" and their potential future to the Soviet state.

Those orphaned, abandoned, and itinerant children who remained on the streets, however, were now often seen as actual or potential dangers to Soviet socialism and a harmonious society. Following from the idea that the social conditions that underlay child homelessness had been completely eliminated, *besprizornye* who remained on the street were considered to be willfully homeless: either already too corrupted by their life on the street, or too hostile to normal society, to be truly capable of change. Not only did such children represent a "source of future criminals," they were at times even presented as potentially anti-Soviet "wreckers" (*desorganizatory*) and saboteurs (*diversanty*).¹⁰¹ In the spring of 1935, such suspicion was codified into Soviet law, as the infamous law of April 7, 1935 allowed juveniles age twelve and above to be prosecuted "to the full extent of the law" for the crimes of murder, attempted murder, aggravated assault, and armed robbery. A secret addendum added to this law allowed

⁹⁹ See, for example, "Zdes' liubiat detei" [Here Children are Loved], *Kommunar Tula* 28 Jan. 1937, TsGAMO f. 916 op. 1 d. 322 l. 34. On the discourse of the "happy childhood" in general during the Stalin period, see Kelly, *Children's World*, 93-129.

¹⁰⁰ GARF f. R5207 op. 1 d. 920 ll. 5-12.

¹⁰¹ A Narkompros report from the Lower Volga territory in 1933, for example, declared that the majority of *besprizornye* still living on the street were "hardened recidivists." GARF f. A2306 op. 70 d. 5306 ll. 1-2. A report from the OGPU in Georgia went even farther, declaring that "kulaks and spies" used homeless children for "sabotage" and "spying." GARF f. R5207 op. 3 d. 34 l. 74.

the use of the death penalty for juveniles. In turn, a joint Sovnarkom and Central Committee decree on May 31, 1935 turned primary responsibility for the administration of the receiving and distribution centers, colonies, and remaining institutions for “difficult” children over to the NKVD. These measures were accompanied by mass police sweeps to round up remaining street children in major Soviet cities. Many of these children ended up not in children’s homes, but in labor colonies for juvenile delinquents or even in adult prisons.¹⁰² From this point, homeless children in the Soviet Union would be treated much the same as recidivist criminals, kulaks, and other “socially dangerous elements,” and subject to the same measures of police control.

While the binary distinction between candidates for reeducation (those *besprizornye* in children’s institutions) and “socially dangerous” *besprizornye* (those still on the street) was typical of Soviet discourse, the divergence between these two categories was never absolute. Orphaned and homeless children throughout the 1930s were represented as both exemplars of the transformative power of Soviet socialism and potential threats to the stability and harmony of Soviet society. As will be explored more thoroughly in Chapter Four, Soviet children’s homes exhibited this dichotomy as well. Although these homes were celebrated in Soviet public discourse as places that granted their charges a “happy childhood” and “road to life,” Soviet policies also increasingly emphasized the need for strict discipline, control, and political conformity within these homes. For juvenile delinquents, chronic runaways, and others labeled “difficult children,” the NKVD labor colonies provided an even stricter measure of discipline and control. Thus, while homeless and orphaned children were encouraged to transform themselves and to become productive members of society, this transformation was to take place in a very controlled, distinctive way, in accordance with proper discipline and political education.

¹⁰² Shearer, *Policing Stalin’s Socialism*, 224-231.

Conclusion

The years of the Five-Year Plan brought an entirely new wave of child homelessness to the Soviet Union, one that could be directly blamed on the Soviet government's own policies of breakneck industrialization, collectivization, and dekulakization. The Five-Year Plan also ushered in the ideological conviction, however, that this problem should no longer exist. The insistence that child homelessness was a thing of the past made Soviet authorities ill-prepared to deal with a growing population of homeless children. As the new wave of homeless children struggled for survival on the streets of Soviet cities, local authorities scrambled to round up, process, and house these children, while various central authorities demanded more action in the "struggle against child homelessness" as they simultaneously insisted this problem had been "liquidated in the main." The result was a largely uncoordinated and at times contradictory response to this problem, as various Soviet authorities worked at cross purposes to try to deal with their own populations of street children, overcrowded institutions, and lack of adequate finances.

As for these homeless, orphaned, and abandoned children themselves, the "children of the Five-Year Plan" appeared in Soviet public culture in one of two roles. Those in Soviet institutions were presented as further examples of the radical transformation being wrought by the Five-Year Plan and the construction of socialism: from thieves, hooligans, and street children they had become productive members of society and future builders of socialism. This rhetoric of transformation, however, was accompanied by a growing discomfort with *besprizornye* and fears about their potential as criminals, hooligans, and sources of disorder. While many street

children had indeed become involved in crime as a way to survive, Soviet discourse increasingly viewed this juvenile crime as a significant threat to the stability and harmony of Soviet society. By 1935, therefore, the Soviet government had essentially criminalized child homelessness itself. For the “children of the Five-Year Plan,” the Soviet government offered only one “road to life:” through the discipline, control, and proper upbringing (*vospitanie*) of the children’s home. The next chapter will therefore follow these children into the Soviet system of children’s homes, exploring the conditions and problems encountered there that often served to challenge this transformative mission.

Chapter Two: The *Detdom*

Moris Davidovich Gershman's (Morris Hershman) journey to the *detdom* was not typical. Unlike the hundreds of thousands of abandoned and orphaned children who swelled the population of Soviet children's homes in the early 1930s, Gershman was voluntarily placed in a children's home. Born in 1926 in Brooklyn, New York to Polish emigrant parents who soon separated, Gershman was taken to the Soviet Union at age five by his father, a committed communist. After arriving in the "socialist utopia," Gershman's father took a position in industry that required him to travel frequently, leaving his son to be raised in a Moscow children's home. Unfortunately for both father and son, their future in the Soviet Union turned out to be far from utopian. Gershman's father would be arrested for suspected espionage in 1938, but released in 1939 in connection with the fall of Ezhov. Before his own arrest in 1941, Gershman had already discovered in his children's home that the Soviet Union markedly differed from the paradise imagined by his father. As he recalled:

Living conditions in children's homes in that time differed little from those in camps and prisons, which I would have my fill of (*s izbytkom khlebnul*) in the future. I will never be able to forget the constant companions of that life – rats, thousands of which inhabited the children's home as well as prisons and camps... In 1933, when I was eight years old in the children's home, at night a big rat grabbed me by the toe, and I could not shake it off, so I became scared and screamed. In the sleeping area were about thirty children my age, who jumped from their beds and turned on the lights, and only at this point did my "friend" (*podruzhka*) abandon me. We saw a disgusting sight: dozens of rats sprang from the children's beds and scurried to their holes.¹

While this may have been among his most traumatic experiences in the children's home (Gershman credited it with giving him a lifelong fear of rats), it was far from the only way in

¹ Moris Davidovich Gershman (Morris Hershman), *Prikluchenie amerikantsa v Rossii 1931-1990* (New York: Effect Pub., 1995), 16.

which life in the children's home failed to mirror the "happy childhood" depicted in Soviet newspapers. Gershman also recalled poor food, widespread disease, unsanitary conditions, and inadequate clothing as being typical of the several children's homes he experienced.²

For their part, Soviet authorities were well aware of the numerous problems that plagued children's homes. In 1930, a Narkompros report titled "On the Condition of Children's Homes" declared that Soviet children's homes were still not serving their intended role as "the primary weapon in the struggle with child homelessness." Instead, many children's homes actually perpetuated this problem, as their poor conditions encouraged "extremely widespread escapes."³ The report went on to provide numerous examples of the "difficult life" in many children's homes and the continued problems that encouraged children to run away. In Saratov, a "fever of transfers" had resulted in numerous children's homes being relocated into unacceptable buildings, many of which lacked light, heat, and basic furniture (not to mention the educational and workshop facilities needed to be an "acceptable" children's home). In the Astrakhan region, a botched repair job at one home resulted in the children's bedroom being inundated with freezing water, causing widespread illness and ten cases of frostbite. In the Izhevsk region, one children's home was relocated four times in a single year, each time with an almost full turnover of staff. The report also drew attention to the numerous shortcomings in children's home staff. In Vladivostok, for example, positions were not only being filled by unqualified personnel, but by convicted criminals being ordered to serve out their sentences in children's homes. In Kraisnoiarsk, lack of personnel resulted in a ratio of fifty children to one caregiver. As the report

² Ibid., 14-19. Gershman did not relate the names of these children's homes, but rather recalled their locations around Moscow. The first was located on Novaia Basmannaia street. The fact that Gershman came from America and did not, at first, know any Russian made him something of a pariah among the other children. In 1934, Gershman was transferred to a different children's home (possibly for "difficult" children) for fighting. In 1935, Gershman was transferred again to an apparently "normal" children's home near the Sokol metro station.

³ Narkompros Informational Report no. 46 "On the Condition of Children's Homes," 18 Dec. 1930, GARF f. R5207 op 1 d. 471 l. 109.

noted, the low salaries for children's home staff meant that many positions were filled by those who could not find a job elsewhere, including "elements alien to the proletariat." Finally, the report highlighted the widespread difficulties in supplying children's homes with the required food, clothing, and other materials. In the Far East, roughly twelve rubles were being spent per children's home resident per month on food, a "starvation ration." A majority of regions also reported insufficient amounts of clean clothing, bedding, mattresses, pillows, and other supplies, again contributing to widespread diseases, particularly skin disorders. Worse, such problems had also been publicized by Soviet newspapers: in *Pionerskaia Pravda*, for example, Pioneers from the children's home "Children's Village" (*Detskoe selo*) complained: "we live like pigs. They give us one shirt and one pair of pants for the entire year and don't change them until they have turned to rags."⁴ Although the report promised that "numerous measures" were being implemented to improve children's homes, and declared that local authorities in particular should direct attention to these problems, the picture painted by the report as a whole was rather grim.

This chapter investigates the general conditions of Soviet children's homes during the 1930s. After providing an overview of the numerous challenges and problems faced by children's homes at this time, it will take up the question of how prevalent and widespread these problems were. Memoirs, oral histories, and other available sources have certainly given the impression that, to use Catriona Kelly's words, conditions in children's homes, "by and large continued to range from the spartan to the dreadful."⁵ Some orphaned children, however, remembered conditions in their children's home as being wholly adequate, or sometimes even expressed fond memories of their time there (usually associated with friendships or the kindness

⁴ Ibid., 109-112.

⁵ Kelly, *Children's World*, 227. See also the memories related to Cathy Frierson in *Children of the Gulag*, 185-232; as well as memories of children whose parents were arrested in Figes, *The Whisperers*, 316-378; and Vilenskii, et al., *Deti Gulaga*, 241-274. In many of these cases, memoirists recalled poor food, crowded and unsanitary spaces, and indifferent or even abusive staff as being typical for their children's home.

of particular staff members).⁶ This range of remembered experiences suggests a need to investigate more thoroughly the prevalence and relative frequency of the poor conditions described in many of these sources. As of yet this has not been done, an oversight that is at least partially due to the limitations of available sources. Despite the Soviet government's frequent demands for reports, statistics, and other information, available archival documents contain few comprehensive reports on conditions in children's homes beyond criticisms of the most problematic cases and general declarations that children's homes were overall still unsatisfactory.

To further complicate the matter, Soviet documents were not always clear about what standards were being used to label children's homes as being in "good," "satisfactory," or "unsatisfactory" condition. Directives from the Sovnarkom, Children's Commission, and Narkompros did provide some specific guidelines as to the material conditions and operations of children's homes. Children's homes were expected to provide each resident with their own bed, at least three changes of underclothes and outer clothing, and meals that provided an established caloric minimum and some nutritional variety. Each children's home was also supposed to meet certain sanitary standards, possess its own bathhouse (or have access to a nearby public bathhouse), and a separate "isolation room" for sick children. Children were to have a bath every seven to ten days and regular medical inspections. In addition, each children's home was to have workshops to provide labor education and vocational skills, and each resident was to attend school as well, either at the children's home, or preferably at the local school. Finally,

⁶ Svetlana Valerianovna Obolenskaia, "Iz vospominanii," Arkhiv MILO "Vozvrashchenie," 66-68, 78-79; Viktor Tenenbaum, "Iskliuchenie iz pravila," Arkhiv MILO "Vozvrashchenie," 15-21; Nelli Tachko, *Zhizn' kazalas' takoi bezoblachnoi: Vospominaniia* (Moskva: Moskovskoe Obschestvo "Memorial," 2004), 40-42; and Mikhail Nikolaev, *Detdom* (New York: Russica, 1985), 24-26, 102-103. While these memoirists recalled conditions in their children's homes as often being adequate, and even at times recalled some fond memories from these years, these memories were often tempered with ongoing grief over the loss of their parents: see Chapters Five and Six.

children's homes were supposed to provide activities and entertainment for their charges, including activity circles (*kruzhki*) for music, literature, drama, and other hobbies, a children's library, and games and sports.⁷ While inspection reports drew attention to the ways in which many children's homes frequently did not meet these standards, they gave few indications as to exactly how the labels "good," "satisfactory," or "unsatisfactory" were applied. As a whole, however, these reports clearly indicate that the majority of Soviet children's homes did not live up to these expectations.

Secondly, this chapter will examine the reasons for these continuing problems in Soviet children's homes. Ultimately, many of these reasons boiled down to financial troubles. Throughout their whole existence, Soviet children's homes had complained about being under-financed, and this situation continued through the 1930s as well.⁸ Difficulties with financing were in turn exacerbated by conflicts and divisions between administrative and oversight organizations (Narkompros and the Children's Commission, for example), and local versus regional and central authorities. As we shall see, these various divisions of the Soviet government in practice seemed to level accusations and complaints at each other almost as often as they collaborated in trying to improve children's homes.⁹ Soviet officials of all stripes also

⁷ Many of these standards were reiterated in the 31 May 1935 joint Sovarkom-Central Committee resolution "On the Liquidation of Child Homelessness," reprinted in *Deti Gulaga*, 183-187. Instructions to Children's Commission inspectors also specified that they should examine in each children's home the state of the facilities, living conditions for the children (including their beds, clothing, food, and medical condition), the actions and qualifications of the staff, the attendance and success of the children in school, the state of the children's home's workshops and how many children were involved in labor education, the extracurricular activities (like activity circles) provided, and the involvement of patron enterprises (*shestvo*) in the life of the children's home: see TsGAMO f. 916 op. 1 d. 108 ll. 189-193.

⁸ Many of these same problems not only existed in the 1920s, but continued after the 1930s as well. See Ball, *And Now My Soul is Hardened*, 141-154; and Green, "There Will Not be Orphans Among Us," 81-113.

⁹ In this way, the administration of children's homes resembled familiar patterns in Stalinist bureaucracy and political culture, including bureaucratic squabbles stemming from somewhat overlapping responsibilities, periodic interventions from central authorities in the operations of local officials, and a tendency to place blame for shortcomings on individuals (particularly local officials) rather than policies or institutions. On administration and political culture in the Stalinist state, see Graeme Gill, *The Origins of the Stalinist Political System* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1990). On the insistence in Soviet political culture that errors and shortcomings were

directed a large share of blame towards children's home workers themselves, accusing them of incompetence, indifference, and outright criminal behavior. The third section of this chapter will therefore focus on children's home personnel, the relative merits of these accusations, and the continual difficulties in attracting dedicated and qualified workers. While many children's home workers were dedicated to the welfare of children, and struggled to make the best of a difficult situation, many others indeed fit these accusations of being poorly trained, indifferent to their work, and at times clearly incompetent. Finally, this chapter will briefly take up the question of whether Soviet children's homes improved over the course of the 1930s, as a series of Sovnarkom and Children's Commission resolutions sought to improve the financial basis of children's homes, establish greater oversight, and bring more children's homes into line with the standards discussed above. While there was indeed some improvement, particularly in comparison with the financial chaos and extreme overcrowding that characterized many children's homes in the early 1930s, the same basic problems (poor financing, poor facilities, poor sanitary conditions, difficulties with supplies) still characterized many children's homes in the late 1930s as well.

This chapter therefore serves as a necessary complement to the more focused discussion of the political education, collective life, and other efforts to mold the New Soviet Person provided in the later chapters of this dissertation. For every "factory of the New Soviet People" like the Dzerzhinskii Commune, there were dozens of children's homes that struggled simply to house, feed, and clothe all their charges. At a time when the Soviet government spoke of children's homes forging yesterday's homeless waifs into tomorrow's builders of socialism,

the results of individuals, not institutions, see Daniel Peris, *Storming the Heavens: the Soviet League of the Militant Godless* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), 148-160. On the tendency to hold local officials and workers to an impossible standard, see Larry Holmes, *Grand Theater: Regional Governance in Stalin's Russia 1931-1941* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009).

many children's home residents were fortunate if they received enough food, basic education, and vocational training. This chapter therefore serves as a necessary reminder that the experience of growing up in a Soviet children's home was highly variable, and that for most Soviet orphans this experience was shaped just as much by the concrete material conditions of the children's home as by the ideological environment and efforts to form "Soviet subjects."

Life in the *Detdom*

Due to the fact that child homelessness had been declared a thing of the past, the plight of wards of the state and conditions in children's homes were generally less publicized in the 1930s than they had been in the previous decade. Nevertheless, numerous reports compiled by Narkompros and branches of the Children's Commission suggest that the problems outlined in the 1930 report discussed above continued throughout the subsequent decade. Overcrowding, poor sanitary conditions, inadequate food and supplies, and lack of access to quality medical care characterized life in many children's institutions. The homeless or orphaned child's first encounter with the Soviet system of children's homes came at the receiving and distribution center (*priemnik-raspredelitel'*). Such receiving centers, as a rule, did not make a very inspiring first impression. As discussed in the previous chapter, the existing network of receiving centers was largely overwhelmed by the wave of homeless children produced by the industrialization drive, collectivization, and dekulakization in the first half of the 1930s. Moreover, the lack of available space in existing children's homes, conditioned by the move by many local Soviet authorities in the late 1920s to consolidate, transfer, and close children's homes, meant that children removed from the street often remained in distribution centers far longer than the

intended maximum of four months (reduced in 1935 to one month).¹⁰ Soviet reports complained of some receiving centers in which children had spent months or even years, despite the fact that most had few facilities for the long-term care or education of children.¹¹ An inspection of one receiving center in Saratov in 1933, for example, revealed that due to a lack of mattresses and available space, many children slept on the floor in their outer clothes. The limited staff tried to provide some kind of education for its numerous charges, but was being overwhelmed. “Only one of the four educators is a trained pedagogue...with ten years experience working with difficult children,” the Children’s Commission inspector noted, “but his nervous system is so broken down that he needs at least eight months of rest and recovery.”¹² Reports also particularly lamented the limited educational and instructional facilities, trained staff, and “educational work [*vospitatel’naia rabota*]” at receiving centers, arguing that without these activities to occupy their time, children reverted to their former life as *besprizornye*, becoming involved in hooliganism, theft, or simply “wandering the city market.” These problems were in turn exacerbated by limited adult supervision brought on by overcrowding and staff shortages. In the Volga German republic, for example, one receiving center had only half of the required number of staff for its overcrowded facilities. The result was that the pedagogical personnel spent their time, according to an inspection report, “not performing educational work, but washing clothes.”¹³

As overcrowding and a lack of available space in regular children’s homes ensured that children spent longer periods in these supposedly temporary arrangements, the Soviet government moved to improve receiving centers to make them more congruent with other

¹⁰ See the joint Sovnarkom-Central Committee Resolution of 31 May 1935 in *Deti Gulaga*, 183-187. This same resolution turned over administration of all receiving and distribution centers to the NKVD.

¹¹ State Archive of the Novgorod Region (GANO), f. R1115 op. 1 d. 357, ll. 11-13, 59.

¹² GARF f. R5207 op. 1 d. 593 ll. 70-71.

¹³ GARF f. R5207 op. 1 d. 593 ll. 75-75.

children's homes. In several cases, receiving centers were officially transformed into children's homes; in many others, receiving centers became *de facto* children's homes as children were never transferred on to other institutions.¹⁴ While conditions in *priemniki* continued in most places to be overcrowded, unsanitary, and rather grim overall, some did improve to the point that Soviet inspection reports singled them out for praise alongside other "model" institutions. A Children's Commission report on the inspection of the Moscow region in 1934, for example, praised the receiving center in Kaluga for its caring and effective staff, which it compared to a loving family for orphaned children.¹⁵ In fact, the report noted, conditions in this receiving center were so good that not only did the staff not need to worry about children running away, but in several cases children who had been transferred to other children's homes fled back to the *priemnik*. A more common type of report, however, was that on the Kostroma receiving center, which described the facilities as cold, dirty, and with an appearance "like after a pogrom." Without any educational or recreational activities to occupy their time, the report noted, the children housed here viewed it only as a convenient place to sleep at night.¹⁶

Overcrowding was also a consistent problem in many children's homes, particularly in the first half of the 1930s, as many children's homes were ill-equipped to deal with the sudden influx of state-dependent children. Declarations that the problem of child homelessness had been "solved" in the Soviet Union, and local authorities' desire to alleviate strain on their budgets by consolidating, downsizing, and closing children's homes meant that in many places the number of children's homes in the early 1930s was actually *dropping* just as demand for space began to

¹⁴ GARF f. R5207 op. 1 d. 849 ll. 1-2.

¹⁵ TsGAMO f. 916 op. 1 d. 108 l. 103.

¹⁶ GARF f. R5207 op. 3 d. 27 l. 141.

increase.¹⁷ Overcrowding, therefore, became one of the most frequently mentioned problems in reports from Children's Commission and Narkompros inspectors, though the degree of this overcrowding greatly varied. A report on the Moscow region in 1934 noted that many children's homes currently held slightly more children than their officially-specified capacity (217 children in space planned for 200, for example). However, there were several children's homes in the region that currently held double their planned capacity.¹⁸ It was not uncommon for such reports to note children sleeping two to a bed, or eating, studying, or working in shifts due to a lack of available space.¹⁹ Such overcrowding was sometimes in turn exacerbated by the general problems with facilities and supplies that faced many children's homes. Apart from not having enough space for all their inhabitants, some children's homes complained of not having enough available beds, which either necessitated the use of cots (when available) and sharing beds, or, in extreme cases, resulted in children simply sleeping on the floor.²⁰

Even for the best children's homes, conditions were relatively cramped. Data gathered by Narkompros in 1935 showed an average of nine square meters for each children's home inhabitant in the RSFSR. This information is somewhat misleading, however. For one, not every children's home was included (1206 children's homes out of 1635 in the whole RSFSR provided data for this report). Secondly, these numbers were apparently calculated by simply dividing the total space of the children's home (including the kitchen, dining areas, workshops, and other facilities that were not in constant use) by the number of inhabitants. The amount of

¹⁷ A circular letter from Narkompros in 1932 criticized local authorities who had taken the "successes" in combating child homelessness of the past few years as reasons to consolidate and close receiving centers and children's homes: see GARF f. A2306 op. 70 d. 5273 l. 29. The Middle Volga region, for example, had actually eliminated seven children's homes in 1931 and reduced its budget by 300,000 rubles. GARF f. A2306 op. 70 d. 5283 l. 1. A similar reduction of the number of children's homes took place in the Central Black Earth Region. GARF f. A2306 op. 70 d. 5297 l. 16.

¹⁸ GARF f. R5207 op. 3 d. 22 ll. 93-94.

¹⁹ GARF f. R5207 op. 3 d. 11 ll. 148-149; op. 3 d. 34 ll. 45-46, 75.

²⁰ Inspection of children's village (*detgorodok*) "Mias," 18 September 1931, GARF f. A2306 op. 70 d. 5281 ll. 43-45.

actual *living* space (space in the sleeping, living, and activity areas) was undoubtedly smaller. Finally, according to this report, 867 children's homes had less than the reported average of nine square meters, which was only balanced out by the 237 homes that reported having more than eleven square meters of space.²¹ While such spaces were undoubtedly crowded, it should be remembered that living space for almost all Soviet citizens at this time was very limited. During the urban housing crisis of the 1930s in Moscow, the average living space in Soviet apartments actually fell to only four square meters per resident – a number that ensured memories of this time almost invariably included the word “crowded.”²²

Beyond finding adequate space and facilities to house its orphaned, abandoned, runaway, and otherwise dependent children, the Soviet state also often struggled to provide its network of children's homes with adequate supplies. Inspectors and children's home workers alike consistently complained that children's homes were not receiving the specified amounts of food products, clothing, and other needed materials. Relying on the Soviet distribution networks for food products seems to have been particularly problematic. As one Children's Commission report from Saratov in 1934 noted, “orders from the center arrive late and often reach their destination only at the end of the quarter, which particularly has an effect on food supplies in April and May, when vegetable reserves are exhausted, the spring floods have made harvest difficult, and milk is being reserved for calves.”²³ Most children's homes, particularly in rural areas, possessed their own vegetable gardens, livestock, and other resources that allowed them to supplement (and in some cases, almost replace if necessary) the at times unreliable food supplies provided through the Commissariat of Supplies (Narkomsnab). In times or places where this

²¹ Statistical Report on Children's Homes Administered by Narkompros in the RSFSR, 1936, GARF f. A2306 op. 70 d. 5331 ll. 39-44.

²² Victoria Semenova, “Equality in Poverty: The Symbolic Meaning of *Kommunalki* in the 1930s-50s,” in *On Living Through Soviet Russia*, ed. Daniel Bertaux, Paul Thompson, and Anna Rotkirch (London: Routledge, 2004), 54-67.

²³ GARF f. R5207 op. 1 d. 849 l. 2.

was not possible, however, food supplies in children's homes could become severely constrained. The same report noted, for example, that due to these supply problems, the number of daily calories provided to children in the Petrovsk children's home had fallen from 1750 to 1100.²⁴ Other children's homes, again due to poor distribution networks, did not receive certain food products in general: children's homes in the Malo-Serdobsk district complained that they had received no flour or grains for the whole of 1934, and only about one-third of the promised ration of meat. Finally, the general inefficiency of Soviet distribution networks often caused severe delays in the distribution of goods. In the Aktarsk district of the Saratov region, for example, food products promised for the second and third quarters were only delivered during the fourth quarter, causing first a shortage of food and then a risk of some food supplies spoiling before they could be used.²⁵ In the absence of reliable supplies, those children's homes that did not have their own vegetable gardens or livestock could try to purchase food (particularly vegetables grown on private plots) at market prices, but few could afford to consistently do so.²⁶ Nor was this exclusively a problem for children's homes. A 1934 report from one district in the Komi region noted that local children's homes were not receiving needed food products (flour, meat, oil, fish, and pasta) because the district itself had not received any supplies.²⁷

Even without distribution problems or other difficulties in receiving supplies, the food provided in Soviet children's homes tended to be rather bland and repetitive. Reports from Soviet inspectors commonly noted the lack of variety in food provided in children's homes,

²⁴ Ibid., l. 6.

²⁵ GARF f. R5207 op. 3 d. 27 ll. 82-83.

²⁶ GARF f. A2306 op. 70 d. 5369 l. 10; d. 5284 l. 61. Some of these difficulties apparently persisted through the whole decade: see the letter from a Narkompros inspector in the Komi Republic on supply inadequacies in children's homes, 10 January 1939, in *Krest'ianskie deti*, 539-540.

²⁷ Report from the Komi regional Children's Friend Society, 1 December 1934, in *Krest'ianskie deti*, 320-321.

calling their menus “monotonous (*odnoobrazno*).” The menu for several children’s homes in the Saratov region, for example, consisted of:

Breakfast: bread and tea, or sometimes bread with boiled water
 Lunch: cabbage soup with bread, or occasionally porridge
 Dinner: bread and tea, or thin gruel (*kashitsa*)²⁸

Other children’s homes provided more substantial food but still tended to lack variety. The Plechansk children’s home in the Saratov region alternated each day between two menus:

Day 1

Breakfast: coffee and fish
 Lunch: noodles
 Dinner: porridge with milk

Day 2

Breakfast: milk soup
 Lunch: noodles with butter
 Dinner: porridge with butter²⁹

Although indeed rather monotonous, such a menu at least provided milk, fats, fish, and a mix of carbohydrates, protein, and needed calories. This was not the case in all children’s homes: of the “norms” established by the Soviet government for children’s homes, the standard amounts for meat, fish, and fats (usually in the form of butter) were those most likely to be unmet by Soviet distribution networks.³⁰

The consequences of this difficulty in providing children’s homes with adequate food supplies went beyond a tendency for menus to be boring and repetitive. As noted in many Soviet reports and conferences, poor conditions in children’s homes undermined their planned role as instruments for reeducation and socialization of former street children into Soviet life.³¹ For one, *besprizornye* and runaways picked up by the Soviet police or social organizations consistently cited poor conditions in children’s homes, including inadequate food, as the main reason they

²⁸ GARF f. R5207 op. 1 d. 849 ll. 6-9

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 28.

³⁰ GARF f. R5207 op. 1 d. 849 ll. 38-39; TsGAMO f. 916 op. 1 d. 225 l. 61.

³¹ A 1931 Narkompros report from the Urals region, for example, directly blamed continuing child homelessness on poor conditions in local children’s home that encouraged children to run away or refuse to go to children’s homes in the first place. GARF f. A2306 op. 70 d. 5281 l. 12.

had fled such institutions.³² Secondly, there were instances in which a lack of adequate food supplies directly undermined the “re-educative” mission of children’s homes by pushing their charges to revert to the survival techniques that many had employed as street children.

According to a Children’s Commission inspection in 1931, food supplies in the Shchigri children’s home in the Central Black Earth region had become so inadequate that children had begged to be allowed to eat in commercial cafeterias, and also began stealing food from the local market. Even more disturbingly, this report noted, some of the older girls in the children’s home had turned to prostitution as a way to obtain money for food.³³ Although the report did not explicitly point out the irony of this situation, this was hardly the “road to life” being concurrently celebrated in Soviet publications on children’s homes.

Apart from food, Soviet children’s homes were also frequently undersupplied with other necessities: clothing, mattresses, pillows, blankets, plates and utensils. One report in 1934 from the Saratov region stated that only three districts could claim that their children’s homes were fully supplied with beds, tables, and other necessary furniture.³⁴ Inspections of children’s homes revealed that many homes fell short of the required three changes of clothing for every child, or had provided clothing that was so worn out and torn that it needed to be immediately replaced.³⁵ Reports were also common of children’s homes in which a lack of mattresses or bedclothes led to children sleeping in their outer garments, sleeping on the floor, sleeping on bare cots or bed frames, or otherwise making due in “completely unsatisfactory” circumstances.³⁶ Never knowing when they might receive replacements from the Soviet distribution networks also made children in some cases particularly protective of their clothing and other possessions. One

³² GARF f. R5207 op. 3 d. 11 l. 221; op. 1 d. 542 ll. 123-125.

³³ GARF f. R5207 op. 3 d. 11 ll. 148-149.

³⁴ GARF f. R5207 op. 1 d. 849 ll. 1-2.

³⁵ TsGAMO f. 916 op. 1 d. 108 l. 200; d. 11 ll. 15-16.

³⁶ GARF f. R5207 op. 1 d. 849 ll. 6-9; op. 3 d. 34 l. 86.

inspector in the Amur region reported that children's home residents wore their towels around their necks for the entire day (including to school), due to a general lack of towels and consequent fear of theft.³⁷ In another case, the children's village "Vozrozhdenie" possessed the recommended changes of clothing and bed sheets, but had refused to distribute them due to fears that they would be stolen by the children. This decision had actually led to physical confrontations between the staff and their charges, in which several individuals on both sides had been beaten.³⁸

As with related problems with the distribution of food, inadequate supplies in children's homes often directly undermined the process of reeducation and the promised "road to life." Numerous Soviet reports provided examples of children from the local children's home not attending school due to a lack of shoes or adequate outer clothing.³⁹ A meeting of the Presidium of the VTsIK Children's Commission in 1932 also explicitly criticized these supply problems as one of the factors limiting the effectiveness of Soviet children's homes as places for reeducation and the production of "full Soviet citizens." In a speech that was heavily critical of Narkomsnab, the Children's Commission inspection brigade argued that problems with the distribution of clothing and shoes not only made life in children's homes more difficult and unattractive, but also forced children's home directors to travel repeatedly to district and regional centers (or even to Moscow) in search of these supplies or to petition the relevant authorities. In desperation, some even turned to the private market to supply their children's homes. Thus, the speech concluded, these directors were forced to spend much of their time and attention on trying to

³⁷ GARF f. R5207 op. 3 d. 11 l. 168.

³⁸ TsGAMO f. 916 op. 1 d. 11 l. 15.

³⁹ GARF f. R5207 op. 3 d. 11 ll. 145-149.

acquire adequate food, clothing, and other supplies, and were distracted from their task of ensuring the proper, Soviet upbringing of their charges.⁴⁰

Due in part to the deficiencies in food, facilities, and supplies discussed above, many children's home residents also suffered from widespread infectious diseases, periodic epidemics, and general health problems, including stunted growth.⁴¹ Overcrowding, shortages of changes of clothing, and lack of sanitation facilities (such as bathhouses) made skin diseases and lice a frequent problem. One Children's Commission report noted that in Novouzensk (Saratov region), 40 percent of the children's home residents suffered from some kind of skin disease, mostly rashes and scabies (*chesotka*).⁴² Along with possessing a shortage of clean clothing, the Novouzensk children's home was also poorly heated and unsanitary; in fact, it was so cold in the winter that the children wore their heavy outer coats all the time. Moreover, the generally poor food in this children's home also led to half of its residents being classified as "severely anemic." Such health problems were widespread in many other children's homes as well. A medical inspection of the Voskresenskii Klara Tsetkin children's home (Moscow region) in 1932 revealed a wide variety of ailments and illnesses among the children, including cases of trachoma, lymphadenitis, heart arrhythmia, skin diseases, anemia, early tuberculosis, and generally poor physical and mental development.⁴³ Beyond the common skin diseases, the overcrowded and often unsanitary facilities in many children's homes were also breeding grounds for typhus and tuberculosis. Several typhus epidemics were reported at children's homes in various regions in the early 1930s.⁴⁴ Moreover, the prevalence of tuberculosis in children's homes caused one representative to the VTsIK Children's Commission annual

⁴⁰ GARF f. R5207 op. 1 d. 542 ll. 134-139.

⁴¹ GARF f. A2306 op. 70 d. 5369 l. 6.

⁴² GARF f. R5207 op. 1 d. 849 l. 10.

⁴³ TsGAMO f. 4341 op. 1 d. 780 ll. 1-20.

⁴⁴ GARF f. R5207 op. 3 d. 27 ll. 75-76, 130.

meeting in 1932 to claim that half of the children's home residents in her region of Voronezh had tuberculosis infections.⁴⁵

Struggles with these various health problems were in turn made more difficult by the fact that many children's homes lacked qualified medical personnel and access to professional health care. Many children's homes had been purposefully established in rural areas, both due to the greater availability of space and the perceived need to isolate *besprizornye* from their former urban haunts, and thus protect them from the "lure of the street." This isolation, however, meant that like many areas of the rural Soviet Union, these children's homes often did not have access to reliable medical care. Policy dictated that each children's home was supposed to have an attached medical specialist (usually a trained nurse) and be visited regularly by a doctor. In practice, however, this requirement often proved difficult to fulfill. A general shortage of qualified medical personnel, and the difficulty in attracting such candidates to work in children's homes, led to available personnel being stretched thin. A report on the Moscow region in 1931, for example, noted that each available doctor was responsible for four to nine different children's homes, and was often required to travel significant distances between them. As a result, many children's homes received only intermittent visits.⁴⁶ Other reports blamed the doctors themselves for the generally poor state of medical care in many children's homes. An inspection conducted by the Moscow regional Children's Commission reported that the doctor responsible for one labor commune had visited only a single time in the last three months, rather than the required weekly visits.⁴⁷ It should be noted that the generally poor evaluation of sanitary conditions and medical care described above did not necessarily apply to all children's

⁴⁵ GARF f. R5207 op. 1 d. 542 l. 117. This number may be exaggerated, but tuberculosis was fairly common in overcrowded facilities.

⁴⁶ TsGAMO f. 916 op. 1 d. 11 l. 8.

⁴⁷ TsGAMO f. 916 op. 1 d. 108 ll. 32-35.

homes. The same series of inspections reported that the “Spartak” children’s home in Kashira and the Kleimenovo children’s village (*detposelok*) both were clean, comfortable, and filled with clean, healthy-looking children.⁴⁸ Both of these children’s homes also had a trained nurse on permanent staff and received regular visits from an attached doctor every six days. Such conditions, however, seem to have often been the exception rather than the rule, particularly in the rural areas where many children’s homes were located.

“A Disgraceful Picture”: Soviet Assessments of Children’s Homes

The litany of problems discussed above, and the multitude of reports detailing the often shockingly poor conditions in many Soviet children’s homes, may give the impression that these institutions were little more than homeless shelters for the Soviet Union’s large population of destitute children, or only one small step removed from prisons and labor camps. In fact, this was often the popular perception of these institutions. In the city of Petrovsk in the Lower Volga region, one Soviet official warned in 1932 that the entire district already considered children’s homes “dens of thieves” (and not without reason, as twenty-five children’s home residents had just been arrested).⁴⁹ Others who experienced the worst that Soviet children’s homes had to offer might agree. Gershman’s observation that children’s homes differed little from the camps has already been noted at the beginning of this chapter. Igor Pol’ also remembered his children’s home as being little more than a hideout for young criminals, who frightened not only the surrounding population but even the staff.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Ibid., ll. 42-45, 108-110.

⁴⁹ Report from head of Petrovsk children’s homes to Narkompros, 19 December 1932, in *Deti Gulaga*, 143.

⁵⁰ Igor Pol’, “Desiat’ let v alzhire,” Arkhiv MILO “Vozvrashchenie,” 79.

Certainly there were many children's homes that were in very poor shape or fit this perception, a fact attested to in countless Soviet documents. It must be remembered, however, that these reports were almost universally produced by the Children's Commission, inspectors from Narkompros, or concerned members of social organizations like the Children's Friend Society (before its liquidation in 1934). Such reports therefore tended to focus the majority of their attention on various shortcomings, inadequacies, and problems in children's homes, as one of the major responsibilities of these inspectorates was to bring such problems to the attention of Soviet authorities. Reports detailing significant problems were also more likely to receive attention from higher Soviet authorities and be passed on to other agencies, thereby again increasing the "profile" of such problematic children's homes in the archival record. The majority of archival documents therefore tend to give a distinctly negative picture of Soviet children's homes that, while not necessarily inaccurate in many cases, nevertheless is skewed towards those children's homes in the worst condition and most in need of drastic changes. Clearly not all Soviet children's homes were in such dire condition. Although Soviet reports tended to focus on poorly functioning children's homes, inspectors also reported on children's homes in which conditions were "acceptable" and needed only minor improvements. Inspections carried out for "best children's home" contests even sometimes described children's homes that approached the touted Soviet model, with clean, well-fed and well-behaved children, who enjoyed a variety of sports and activities, job training, and educational opportunities.⁵¹

How extensive, then, were the problems described in the first section of this chapter? Soviet documents give few comprehensive statistics about the general condition of children's homes. However, in connection with the joint Sovnarkom-Central Committee Resolution of May 31, 1935, the Soviet government ordered a one-time inspection of all children's homes.

⁵¹ TsGAMO f. 916 op. 1 d. 108 ll. 111-115 contains short reports for such a contest in 1935 in the Moscow region.

The reports from this inspection provide some useful information on the number of “good” and “poor” children’s homes in the Soviet Union, though these data are far from complete and must be approached with some caveats. Along with reporting on inadequacies, inspectors were supposed to carry out a “typification” (*tipizatsiia*) of all children’s homes to ensure that each contained the appropriate contingent of children for its classification: pre-school, school-age, “difficult children” and juvenile delinquents, developmentally disabled (*umstvenno-otstalykh*), or deaf-mute (*glukho-nemykh*).⁵² This extra provision was intended to address a frequently-noted problem in which children had been placed in an inappropriate institution but, usually due to bureaucratic inertia, had never been transferred.⁵³ The goal of this one-time inspection was therefore in some way to correct the situation that had resulted from the *ad hoc* and uncoordinated measures employed to address the wave of *besprizornost’* in the early 1930s. This inspection promised to be a step in transforming the mass of varied children’s homes into the well-regulated, efficiently-structured, and effective system of institutional childcare that the Soviet government desired.

The reports gathered by the Children’s Commission, however, suggest that this inspection was, at best, carried out in a haphazard and incomplete manner, and, at worst, was not carried out in some areas at all. The Commission noted that in many places the ordered “typification” was conducted solely on the basis of self-reported data from children’s home directors and pedagogues, which undermined the purpose of the inspection in the first place. As one Children’s Commission representative pointed out, the directors and other children’s home

⁵² GARF f. R5207 op. 3 d. 35 ll. 44-57.

⁵³ A report on the Skriparovskii children’s home in the Malo-Iaroslavets district (Moscow region), for example, declared that up to 30 percent of the inhabitants of this children’s home should be in other places: see TsGAMO f. 916 op. 1 d. 225 l. 103. Other reports noted similar cases of children being placed in inappropriate institutions and called for more stringent “typification”: see TsGAMO f. 916 op. 1 d. 225 l. 149; TsGAMO f. 4341 op. 1 d. 870 l. 30; TsGAMO f. 4341 op. 1 d. 817 l. 41; and GARF f. A2306 op. 70 d. 5297 l. 1.

workers were often those originally responsible for “misclassifying” individual children, as well as failing to rectify earlier these mistakes.⁵⁴ In other places, the “typification” had not been carried out at all. Nor does it seem that a complete inspection took place in every region (or at least complete data were not reported for every region). The report for the Moscow region, for example, provided information on only twenty-five children’s homes, when other Soviet reports listed 225 different children’s homes in the Moscow region.⁵⁵

Nevertheless, the data from this report give us some picture of the general condition of Soviet children’s homes in the mid-1930s. This picture is not often encouraging. Of the twenty-five children’s homes reported on from the Moscow region, only two were considered to be in “good” condition, while another four were “satisfactory.” In Western Siberia, twenty-four of the total 120 children’s homes were reported as being in “good” condition. Although the report did not give any figures for the Soviet Union as a whole, it pointed out problems in every region, drawing attention to overcrowded conditions, inadequate food, difficulties with supplies, poor cadres, and other common problems.⁵⁶ The report concluded that the majority of children’s homes in the Soviet Union, despite orders from the Sovnarkom and Children’s Commission to improve conditions, were still “unsatisfactory.”

Collections of reports from specific regions also allow one to draw some conclusions about the prevalence of problematic children’s homes in the 1930s. Regional Children’s Commissions and branches of Narkompros at times carried out their own systematic inspections, often in connection with one of the central Sovnarkom or Children’s Commission decrees. Though these inspections were not always comprehensive, they do give a reasonable overview of the conditions in a given region’s children’s homes. Moreover, although such inspections still

⁵⁴ GARF f. R5207 op. 3 d. 35 l. 86.

⁵⁵ GARF f. R5207 op. 3 d. 35 ll. 50-55; TsGAMO f. 916 op. 1 d. 11 l. 7.

⁵⁶ GARF f. R5207 op. 3 d. 35 ll. 44-57.

tended to devote the most attention to problematic children's homes, their efforts to be systematic also meant that children's homes in good condition also received short reports. These reports therefore provide an imperfect but useful impression of the relative number of "good" and "poor" children's homes, particularly when compared to the reports sent to central Soviet authorities, which only tended to concern the cases most in need of intervention or drastic measures.

The overall picture given in these reports is similar to that presented above: though there were certainly a number of good and "satisfactory" children's homes, the majority were officially considered "unsatisfactory" and suffered from at least some of the problems discussed in the first section of this chapter. Consider the example of the Pushkin district, in the Moscow region. In 1932, the Moscow regional Children's Commission conducted an inspection of all ten children's homes in the district (one pre-school, seven school-age, two labor communes) after declaring the efforts of the district Children's Commission to be "weak (*slabo*)" and inadequate.⁵⁷ The summaries of the results of these inspections show a number of problems with each children's home in the district:

⁵⁷ TsGAMO f. 916 op. 1 d. 11 l. 83.

Table 3: Inspection of the Pushkin District, Moscow Region, 1932

Labor Commune “Prusa”: “the children’s collective is undisciplined...children have a dirty appearance and have not received haircuts...in the sleeping areas there is the distinct smell of urine...the dining area is small and cannot fit all ninety-five residents...food is inadequate...facilities are in a dilapidated state...”

Labor Colony “First of May”: “a children’s doctor has not visited the commune in two years...the staff is inadequate and several need to be replaced...despite having club facilities, political education is not developed...discipline is weak...”

Children’s Home “Ilyich”: “the children’s home is poorly equipped and not all of the materials are appropriate for the children’s age...there are not enough blankets, bed clothes, and outer clothing, particularly for the boys...no repairs were conducted in 1932...supplies are irregular, and food suffers...” (this report did note, however, that sanitary conditions were satisfactory, that the attached doctor regularly visited the children’s home, and that discipline among the children was good).

Children’s Home “Karl Marx”: “there are not enough supplies, not enough furniture...food is monotonous...they often do not receive bread and flour, and never receive milk...despite having the means, repairs have not been conducted...” (on a more positive note, the children’s home was described as sanitary, with “satisfactorily healthy” children)

Children’s Home “Krupskaia”: “there are no Pioneer or Octobrist organizations...the children’s home does not have its own economic base (*khoziastvo*)...half of the space is taken up by the staff’s families and former staff...during the summer the children literally lived in a barn...there are not enough clothes and no shoes...”

Children’s Home “Sverdlov”: this was one of the only children’s homes characterized in a wholly positive light in this report, which noted “the sanitary conditions are good...children work by agreement in the local collective farm...children’s self-government (*samoupravlenie*) works well...the staff has a wonderful attitude to their work.” In fact, the only inadequacies noted for this children’s home were the lack of a proper workshop (though the children’s home did possess a “work room”) for vocational training, and the lack of local patronage (*shefstvo*).

Children’s Home “Young Worker”: another children’s home that was characterized as being satisfactory, but with a few problems: “there are no Octobrists, but children participate in activity circles (*kruzhki*)...the Komsomol from the Ivankeev factory have become patrons but do not actually do anything...the district executive committee has been delaying repairs...due to staff shortages, right now there is only one educator (*vospitatel’*) for seventy children...discipline is satisfactory, sanitary conditions are good...recently there have been two incidents of children running away”

Children's Home "Nogina": another example of a satisfactory children's home: "the work plan is fulfilled conscientiously and checked by the council...all children participate in Pioneer work...the children eat four times a day and the food is varied...there are no workshops, but the children's home does have a club room...cultural work and children's self-government are weak...the sanitary conditions are satisfactory"

Children's Home "Timiriazeva": the short report on this children's home was generally positive, mentioning only that the home did not have enough furniture, that not enough food was being provided for the home's animals, and that "in nine months of 1932, a doctor has visited only once"

Children's Home "Young Builder": "the children's home is completely falling apart (*v polnom razvale*)...due to the former director, who is now under investigation...there were incidents of children being beaten and theft by the staff...some of the staff have ties with alien elements, such as kulaks...in August of 1932 one of the children's home's dachas was burned; it was later revealed that children did this at the direction of adults...now there is no kitchen and food is prepared outside...two children sleep to a cot...food supplies are received infrequently, milk and vegetables are a particular problem...the children's home has none of its own *khoziastvo* and no workshop...school should be held in children's home but due to the fire there is no space for it...sanitary conditions are unsatisfactory"

Source: Inspection of the Pushkin District Children's Commission and Children's Homes, 21 August 1932, TsGAMO f. 916 op. 1 d. 11 ll. 83-93

Again, it should be noted that Soviet reports often gave no indication of exactly how children's homes were determined to be "good," "satisfactory," or "unsatisfactory." Judging from the report above, however, at least half of the children's homes in the Pushkin district showed significant problems and clearly did not meet the standards spelled out in Soviet directives, and would therefore likely be considered "unsatisfactory."

While it is possible that Pushkin district had an unusually high percentage of "unsatisfactory" children's homes (and thus attracted the attention of the regional Children's Commission in the first place), available reports from other districts and regions support the conclusion that at least half of the Soviet children's homes at this time exhibited significant problems. A review of fifty-six children's homes in the Moscow region in May of 1931, for

example, found only fifteen to be in “satisfactory” condition.⁵⁸ Another general report from 1932 characterized the children’s homes in the region as forming a “disgraceful picture (*bezobraznaia kartina*).”⁵⁹ Other regions struggled with the same problems as Moscow, and were often comparatively worse off. The region surrounding the middle and lower Volga (Saratov and the Middle Volga Territory, Stalingrad and the Lower Volga Territory) for example, struggled in particular to cope with the wave of homeless children produced by collectivization, dekulakization, and the 1932-33 famine. Along with the serious overcrowding produced by the influx of orphaned and abandoned children, Soviet authorities in this area struggled to deliver adequate food, supplies, and finances for these new charges. In 1934, the regional Children’s Commission carried out an inspection of children’s homes in twenty-six districts, concluding that conditions were still “extremely unacceptable” and that a majority of children’s homes were unsanitary, poorly staffed, and in need of significant repairs.⁶⁰ Another report noted that apart from the city of Saratov and the Volsk and Serdobsk districts, almost every children’s home in the region lacked sufficient beds, chairs, pillows, mattresses, and other essential equipment.⁶¹ The harshest criticism, however, was delivered in a presentation from a Children’s Commission inspector to the Central Executive Committee Presidium “On the Question of the Intolerable Condition of Children’s Homes in the Saratov Territory (25 December 1934).” This presentation stated that children’s homes in the Saratov territory could be characterized by:

Unsanitary conditions, lack of cleanliness, bored children, dirt, lice, skin disease, cold, lack of isolation rooms, completely unsatisfactory educational-upbringing work, rude relations to children, a lack of clothes, shoes, and supplies, making children wear only their nightclothes as a form of punishment, lack of necessary medical care, and finally,

⁵⁸ TsGAMO f. 916 op. 1 d. 11 l. 2.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, ll. 14-16.

⁶⁰ GARF f. R5207 op. 1 d. 713 ll. 35-38.

⁶¹ GARF f. R5207 op. 1 d. 849 ll. 1-2.

the ignoring of the needs of children's homes by the district financial sectors, district executive committees, and city soviets.⁶²

Similar reports can be found for the Northern Territory, the Novgorod region (*okrug*) (until 1945 part of the larger Leningrad Oblast), the Amur region, the Ivanovo region, and other areas.⁶³

“Our Task is Not Yelling”: Administrative Squabbles over Children's Homes

The ongoing difficulties with Soviet children's homes inevitably drew a significant amount of scrutiny, particularly from oversight organizations like the Children's Commission, the Children's Friend Society, and the Narkompros inspectorate. Indeed, these various organizations are the major source of archival information about the operation and limitations of Soviet children's homes at this time. Reports from these organizations, despite the obligatory and clichéd declarations that various “historic decisions” of the Sovnarkom had led to “numerous achievements,” reluctantly acknowledged that, to quote one report mentioned above, the Soviet Union's children's homes as a whole still formed a “disgraceful picture.” There seems to have been little agreement, however, about what (or, inevitably, *who*) was to blame for this situation. Reports and directives from central Soviet authorities tended to place the blame on various local authorities, accusing them of not directing enough attention to the problems of children's homes and not properly implementing directives from the center. Local authorities, in turn, complained of a lack of financial support and a system of inspections that, in their view, offered numerous criticisms but little real assistance in solving the numerous problems facing their children's homes. As with the general “struggle against child homelessness” discussed in

⁶² GARF f. R5207 op. 3 d. 27 l. 130.

⁶³ GARF f. R5207 op. 1 d. 1083 ll. 1-10; GARF f. R5207 op. 3 d. 27 ll. 131-141, 155-168; GANO f. R1115 op. 1 d. 357 ll. 76-117.

Chapter One, rivalries and accusations between various Soviet departments also emerged, with Narkompros blaming Narkomsnab for not providing adequate supplies, and the Children's Commission accusing local ONO and Narkompros in general of ignoring children's homes, particularly in the area of financing. Once again, various Soviet authorities failed to cooperate fully, and even at times seem to have worked at cross-purposes.

One of the central factors promoting this lack of cooperation was the basic division of responsibilities between oversight organizations like the Children's Commission and administrative organizations like Narkompros. Although the Children's Commission had a great deal of authority to conduct inspections and report to various executive committees (including the Central Executive Committee), it did not generally have the authority to enforce its recommendations and directives. For enforcement, it was dependent on other Soviet organs, such as the aforementioned executive committees or, in cases of criminal action, the Procuracy. Thus, despite its original ties to the Cheka's founder, Feliks Dzerzhinskii, the Children's Commission came to be perceived as something of a "toothless" organization. Indeed, this was one of the justifications provided for the liquidation of the Children's Commission in Aug. 1938, along with the accusation that, with the supposed disappearance of child homelessness in the Soviet Union, the Children's Commission had outlived its usefulness and only "concerns itself with work that it thinks up itself."⁶⁴

Moreover, despite the fact that the Children's Commission served as a significant source of extra financial support for children's homes and adopted children, various branches of the Commission itself often voiced complaints about a lack of resources and personnel. In 1932, for example, the Children's Commission spent 28,712,152 rubles, mostly to support various

⁶⁴ N.A. Semashko, a professor of medicine and VTsIK Children's Commission representative, tried to answer these charges in a meeting with the Party Control Commission shortly before the liquidation of the Children's Commission: see GARF f. R5207 op. 3 d. 40 ll. 107-118.

children's homes.⁶⁵ At the same time, however, the Orekhovo-Zuevo district Children's Commission in the Moscow region complained that it had not even been given its own working desk (instead sharing a quarter of a desk with another organization), and did not possess "even a box, not to mention a file cabinet" in which to store papers.⁶⁶ Although the complaint did not make clear who was considered responsible for this inadequacy, it illustrates a relatively common situation, in which local branches of the Children's Commission found themselves tasked with carrying out inspections of children's homes and the general "struggle with child homelessness" but lacked the resources and personnel to do so effectively.

Such situations also reveal an important division between the central Children's Commission and its various local branches. While the central Children's Commission (attached to the Central Executive Committee, VTsIK) and the regional commissions played an important role in conducting inspections of children's homes, administering the supplementary funds that provided a much-needed source of support for these institutions, and even influencing Soviet policy, the smaller city and district commissions seem to have struggled at times to perform their required "oversight" role and fulfill the expectations of the higher commission authorities. Reports from the VTsIK Children's Commission and various regional (*oblast'*) commissions abound with criticism of district (*raion*) Children's Commissions, calling their work "weak (*slabo*)," disorganized, and "incorrect (*ne pravil'no*)."⁶⁷ One report on various district commissions in the Moscow region declared "the secretary of the [Kashira district] Children's Commission knows nothing about working with children" and called the attitude of this commission "criminal."⁶⁸ Nor does such criticism seem to have been entirely without merit. In

⁶⁵ Ibid., l. 78. This was the single largest annual expenditure by the Children's Commission in the 1930s.

⁶⁶ TsGAMO f. 916 op. 1 d. 25 l. 96.

⁶⁷ TsGAMO f. 916 op. 1 d. 225 ll. 68-83.

⁶⁸ Ibid., ll. 3-4.

Kaluga, for example, the district Children's Commission listed forty-eight individuals as part of its "section for the struggle with child homelessness," but only five or six people ever actually participated.⁶⁹ Similarly, another report from the Moscow regional Children's Commission accused various local authorities (including district executive committees and even district Children's Commissions) of devoting only "paper work" (*bumazhnaia rabota*) to the problems of children's homes, by issuing various declarations but not conducting the required inspections to ensure they were being carried out.⁷⁰ Such examples were presented as further evidence of the "disinterest" of local authorities in supporting Soviet children's homes and work with homeless and orphaned children.

The most frequent squabbles, however, were between the Children's Commission and various divisions of Narkompros. The same criticisms, accusations, and at times animosity that had often characterized interactions between these two agencies over the "struggle with child homelessness" extended into the realm of administration of children's homes. As noted previously, the administration of children's homes fell under the jurisdiction of Narkompros, with the Children's Commission providing oversight (through the work of its inspectors) and administration of supplementary funds, as well as encouraging policy changes through its reports to Soviet executive committees. Although there was some overlap in personnel, and some collaboration between the two organizations, the division in responsibilities between the Children's Commission and Narkompros also at times encouraged friction and outright animosity. Children's Commission reports frequently singled out local ONOs and other divisions of Narkompros for criticism, accusing them of mismanaging funds, not providing enough support for children's homes, and generally doing a poor job of administering their local

⁶⁹ Ibid., l. 6.

⁷⁰ TsGAMO f. 916 op. 1 d. 11 l. 83.

network of children's homes. For its part, Narkompros also leveled criticism at local authorities for "not following the center's directives" and not taking effective actions even after being informed by inspectors of various problems.⁷¹ At the same time, however, many Narkompros officials seem to have resented the intervention of the Children's Commission, whose inspectors freely dispensed criticism, advice, and threats, but did not have to deal personally with the administrative and financial realities of trying to manage a whole system of children's homes on a limited budget.

These tensions sometimes came to a head at the various conferences and policy meetings that brought together various groups of officials responsible for administering, supplying, financing, and inspecting Soviet children's homes. Such was the case during a Plenum meeting of the Moscow regional Children's Commission on February 19-20, 1933, the transcripts of which give a vivid example of the back-and-forth accusations between representatives of various Soviet organizations. After listening to a presentation by Comrade Burtseva, representative of the Children's Commission, on the status of the "struggle with child homelessness" in the Moscow region, various other representatives from the Children's Commission, the Children's Friend Society, and the Moscow regional ONO traded accusations over who was to blame for the problems raised in this presentation. Comrade Gandelsman, representing the Children's Friend society, responded that Burtseva's presentation had "not admitted any mistakes or defects in the work of the Children's Commission" and had instead "shifted the blame to other organizations." Furthermore, he suggested, the Moscow regional Children's Commission had failed to take the required leadership role in the "struggle with child homelessness" and had the gall to accuse the Moscow regional Executive Committee of not providing the required assistance, when in fact the Children's Commission had not paid attention to the numerous problems in children's homes

⁷¹ See, for example, GARF f. A2306 op. 70 d. 5281 l. 12; and d. 5297 l. 16.

until directed to do so by the Executive Committee.⁷² A further presentation by Comrade Zuev (Moscow regional ONO, MOONO) admitted that the MOONO partially bore responsibility for the poor condition of many children's homes, but also pointed out that many district executive committees had directed funds intended for children's homes to other purposes, systematically undersupplied children's homes, and otherwise completely mismanaged the situation. Comrade Rusak (representing the Moscow regional Commissariat of Health, MosZdrav) in turn supported Zuev, arguing that more funds were needed in general to provide adequate conditions in children's homes. The next speaker, Comrade Savchenko of the VTsIK Children's Commission, however, returned to Burtseva's earlier accusation, declaring that "despite its flaws" the Children's Commission was only a planning and oversight organization, while the MOONO was the "operational" organ. Should the Children's Commission then be blamed when its recommendations were not put into practice? After all, "if the MOONO worked properly, there would be nothing for the Children's Commission to do."⁷³

From this point, the meeting became punctuated with a series of back and forth accusations. Comrade Karmanova (MosZdrav), tried to draw attention to the plight of foster (*patronirovannye*) children, but also challenged the criticism put forth by the Children's Friend Society by stating "they haven't done anything themselves." Comrade Trusov (MOONO) offered the usual criticism of local authorities by stating that the district organizations "don't concern themselves with children's work and rely on the MOONO." Comrade Kuzmina (MOONO) tried to play "peacemaker" by reminding the others that "we are yelling at each other (*rugaiut drug druga*), but our task is not yelling, but finding concrete solutions." This message seems to have had some effect, as the following presentations did propose some solutions. At

⁷² TsGAMO f. 916 op. 1 d. 67 l. 2.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, ll. 3-4.

the same time, however, they shifted focus again to a previously mentioned target of blame: the children's home workers themselves. Comrade Kuchmin (Moscow regional Children's Commission) argued that more children's home directors should be invited to speak with the Children's Commission, as this would allow the Commission to hear about problems directly from the source (and keep a closer eye on these directors). In her conclusion, Comrade Burtseva took up this notion, stating that whether a children's home was in good or bad condition was most often a function of its cadres, and calling on the Children's Commission to carry out an inspection and "examination" (*proverka*) of all children's home workers.⁷⁴ As revealed in these transcripts, the various Soviet organs tasked with overseeing and improving the lives of orphaned children often seemed to squabble amongst themselves as much as they cooperated, at the same time as national and regional authorities sought to shift blame onto various local branches.⁷⁵

In some ways, this bureaucratic in-fighting resembled the "administrative schizophrenia" discussed by Larry Holmes in his investigation of the educational bureaucracy in Kirov (Viatka) during the 1930s.⁷⁶ At the same time as public pronouncements trumpeted the "many successes" in the struggle with *besprizornost'*, meetings behind closed doors were filled with more pessimistic assessments, recriminations between various agencies, and attempts to shift the blame for observed problems onto other authorities. Seemingly concessionary acknowledgments of the shortcomings of one's own agency were coupled with demands that others do the same, leading to a new cycle of accusations. Though some officials did call for "concrete solutions," few were agreed upon. What was agreed upon, however, was that children's home workers themselves also bore much of the blame for conditions in their institutions. Like the teachers

⁷⁴ Ibid., ll. 7-8.

⁷⁵ As another example, see the transcripts of the 1932 conference of the VTsIK Children's Commission Presidium, GARF f. R5207 op. 1 d. 542.

⁷⁶ Holmes, *Grand Theater*, particularly 25-62.

investigated by Holmes, these workers were caught in an administrative system and bureaucratic discourse that seemed to both demand perfection and expect inevitable failure.⁷⁷

“The Caregivers Have Been Assembled Without Any Vetting”: Personnel in Children’s Homes

This is not to say that these workers were blameless, or that the documented shortcomings of many children’s home and their staff were purely discursive artifacts. Reports from children’s home inspections were filled with stories of inadequate, incompetent, unqualified, abusive, and even outright criminal staff members – too many to ignore. Unsurprisingly, such workers were often declared responsible for the poor conditions in their children’s homes. As we shall see, the quality of the staff and particularly the director does seem to have played a significant role in the quality of the children’s home as a whole. Children’s home personnel, however, were only one of a number of factors that influenced the overall conditions of a children’s home. In some cases, these workers did indeed deserve the lion’s share of blame, particularly in cases where embezzlement, abuse, and other outright criminal activities were discovered. In many other cases, they were simply inexperienced, unqualified, and underpaid workers trying to perform a difficult job in trying circumstances, with rather few resources and assistance. Soviet reports continually lamented the difficulty of attracting qualified and dedicated educators to work in children’s homes, yet were just as quick to blame these workers for not “correcting” any problems.

This tendency to direct blame onto the children’s home workers themselves must also be examined in light of the Stalinist government’s tendency during the 1930s to emphasize

⁷⁷ Ibid., 28.

“personal responsibility” in all Soviet enterprises, and to blame administrators (like children’s home directors) for the state of their institutions. Directives from the Sovnarkom, Party Central Committee, and NKVD contained frequent reminders that children’s home directors were “personally responsible” for the welfare of their charges and the condition of their institution.⁷⁸ When such inspections revealed serious problems in children’s homes, these reports were in turn filled with demands that criminal charges be filed against children’s home staff, though such calls did not always lead to immediate action. A meeting of the Children’s Commission Presidium in March of 1934, for example, complained that despite numerous requests, criminal charges had still not be brought against those responsible for “inadequate supplies, inadequate financing, and theft of property” from several children’s homes in Bashkiria.⁷⁹ Whether such reports resulted in censure, dismissal, or criminal charges, they served as a corollary to the increasing emphasis on the personal authority of the director and the increasing control exerted by central authorities in the realm of children’s homes.⁸⁰ While increasingly strict administrative regulations gave more authority to individual directors, these very same officials were also liable to be blamed for any problems in their children’s home under the moniker of “personal responsibility.”

Certainly there were numerous reported instances in which children’s home workers, including directors, were accused of criminal behavior.⁸¹ Most often, this took the form of embezzlement or otherwise misappropriating funds and supplies, usually described as “squandering” (*razbazarivanie*). A typical case occurred in Vologda in 1934. An inspection by

⁷⁸ See, for example, the plan for the VTsIK Children’s Commission, 7 April 1935, GARF f. 393 op. 1 d. 272 ll. 14-18; the Joint Sovnarkom-Central Committee Resolution “On the Liquidation of Child Homelessness, 31 May 1935, in *Deti Gulaga*, 183-187; and NKVD order no. 071 “On the Organization of Work to Liquidate Child Homelessness,” in *Deti Gulaga*, 187-191.

⁷⁹ GARF f. R5207 op. 1 d. 713 ll. 23-24.

⁸⁰ See Kelly, *Children’s World*, 224-230.

⁸¹ See, for example, GARF f. R5207 op. 3 d. 11 l. 201; TsGAMO f. 916 op. 1 d. 322 l. 10; and TsGAMO f. 916 op. 1 d. 303 l. 2.

the VTsIK Children's Commission inspector Tsvei accused the leadership of the labor colony (comrades Zykina and Kabanov) of "systematically squandering government property," including purchasing supplies using "fictional documents" for personal use, transferring 1200 rubles worth of goods from the children's home account to Zykina's husband, giving children's home workers bread "from the children's supply" to the point that 540 kg of bread was now "owed," and "concealing this situation from the authorities." At the end of this report, inspector Tsvei recommended that the two accused officials be immediately removed from their posts and turned over to the city prosecutor.⁸² In another case, a children's home director collaborated with the home's accountant and supply agent to issue false requisition orders, allowing them to embezzle 5000 rubles and 320 kg of supplies.⁸³ Although we have no information about what happened to these particular officials, the director and accountant from the Volokolamsk "children's village" were sentenced in 1935 to one to two years in prison for embezzling 24,000 rubles.⁸⁴ In all these cases, the Children's Commission inspectors were particularly disturbed not only by the fact that these personnel were effectively stealing from their charges and the Soviet state, but also by the collusion between various personnel in this endeavor. Apart from (oftentimes infrequent) inspections, there were few means to discover such embezzlement if all the responsible officials (director, accountant, supply agent) were intent on concealing it.⁸⁵

The majority of children's home workers were not criminals, nor were they necessarily accused of being such. What many *were* accused of being was unqualified, "apathetic," inexperienced, incompetent, and otherwise unfit to work in a children's home. The experience

⁸² GARF f. R5207 op. 1 d. 713 ll. 91-96.

⁸³ GARF f. R5207 op. 1 d. 1051 l. 40.

⁸⁴ TsGAMO f. 916 op. 1 d. 108 l. 36.

⁸⁵ Inspectors often labeled these types of arrangements, in which workers or officials would band together to protect each other from outside inquiries, "family circles" (*semeistva*). The term *semeistva* was also applied to informal patron-client networks among Soviet bureaucrats, arrangements that were common enough to provoke concern from the central authorities: see Fitzpatrick, *Tear off the Masks!*, 108-109, 182-202.

and qualifications of the staff does seem to have played an important role in determining the success of a children's home. Positive reports on children's homes almost always singled out the director and the children's home staff more generally for praise. A 1937 report on the Uspenskii Children's Home in Noginsk, for example, noted that the home had been in very poor condition in 1936, but credited a new director with completely transforming the situation.⁸⁶ While this credit for the director might be considered simply another facet of the emphasis on "personal responsibility," numerous memoirists (as well as other reports) also recall the central position of the director in the life of the children's home.⁸⁷ Moreover, a director's ability to forge and utilize personal connections also had a significant effect on the material security of a children's home. As previously suggested, being dependent on Soviet distribution networks and local authorities for supplies and funds often placed children's homes in a precarious position. Canny directors, however, countered this uncertainty by establishing ties, both formal and "unofficial," with local collective farms and other enterprises. As with the practice of patronage (*shestvo*), these ties were encouraged by Children's Commission inspectors and other officials who could not guarantee that official distribution networks would provide adequate supplies.⁸⁸ Thus, the director of the Lenin Children's Home in the Moscow region was praised for establishing a "close relationship" with the local collective farm, which allowed him to provide his charges with much better food (including fresh vegetables) than was typically the case.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ TsGAMO f. 916 op. 1 d. 301 l. 3.

⁸⁷ Both Svetlana Obolenskaia and Viktor Tenenbaum remembered the director of their children's home as playing a key role both in the daily life of the home, and in helping these children of "enemies of the people" adjust to their new lives. Obolenskaia, 65-65; Tenenbaum, 17-20. For more discussion of the role played by children's homes directors in these memoirists' lives, see Chapter Five.

⁸⁸ Children's home directors were sometimes even criticized for relying solely on Soviet distribution networks: see Protocol no. 15 of the Storozhevsk District Executive Committee Presidium "On Conditions in Children's Homes," 12 March 1937, in *Krest'ianskie deti*, 453-455. This protocol criticized directors who "rely on central distribution" and did not make extra efforts to seek out other sources of food, particularly fats and meats.

⁸⁹ TsGAMO f. 916 op. 1 d. 107 l. 1.

Along with having a dedicated, experienced, and effective director, the experience and skill of the staff as a whole was an important factor in the relative success of a children's home. An illustrative example is the comparison between the Arkhangelsk Children's Home and the October Children's Home in the city of Arkhangelsk. In contrast to the majority of children's homes in the Northern Territory, which were declared to be "unacceptable," the October Children's Home was praised for being clean and organized, with all children successfully attending school.⁹⁰ The Arkhangelsk Children's Home was in much worse condition: children slept two to a bed due to overcrowding, were given only water to drink because the home could not afford tea, and were "dirty, undisciplined, reticent, and morose."⁹¹ A 1936 newspaper article from *Pravda Severa* written by Inspector Tsvei seized on this comparison, arguing that at a time when the USSR had become "rich," and "life has become better, life has become more joyous," only the "unfeeling attitudes of some officials" could explain such disparities in various children's homes.⁹² While there may have been other, undisclosed factors at work in these children's homes, one of the immediately apparent differences was the relative experience of the directors and staff. The Arkhangelsk Children's Home had two workers in charge of educational work (*vospitatel'naia rabota*), both with qualified education (high school and pedagogical college, respectively). However, both these workers had joined the Arkhangelsk Children's Home only in the last two years. Similarly, the director of the Arkhangelsk Children's Home possessed thirteen years experience as a director, but had only been transferred to the Arkhangelsk Children's Home in the last year.⁹³ In contrast, the workers in the October Children's Home actually possessed slightly less education overall, but had much more

⁹⁰ GARF f. R5207 op. 1 d. 1083 ll. 2-3.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, l. 5.

⁹² *Ibid.*, l. 25.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, ll. 56-62. It is possible that these workers were specifically transferred to the Arkhangelsk Children's Home in an effort to improve conditions there, though this report gives no indication if this was the case.

experience working in their particular children's home. The head of educational work, Surovtseva, did not have any higher education but had been working in children's homes since 1916 and in this particular children's home since 1928. Similarly, the director, Romanova, possessed only an elementary school education, but had been working in the October Children's Home since 1922.⁹⁴

While this conclusion may not have been valid for every case, the experience of the staff (particularly the director) *in their current position* does seem to have had an important influence on the quality of their children's home. The Soviet government's insistence on "personal responsibility" and quick results therefore actually had a detrimental side effect in some cases. One of the most common responses to problematic children's homes was to replace the director and other key staff members.⁹⁵ While this was oftentimes necessary, it also created a dysfunctional cycle in which a new director would be brought on and given only a short time to "correct" the situation before being also threatened with replacement. As a result, many "unacceptable" children's homes saw a rapid series of replaced directors that had little opportunity to improve conditions in the home. This situation was further complicated by the fact that the high turnover in these positions, and the general shortage of qualified and experienced workers, made attracting strong candidates for these positions difficult. Though the Soviet government sometimes transferred experienced directors and other staff to try to "troubleshoot" problematic children's homes, in other cases these institutions remained in dire straits as a series of poorly qualified, inexperienced, apathetic, or even criminal personnel cycled through and were often quickly replaced.

⁹⁴ Ibid. II. 60-62.

⁹⁵ In the Komi region in July and August of 1933, for example, four directors were replaced (out of twelve children's homes), four heads of educational sections were fired, and two children's home workers were brought up on criminal charges. Report "On the Results of the Work of Children's Homes in the Komi Region for 1 January-1 December 1933," in *Krest'ianskie deti*, 262-265.

This constant turnover of personnel was identified by Soviet inspectors as contributing to the problems of many children's homes. In one of the more extreme examples, the Uglich Children's Home had undergone five changes of directors in less than a year:

Table 4: Replaced Directors at the Uglich Children's Home, Ivanovo Region

- 1) Alekseev: "had nothing in common with the upbringing of children"; removed for causing "collapse" of children's home.
- 2) Petrov: sent by regional ONO; removed.
- 3) Musanin: a "rogue" and "crook"; recommended by the head of children's homes for the regional ONO; "worked" for seven days, stole 7000 rubles, and disappeared.
- 4) Mchtov: lasted twenty days, fired for being an unsuitable worker.

Source: Report on the Condition of Children's Homes in the Ivanovo Region 1934, GARF f. R5207 op. 3 d. 27 l. 140.

This report did not specify the fate of the current director, who was presumably still employed. The Uglich Children's Home, however, was still considered to be in poor condition. Other documents also identified high personnel turnover, particularly among directors, as contributing to the problems plaguing many children's homes, or at least the ongoing difficulty in solving these problems.⁹⁶

Soviet government policies and the generally difficult financial condition of many children's homes also directly contributed to this problem in finding qualified, experienced, and dedicated workers for children's homes. Countless Soviet documents pointed to the lack of qualifications and experience among personnel as one of the most serious problems facing Soviet children's homes. Writing in 1934, the VTsIK Children's Commission representative Savchenko declared children's home workers to be "almost day-laborers (*chut li podennye*)," citing the fact that of the workers he had spoken to in the Western Region, the majority had been

⁹⁶ GARF f. A2306 op. 70 d. 5297 l. 7; TsGAMO f. 4341 op. 1 d. 818 l. 19.

working in children's homes for only a few weeks, with a maximum of three months work experience.⁹⁷ Relying on such inexperienced workers, Savchenko declared, had produced a "catastrophic" situation.

Children's homes, however, often had no choice in this matter. Attracting qualified and experienced workers was made particularly difficult by the low pay given to children's home workers. Graduates from pedagogical institutes and other higher education were more likely, if given the choice, to choose work in Soviet kindergartens or elementary schools, rather than a more demanding, lower-paying position in a children's home. Thus, a letter from the VTsIK Children's Commission representative A. Semashko to Stalin's associate Molotov asked the Sovnarkom to raise the pay of children's home workers to be equivalent with elementary school teachers. Semashko claimed that if this was not done, children's homes would be threatened with a "massive exodus of qualified cadres."⁹⁸ The fact that local authorities often set separate (usually lower) rates of pay for children's home workers made attracting and retaining qualified workers even more challenging.⁹⁹ Although almost every Sovnarkom and Children's Commission resolution "on the struggle with child homelessness," including the May 31, 1935 resolution, contained promises to improve financial compensation for children's home workers, by the end of the 1930s work in a children's home was still usually less lucrative and less prestigious than other options.

⁹⁷ GARF f. R5207 op. 3 d. 34 l. 48. In another example, the Novgorod receiving center received twelve different replacement educators in a single year, with each lasting only an average of one month before quitting or being fired. GANO f. R1115 op. 1 d. 357 l. 12.

⁹⁸ GARF f. R5207 op. 1 d. 1107 l. 194. According to this letter, the minimum pay for school teachers in 1936 was 240 rubles per month, while the average pay for an educator (*vospitatel'*) working at a children's home was 115 rubles.

⁹⁹ A 1931 report from the Moscow regional Children's Commission, for example, pointed out that the Moscow regional ONO had not established set standards of pay for children's home workers. Thus, while a director might make 180 rubles in Riazan, a director was paid only 135 rubles in Elatma and a mere 110 in Kasimov. Not surprisingly, the Elatma children's village was one institution singled out for criticism in this report: see TsGAMO f. 916 op. 1 d. 11 ll. 14-16.

The low pay, difficult conditions, and lack of prestige associated with children's home work in turn hampered various government efforts to improve the quality and qualifications of children's home cadres. Throughout the 1930s, various divisions of Narkompros and the Children's Commission tried to implement special training courses for prospective workers in children's homes, as well as offer courses for current workers to improve their professional qualifications. In their intentions, these courses followed a growing trend during the Stalin period to emphasize professional qualifications and formal education.¹⁰⁰ The results of such courses, however, were decidedly mixed. In 1934, for example, the Ivanovo regional ONO held special training courses to provide more workers for children's homes. Of the fifty graduates of these courses, however, twelve had been fired for incompetence and five arrested as of 1935.¹⁰¹ Similarly, a report from the Kuibyshev regional ONO in 1939 commented on the difficulty of attracting good candidates for work in children's homes. As part of efforts to improve the quality and qualifications of children's home cadres, the ONO had offered a three-month special course for graduates of the Soviet seven-year schools to prepare them for work in children's homes. The report noted, however, that such courses had attracted only twenty students, and that these were generally the poorer students with few other options.¹⁰² Managing to attract qualified workers was also no guarantee that they would stay: a report on the Raisemenovskoe village Children's Home (Moscow region), for example, noted that those caregivers who did possess a

¹⁰⁰ In 1936, for example, the Commissariat of Education launched a campaign to ensure that all teachers possessed the required training (fourteen years of school and a pedagogical degree for teachers in secondary schools) or face dismissal. The state's need for an ever-increasing number of teachers ensured that these regulations were often ignored: see Holmes, *Grand Theater*, 28-29.

¹⁰¹ GARF f. R5207 op. 3 d. 27 l. 139.

¹⁰² GARF f. A2306 op. 70 d. 5369 l. 4. As this report put it, "obviously the better students chose to attend the ten-year schools."

formal pedagogical education universally expressed a desire to leave the children's home and find work in their area of expertise (primary education).¹⁰³

At the same time, the Soviet government continued to stress the importance of political and "social" qualifications as well: that is, being from the proper class background and, preferably, a party member. In 1931, for example, the Central Committee of the national Komsomol declared that children's home workers were not suited for their work in a time of "increasing tempo," "neither in their qualifications, nor in their social backgrounds." Instead, it ordered a mobilization of at least 2000 Komsomol members for work in children's institutions. Those mobilized should be Pioneer leaders, Komsomol leaders, and individuals with industrial work experience who could serve as vocational instructors.¹⁰⁴ Such an insistence on "social qualifications" clearly did not help alleviate the shortage of qualified and experienced children's home workers, many of whom had found work in children's homes precisely because their class background had made it difficult for them to find higher paying, more prestigious work.¹⁰⁵ Even among directors it was not unheard of to find children of priests, kulaks, and other compromised social origins. Three such individuals could be found among the list of twenty-six children's home directors in the Komi region in 1935. Interestingly, all three of these directors were characterized as being acceptable in their work and not slated for replacement, unlike several of their more "proletarian" colleagues.¹⁰⁶ In many cases, it seems that local authorities, children's home directors, and even regional authorities essentially ignored this call for more "socially

¹⁰³ TsGAMO f. 916 op. 1 d. 375 l. 100.

¹⁰⁴ GARF f. A2306 op. 70 d. 5273 l. 2.

¹⁰⁵ Children of priests were mentioned often as being "class aliens" who had nevertheless found work in children's homes, either by concealing their origins or due to the fact that directors and local authorities turned a blind eye to their social background. There were also some reports of children of "kulaks" or even those who had previously been convicted of political crimes under Article 58 who had later obtained positions in children's homes: see GANO f. R1115 op. 1 d. 357 l. 11; and TsGAMO f. 2157 op. 1 d. 1632 ll. 517-518. Unfortunately, most of these documents do not indicate whether any actions were pursued against these individuals.

¹⁰⁶ List of children's home directors for the Komi Region, in *Krest'ianskie deti*, 371-373.

qualified” staff, instead preferring to accept what workers they find, particularly if such workers performed well.¹⁰⁷ Although Komsomol members seemed to be preferred as Pioneer leaders and other overtly political positions, and many directors were or became party members, the available documents do not show many instances of children’s home workers either being hired or fired over their class background, despite some inspectors pointing out the presence of “class aliens” among workers.

The end result was that many children’s homes made due with the workers they could attract (and keep). At times this was relatively successful, particularly in cases where older, more experienced workers were able to provide some guidance for younger workers who, despite sometimes possessing more formal education, at first struggled in their positions.¹⁰⁸ In other cases, this approach led to “disaster,” according to reports from Children’s Commission inspectors. One report on Children’s Village no. 2 in Khvalynsk (Saratov region) stated “the caregivers have been assembled without any vetting (*proverka*)...twenty random individuals, absolutely illiterate, a significant portion of whom have been convicted of a variety of crimes, corrupt, drunkards, involved in theft.”¹⁰⁹ In response, the organizational bureau of the Saratov regional party commission ordered that the director Nikitin be removed from his position, stripped of his candidate membership, and brought up on criminal charges. It also ordered that within ten days, twenty new caregivers be found for the children’s village, of whom ten to fifteen

¹⁰⁷ A 1937 report from Vologda, for example, noted that four caregivers and other workers in the area’s children’s homes had obtained positions by concealing their social origins, but even after their deception was discovered, the directors had refused to fire them. This report, however, demanded that such workers be fired as “class alien elements.” GARF f. R5207 op. 1 d. 1591 ll. 30-31. Though many children’s home directors and local officials seem to have turned a blind eye, this is not to say that workers were never fired for their class origins: see examples of such firings in N.V. Riabinina, *Vospitanie “novogo cheloveka” v Sovetskoi Rossii (Oktiabr’ 1917-1920-e gody): Sistema doshkol’nykh uchrezhdenii* (Iaroslavl’: Iaroslavskii Gosudarstvennyi Universitet, 2009), 87-88.

¹⁰⁸ A report on the educational work conducted at the “Prussa” Labor Commune (Moscow region) credited the head of the educational section in particular for helping new workers adjust to their duties. TsGAMO f. 916 op. 1 d. 301 l. 18. See also the reports on children’s home workers in GARF f. R5207 op. 1 d. 1083 ll. 56-62.

¹⁰⁹ GARF f. R5207 op. 3 d. 35 l. 82.

should be Komsomol members. Unfortunately, there is no follow-up information about whether this extreme turnover in personnel was accomplished.¹¹⁰ There is little reason to believe, however, that such a massive replacement of personnel was possible, considering the numerous complaints from local authorities and children's home directors on the difficulty in finding personnel throughout the 1930s. During a meeting between the VTsIK Children's Commission representative Semashko and representatives from children's homes in Rostov-on-the-Don in 1935, Semashko asked why a worker repeatedly criticized in inspectors' reports had still not been replaced. The local representatives answered that they had submitted requests several times to the relevant party authorities, but had been told "if a better worker is sent, we will remove this individual. But [right now] there is no one to replace him."¹¹¹

"In Two Months Everything Will Be As It Was": Finances, Inspections, and the Struggle to Improve *Detdoma*

Throughout the 1930s, inspectors' reports continued to bring the ongoing problems of many children's homes to the Soviet authorities' attention in the most unflattering terms. In response, the Soviet government attempted to improve children's homes through administrative declarations, the most sweeping of which was the joint Sovnarkom-Central Committee Resolution of May 31, 1935.¹¹² After noting the "uninterrupted improvements" in the material conditions of Soviet cities and villages, and the "enormous resources" devoted by the state to the support of children's institutions, this legislation declared (predictably) that the continued

¹¹⁰ Ibid. II. 81-82.

¹¹¹ GARF f. R5207 op. 1 d. 892 l. 16.

¹¹² Joint Sovnarkom-Central Committee Resolution "On the Liquidation of Child Homelessness," 31 May 1935, in *Deti Gulaga*, 184-187.

problems with homeless children and unsatisfactory conditions in children's homes could be explained by the poor work of local authorities, as well as lack of participation by Party, Komsomol, professional, and societal (*obshchestvennitsa*) organizations.¹¹³ Along with a number of measures that toughened Soviet policies toward “criminal elements among children and teenagers” and called for parents to be held responsible for the behavior of their children, this legislation implemented several important changes in the administration of children's institutions. These regulations specified the NKVD would now be responsible for the administration of all receiving-distribution centers and colonies for juvenile delinquents, while Narkompros would remain responsible for “normal” children's homes for children from ages three to fourteen. As Catriona Kelly has noted, this regulation therefore established a clear divide between those children classified as “juvenile delinquents” or “difficult” (*trudnye*) and “normal” children, both in terms of the institution they would inhabit and in their potential futures as well.¹¹⁴

The law also contained numerous provisions that clearly attempted to address many of the problems in Soviet children's homes outlined earlier in this chapter. Recognizing that children's homes often could not rely on Soviet distribution networks to provide adequate food supplies, this declaration specified that children's homes were to be provided with land for their own garden and animal husbandry (in the case of rural children's homes), and that regional and republic executive committees should establish strict norms for supplying and financing children's homes, as well as ensuring that each children's home had a patron enterprise. Other

¹¹³ The *obshchestvennitsa* movement encouraged the wives of party members, professionals, and other members of the Soviet “middle class” to become involved in social work: see David L. Hoffmann, *Stalinist Values: the Cultural Norms of Soviet Modernity 1917-1941* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), 23-26.

¹¹⁴ Catriona Kelly discusses the content and intentions of this decree in *Children's World*, 224-225. See also the discussion of this increasing delineation between acceptable “normal” *besprizornye* and “recidivists,” “difficult (*trudnovospituemye*)” children, and juvenile delinquents in Chapter One of this dissertation.

provisions sought to address the constant difficulties with children's home personnel, including the shortage of qualified workers. The May 31, 1935 resolution ordered 200 Party members to be transferred to leadership positions in children's homes, and 500 Komsomol members to be mobilized for educational work. Workers who were specifically transferred to children's homes were also supposed to receive higher pay (at least equal to their previous position). In keeping with the growing Stalinist emphasis on "personal responsibility," the law also specified that individual staff would be held accountable for theft of property and runaways. Finally, the law sought to increase the amount of administrative oversight and centralized control over children's homes, ordering that the Union republics establish special sections of Narkompros and the NKVD for the administration of children's institutions, that each children's institution establish a special supervisory council (*nabliudatel'nyi sovet*), and that each ONO establish a special group of volunteer inspectors to provide further observation of children's homes.¹¹⁵ In this way, it also followed the general Stalinist trend of increasing central control, bureaucratization, and rigidity in administrative matters.

While this resolution may have sought to address important problems with Soviet children's homes that undoubtedly needed attention, whether it actually led to improvements in the majority of children's homes is an open question. For one, the law still heavily relied on the imperfect and undermanned cohort of Children's Commission and Narkompros inspectors to ensure compliance and enforcement. As noted previously, the Soviet government ordered a one-time inspection and "typification" of all children's homes in connection with the May 31, 1935 resolution. The results, however, were not encouraging: apart from the fact that there were simply not enough inspectors to visit every children's home, some areas apparently did not conduct the required inspections at all (or at least did not report their results). Reports from

¹¹⁵ Vilenskii, et al., *Deti Gulaga*, 184-186.

various inspectors also contained the usual complaints that local authorities were not “properly” implementing the center’s instructions, that the provisions of the May 31, 1935 law were being implemented too slowly, and that as a result the continuing problems with *besprizornost*’ and Soviet children’s homes had not been solved.¹¹⁶

Furthermore, there is limited evidence as to whether the admonishments and recommendations delivered by various inspectors actually led to improvements in Soviet children’s homes. There were certainly examples of children’s homes that improved between various inspections. A report on the Skriparovskii children’s home in the Malo-Iaroslavets district in January of 1936, for example, was harshly critical of conditions there, calling attention to the lack of clothing, unsanitary conditions, and widespread lice and skin diseases. However, the report noted that many staff had recently been replaced, and that the new workers displayed a “fire” for their work and “clear concern for the children.”¹¹⁷ By the time of a follow-up inspection in March of 1936, conditions had apparently clearly improved. While the report still complained that “typification” had not been carried out and that almost thirty percent of the children should be in other institutions, it noted that in other areas that children’s home was in satisfactory condition. All the children possessed the required clothing (including good winter coats), ate good food four times a day, and lived in satisfactory sanitary conditions. Although some aspects could still be improved (the report called for repairing the bathhouse and increasing political participation), the report as a whole was fairly positive.¹¹⁸

The reason for this improvement, however, seemed to have less to do with the specific recommendations made in the January report, and more to do with the new staff members, and

¹¹⁶ See for example, the inspection reports from the Moscow region in TsGAMO f. 916 op. 1 d. 225; and communications between the Children’s Commission and other Soviet organs regarding the implementation of the 31 May 1935 resolution in *Deti Gulaga*, 203-210.

¹¹⁷ TsGAMO f. 916 op. 1 d. 225 l. 109.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, ll. 103-104.

the fact that the Moscow regional ONO and regional Children's Commission had assigned an extra 15,000 rubles to the children's home for purchasing new clothing, repairs, and other needed improvements.¹¹⁹ The latter was particularly important, as questions of adequate financial support had always been the "Achille's heel" of the Soviet system of children's homes.¹²⁰ Weaving through all the accusations of incompetence and "disinterest" that filled Children's Commission reports in the 1930s lay the more fundamental problems with children's home budgets. Many of the problems discussed in the first part of this chapter (inadequate supplies, poor and overcrowded facilities in need of repairs, limited and overworked staff) were either directly caused or at least severely exacerbated by difficulties in financially supporting children's homes. Addressing these financial problems in turn proved a challenge throughout the Stalin years (and beyond).

According to Soviet policy before 1935, district and city divisions of Narkompros (the RaiONO and GorONO) were supposed to be primarily responsible for the financial support of children's homes, with the Children's Commission and other organizations providing supplemental funds when and where needed. The limited budgets of local authorities, however, often struggled to provide this support, particularly in areas hit hard by the rise in *besprizornost'* in the early 1930s. A report from the Saratov territory in 1934, for example, complained that in the Balanda district, only 4.6% of the promised yearly budget for children's homes had been delivered as of June 1, meaning that these children's homes survived only on what small support their patron enterprise could provide.¹²¹ While this was an extreme example, reports were common of various children's homes regularly receiving as little as half of the promised

¹¹⁹ TsGAMO f. 916 op. 1 d. 225 l. 110-111.

¹²⁰ Ball, 141-154.

¹²¹ GARF f. R5207 op. 1 d. 849 ll. 1-2.

budget.¹²² Financial troubles also distinctly limited the possibilities of reform and improvement within children's homes. To improve the conditions of its children's homes, for example, the Ural Children's Commission approved an increase in spending of twenty-eight rubles per inhabitant in 1931. Due to a lack of finances on the part of the Ural ONO (whose budget would provide these funds), this increase had to be delayed by at least three months.¹²³ In the Moscow region, another report complained that while many children's homes were in need of repairs, only four percent of the required building materials had been provided, and individual local ONOs lacked the funds to purchase any additional materials.¹²⁴

While the Resolution of May 31, 1935 sought to shift more financial responsibility for children's homes onto regional and republic authorities, and hence produced a more stable financial situation than the chaos of the early 1930s, finances for most children's homes still remained relatively limited.¹²⁵ The Soviet government in turn tried to improve financial support for children's homes by expanding the practice of patronage (*shestvo*), in which each children's home would be attached to a patron enterprise (usually a factory) that would provide financial support, another system of oversight, and, in theory, a place for children's home graduates to find work. In some cases, there was indeed a close relationship between the children's home and its patron enterprise; one report from the Ural region, for example, pointed out two factories that not only provided financial support for the children's home, but often provided graduates with jobs. The same report, however, declared that the majority of patronage was merely "on paper"

¹²² GARF f. R5207 op. 3 d. 34 ll. 45-46; op. 1 d. 713 l. 35; GARF f. A2306 op. 70 d. 5281 l. 5; TsGAMO f. 916 op. 1 d. 11 ll. 8, 15.

¹²³ GARF f. A2306 op. 70 d. 5281 l. 1.

¹²⁴ TsGAMO f. 916 op. 1 d. 11 l. 3.

¹²⁵ Reports to the Central Executive Committee in 1936, for example, noted that the financial situation had improved since the May 31, 1935 resolution, but that in a wide number of regions children's homes were still not being adequately financed: see GARF f. R5207 op. 1 d. 1107 ll. 8-9, 41, 73.

and had no practical benefits.¹²⁶ The latter type of “patronage” seemed to be much more common, at least according to reports from Children’s Commission and Narkompros inspectors.¹²⁷ At best, most children’s homes could rely on their patron only for some minimal financial support and an occasional visit on official holidays. The Moscow regional Council of Trade Unions, for example, ordered all enterprises engaged in patronage of children’s homes to deliver presents for the May 1, 1935 holiday (suggestions included musical instruments and radios), as well as small individual presents for the children.¹²⁸ While undoubtedly a welcome surprise for the young residents, such official gestures did not solve the underlying financial troubles of many children’s homes.

The ongoing financial troubles with Soviet children’s homes in turn cast doubt on the ability of the existing system of administrative and inspection organs to effect real change in children’s homes, despite the public declarations of “numerous achievements” and “successes.” At times this cynicism came from within these organizations themselves: at a meeting of the VTsIK Children’s Commission in 1929, for example, representative Pervukhina concluded her speech with the statement, “our meeting has touched on many large problems...but in two months everything will be as it was, nothing will be accomplished (*nichego ne budet vpolneno*),” due to a lack of financial support.¹²⁹ The staff at children’s homes also expressed doubt about the inspection apparatus. At a meeting of children’s home workers in 1931, several workers complained that various revision commissions, inspectors, and other oversight organizations were quick to point out numerous problems in children’s homes, but offered few

¹²⁶ GARF f. A2306 op. 70 d. 5281 l. 3.

¹²⁷ Numerous inspection reports stated that children’s homes either did not have patron enterprises, or that these patrons did not have any real effect. See, for example, the reports on many otherwise acceptable children’s homes in the Moscow region, in TsGAMO f. 916 op. 1 d. 108 and d. 307.

¹²⁸ GARF f. R5207 op. 1 d. 1051 l. 123.

¹²⁹ GARF f. R5207 op. 1 d. 373 l. 195.

suggestions on how to improve, and no real concrete (i.e. financial) support.¹³⁰ Finally, some Soviet documents noted that children's home inhabitants also took a rather cynical view on inspections and their efficacy. One report from the Ivanovo region, for example, observed "the inspections do not bring the children anything except annoyance," and that children tended to scoff when they heard another inspector would be arriving, making disparaging remarks and even throwing things at the officials. This report argued that such a reaction was justified, because repeated inspections had still failed to produce noticeable improvements in the conditions of the region's children's homes.¹³¹

Although the financial situation of many children's homes had at least stabilized somewhat toward the end of the 1930s, many reports still noted the same series of problems that had characterized children's homes throughout the decade. Inspections carried out over an eight month period in 1937 in the Northern Territory determined that the majority of the region's thirty-three children's homes were "still in an unacceptable condition."¹³² While some children's homes had indeed improved, including the Arkhangelsk Children's Home mentioned earlier in this chapter, many others were still in poor condition. The Shelygino Children's Home, for example, was described as being unsanitary, possessing only broken-down furniture and ratty clothing, and lacking adequate medical services.¹³³ Another report from the Kuibyshev region complained in 1938 that overcrowding was still a huge problem in children's homes, noting that in many places children slept two to a bed in "unbelievably crowded" conditions.¹³⁴ The same report also noted that most children's homes could still only provide bread and tea for breakfast and dinner, were not being supplied with fresh vegetables and other needed foodstuffs, and could

¹³⁰ GARF f. A2306 op. 70 d. 5280 l. 13.

¹³¹ GARF f. R5207 op. 3 d. 27 ll. 141-142.

¹³² GARF f. R5207 op. 1 d. 1591 l. 7.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 26-35.

¹³⁴ GARF f. A2306 op. 70 d. 5369 l. 6.

not afford to buy these products at market prices. These problems were again tied to inadequate financing. Not only had the region's children's homes not received 400,000 rubles of their promised budget, but this lack of financial support had become so endemic that local enterprises no longer trusted children's home directors enough to give them products on credit.¹³⁵ Finally, while some children's homes had shown distinct improvement by the second half of the 1930s, others had deteriorated to the point that the Soviet government recommended they be closed completely, despite the ongoing shortage of space in many regions. A 1938 letter from the Moscow regional Children's Commission regarding the "Prussa" Labor Commune, for example, noted that due to inadequate repairs, the commune's facilities had become so dilapidated that several buildings were threatening to collapse. The roof of one building had already partially collapsed, leading the commission to warn that children needed to be evacuated immediately and the commune closed to prevent injuries or death.¹³⁶

Evaluating whether children's homes on the whole improved after 1935 is therefore not easy. Reports from regions and districts where thorough inspections were carried out at several different points, however, do allow us to draw some tentative conclusions. In the Moscow region, the general conditions do seem to have slightly improved after 1935, though there were still many children's homes that were criticized for being overcrowded, dirty, inadequately staffed, or otherwise lacking. The terrible conditions that characterized some children's homes in the first half of the 1930s seem to have been mostly alleviated, at least according to reports from Children's Commission inspectors. While these reports were still often critical, the degree of this criticism had changed. Earlier, inspection reports had described children's homes where children lived in absolutely filthy conditions, slept two or three to a bed, suffered from epidemic

¹³⁵ Ibid., ll. 14-15.

¹³⁶ TsGAMO f. 916 op. 1 d. 375 ll. 160-161.

diseases, or were left entirely to their own devices by indifferent or overwhelmed staff members. Inspections carried out in 1937 and 1938 were more likely to criticize a children's home for needing to replace some worn-out clothing or furniture (instead of lacking it entirely), or criticize staff for not possessing sufficient professional credentials or specialized training (rather than being completely absent or criminally incompetent; though the latter did still happen).¹³⁷ This is not to say that conditions in the majority of children's homes were wonderful or up to the standards established by a few "model" institutions.¹³⁸ The absolute worst cases, however, do seem to have mostly disappeared (or, perhaps, were no longer reported), allowing the establishment of a certain minimal standard for living conditions, facilities, and education.

Other regions also showed this mixture of some apparent improvements combined with several ongoing problems. They also seem, however, to have been worse off than Moscow, most likely as a result of being farther away from the gaze of central Soviet authorities. In the Northern Territory, reports from 1937 indicated that while some children's homes had improved in recent years, others were still in poor condition, with the majority, as noted above, still considered "unacceptable." Several children's homes had experienced severe disciplinary problems or troubles with staff. In one children's home, a resident had fatally stabbed another resident during an argument, while several other children's homes had seen their charges arrested for hooliganism.¹³⁹ In another series of incidents, various staff members had been charged with physical abuse. Conditions in the Volga German republic seem to have been slightly better, and again showed some improvement in the years since 1935 along with persistent shortcomings.

¹³⁷ See, for example, the inspection reports from the Moscow region in TsGAMO f. 916 op. 1 d. 250 (1936); d. 301 (1937); d. 370 (1938); and d. 375 (also 1938).

¹³⁸ The "Ilyich" Children's Home in the Pushkin district (see p. 21), for example, was described as so crowded that one could barely walk between beds in the dormitories. Moreover, due to poor "educational work," several residents had apparently been involved in petty crimes, causing the state prosecutor to issue a warning to the director about his "personal responsibility" for their behavior. TsGAMO f. 916 op. 1 d. 301 ll. 38-43.

¹³⁹ GARF f. R5207 op. 1 d. 1591 ll. 13-25.

Reports were generally more favorable in 1937 than in years past, noting that with a few exceptions the republic's children's homes were usually clean, reasonably equipped, and fully staffed. The major exception was the children's home in Lipovskii, which was described as being dirty, packed with poorly clothed and "filthy" children, and characterized by "a series of disgraceful incidents bordering on crimes."¹⁴⁰ These included food containing maggots and dead cockroaches, persistent financial irregularities (which the director refused to discuss), and a series of drunken revelries organized by the director himself. Moreover, none of the changes ordered after the removal of the previous director had been implemented.¹⁴¹ With the exception of Lipovskii, however, the children's homes as a whole seemed to have been better off than earlier, particularly with regard to supplies and financing.¹⁴² The major criticism offered of most children's homes in 1937 was that educational work needed to be improved, including more political education and training for staff, and more available hobby circles (*kruzhki*) for the children.

Conclusion

What was life like in a Soviet children's home in the 1930s? In many ways it was not good – perhaps an improvement over life on the street for the Soviet Union's hundreds of thousands of *besprizornye*, but not always significantly (particularly in the first half of the 1930s). At best, these children usually received bland but sufficient food, clean but crowded living quarters, adequate but not extensive clothing, a chance for some education and vocational training, and attention and care from conscientious, though often overworked and underpaid

¹⁴⁰ GARF f. R5207 op. 1 d. 1298 l. 27.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, ll. 42-43.

¹⁴² On earlier conditions in the Volga German republic, see GARF f. R5207 op. 1 d. 840.

staff. At worst, they might be starving, sick, abused by their caregivers or older children, and left with very little education and few prospects. It should be noted, however, that these conditions were not necessarily so different from those in which a large section of Soviet society existed in the first half of the 1930s. Peasants forced onto unproductive collective farms, migrant workers living in overcrowded barracks or dugouts (*zemlianki*), students struggling to get by on a meager stipend, city-dwellers crammed into communal apartments or braving lines for the small chance to obtain a rare consumer good – much of Soviet society had extensive experience with deprivation, shortages, and hunger.¹⁴³ Like life outside the children’s home, conditions may have improved somewhat in the second half of the 1930s, but for most they did not match the happy, joyous life promoted in Soviet public culture.

For a system that had made the promise of a “happy childhood” and “road to life” for *besprizornye* a part of its claim to legitimacy, this was a source of ongoing anxiety. Soviet officials worried that poor living conditions and indifferent or incompetent staff would undermine the re-educative mission of these children’s homes. Official reports declared that poor conditions in children’s homes harmed their fundamental mission to “turn their pupils into healthy, literate, disciplined, cultured individuals capable of socially useful work and loyal to the goal of communism.”¹⁴⁴ Nor were these officials wrong to worry, as numerous children wrote letters of complaint through the years to ask why their children’s homes did not resemble the institutions celebrated in Soviet newspapers (see Chapter Four). While a few model institutions, like the Dzerzhinskii and Bolshevo communes, did seem to provide the promised “road to life,” turning former *besprizornye* and juvenile delinquents into full Soviet citizens, a large number of

¹⁴³ On shortages and deprivations in the Stalin period, see Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, 40-66; Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*, 157-197, 238-279; and Mark Edele, *Stalinist Society 1928-1953* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 193-210.

¹⁴⁴ GARF f. R5207 op. 1 d. 1298 l. 42.

children's homes struggled in this task. The next two chapters will therefore examine more closely these efforts to reeducate and "re-make" *besprizornye*, first in these model institutions, and then in the wider system of children's homes.

Chapter Three: Factories of the New Soviet People

<i>My prokhodim bez ukora,</i>	We pass by without reproach
<i>Molodym – kto byl star,</i>	Young people who once were old
<i>Peredelav imia vora</i>	Having exchanged the name of thief
<i>Na rodnoe “Kommunar”</i>	For our dear “Communard”

Stanza from the song “Kommunary,” Bolshevo Commune (words by communard A. Bobrinskii)¹

At the same time as residents of the Bolshevo Labor Commune (*trudkommuna*) sang of abandoning the life of a thief for that of a communard, another soon-to-be even more celebrated institution was beginning its operations near Kharkov. The Dzerzhinskii Labor Commune was actually the third institution associated with the celebrated Soviet educator and pedagogue Anton Semenovich Makarenko, and destined to be the largest. While Makarenko’s Gorky Colony may have been more famous, having served as the setting for his bestselling *Pedagogicheskaiia Poema* (1933-35, translated in English as *The Road to Life*), the Dzerzhinskii Commune left its own legacy as well on the bookshelves of Soviet citizens for years to come. Next to *Flagi na Bashniakh* (1938, translated as *Learning to Live*), in which Makarenko wrote about his years at the Dzerzhinskii Commune, one might find another enduring symbol of the commune: the FED camera. First manufactured at the commune, these cameras for decades remained one of the most popular cameras available to Soviet households, ensuring that several generations of family photos and snapshots were taken with a FED.²

¹ Bolshevo. *Literaturno-istoricheskii al'manakh* v. 3 (Bolshevo: Tovarishchestvo “Pisatel’”, 1994), 176.

² Oscar Fricke, “The Dzerzhinsky Commune: Birth of the Soviet 35mm Camera Industry,” *History of Photography* 3, no. 2 (April 1979): 135-155.

It is then no surprise that Efim Roitenberg, a commune resident and future journalist, gave particular attention to the development of this camera factory when attempting to write the history of the commune. Yet Roitenberg ultimately wanted to emphasize a different legacy:

However, the real basic production of the commune is living people. Over the course of seven years, more than 100 people have been sent to institutes [of higher education] from the commune...[all these graduates] arrived at the commune almost illiterate, dirtied (*izmyzgannye*) by life. For seven years the worthy Chekists cleaned off the dirty remains of the past. Their stubborn work was not in vain...[these graduates] left the commune cultured, politically literate, and connected to the whole life of our shining motherland...³

Echoing this sentiment, Matvei Samoilovich Pogrebinskii, the Cheka (OGPU/NKVD) official who helped establish the Bolshevo Commune, titled one of his two written works on this commune *The Factory of People (Fabrika liudei)*.⁴ In fitting with the industrial-themed language of the Stalin period, both of these communes were imagined as a new type of enterprise, an educational factory devoted to the mass production of New Soviet People. By raising former juvenile delinquents and *besprizornye* (those “dirtied by life”) to be exemplary Soviet citizens, these communes were to serve as further evidence of the total transformation of human nature and society being successfully conducted in the Soviet Union, as well as providing a model system to be imitated in other children’s institutions.

Pogrebinskii and Makarenko welcomed this task and explicitly strove to establish these institutions as models for other children’s homes, communes, and educational institutions. In a 1932 letter to Maxim Gorky, Makarenko praised the work of the Dzerzhinskii Commune and listed its many achievements: establishing several productive enterprises (including the camera factory), opening a worker’s school (*rabfak*), achieving full financial self-sufficiency, and adding many new residents to the core communards transplanted from Makarenko’s earlier Gorky Colony. At the same time, Makarenko was still bitter about being forced to leave the Gorky

³ Efim Osipovich Roitenberg, “Imeni Dzerzhinskogo,” RGALI f. 332 op. 2 d. 24 l. 107.

⁴ M.S. Pogrebinskii, *Fabrika liudei* (Moscow, 1929).

Colony, and railed against both an announcement that a new colony bearing the same name was to be opened near Moscow, and rumors that a new technical college was being planned to train pedagogues to work in children's homes and colonies. If anyone held the experience and qualifications necessary to head such an institute, Makarenko argued, it was he. Nor should Gorky lend his name to any institution not directed by Makarenko himself – as he argued, any new Gorky colony, like its predecessor (and the Dzerzhinskii Commune), should be “a model in every respect.”⁵ The Bolshevo Commune arguably played an even greater role as a model institution, as its accessible location near Moscow ensured a steady stream of visitors, particularly foreign delegations being given a tour of the Soviet Union's reformatory and humane approach to young criminals. One former worker at the commune remembered days when the entire square in front of the main building was filled with Intourist tour buses.⁶ Judging from the numerous enthusiastic inscriptions left in the visitors' book, these guests, which included such luminaries as George Bernard Shaw, were suitably impressed.⁷ Lest anyone forget the Bolshevo Commune's role as a model institution, an NKVD order issued for the commune's tenth anniversary in 1935, along with lauding its achievements and specifying prizes for many of the staff, declared that the Bolshevo Commune should strive to improve even more, in order to “serve as an example for other labor colonies, which we have now been ordered to organize.”⁸

This chapter will examine these celebrated communes' role as “models” in two important respects. First, it will discuss these communes' role as exemplary institutions whose system and achievements were supposed to be adopted and emulated by other Soviet children's institutions.

⁵ A.S. Makarenko, letter to M.A. Gorky, 5 October 1932, RGALI f. 332 op. 4 d. 258 ll. 1-7. Makarenko also argued that such models were clearly necessary, as “it is no secret that [children] in our children's homes and colonies still live poorly, and [the staff] still do not properly know how to work there.”

⁶ *Bolshevo al'manakh*, 79.

⁷ Many of these inscriptions have been reprinted in Svetlana Gladyshev, *Deti bol'shoi bedy* (Moscow: Izdatel'skii Dom “Zvonitsa,” 2004), 102-137.

⁸ *Bolshevo al'manakh*, 124.

Second, it will explore the ways in which these communes served as a discursive model, including how these communes encouraged their residents to narrate their own lives following a shared “script,” and how the resultant texts, along with published writings on these communes, helped make this “script” part of a wider Soviet discourse on children’s institutions. Through examining texts produced by commune residents, including autobiographies, and writings about the communes, such as “fan letters” to Makarenko, it will explore the ways in which this “script” was reproduced, personalized, or transformed by various authors. The stories of Makarenko’s pupils and the Bolshevo communards were also presented in Soviet newspapers, Makarenko’s own writings, and other publications as examples of the results that could be achieved by a properly organized and directed process of “reeducation” (*perevospitanie*). In this way, the Bolshevo and Dzerzhinskii communes provided not just a system to imitate. They became the very image of what a properly Soviet children’s institution was imagined to be.

I therefore consider these communes as comprising two interrelated elements of the Soviet ideological project of reeducation and building the New Soviet Person: social and discursive. Scholars to date have focused almost exclusively on the former, discussing, for example, the organization and daily life of the Gorky Colony and Dzerzhinskii Commune, or Makarenko’s pedagogical system and the reasoning behind it. While several have related Makarenko’s pedagogy to Soviet ideology, or sought to place it in the context of the 1920s and 1930s, few have considered Makarenko’s pedagogy as a discursive project as well, a system that sought to transform not only how communards lived, worked, and behaved, but how they thought about themselves and spoke about their lives.⁹ The Bolshevo Commune, despite its

⁹ Major works in English that place Makarenko’s pedagogy in a historical context are James Bowen, *Soviet Education: Anton Makarenko and the Years of Experiment* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1962); and sections of Kharkhordin, *The Collective and the Individual*. Both Bowen and Kharkhordin do consider one aim of Makarenko’s pedagogy as being the transformation of individual personalities. However, they do not address the

fame in its own time, is generally less well-documented, though it has begun to receive some renewed attention from Russian scholars.¹⁰ In both cases, attention to the discursive practices of these communes has still been absent. Yet, as I will show, commune residents were in a sense learning a new language at the same time as they were drawn into new, more structured living arrangements. This shift in language, and commune residents' participation in this project of narrating their lives, their aspirations, and even their sense of self in new ways, played an important role in the dramatic individual transformations that were celebrated as these communes' main achievement. At the same time, it was precisely these transformations, and the way they were celebrated and discussed in Makarenko's writings, Soviet publications (including the "collective history" of the Bolshevo Commune, *Bolshevtsy*), and other public discourse, that shaped perceptions of how children's institutions could, and should, go about raising their charges to be New Soviet People.

As institutions that grew out of the experimentalist impulses of the immediate post-revolutionary years, but became particularly celebrated and influential in the 1930s, the Dzerzhinskii and Bolshevo communes were part of the wider history of the Soviet project and the Stalin period. Scholarly assessment of the relationship between these communes and the political, cultural, and ideological environment in which they arose, however, has been widely divergent. Many have seen Makarenko's system, with its emphasis on authority, discipline, and the supremacy of the collective, as in its essence totalitarian, making its growing influence

role of self-narration or discursive practices in this transformation. Russian-language works on Makarenko are far too numerous to list here. However, the state of "Makarenko studies" (*makarenkovedenie*) as a field of pedagogy is discussed in A.A. Frolov, *A.S. Makarenko v SSSR, Rossii i v mire: Istorioografiia osvoeniia i razrabotki ego naslediia* (Nizhnyi Novgorod, 2006). To my knowledge, none of these Russian-language works address Makarenko's pedagogy in light of recent historical research on Soviet subjectivity.

¹⁰ Gladyshev's *Deti bol'shoi bedy* discusses both the Bolshevo and Dzerzhinskii communes. The local history museum of the city of Korolev (Istoriko-Kravedcheskii Muzei g. Koroleva) has also published a collection of documents on the Bolshevo commune in the third volume of their *Bolshevo. Literaturno-istoricheskii al'manakh*.

during the Stalin period no accident.¹¹ Many others, particularly Russian authors writing since 1991, have found in Makarenko's system or the Bolshevo commune the original utopian, emancipatory, truly socialist essence of the Russian revolution that was later crushed by Stalinist dictatorship. For these authors, Makarenko was a true humanist and "democrat" who also suffered under Stalinism.¹² This chapter adheres strictly to neither of these views, suggesting instead that both readings are in some way correct because these communes embodied both the productive and exclusionary impulses of the Stalin period. The communes offered a chance for *besprizornye* and juvenile delinquents to become full Soviet citizens, to take on a new identity as "builders of socialism." The collective of their fellow communards was to be the vehicle of this transformation. Yet at the same time, the collective was also the source of discipline and authority, and those who refused to follow its rules faced punishment or potential expulsion.

As the general history of these communes has been fairly well documented, a brief overview of their respective origins and organization will suffice. The Bolshevo Commune (OGPU Labor Commune No. 1) opened in 1924 approximately half an hour by train to the north of Moscow. The commune was established under the leadership of Matvei Samoilovich Pogrebinskii (1885-1937), an OGPU official who helped select both the staff and the first contingent of residents, many of whom were juvenile criminals taken from Moscow's Butyrskaiia prison. Pogrebinskii was also instrumental in selecting the commune's first director, F.G. Melikhov, and remained closely involved in the operations of the commune, visiting frequently

¹¹ Bowen, although generally supportive of Makarenko's achievements, declared Makarenko's system "not applicable in the democratic state," at least without qualification. Bowen did not doubt that Makarenko was motivated by a genuine humanism, but saw his system as a response to the crisis of child homelessness and the product of a specific, non-democratic political system; Bowen, 203-209. Others have been harsher in their assessments: see Iu.P. Azarov, *Ne podniat'sia tebe, starik: roman-issledovanie* (Moscow: Molodaia Gvardiia, 1989).

¹² For Richard Stites, experimental communes like Makarenko's Gorky Colony and Bolshevo were part of the revolution's original utopianism, later stifled by Stalinism: see *Revolutionary Dreams*, 209-222. Svetlana Gladyshevskaya also presents the Bolshevo and Dzerzhinskii communes as products of the "liberal 1920s" that were eventually eliminated by the Stalinist purges: see *Deti bol'shoi bedy*, 149, 167-172.

and living at the commune from 1926-1930 (when he was transferred to head the regional division of the GPU in Bashkiriia). The commune began with a small contingent of former *besprizornye* and convicted juvenile criminals, along with two workshops for shoes and metalworking, and eventually grew to almost 4000 residents, including communards, staff, and their families. At the same time, the facilities expanded to encompass several modern, mechanized factories for shoes and sports equipment, a medical clinic, and other amenities.

The Dzerzhinskii Commune, though never as large as Bolshevo, followed a similar trajectory. Makarenko's pedagogical system, with its semi-militarized elements (like drills, uniforms, and commanders for each "detachment") and emphasis on the need for discipline and authority, had always stood in contrast to the theory of "free education," which predominated in Soviet educational circles in the 1920s. After continually butting heads with the Ukraine SSR Narkompros (which supported "free education"), Makarenko was essentially forced to leave the Gorky Colony in 1928. In the meantime, in the hopes of finding a more compatible patron, he had established the Dzerzhinskii Commune under the patronage of the OGPU in December of 1927. As with its counterpart in Bolshevo, the Dzerzhinskii Commune began with a small contingent (160 pupils, sixty of whom had come from the Gorky Colony) but grew to over 800 residents. The commune would also eventually house two factories known throughout the Soviet Union for producing electric drills and FED cameras, the sales of which allowed the commune to achieve financial self-sufficiency. Being freed from the supervision of Narkompros, Makarenko was able to implement his system as he saw fit, and organized the Dzerzhinskii Commune along the same lines as the earlier Gorky Colony. The commune was divided into detachments, each of which chose a commander who also sat on the Council of Commanders which served as the highest organ of self-government. While Makarenko retained a great deal of individual authority

in the commune, its formal organization strove for a balance between the organs of self-government and the personal authority of the director.

It should be noted that, despite their somewhat similar histories, the Bolshevo and Dzerzhinskii communes, and their respective founders, differed in a few important respects. Whereas Makarenko was a trained pedagogue and had worked for years as a schoolteacher before founding the Gorky Colony, Pogrebinskii had no formal pedagogical training – though, in the Soviet tradition of “working on oneself,” he was described as an avid reader who devoured books on educational theory and practice after being appointed head of OGPU labor communes.¹³ Bolshevo Commune residents were also usually older (typically 16-21) than those at the Dzerzhinskii Commune (who typically fell between the ages of twelve and fifteen). This difference was in part due to the means by which these communes received their charges (the Bolshevo Commune received many convicted young criminals directly from Soviet prisons, while the Dzerzhinskii Commune appears to have more often received *besprizornye* from receiving-distribution centers or other children’s homes and colonies) and their respective approaches to “graduation.” Many Bolshevo residents essentially became permanent members of the commune and lived there, sometimes with their whole families, into their 20s and 30s, while the Dzerzhinskii Commune graduated its residents at the more typical age of 15-18. Makarenko and Pogrebinskii also did not share the same approach to their charges’ past lives, a difference that will be addressed more thoroughly in the next section. These differences, however, were far overshadowed by what these communes shared, including the general goal of re-educating juvenile delinquents and *besprizornye*, an ideological heritage shaped by dreams of building the New Soviet Person, similar institutions and methods, an emphasis on collectivism, and a common discourse of individual transformation. Moreover, both communes were often

¹³ *Bolshevo al'manakh*, 14-15.

presented as part of the same ideological project: the article “The Engineer of Human Souls,” prepared for the tenth anniversary celebration of the Bolshevo Commune, cited both Makarenko and Pogrebinskii as examples of “true Bolshevik engineers.”¹⁴ Though it is unclear if they ever met in person, both were familiar with each other’s work and seem to have agreed that they were part of the same effort to reform and reeducate *besprizornye* and juvenile delinquents, as they occasionally made reference to each other’s institutions in their writings.¹⁵

Forging the New Soviet People: The Communes as Models of Collective Life

As noted, this chapter does not seek to provide a thorough history or comparison of the two communes, but to examine their role as model institutions in which the creation of the New Soviet Person was to take place. The following section will therefore highlight key aspects of these institutions that both: 1) served as models of how to raise New Soviet People and were thus intended to be imitated in other Soviet institutions, and 2) reinforced the idea of the communes as subjective, discursive projects, in which communards were not only to live differently in a more collective social environment, but also to learn to think and speak about themselves and their lives in a new way. These included various rituals that were supposed to mark the beginning of one’s “new life” at the commune (in its most broad, transformational sense), the particular relationship between collective and individual that shaped many aspects of life at the commune, and the system of discipline that began with external, collective discipline but aimed at the development of conscious self-discipline within each individual communard.

¹⁴ GARF f. 7952 op. 3 d. 23 l. 42.

¹⁵ G. Khillig, “A.S. Makarenko and the Bolshevo Commune,” *Russian Education and Society* 44, no. 9 (September 2002): 75-92. Khillig points out several places in Makarenko’s writings where he refers to the Bolshevo Commune, including pointing out the similarities in their organization (86) and offering a favorable assessment of the book *Bolshevtsy* (87).

For Makarenko, a communitard's new life and new self began as soon as he or she entered the commune. Makarenko implemented a rule at the Gorky Colony that his pupils were not to talk about their lives before arriving at the colony, a rule that continued at the Dzerzhinskii Commune. Both the communitards and staff were also supposed to uphold this "tradition" and refrain from asking new arrivals about their background or the circumstances that had brought them to the commune.¹⁶ The beginning of this new life was also marked by certain symbolic rituals. Newly arrived *besprizornye* would burn their street clothes and instead receive a new, clean uniform as a symbol of their induction into the commune. Similarly, Makarenko was known to burn the files that accompanied juvenile delinquents referred by Soviet courts or other authorities, instead replacing these documents with a new file that contained only disciplinary infractions committed while a member of the commune.¹⁷ This destruction of the communitard's former "file self," and its replacement with a literally clean sheet, symbolized the new life available in the commune, as well as reflecting Makarenko's general disdain for mainstream psychology and the search for the roots of criminal actions within an individual's past.¹⁸

In fact, this general disinterest in his pupils' past led to one major point of departure between Makarenko and Pogrebinskii. In a letter written in 1930, Makarenko extensively elaborated on his disagreement with the practice of encouraging commune residents to discuss their transformation from "thieves" to "people," a discourse that was repeated often in both official celebrations and newspaper articles about the Bolshevo Commune. Makarenko called this practice "a pedagogical disgrace" and "inhumane towards children," arguing "what kind of upbringing is this, that takes such a high price from children: [stating] we will raise you...but

¹⁶ Makarenko, *Makarenko: His Life and Work in Education* (1976), 106.

¹⁷ Kharkhordin, 208-209.

¹⁸ On personal identities and the concept of "file selves," see Rom Harre, *Personal Being: A Theory for Individual Psychology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 69-71; and Fitzpatrick, *Tear Off the Masks!*, 14-18.

remember, how bad (*skvernye*) you were and what you are becoming in our hands?”¹⁹

Makarenko then went on to argue that the constant repetition of this narrative was both a waste of energy and “ideologically unsound.” Why focus so much attention on a resident’s past, which implied that this past continued to be relevant and thus deprived him of the opportunity for truly free development (*svobodnoe razvitiie*)? Along with this question, Makarenko posed another: given that Soviet ideology held that social circumstances and not an inborn tendency caused crime, did it not follow that as soon as a juvenile delinquent entered the social environment of the commune and became part of its collective, he ceased to be a criminal? What, then, was served by pedagogues constantly celebrating having “turned a criminal into a person,” except for self-congratulatory pride?²⁰

Behind this disagreement, however, lay a similar goal in encouraging former *besprizornye* and juvenile delinquents to think about themselves as entirely new people. While the Bolshevo Commune did encourage communards to adopt a discourse of transformation, to articulate the stark break between “who I was and who I am now,” this discussion of the past was always in service of the overall effort to change the behavior, worldview, and self-image of these former criminals.²¹ This sense of a new beginning at the commune was reinforced by the way prospective communards were treated, in their own words, as “real people” rather than criminals. Many communards later remarked on being surprised at the degree of trust they were granted from the very beginning. One of the stories that appeared in the published history of the commune, *Bolshevtsy*, in the memories of communards, and in later histories of the commune

¹⁹ RGALI f. 332 op. 4 d. 387 l. 8.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 9-10. Interestingly, Makarenko called out Pogrebinskii and the Bolshevo Commune by name in this letter as examples of this counterproductive narrative, despite his other favorable references to the Bolshevo Commune.

²¹ This idea of a stark division between the past and present of communards was particularly emphasized in the published history of the commune: Gorkii, Maksim, K.Ia. Gorbunov, and M.V. Luzgin, eds., *Bolshevtsy: ocherki po istorii Bolshevskoi imeni G.G. Iagoda trudkommunoi NKVD* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel'stvo “Istoriia Zavodov,” 1936).

involved Pogrebinskii, having just removed a group of convicted juvenile criminals from prison, giving them money and telling them to buy their own lunch. Most commune members remembered being shocked by this trust, by the apparent faith on the part of Pogrebinskii that they would not just pocket the money and run away.²² In fact, this story became repeated so many times that it became part of the “script” that commune residents tended to follow when articulating their lives, to be discussed more in the second half of this chapter. Many also remembered being shocked upon arrival by the relative freedom and trust granted to the communards, and by the good relationships between communards and the staff, including the previously frightening OGPU. Writing in 1994, one former communard recalled, “I liked everything at the commune (*v kommune mne vse prishlos’ po dushe*): its order and rules, the kindness of the educators and foremen in the factories, and the trust [in us].”²³

This idea of a new self being created at the communes was in turn intimately tied to labor, and the notion that work was essential not only for learning useful skills and discipline, but as part of developing the “well-rounded” individual. While the intellectual heritage of this idea stemmed from the Marxist notion that the New Man would overcome the historic alienation of mental and manual labor, Makarenko and Pogrebinskii often seemed more immediately interested in the practical results of labor education. In unpublished writings, Makarenko spoke of the need to produce the type of individuals needed by socialist society – not necessarily the lofty, harmonious New Soviet Person imagined by Soviet theorists (though this might come later), but disciplined workers and trained professionals.²⁴ This is not to say that Makarenko was not influenced by ideas about the development of the New Soviet Person under Soviet socialism.

²² *Bolshevo al'manakh*, 17. See also the autobiographies of Bolshevo communards reprinted in Gladyshev, 62-85, and discussed in more detail in the second half of this chapter.

²³ *Bolshevo al'manakh*, 67.

²⁴ Kharkhordin, 200-203.

In fitting with his self-perception as a practical educator rather than a theorist, however, Makarenko concentrated on labor education as a means to teach discipline, a love for work, and useful skills for the Soviet industrial economy.

Both the Dzerzhinskii and Bolshevo communes promoted polytechnical education, in which residents typically spent four hours in school and four hours working in the commune's workshops and factories (adjusted by age, with older residents spending more time working). This mixture between work and school was intended to provide academic knowledge and practical skills, while also teaching the rewards of disciplined work, as communards were (somewhat controversially) also paid for their labor.²⁵ There were also many direct, practical benefits of this system of labor education for the commune as a whole, as both the Dzerzhinskii and Bolshevo communes managed to financially support themselves from the products of their factories. Nevertheless, this system was also fundamentally based on the principle that labor was transformative, a principle that was repeated often in various stories about the communes. Roitenberg, for example, related the tale of Mitia and Vasia, former *besprizornye* who discovered a love for labor at the commune that changed their lives:

Mitia and Vasia not only had none of the elementary skills of a joiner (*stoliar*), but had never seen a workshop and had never honestly labored. Now they had to exchange the profession of being train thieves, honed over eight years of their life as *besprizornye*, for that of joiners. And when Mitia turned on the motor...and Vasia took off the first layer with the wood plane...they experienced a childlike joy. They felt the first joy of labor. And when they saw their own work among the smooth, varnished benches, and these

²⁵ Makarenko's support for external incentives for work (like wages) sometimes drew criticism from more orthodox educators as being potentially "anti-communist." Makarenko saw wages, however, as an immediate incentive necessary to get former *besprizornye* to be involved in work, and a useful tool for teaching them to coordinate their individual interests (i.e. money) with collective interests (production goals and the overall financial state of the commune). As time went on, these immediate incentives would be overshadowed by more long-term incentives, such as the prospect of developing useful skills and ensuring one's future. See Bowen, 128-129. For Makarenko's answer to criticism of his support for incentives, see A.S. Makarenko, *Pedagogicheskaiia Poema*, rev. ed., ed. S.S. Nevskaiia (Moscow: Moscow: ITRK, 2003), 583-584. This revised edition restores some sections of excised text from Makarenko's earlier drafts of the work, and distinguishes this text from the published, "canonical" version. It is thus useful for seeing Makarenko's thought process as he worked on *Pedagogicheskaiia Poema*. All subsequent citations refer to this version.

benches were purchased by a workers' club, then some kind of shadowy and up to this point hidden feeling of love for labor filled them, a love for honest, productive labor.²⁶

In this description, Mitia and Vasia undergo something almost like a religious conversion from the first moment that they discover "honest labor." Thus, while labor education may have served many practical goals at the communes, it was never far from the notion, fundamental to the Soviet conception of the New Soviet Person, that labor was an essential part of human life and a transformative experience.

The system of self-government (*samoupravlenie*) implemented at both the Bolshevo and Dzerzhinskii Communes also sought to foster a sense of a new life at the commune, as well as a feeling of belonging to the wider collective. At the Bolshevo Commune, new arrivals had to be formally accepted by the general assembly of all communards (the main organ of self-government, supplemented by various smaller commissions in charge of supplies, sanitation, etc.) before they could join the commune.²⁷ The general assembly was also responsible for enforcing the commune's rules and deciding punishment. Having the commune members themselves enforce these rules was intended to produce a greater sense of collective solidarity and responsibility to the overall commune; as one educator at Bolshevo declared, "we explained to the lads that in the commune they themselves were the bosses."²⁸ The same principle was reflected in the famous choice offered to each prospective communard: they were always free to leave the commune, but if they chose to remain they were then obligated to observe the commune's rules, as decided and enforced by the general assembly. The Dzerzhinskii Commune followed a similar system of self-government that was also intended to draw each individual communard into the collective life of the commune. Each communard belonged to a

²⁶ RGALI f. 332 op. 1 d. 61 l. 33.

²⁷ On the general organization of the Bolshevo Commune, see Gladyshev, 41-61.

²⁸ *Bolshevo al'manakh*, 17.

detachment, which in turn chose a commander to sit on the Council of Commanders, the commune's governing body. As with Bolshevo, these organs of self-government bore responsibility for enforcing the commune's rules, with detachments serving as the basic unit of administration and discipline. When he felt the need to address the discipline problems or poor behavior of an individual communitarian, Makarenko would usually invite the guilty party's entire detachment to his office, sometimes without revealing the reason for this meeting. Instead, the detachment was encouraged to scrutinize itself in an effort to discover why they had been summoned, and thereby to correct the aberrant behavior themselves.²⁹

Both these systems of self-government aimed at promoting collectivism within the commune and encouraging each individual communitarian to identify his or her own interests with the wider interests of the collective. This conceptualization of the relationship between the collective and the individual, and the means to build a strong collective, were Makarenko's most important and influential ideas. They have arguably received the most scholarly attention as well, notably from James Bowen and, more recently, Oleg Kharkhordin.³⁰ While Makarenko's system has sometimes been simplistically portrayed as the complete subordination of the individual to the collective, his ideas and methods were in fact a bit more complex. It is true that Makarenko spoke of the "sovereignty of the collective (*kollektiv*)" and adhered to the principle that collective interests should always trump individual interests. Over the course of his career, Makarenko devoted more effort and thought to the problem of how to create a functioning

²⁹ Kharkhordin, 206.

³⁰ Bowen argues that Makarenko's system became very influential during the Stalin period (and afterwards) because it served the political needs of the totalitarian state: *Soviet Education*, 191-203. Kharkhordin argues that Makarenko's methods became the model for forming all *kollektiv*y in the Soviet Union: see *The Collective and the Individual*, especially 91-92, 114-117, 210-212. Kharkhordin also provides a useful discussion of the history of the term *kollektiv*, arguing that what defined a true *kollektiv* (as opposed to the more general use of "collective" for any group of colleagues) in Makarenko's time was its ties to the political cause of communism.

kollektiv than to any other question, eventually developing a general, four-step method, outlined by Bowen and Kharkhordin.

In the first stage, the pedagogue simply issued simple external demands, such as rules for behavior, and “collective” life, to the extent it existed, was simply a response to these demands or to other external threats, such as a hunger (something familiar to “gangs” of former *besprizornye*). In the second stage, the “activist group” (*aktiv*) was formed, composed of those individuals who supported these demands and began to follow them. In the third stage, the responsibility for enforcing these demands was passed to the group as a whole, with the *aktiv* enforcing these rules and taking responsibility for shaming and punishing those who transgressed them. It was at this moment that a true *kollektiv* emerged. In the fourth and final stage, full self-governance was introduced, with the punitive power of the collective actually needing to be curtailed, as Makarenko worried that it could become *too* demanding. This stage was also characterized by self-discipline, as each individual member of the collective, fully aware of its rules and bound by “relations of responsible dependence” (in Makarenko’s words) began to scrutinize their own behavior more thoroughly.³¹ The end result was thus a collective that was self-disciplining, both in the sense that the group policed the behavior of its members, and in the sense that each individual policed his or her own conduct.

Makarenko’s method for forming the *kollektiv* thus broadly involved drawing individuals into the larger group and teaching them not simply to subordinate or ignore their own interests in favor of collective interests, but to identify their individual interest with the collective. The promotion of collective interests over one’s self-interest was to be both conscientious and voluntary, but it was also to be absolute. Makarenko even at times seemed to suggest that this dominance of the collective extended to individual identity as well. In *Learning to Live*, one new

³¹ Bowen, 68-112; Kharkhordin, 102-105.

arrival to the commune, Igor, was brought before his new detachment. In turn, the commander introduced and criticized each member of the detachment, providing a quick summary of his abilities and faults. Igor, however, was not given a chance to speak, in accordance with the commune's tradition. "You've nothing to say anyway," the commander noted, because "We shall see for ourselves what kind you are."³² This passage described another practice of the commune, in which each individual member of a detachment would be periodically evaluated by the commander, and the commander's opinion related back to the detachment. In this way, each individual became, in Kharkhordin's words, an "object of public knowledge," with the collective in effect determining each individual's identity within the group.³³ The formation of individual identity (*lichnost'*) thus took place primarily within the larger context of the *kollektiv*: in the same way that the detachment as a whole had measured and individuated each of its members, it would determine what kind of person Igor would be as well.

Yet, as shall become clear in the second half of this chapter, this was not the only way in which individual identity was formed, as communards also engaged in practices of self-narration like writing autobiographies. Despite his belief in the primacy of the collective, Makarenko did not ignore children as individuals; indeed, many of his former pupils remembered not only enjoying a warm personal relationship with Makarenko, but also the way in which Makarenko was adept at varying his methods to best suit individual personalities (a talent that was celebrated by later Soviet and Russian writings as well).³⁴ For Makarenko, the collective and the individual were inextricably linked. On the one hand, Makarenko believed that the individual could only

³² A.S. Makarenko, *Learning to Live: Flashes on the Battlements*, trans. Ralph Parker (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1953), 116.

³³ Kharkhordin, 209-211.

³⁴ Makarenko, *Makarenko: His Life and Work in Education* (1976), 10, 110, 172-173. Roitenberg also described how Makarenko "approached each person individually in each situation" in his memories of the Dzerzhinskii Commune, RGALI f. 332 op. 1 d. 61 ll. 18-30.

truly flourish and reach his or her full potential within a properly constituted collective.³⁵ On the other, the collective could only truly function if each individual was fully committed to its well-being; a single antagonistic or worse, insincerely collectivist individual could disrupt the functioning of a healthy collective. Such was the case with Grisha Ryzhikov, described by Makarenko in *Learning to Live*.³⁶ While Ryzhikov appeared to live an exemplary life at the commune, and had even risen to become a detachment commander, he was secretly engaged in systematic theft of personal items and supplies from the commune, reselling these items for profit. These ongoing thefts created a climate of suspicion at the commune and even threatened to undermine the whole collective spirit of the detachment. When he was finally caught, Ryzhikov became a problem that could not be solved by the commune itself. Instead, Makarenko sent for the police, and Ryzhikov was removed from the commune. This action had the desired affect of restoring the commune's spirit, as if "Ryzhikov had never existed, [and] that the colony had never known sorrow in all its existence."³⁷

In Bowen's argument, Ryzhikov represented a failure of Makarenko's system, a failure that Makarenko himself was willing to acknowledge. This may be true, but the reasons for this failure deserve more scrutiny for what they reveal about Makarenko's ultimate goal at the commune. In *Learning to Live*, Ryzhikov's arrest was followed by a solemn speech given by the policeman Kreutzer, a speech worth quoting at length:

Now you know what an enemy is and how much harm he can do. Your enemies will never come to you in a colorless and dingy guise. They will always seek to dazzle your eyes and worm their way into your heart. They will try to make themselves popular and

³⁵ This point was emphasized often in Makarenko's writings, and presented as one of his core principles in the numerous pedagogical articles and lectures that appeared immediately after his death. See, for example, Kharkhordin, 200-210; and the transcripts of a lecture at the Kharkov scientific-pedagogical session, RGALI f. 332 op. 2 d. 1 l. 26.

³⁶ James Bowen also provides an interesting analysis of Ryzhikov as one of three characters in *Learning to Live* representing the successes and, in the case of Ryzhikov, failure of his method: see Bowen, 156-166.

³⁷ Makarenko, *Learning to Live*, 633, quoted in Bowen, 165.

do all kinds of things for you so that you will consider them your comrades. You have had a good lesson but you must keep a careful look-out...³⁸

This was the classic Stalinist enemy: the double-dealer, the dissimulator who possessed all the apparent external trappings of a loyally Soviet collectivist but hid his true face.³⁹ In his “failure” with Ryzhikov, therefore, Makarenko suggested that an external appearance of collectivism was not enough: each individual communard needed to be internally disciplined and committed to the collective as well. Ryzhikov represented a “failure” precisely because this desired internal transformation was incomplete; whatever his exemplary outward conduct, Ryzhikov, in his core, retained the selfish and cunning mentality of a thief. In this sense, Ryzhikov’s “failure” illustrated, and even validated, the underlying idea that what was ultimately needed was for each individual communard to scrutinize and transform their “inner self.”

Makarenko’s goal was therefore never limited to simply providing the outward trappings of collective life, or simply imposing an external, superficially “collective” discipline (as some of his critics alleged).⁴⁰ It is true that Makarenko put little faith in the notion of “conscious self-discipline” as it was imagined by some Soviet educational theorists. In this theory, true discipline needed to come from a conscientious understanding of why one should act a certain

³⁸ Makarenko, *Learning to Live*, 633-634, quoted in Bowen, 165-166.

³⁹ In this sense, Ryzhikov represented an interesting evolution of the commune’s “outsider”: the individual who would not or could not become a true part of the *kollektiv*. In the Gorky Colony in *Pedagogicheskaiia Poema*, this role was played by Chobot. Chobot was initially expelled from the colony after starting a knife fight with another colonist, but then allowed to return. Chobot was described by Makarenko as a “crisis” for the colony, overly individualistic and aloof from the collective. Part of this crisis stemmed from Chobot’s tragic love for another colonist, Natasha. After learning that Natasha had decided to heed Makarenko’s advice and continue her studies in higher education, rather than marry Chobot and settle for the life of a village farmer, Chobot committed suicide in 1925. Reactions to his suicide on the part of other colonists were hardly charitable and even frightening, as described by Bowen in *Soviet Education*, 99-101. Chobot was called a “kulak,” and one colonist reportedly refused to attend the funeral, declaring “I would hang fellows like Chobot myself.” Yet it should be noted that in this case, hostility toward Chobot derived from his status as an outsider to the collective, as an individualist who (in the minds of the colonists described by Makarenko) allowed his personal interests and obsessions, like romantic love, to undermine the solidarity of the collective. Chobot’s case was therefore different than that of Ryzhikov, who seemed to participate in all aspects of collective life and be a true collectivist, but was later revealed to in fact be a thief and selfish individualist.

⁴⁰ On criticism of Makarenko’s system for its allegedly superficial appearance of collectivism, see Bowen, 124-125. Makarenko also complained about these criticisms in his own writings in RGALI f. 332 op. 4 d. 387 ll. 3-10.

way, or, in Makarenko's dismissive formulation, "from pure consciousness, from purely intellectual conviction."⁴¹ Attempts to instill such consciousness directly only led to the pedagogue delivering entirely ineffective "sermons."⁴² For Makarenko, discipline needed to begin with the collective and was, as Bowen points out, necessarily external. Over time, however, each individual, through the "friendly pressure" of the collective to conform to its rules (in this case, the detachment), and a feeling of mutual responsibility, would begin to internalize these rules and discipline himself. This self-discipline might at first begin as simply as an effort simply to avoid punishment. However, a much more effective way of establishing this self-discipline, both according to Makarenko and the memories of communards, was a feeling of shame before the collective.

This shame was encouraged in a number of ways. For one, punishments and rewards were often collectively distributed to an entire detachment; thus, members whose transgressions had brought punishment upon all, or who had not contributed to the detachment's victory (and therefore had no right to share in it) would feel shame and strive to better themselves. Secondly, one of the harshest punishments for serious infractions was public shaming before the general assembly of communards, a disciplinary measure practiced at both the Dzerzhinskii and Bolshevo communes. These sessions could be extremely harsh in their criticism of the accused, and indeed were sometimes encouraged to be; as Makarenko stated, what was needed in such situations, particularly with individuals who had broken the commune's rules multiple times, was not a "kind heart," but a genuine demonstration of the "power of the collective."⁴³ One of the Bolshevo communards, after being criticized for violating the commune's rules against drinking,

⁴¹ Bowen, 127.

⁴² Kharkhordin, 103. Makarenko also elaborated at length on this idea in an "unofficial report" on the state of the commune in 1930, RGALI f. 332 op. 4 d. 387 ll. 1-4.

⁴³ RGALI f. 332 op. 4 d. 387 l. 7.

would later comment that he would rather pay a fine of 200 rubles, a not insignificant sum, than endure another session in front of the general assembly.⁴⁴ More often, however, minor public shame was applied to small infractions. N.A. Storchakova, for example, remembered that communards who accidentally broke a dish were usually forced to eat from a clay bowl, a sight that would provoke ribbing from other communards and embarrassment from the guilty, so that “next time he would try to be more careful.”⁴⁵

The harshest punishment (expulsion) was reserved for those individuals who, like Ryzhikov, were considered to be incapable of reforming themselves or, worse, to have consciously set themselves against the wider collective. In an earlier case, Makarenko had praised the decision of the Council of Commanders to expel Gershanov, a communard who had stolen several times from the commune. What seemed to be most disturbing in this case for Makarenko was not necessarily Gershanov’s actions (as others had also committed thefts or broken the commune’s rules several times) but his attitude and personality:

[Gershanov is] very developed, capable, cynical, insolent, self-interested, brave, and most importantly has a disturbing moral orientation: he does not respect anyone or anything. He is representative of a rare type, which I call the “unjustified actions” type. These people set themselves against society in an absolutely conscious manner, and do not try to justify their position with any kind of logical principles.⁴⁶

Although Gershanov had some qualities that would seem admirable and desirable, being “developed,” “capable,” and “brave,” the fact that he directed these talents purely toward his own self-interest was what set him apart from the collective. Moreover, the fact that he *consciously* did so – that he, being “developed,” should have known better, and that he did not even try to offer excuses or justifications for his behavior – raised the question of whether

⁴⁴ GARF f. 7952 op. 3 d. 3 l. 45; and Gladyshev, 78-79. The fascinating story of this communard (Panin) is discussed further later in this chapter.

⁴⁵ RGALI f. 332 op. 1 d. 61 l. 50.

⁴⁶ RGALI f. 332 op. 4 d. 387 l. 7.

Gershanov could ever really change, or truly be integrated into the collective. Although Makarenko seemed to suggest that such “types” could be reeducated by “a very strong will, that holds a constant influence over them,” in this case, as in the case of Ryzhikov, expulsion of the problematic individual from the otherwise healthy collective was seen as the solution that best served the interests of the collective as a whole.

This system in turn was emulated in other children’s institutions, with most children’s homes and colonies seeking to implement their own institutions of self-government and collective discipline, and adopting some of Makarenko’s methods in an attempt to form functioning *kollektivy* among their charges – often with mixed results.⁴⁷ In their emphasis on the collective shaping individuals, and the idea that the external discipline provided by collective pressure would eventually be internalized as conscious self-discipline, these communes also provided the model for how Soviet children’s institutions were to go about re-shaping, “re-forging,” and re-educating their charges into disciplined, conscious Soviet citizens – in other words, into Soviet subjects. Thus, despite the extensive attention devoted by Makarenko and others to the question of how to establish a healthy, properly functioning collective, these communes were ultimately concerned with individual self-understanding, consciousness, and transformation. The collective was a powerful means to effect this transformation, but it was not the sole concern. After all, if a secretly self-interested “enemy” like Ryzhikov could so effectively imitate the outward appearance of a committed collectivist, then relying on conformity to imposed social norms, even those powerfully imposed by a fully functioning collective, would not be enough. One’s internal world, self-understanding, and personality had to be changed as well.

⁴⁷ See Chapter Four of this dissertation.

There was a strong discursive element to this process that has not previously been discussed by scholars: at the Bolshevo and Dzerzhinskii communes, former *besprizornye* and juvenile delinquents were not just placed into new living arrangements, but encouraged to narrate their lives in a new way. In doing so, it was hoped, they would begin to think about themselves, and their place in Soviet society, in a new way as well. The commune was therefore simultaneously a social and discursive project, as well as serving as a model for how the mental worlds of Soviet subjects could be changed. Roitenberg alluded to this mission in a 1940 letter to commemorate Makarenko's passing, when he wrote, "Anton Semenovich taught us to place the interests of the collective above our personal interests. This is particularly important now, when the historic Eighteenth Party Congress has established the widespread tasks of communist education for the Soviet people, and overcoming the remnants of capitalism *in the minds of our citizens*."⁴⁸ The experience of the Dzerzhinskii Commune, Roitenberg suggested, showed how these "remnants" could be eradicated, and how the physical "remnants" of the capitalist order (*besprizornye* and criminals) could be taught to think and act like new, Soviet citizens. We shall now turn our attention to an important part of this process: the way in which the Dzerzhinskii and Bolshevo communes encouraged their charges to form this new, Soviet identity for themselves by narrating their life stories in an appropriately "Soviet" manner.

Narrating a Corrected Self: Bolshevo and the Commune as a Discursive Project

Like Soviet citizens in many other contexts, commune residents were encouraged to write about themselves, their lives at the commune, and their ambitions for the future. Moreover, as we shall see, they were encouraged to follow a certain "script" in narrating their lives. The

⁴⁸ RGALI f. 332 op. 1 d. 61 l. 24. Emphasis added.

autobiographical, “textual selves” that were produced in these sources can be read in several different ways. First, these autobiographical sources can simply be mined for information and stories about the commune, an approach taken by the collective history *Bolshevtsy* and by later historians.⁴⁹ Secondly, one might consider such autobiographies as evidence for evaluating the effectiveness of the commune’s methods of reeducation. One could take the fact that many of these autobiographical sources utilized Soviet discourse and presented their authors as reformed and loyal Soviet citizens as evidence that these communes were indeed successful in their goals of rehabilitating former *besprizornye* and juvenile delinquents. However, these sources can also be read in two equally legitimate ways that reveal the commune as not only a social, but a discursive project. First, the very practice of writing these “textual selves” was a part of this effort at reeducation. In the production of these autobiographical sources, communards were encouraged to articulate a new, reformed, Soviet identity for themselves. The scripting of this new identity was therefore not just an end result of “reeducation,” but a key part of this process. These autobiographical stories then formed another model of how residents of Soviet children’s institutions were supposed to talk about their lives and selves. The appearance of such stories in newspapers, in pedagogical literature, and in collections like *Bolshevtsy* helped form an image in Soviet public culture of how Soviet children’s institutions were supposed to function and what their genuinely reformed, truly Soviet graduates should look like.

The idea of the commune as a discursive project can be most clearly seen in a documentary project carried out at the Bolshevo Commune as part of Maxim Gorky’s larger “History of Factories” (*Istoriia zavodov*) that began in 1931. This project, part of a Soviet effort to capture (and, as we shall see, shape) the “real history” of the Soviet working class, brought

⁴⁹ Svetlana Gladyshevskaya, for example, reprints in *Deti bol’shoi bedy* many of stories gathered for the “evening of remembrances” discussed below, but does not really interrogate their form and content. Gladyshevskaya, 62-85.

together workers in various prominent factories to write collectively the history of their enterprise under the guidance and editorial supervision of Gorky.⁵⁰ For the volume on Bolshevo, groups of communards were gathered together for “evenings of remembrances” (*vechera vospominanii*) to discuss and record their memories of the commune, which included not only the development of its industrial enterprises but their own personal stories as well (one of these evenings of remembrances was dedicated to “how we came to the commune”). Participants in these evenings of remembrances seem to have come primarily from the older communards and those involved in the Komsomol, as one might expect.⁵¹ Commune residents were also invited to submit their own written materials for potential inclusion in what eventually would become the book *Bolshevtsy*. Many of the materials gathered for this book, including transcripts of some evenings of reminiscences, have been preserved in the “History of Factories” collection in the Russian archives (GARF f. 7952).⁵² These materials allow us to examine closely the process by which commune residents were encouraged to narrate their own lives, and how these stories were eventually refined and presented in a more explicitly “Soviet” manner in *Bolshevtsy*. At the same time, by analyzing recurring themes, tropes, and language in these various stories, we can

⁵⁰ On the “History of Factories” project, see Katerina Clark “The History of Factories as Factories of History,” in *Autobiographical Practices in Russia*, ed. Jochen Hellbeck and Klaus Heller (Göttingen: V&R Unipress, 2004), 251-278. On Gorky’s documentary efforts, see Elizabeth Papazian, *Manufacturing Truth* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2009). The “History of Factories” project aspired to establish a department in every major factory, and during its height (1932-35) involved as many as eighty-eight full-time writers and journalists: see Clark, 253.

⁵¹ Not every autobiography collected here listed the birth date of the author, as most began immediately with a discussion of how they arrived at the commune. Most respondents, however, seem to have arrived at the commune in 1927-1928. Many also reported that they had extensive criminal histories by this time, suggesting that at the time they entered the commune they were somewhere in their teens to late twenties. O.I. Shlikova, for example, was born in 1905 and was twenty-four when she joined the commune: see Gladys, 71-73. Katarina Clark notes that the organizers of the “History of Factories” project desired narratives that showed the “Bolshevik” history of the working class and were written from an appropriately Marxist-Leninist perspective. Participants in the project were therefore often given a political and literary education, sometimes in a political study circle formed specifically for this purpose. Clark, 265-266. This preference would be consistent with selecting participants for this “evening of reminiscences” from the commune’s Komsomol or political study circle (*kruzhka*).

⁵² The GARF catalog gives 15 October 1931 as the date for the evening of reminiscences “How We Came to the Commune” (op. 3 d. 3). GARF f. 7952 op. 3 d. 5 in turn has materials labeled “conversations with communards” that seem to be from a later date, as they mention events in 1933 (but no later).

begin to understand the “script” of the commune: the general narrative that commune residents tended to follow in telling their stories, and the way in which the act of recounting these individual histories helped to reinforce this narrative.

Previous work on history and memory in the Soviet Union, particularly Frederick Corney’s work on Soviet efforts to shape memories and narratives of the October Revolution, provides a useful comparative context for understanding the Bolshevo Commune as a discursive project. As Corney’s discussion of the activities of the Commission on the History of the October Revolution and the Russian Communist Party (*IstPart*) argues, the task of this commission was not just to gather memories, documents, and other potential historical sources, but to encourage and shape a certain narrative of October (the “correct understanding” of revolution). Despite being officially encouraged, this narrative was not necessarily directly imposed. Rather, this narrative was flexible enough that informants could situate their remembered experiences within it, but was also cultivated and “pruned” by the work of *IstPart* editors who conducted interviews with veterans of October, solicited memories through questionnaires, held evenings of remembrances, and wrote down the memories of those who could not write. The language, phrasing, and topics of questions included in *IstPart* questionnaires also helped guide respondents’ memories in certain directions. As Corney shows, these questionnaires themselves created a certain narrative of the October Revolution as an inexorable, broadly based movement guided by the Bolshevik Party, and sought to draw respondents into this narrative.⁵³ Although *IstPart* and the Soviet government may not have been successful in shaping one single, dominant narrative of October, they did largely succeed in ensuring that the language of the October Revolution, in its Bolshevik interpretation, became the

⁵³ Frederick C. Corney, *Telling October: Memory and the Making of the Bolshevik Revolution* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), 121-122.

major lens through which Soviet citizens articulated and understood their lives in the new Soviet state.⁵⁴

The effort to gather the memories of communards and collectively write the history of the Bolshevo Commune operated in a similar manner. Although the list of questions posed to communards at the evening of remembrances dedicated to “How We Came to the Commune” has not been preserved in the archives, the patterns of responses suggest that such a list did indeed exist and helped to structure the stories told by these communards.⁵⁵ Almost every respondent referred to a “break” (*perelom*), “breaking point” (*perelomnyi moment*), or even posed to themselves the rhetorical question “how did the decisive break happen?” (*kak proizoshel perelom?*), strongly implying that respondents were explicitly asked about a “breaking point” in their lives, perhaps even in the exact words “*kak proizoshel perelom?*”⁵⁶ Similarly, almost every respondent discussed in detail their first experience with work at the commune. This is unsurprising, given the fact that Bolshevo was a labor commune that required its residents to work, but also indicative of questions directed specifically toward this topic. The fact that almost every communard at least mentioned in passing the visit of Iagoda to the commune (usually without really elaborating on this), also implies that they may have been explicitly asked this question, while showing that such questions did not always elicit the desired responses.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Ibid., 201-203.

⁵⁵ Guidelines for the “History of Factories” project advised organizers to distribute questionnaires to provide an “outline” for their respondents’ autobiographies and guide their narratives in certain directions: see Clark, 266.

⁵⁶ Various stories from this evening of remembrances are contained in GARF f. 7952 op. 3 d. 3. Many, drawn from the files of the Istoriko-Kraevedcheskii Muzei g. Koroleva (in which these stories appear in abridged and edited versions, perhaps in preparation for their inclusion in *Bolshevtsy*) are also reprinted in *Bolshevo al'manakh* no. 3 and in Gladyshev, 62-85. I have chosen to use the original archival materials from GARF whenever possible. M.F. Sokolov-Ovchinnikov wrote “what can I say about the breaking point?” (l. 4), Bunakov posed the rhetorical question to himself, “how did the break happen?” (l. 11), others also spoke of a “break” with their past or stated, like Panin, that the Bolshevo Commune “broke my previous habits” (l. 40).

⁵⁷ Iagoda’s visit to the commune was also featured more extensively in Gorkii et al., eds., *Bolshevtsy*, 188-197.

The “script” promoted by such questions was therefore never monolithic, nor even completely defined. Rather, in a process somewhat reminiscent of Hellbeck’s “personal Bolshevism,” each communard personalized this script and, through telling their own story, in some way transformed it.⁵⁸ The same tropes and language tend to appear in each of these autobiographies, but are at times presented in quite different ways. Almost all the communards, for example, discussed examples of “struggle,” but for one this struggle was an ongoing personal battle with alcoholism, while another described her struggle to correct the behavior of unruly new arrivals. At the same time, we should remember that this process was not solely personal – the evenings of remembrances in which such stories were articulated were public events and social spaces in which one related one’s history in front of one’s fellow communards. In this sense, they were more reminiscent of the Soviet practice of writing and often publicly reciting one’s autobiography than of pouring out one’s inner thoughts on the pages of a diary.⁵⁹ Finally, it was precisely these types of discursive practices, like relating one’s personal history at an evening of remembrances, that helped to create this shared “script.” In utilizing a common language and set of narrative tropes to relate one’s personal history, these communards simultaneously personalized and reinforced these tropes, creating a shared narrative of the commune as a place where former criminals were transformed into new, “real people.”

As mentioned above, among the most commonly repeated elements of these stories was the idea of a “decisive break” or *perelom* in one’s life, a great barrier separating one’s life before the commune from one’s current life. This was true even for those communards who admitted that their initial experiences at the commune had sometimes been difficult, or that they had still

⁵⁸ Hellbeck, “Fashioning the Stalinist Soul,” 99-112.

⁵⁹ On the scripting and public recitation of autobiographies, see Halfin, *Terror in My Soul*, particularly 49-64; and Fitzpatrick, *Tear off the Masks!*, 91-101. On practices of “revealing the self,” in part through autobiography though more through self-criticism, see Kharkhordin, 175-181.

been tempted to leave, steal, or otherwise return to their criminal life.⁶⁰ This “break” almost always involved a few key events, usually in a specific succession. The first was a discussion with Pogrebinskii while still in prison, in which Pogrebinskii convinced the prospective communard of the futility of a criminal existence and that the Bolshevo Commune offered the prospect of a better life. M.F. Sokolov-Ovchinnikov remembered Pogrebinskii asking him “how do you think you will live in the future, and what are your prospects (*perspektivy*)?” This question prompted the realization that a criminal life indeed held no future for Sokolov-Ovchinnikov, other than “two months of freedom, two years in prison, in the best case another two months of freedom before prison again, without end.”⁶¹ This conversation and realization in turn prompted a decision to visit the commune “just to see,” often with the intention of running away if things turned out to be not as good as promised.

Upon arrival, however, something began to change for the prospective communard, eventually prompting a genuine break with one’s past life. For some, this was apparently difficult to articulate. Nevertheless, even unknowingly, some decisive change had occurred. Chuvaev, having left the commune to shop in Moscow, remembered feeling again the lure of being among “one’s own” (*svoi* –i.e. juvenile delinquents) and decided not to return to the commune. At night, however, Chuvaev stated “I somehow wasn’t myself. I thought and thought and decided to go back...I decided that I needed to come to a single decision – either leave for good, or stay and live.”⁶² Zaitsev also spoke of “some kind of pull” that kept juvenile delinquents from leaving the commune, though in his case, although Zaitsev stated it was “difficulty to say why,” this pull was tied to the experience of being accepted by the general

⁶⁰ See the autobiographies of Shigareva, Shelukhin, Chuvaev, and Panin, in GARF f. 7952 op. 3 d. 3 l. 40, 63; and Gladyshev, 66, 72.

⁶¹ GARF f. 7952 op. 3 d. 3 l. 1; Gladyshev, 66.

⁶² Gladyshev, 66.

assembly of communards.⁶³ Others, like Sokolov-Ovchinnikov, were much more explicit in declaring that the experience of living by the commune's rules and participating in its collective institutions were key in prompting their break with the past. As Sokolov-Ovchinnikov stated, "after all, if you arrive at the commune and give your word that you won't steal any more, it doesn't mean that your psychology has immediately changed." Rather, what prompted this realization of a genuine "break" for Sokolov-Ovchinnikov was the moment when he, along with the other communards, gathered in the general assembly to criticize three communards who had committed thefts (and even bragged about them) while on leave in Moscow:

This was the first moment when we former thieves became, in our expression, 'twisted' or 'snitches' - that is, we started on the path of struggle with those who stole. This was one of the major moments, when the whole group of former thieves in its entirety moved onto the side of our commune.⁶⁴

After this critical general assembly, one of the thieves left for good; the other two remained and reportedly never violated the rules again.

Many communards attending this evening of remembrances also, unsurprisingly, emphasized the important role of labor in encouraging their break with the past. Labor was presented in these stories not just as work, but as a profoundly transformative experience, reaching even to one's "soul."⁶⁵ N.M. Shelukhin remarked that his first impression of the commune was very positive: everything was "comfortable, clean, comradely." It was his first experience of real labor, however, that truly changed his life:

In my whole life I had never been in a factory, and here I saw everything with my own eyes. I walked into the mechanical workshop and saw Vasia Agakina, how he was working at a workbench. I spent half an hour with him, listening to his stories, and this

⁶³ GARF f. 7952 op. 3 d. 3 l. 25.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, l. 6.

⁶⁵ The term "soul" (*dusha*) appears often in these types of autobiographical sources to denote one's inner self: see, for example, Podlubnyi's use of the term "soul" in Hellbeck, "Fashioning the Stalinist Soul," 81.

half-hour drew me in and seized my soul to the point that I decided to quit all my thieving.⁶⁶

A.E. Umnov had a similar tale of being transformed by labor, though not in the immediate sense of Shelukhin. After being placed in the blacksmith workshop, Umnov was surprised to discover his own talents: “the first industrial fervor (*proizvodstvennyi azart*) I felt was when I saw that I alone, without the help of others, could make valuable things out of hot metal.”⁶⁷ After realizing his abilities, Umnov was seized by a desire to become a skilled worker, thus setting him on the path to his current position as head of metalworking for the commune’s ice skate factory. Many other communards also discussed their current work with pride, often contrasting their current position with their past life to emphasize again the decisive break that had occurred. As one communard, Comrade Surovtsova, stated, “everyone has left prison behind, and it needs to be finished with once and for all. Now I work in the textile factory, and hold a position of responsibility.”⁶⁸ In this immediate juxtaposition of the past (prison) and present (responsible work), Surovtsova highlighted the break that the commune had wrought in her life.

Finally, some communards presented this “break” as simply a realization of a change that had long been in development. Sokolov-Ovchinnikov, commenting on his reaction to Pogrebinskii’s visit in the OGPU prison, stated, “incidentally, it had already been clear to me for a long time that I had no prospects in life.”⁶⁹ It was not until he arrived at the commune, however, that he discovered a way to gain these prospects. B.I. Bunakov portrayed his decision to join the commune (and remain there) as the culmination of a gradual process of increasing political knowledge and self-awareness. While still in prison, Bunakov had begun to read books on politics and Marxism at first out of sheer boredom, but then with increasing interest. He

⁶⁶ GARF f. 7952 op. 3 d. 3 l. 47; Gladyshev, 77.

⁶⁷ Gladyshev, 65.

⁶⁸ GARF f. 7952 op. 3 d. 3 l. 66.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, l. 1.

particularly remembered reading one book that described how thieves steal because they have nothing to eat and do not work; if they were given work, they would not steal. This thought convinced him to give the Bolshevo Commune a chance, since he had heard that they provided work training. Interestingly, this was Bunakov's second chance to join the commune – in the first instance, before he had begun to educate himself, Bunakov had agreed to go with Pogrebinskii only in the hope that he might escape, which he managed to do as soon as they left the Lubyanka prison. After spending another eight months in prison and becoming absorbed in books, however, Bunakov had a change of heart: “even before entering the commune I felt that stealing was disadvantageous, didn't bring any good, and only killed a person. For this reason I didn't run away from the commune. I didn't even waver...who would choose to exchange an honest, calm life for that of a thief? That is simply insanity!”⁷⁰

As illustrated particularly in Bunakov's autobiography, all of these stories presented a narrative of personal transformation as well. Life at the commune had done more than provide improved material circumstances, work training, and “prospects” for the future, including the very important chance to have one's criminal convictions removed and thereby become a full Soviet citizen. The change from “thief” to “communard” celebrated in the song “Kommunary” was presented not merely as a change in lifestyle, but in their very selves. Every comunard who participated in this evening of remembrances stated that the experience of being trusted, of being treated as if they were “real people” and already not convicted criminals, had left a profound impression. Sokolov-Ovchinnikov related the story of how, when told that the commune had no guards and that he would be allowed to live freely (“*na svobode*”), he at first assumed this was a trick. On the road to the commune, however, the new recruits, having come straight from prison, were given tobacco and money to buy their own lunch. This experience of

⁷⁰ Ibid., ll. 10-13; Gladyshev, 68-70.

being trusted did much to change Sokolov-Ovchinnikov's opinion about the commune, as did his interactions with the OGPU staff working there. Sokolov-Ovchinnikov recalled his shock at the way these OGPU personnel, "whom we had always been afraid of," treated them "like comrades, shook our hands, spoke warmly with us. This made us feel that we were not longer thieves, that we were also people, if the GPU treated us this way, like equals."⁷¹ V.B. Veidner, another communard, also spoke of the profound impression created by the experience of being trusted. It was standard practice at the Bolshevo Commune for communards in various workshops and positions of responsibility to be given the keys to the commune's storage warehouses. This in itself signaled an important degree of trust, as thefts from storage areas were fairly common in Soviet institutions, including collective farms and children's homes. Veidner was more profoundly affected, however, by being trusted with 1000 rubles of the commune's money to buy materials for its factories. As Veidner recalled, he had handled greater sums of money in his life as a thief, but after receiving this sum of money from the commune director, without any problems or questions, "I understood that I was genuinely trusted, and this meant that it was already possible to live."⁷²

Another key part of this narrative of personal transformation was the idea of a genuine struggle to improve oneself and a growing degree of self-awareness and self-discipline. Several of these communards mentioned their difficulties at first in adjusting to the more strict life at the commune, or the temptation of returning to criminal life. Chuvaev, as already mentioned, discussed his aborted attempt to run away from the commune and resume life among "our own" in Moscow. Few others mentioned an actual desire to leave the commune, except during their first few days as they waited to see if the commune would live up to its promises. Several

⁷¹ GARF f. 7952 op. 3 d. 3 l. 4.

⁷² Gladyshev, 75.

others, however, discussed their struggles to obey the core rules of the commune, most notably the promise that they would not drink and not steal. I.S. Panin, in particular, related the difficulties he had with abstaining from alcohol. While he proudly declared that he had managed to refrain from drinking while on the grounds of the commune, he would often drink on weekends while visiting Moscow, something he regretted but struggled to stop. (Panin also reported that he had begun drinking at age eleven and had a history of alcoholism in his family.) Once, after becoming particularly drunk in Moscow and returning to the commune with a nasty hangover, Panin was certain that he would be kicked out. Melikhov, however, treated his problem with sympathy and gave him another chance to show that he would not drink. Panin managed to refrain for another seven months, before indulging “just a little.” While on vacation (*otpusk*) to Moscow, Panin again began to drink, and became so uncomfortable with this situation that he decided to end his vacation and return to the commune early. Moreover, realizing that if he went to Moscow, he would always end up drinking (or worse – on one trip, Panin recalled that he almost left the commune completely after a chance meeting with some old “comrades,” but was helped home by his fellow communards), Panin asked the commune leadership not to be given permission to go to Moscow in the future. Twice, however, Panin ended up getting drunk again, resulting first in fines, and then a meeting of the general assembly to criticize Panin’s behavior. As Panin recalled, “it was so difficult for me in front of the assembly, that it would have been better to pay a 200 ruble fine than live through that. I became completely depressed.”⁷³ Finally, however, he decided to “put a cross [*postavit’ krest*] on the past” (i.e. bury the past) and for three months did not visit Moscow or drink, causing Panin to declare, “the commune has completely broken all my old habits.” This triumph, however, was still not complete, as Panin admitted, “as for drinking, I can’t guarantee. It is very difficult for

⁷³ GARF f. 7952 op. 3 d. 3 l. 45; Gladyshev, 78-79.

me to struggle with this.” Panin was committed to his future at the Bolshevo Commune, hoping that he could eventually receive an apartment for his wife and “little monkey” (his child), and declaring “I don’t want to leave [the commune]; rather I have decided to reeducate myself for good.”⁷⁴

Panin’s story is compelling for many reasons, not the least of which is the human dimensions of his struggle and the way his frank discussion of his problems with alcoholism feels very honest in a way that many Stalin-era writings do not. Panin’s story, however, also illustrates the way in which these narratives adopted the discourse of struggle that permeated the era of the Five-Year Plan and Stalin’s Cultural Revolution.⁷⁵ Personal difficulties, temptations to violate the commune’s rules or return to one’s previous criminal life, and other setbacks were presented to show how, with individual will, growing self-awareness, and the assistance of the collective, such problems could be overcome and individuals transformed (even if this triumph, as in the case of Panin, might still be incomplete).

Other communards related similar, though not as extensive, stories of a struggle to overcome previous habits through a growing self-awareness and self-discipline. Sokolov-Ovchinnikov, for example, stated that he made the decision not to take his allowed vacation in Moscow because he realized that he had no real reason to go there, except “to steal.”⁷⁶ Sokolov-Ovchinnikov characterized this as an important moment in his life at the commune, and part of a realization that he could change his habits and “psychology.” Shlikova also discussed how her initial involvement in social work and the commune’s activist core (*aktiv*) stemmed from a desire

⁷⁴ GARF f. 7952 op. 3 d. 3 l. 45; Gladyshev, 79.

⁷⁵ Stepan Podlubnyi also conceived of his life as a constant struggle: see Hellbeck, “Fashioning the Stalinist Soul,” 101-102. Stalinist culture was pervaded with the language of struggle, military mobilization, “campaigns,” and other allusions to conflict: see, for example, Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*, 29-33. Stalinist culture also promoted self-scrutiny and “working on oneself” as another type of struggle: see Hoffmann, *Stalinist Values*, 52-53. On the increasing importance attributed to individual will and restraint in the 1930s, see Halfin, *Terror in my Soul*, 186-188; and Hellbeck, *Revolution on my Mind*, 32-35.

⁷⁶ GARF f. 7952 op. 3 d. 3 l.3; Gladyshev 67.

to “keep myself away from trouble (*uderzhat’ sebia ot plokhogo*).”⁷⁷ Whereas she once might have given in to the temptation to play cards or drink, as an activist it was even more necessary to set a good example and resist these urges. Through her political and social work, Shlikova had overcome such habits and now “lived wonderfully.” Such struggles and temptations served a specific role in these narratives, by providing an opportunity for the communard to demonstrate their willpower, reject these temptations, and therefore show the degree to which their consciousness (“psychology”) and understanding of themselves had changed.

The end of these stories, with the possible exception of Panin, was therefore almost always a declaration of triumph: of having successfully overcome these initial struggles, of having executed a definitive break with one’s criminal past, of building a new life within the commune, and of becoming a completely different person. Often this narrative of individual transformation and development was tied to the development of the commune as well. Having been transformed by their experience at the commune, these communards now reemphasized their commitment to building the commune and working with new residents to help them undergo the same transformation. Shlikova, for example, declared:

Now I will never leave the commune. I love it so much it hurts. Yesterday I came home only at three in the morning. We had a particularly boisterous dormitory meeting. I’m attached there to work with the girls. We put on trial some of the new girls for swearing and for absenteeism. I often couldn’t speak, my throat seized up from agitation. I want to refine (*obrabotat’*) them, to show them a better life- my soul feels for them.⁷⁸

A.N. Pogodin, an older communard, also took up this question in his autobiography, declaring “right now I think that we need to create a plan for the development of the commune until, for example, 1940. We should know what we are developing towards.”⁷⁹ Pogodin went on to list some of the improvements that could be made, including better club facilities, more cultural

⁷⁷ Gladyshev, 72.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 73.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 83.

activities, a daycare for children of communards, and other improvements that would ensure “the commune will grow and be strengthened, and people will talk about it.” Pogodin ended his story, however, with a piece of reflection similar to the many other communards who expressed amazement at how much they had changed, or noted, like Shelukhin, that in their days as a thief “I could never have imagined I would be like this.”⁸⁰ Pogodin stated:

Sometimes I ponder whether I am sorry about the past. Sometimes I am sorry that so much time was lost. I feel that, considering my level of development, I could have brought more good, but on the other hand I received a good education from life. It is as if I have been born for a second time in the commune.⁸¹

Although Pogodin did not seem to regret completely his past life as a criminal, he was adamant that this life was indeed behind him, and that he had been “born again” as a completely different person within the commune.

While each of these communards related their own version of how they left their criminal past behind and began a new life at the Bolshevo Commune, their stories shared many key elements. These included an identification of a distinct “break” with the past, a focus on the transformative effect of life in the commune (particularly labor), a discussion of struggles overcome through self-discipline and the help of the wider collective, and a final declaration of having become a completely new person, now fully committed to building one’s life within the commune. Taken together, these elements formed a general “script” for discussing one’s history and transformation at the commune. The astute reader will recognize that many elements of this “script” were precisely those aspects of Makarenko’s pedagogy, and the similar system of Bolshevo, that were identified in the first part of this chapter as providing the model for other Soviet institutions. This is not a coincidence. Rather, it is indicative of the way in which the pedagogical system of these communes and their discursive projects operated in tandem. While

⁸⁰ GARF f. 7952 op. 3 d. 3 l. 47.

⁸¹ Gladyshev, 83.

the pedagogical system, with its new social arrangements and emphasis on the primacy of the collective, sought to effect a transformation in these former *besprizornye* and juvenile delinquents, the discursive environment of the commune simultaneously promoted a narrative of this transformation, and encouraged communards to adopt this narrative when describing themselves and their lives at the commune.

It must be again reiterated that this general narrative was not necessarily imposed, but it was ever-present and encouraged in organized practices like these evenings of remembrances, or in the autobiographies that had to be submitted for acceptance into the Komsomol. In fact, there are a number of interesting similarities between the general “script” of these communards and the autobiographies of Communist Party applicants analyzed by Igal Halfin. Like these aspiring party members, communards concentrated on those moments in their life that seemed “morally meaningful” – in this case, clearly delineating one’s past from one’s present or signaling one’s transformation (whether gradual or sudden) from “thief” to “communard.” The experience of “conversion” was again the centerpiece of these narratives, the moment when the narrator, previously confused, spiritually restless, and unhappy, had shed their old life and embraced a new, “corrected self.”⁸² The similarities between these two general scripts may have stemmed from more than a shared Soviet discourse that emphasized the ability of individuals to remake themselves; most of the communards who participated in this evening of remembrances were either already Komsomol members or expressed their ambitions to join the Communist Party.

The narratives of these communards were therefore “Soviet,” despite the fact that none of these communards explicitly referred to the Soviet government (with the exception of its representatives in the OGPU) or used the popular term “Soviet power” (*Sovetskaia vlast’*) when

⁸² Halfin, *Terror in My Soul*, 43-58. These tropes also broadly appeared in other writings from the “History of Factories” project: see Clark, 255-256.

discussing their transformation at the Bolshevo Commune. Nor did the Soviet government explicitly appear in a letter sent by communards to Gorky in April of 1930, though many other “Soviet” themes did, particularly those of the first Five-Year Plan. The letter, beyond simply listing recent achievements at the commune, again emphasized a narrative of revolutionary change in the communards’ lives. The communards had been “people of the past, people of the frenzied moment (*liudi minutnogo ugara*), whose lives were bound for the gloomy vaults of prisons,” but now “we live again, feeling the sunlit youth of life. We live and are proud.”⁸³ Moreover, these communards were now caught up in the changes sweeping the Soviet Union, writing “we burn with the youth of the revolutionary storm” and “we live, struggle, and labor. We look at the future clearly and irresistibly.” Finally, the letter reaffirmed these communards’ commitment to building a better, Soviet future, declaring “Yes, Aleksei Maksimovich! We live and build, and burn with the fire of the bright future.”⁸⁴ In this way, the Bolshevo communards made themselves and the Bolshevo Commune a part of the wider Soviet project, but without explicitly mentioning Stalin or the Soviet government.

When the collection *Bolshevtsy* was finally published in 1936, this apparent oversight was “corrected.”⁸⁵ With the Stalin cult in full swing, and Soviet public discourse insistently declaring the gratitude of the whole Soviet people to Stalin personally, *Bolshevtsy* framed its narrative in much more overtly politicized terms. Though still a story about, in the words of Gorky’s introduction, “how an antisocial, deeply anarchistic person transformed into a conscious proletarian, revolutionary, and Communist,” the actor ultimately responsible for this

⁸³ Letter from Bolshevo communards to A.M. Gorky, 22 April 1930, in *Bolshevo al'manakh*, 127.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 128.

⁸⁵ This was also not unusual for the “History of Factories” project, as the project had always aimed at promoting a specifically Bolshevik narrative, and worried that workers would not necessarily tell the “right” stories. The editorial process therefore played a role in shaping these published narratives, by selecting which materials to include or condensing and editing individual biographies, for example. Yet, as Clark argues, these published volumes retained some of the individual character of these workers’ stories and tended to show more generic and stylistic variety than socialist realist novels. Clark, 273-276.

transformation had changed.⁸⁶ The earlier stories related by communards in the “evening of remembrances” discussed above had often focused on an individual’s struggle to change him or herself, with the assistance of the collective and the whole commune helping to facilitate this change. While this trope still appeared in *Bolshevtsy*, the collection not only shifted focus generally away from individual stories to a largely third-person (and frankly, much more bland) history of the commune, but also emphasized this history as the fulfillment of the will of the Communist Party and Stalin. A letter to Iagoda that served as a preface, apparently written by the same M. Sokolov (now a Party member) discussed above, declared:

We have told you many times how Stalin ordered the Cheka to turn us, lawbreakers, into useful people...Dzerzhinskii and you, a faithful disciple of Stalin, created all the conditions for our reeducation into equal (*ravnopravnyi*) citizens of the Soviet Union. Now we ourselves govern the work and life of communes and labor colonies in our country... We want to tell you, tell Stalin, tell our whole people with all our voice, that we value our new lives and will give them up only for our country, our people, our party, our Stalin.⁸⁷

In this passage, the twin pillars of Stalinist public culture, gratitude and obligation, show clearly.⁸⁸ While the Bolshevo communards appear here as masters of their own lives (“we ourselves govern the work and life of communes”), they have also not forgotten to whom they owe these new lives, and for whom these lives might need to be sacrificed.

Other speeches on the occasion of the commune’s tenth anniversary, also reprinted in *Bolshevtsy*, continued to emphasize this obligation. Emelian Iaroslavskii, the head of the League of the (Militant) Godless, reminded communards “you have become who you are now only thanks to our Great Stalin, only thanks to our party.”⁸⁹ Pogrebinskii’s celebratory address

⁸⁶ Gorkii et al., eds., *Bolshevtsy*, 9.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁸⁸ See Jeffrey Brooks’ discussion of the “economy of the gift” in Stalinist public culture in Brooks, *Thank You Comrade Stalin*, 83-105. See also Chapter One and Chapter Four of this dissertation for other examples of this discourse being applied to former *besprizornye*.

⁸⁹ Gorkii et al., eds., *Bolshevtsy*, 548.

declared that Bolshevo, as a “factory of people,” was successful only because Iagoda was “a true son of the Motherland, a true Bolshevik, true to his party, a true student of Stalin...precisely this ensured victory.” Nor was this discourse unique to *Bolshevtsy*; the official NKVD declaration celebrating the tenth anniversary of the Bolshevo Commune, before listing communards and staff that were to receive congratulatory prizes, reminded communards “in all this you are indebted to the party and Soviet power. The party and Soviet power taught you to respect and love labor. They created the conditions in which you received the full possibility to develop all your talents and abilities...”⁹⁰ In this new version of the general narrative of the commune, all of its successes in re-educating and transforming former criminals were now attributed ultimately to the beneficence and vision of the Soviet state and, most importantly, Stalin himself.

“The Commune Raised Me in the Communist Spirit”: Autobiography in the Dzerzhinskii Commune

Though most institutions did not engage in the same type of elaborate discursive project as the Bolshevo Commune, they did commonly involve their charges in the simple Soviet discursive project of writing short autobiographies, usually ranging from a single paragraph to at most a few pages. In writing such autobiographies, residents of children’s homes and communes were encouraged to script Soviet identities for themselves, elaborating on their professional ambitions and desires to become part of the wider Soviet society. Such was the case at the Dzerzhinskii Commune as well, as autobiographies written by communards for the educational section in 1936 have been preserved in Makarenko’s personal files (RGALI f. 332). These

⁹⁰ *Bolshevo al'manakh*, 124. Among the “old communards” and “builders of the commune” listed to receive prizes were Sokolov-Ovchinnikov, Chuvaev, Shelukhin, and Pogodin, who all participated in the “evening of remembrances” discussed above.

autobiographies offer a particularly interesting insight into the discursive project of the Dzerzhinskii Commune, as the majority of other sources on the operations and reeducational efforts of the commune come from Makarenko's own writings. Though not as elaborate as the extensive narratives provided by the Bolshevo communards, these short autobiographies were also clearly written in response to a series of provided questions, and followed some of the same contours. At the same time, however, these autobiographies also reveal the way in which these discursive projects required active participation on the part of communards, the results of which could not be predetermined. Many communards, even at a celebrated institution like the Dzerzhinskii Commune, did not construct elaborately "Soviet" narratives for themselves, wrote only a minimal amount, or otherwise produced autobiographies that most likely did not live up to the expectations of this project.

Every autobiography included certain key details: when a communard was born, when they left home, why they left home, when they entered the commune, and what they hoped to become after leaving the commune. Several autobiographies did not go beyond these questions, providing, in some cases, only one word answers. One communard's "autobiography" simply read: "1. 15 years old 2. 1935, Feb. 17 3. my uncle and aunt died 4. sports trainer."⁹¹ Such simplistic answers were undoubtedly frustrating for Soviet educators who expected this series of questions to elicit a more elaborate response. Many other autobiographies did provide more discussion on several of these points, particularly a communard's future goals. In fitting with Makarenko's emphasis on communards' future as opposed to their past lives, communards were also asked to discuss their life at the commune and their professional or educational ambitions. Many lauded the educational opportunities provided at the commune, writing, for example, "if you want to study the commune gives every opportunity for this," or "I now have a plan to finish

⁹¹ RGALI f. 332 op. 2 d. 39 l. 11.

my secondary education and the commune gives me every opportunity to finish school and work.”⁹² With regard to their future plans, communards expressed a range of desired professions. Some hoped to study further at technical colleges, institutes, or universities in order to become agronomists, astronomers, mechanical engineers, and doctors.⁹³ Military professions also seem to have been popular, with various communards expressing desires to be pilots and snipers, graduate from a naval academy, or simply “go to some kind of military school.”⁹⁴ Several others spoke specifically of the ways in which the training and activities provided at the Dzerzhinskii Commune had furthered their professional ambitions. One young man expressed pride that he would receive qualification as a skilled worker at the commune and stated “I will definitely be a photographer (*fotoapparator*).”⁹⁵ Another fourteen-year-old girl discussed her participation in the commune’s choir and how this practice was furthering her ambition to become a singer.⁹⁶ Finally, one communard admitted that, apart from a goal of finishing secondary school and the worker’s school (*rabfak*) at the commune, “I don’t know where I will study further.”⁹⁷

The majority of these autobiographies were simple responses to this series of questions, often no more than three or four sentences long. Their relative brevity suggests that most of these children understood the given set of questions as exactly that: questions to be answered directly, and not necessarily invitations to elaborate on these key biographical details or arrange them into a coherent narrative. Some autobiographies, however, did show efforts to construct such a narrative, employing some of the same discourse of transformation and gratitude to the

⁹² Ibid., ll. 4, 9.

⁹³ Ibid., ll. 1, 48, 109, 214, 235.

⁹⁴ Ibid., ll. 5, 15, 17, 92.

⁹⁵ Ibid., l. 221. It should be noted that *fotoapparator*, apparently derived by this communard from the Russian word for camera (*fotoapparat*) is not necessarily the correct term; usually a photographer is a *fotograf*.

⁹⁶ Ibid., l. 69.

⁹⁷ Ibid., l. 4.

commune as the more elaborate autobiographies gathered at Bolshevo. Several seem to have been responding to the question, whether explicitly or implicitly posed, of “what has the commune given you?” Many of these expressed gratitude for educational opportunities and labor training, writing, for example, “I will receive working credentials and leave the commune as an educated person.”⁹⁸ Many took up at least in part the discourse of transformation and reeducation. One teenage boy wrote “I am very satisfied with the commune because I am being reeducated here.”⁹⁹ Another wrote “the commune has given me industry, education, and an upbringing in the communist spirit.”¹⁰⁰ Though these autobiographies were still usually not extensive or elaborate, they had begun to describe their lives using the encouraged language and tropes of reeducation, opportunity, and gratitude.

Others stressed the way in which the commune had fulfilled their own desires to improve themselves, a project that was sometimes emphasized as being ongoing. One sixteen-year old girl wrote, “when I entered the commune I dreamed of being a disciplined communaard...now I dream of being a pilot and try to be a good person. I want to enter independent life, a life of culture.”¹⁰¹ Another communaard offered this explanation for why he joined the commune: “I wanted to be a real person, which I would have never learned to do in my home circumstances.”¹⁰² Others also expressed gratitude for a chance at a “new life” in the commune. A seventeen-year-old girl declared, for example, “the commune helps me in my studies, in my work, brings me up well, and I am very glad that the commune is raising me for a new life. When I left home I was fourteen. I did not spend a single day on the streets. Now I have moved

⁹⁸ Ibid., l. 221.

⁹⁹ Ibid., l. 1.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., l. 5.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., l. 17.

¹⁰² Ibid., l. 42.

on to a new, happy life.”¹⁰³ Finally, several other autobiographies explicitly declared their desire to live as useful, productive Soviet citizens. The aspiring singer mentioned previously also wrote “I want to study and work in order to be useful to the Soviet Union,” while another communitarian stated “I became interested in the commune because it raises the kind of people who are needed by our country.”¹⁰⁴ Such explicitly patriotic autobiographies (which, it should be noted, were relatively few) thus tied the commune’s project of individual transformation to the needs of the Soviet Union as a whole, reflecting a larger discourse that had always presented the reeducation of juvenile delinquents and *besprizornye* as a concern for the Soviet state and part of the larger effort to build socialism.

Taken together, these autobiographies from the Dzerzhinskii Commune showed some of the same language and tropes as those from the Bolshevo Commune. Though most autobiographies remained simple, many did feature some elements of the same general “script,” including an emphasis on the process of reeducation and individual transformation, becoming a “real person” at the commune, beginning a “new life,” and aspiring to become a productive, cultured, useful Soviet citizen. Few were as adept at crafting this narrative of individual transformation, however, as V.K. Varenik (b. 1918), who joined the commune in 1933. Along with producing the longest of these autobiographies, Varenik most confidently employed various Soviet tropes to create a coherent narrative of a worker’s son, forced by difficult material circumstances to leave home, who found a new life, new identity, and new future at the commune. Beginning with his origins as the son of a miner in the Donbass region, Varenik went on to describe how, when health problems required his father to retire from mining and no one

¹⁰³ Ibid., l. 235.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., ll. 69, 109.

else in the family could work, he was forced to move to Kharkov to live with his brother for two years. At this point, Varenik made a decision that changed his life:

Having heard about the commune, I had no desire to live with [my brother]. I understood that for my future life it was necessary to work and study a lot. This would not only set my path in life, but make me a useful person for our country. I joined the commune in 1933. This was the most dramatic moment in the growth of the commune. I was not afraid of difficulties, and I even didn't notice them in the commune.¹⁰⁵

As with several of the autobiographies discussed above, Varenik portrayed the decision to join the commune as both beneficial for his individual future and for the Soviet Union as a whole. Moreover, he understood that this path would contain “difficulties,” but that through his own efforts and the work of the commune he would become a new person and gain a new life.

Varenik went on to describe the ways in which the commune had assisted him, including work training, study in the worker's school, and the opportunity to try to apply to a university.

This was accompanied by an equally important, ongoing process of individual transformation:

In my three years at the commune, I have dramatically changed in all respects: I have grown cultured, received a secondary education, qualifications. In a word, the commune has raised me in the Communist spirit. However, before I leave the commune I still need to work on myself.¹⁰⁶

Thus, Varenik portrayed this process of transformation as still incomplete; though he had “dramatically changed,” there was still room for improvement, for further “work on myself.”¹⁰⁷

Varenik ended his autobiography with a confident declaration that in this effort, as in his previous endeavors, he would succeed: “I will be accepted into higher education (VUZ). In order to do this I will need to study well and read a lot. And I will fulfill this task.”¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 29.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 29.

¹⁰⁷ This notion of “working on oneself,” including through the act of writing, was a common feature of Soviet autobiographical texts: see Jochen Hellbeck, “Working, Struggling, Becoming: Stalin-Era Autobiographical Texts,” *Russian Review* 60, no. 3 (July 2001): 340-359.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 29.

Varenik's autobiography serves as an example of a communard who learned to employ confidently the discursive tropes of the Dzerzhinskii Commune to construct a narrative of his transformation into a new, more Soviet self. Along with the more extensive narratives created at the Bolshevo Commune and the other Dzerzhinskii Commune autobiographies that drew on at least some of the same tropes, this autobiography shows that some residents did become enthusiastic participants in the communes' discursive project, shaping their life stories to fit a general model and, in the process, creating a new identity for themselves (at least in these texts) as transformed, reeducated, committed and confident future contributors to Soviet society. On the other hand, such extensive, "Soviet" narratives made up a minority of these autobiographies, even at the celebrated Dzerzhinskii Commune. (Varenik's autobiography was only one of many dozen found in this file). In other words, few of these communards constructed the same kind of sophisticated, ideologically sound "textual self" for themselves as the participants in Bolshevo's evening of remembrances or the older residents of the Dzerzhinskii Commune like Varenik. While the communes were permeated with this discourse of transformation and the promises of a bright future, not every communard displayed the same mastery of this discourse, or, perhaps, the same desire to participate in this discursive project. The stark difference between Varenik's extensive narrative and an "autobiography" consisting only of one-word answers serves as a reminder that this discourse, however pervasive, was not all-powerful in its influence, and that any project of this type relied on the participation and effort of its subjects.

Such autobiographies did not serve as the only means by which communards were encouraged to adopt a discourse of transformation and building a "new life" at the commune. Commemorative addresses, speeches, and other official events also provided important occasions for promoting this discourse. The fourth anniversary of the Dzerzhinskii Commune in 1932, for

example, saw the head of the commune's Komsomol organization deliver a congratulatory address to Makarenko that presented his work as a key part of the wider Soviet project of building socialism. Through the work of the commune, this address stated, Makarenko was making the "precepts of Ilyich and the directives of the Party" into reality; from the very first days of the commune, its goal had been to create "educated cadres of cultured and honest workers, who will be useful on all fronts of our socialist construction."¹⁰⁹ For each communard, this was a process of individual change, of working toward becoming the desired New Soviet Person. "Your wish to see within every *besprizornyi* a person, able to work and to become a useful member of society, [and] your certainty that there are no children who cannot be reeducated," the address stated, "have been confirmed by the results of your many years of work."¹¹⁰ However, while the address gave particular credit to Makarenko personally, expressing both gratitude and love for the communards' "best friend and comrade," it also presented the commune as a project that required both the "ideological leadership of the Party and Komsomol" and the participation of communards. The key feature of the commune, and what supposedly set it apart from other institutions, was its collective: "our commune...is being raised (*vospityvaetsia*) by the collective of the communards themselves. We do not have educators (*vospitateli*)- we have a collective."¹¹¹ In this way, the commune was presented as a uniquely participatory project, where communards were not merely the objects of reeducation, but were in fact re-educating themselves. The address then ended with a reemphasis on Makarenko's work as being part of the larger, ongoing Soviet project, declaring "we wish you strength for further, diligent work in raising the New Person (*novyi chelovek*)."¹¹² The occasion

¹⁰⁹ RGALI f. 332 op. 4 d. 391 l. 1.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, l. 1.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, l. 1.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, l. 2.

of the commune's anniversary thus became an opportunity both to stress the re-educative project of the commune, and the communards' own participation in this project.

“A Symbol of Our Time”: The Communes as Discursive Models

Soviet newspaper articles, delegations to the Bolshevo and Dzerzhinskii communes (and their predecessor, the Gorky Colony), and Makarenko's own popular writings, most notably *Pedagogicheskaiia Poema*, in turn made these communes and their program of reeducation a part of the wider Soviet public culture.¹¹³ For many Soviet citizens, these communes became the very image of how a “Soviet” children's institution should function. The first Soviet sound film, 1931's *Road to Life* (*Doroga v Zhizn'*), also did much to popularize this image of Soviet children's institutions, as it told the story of an uncouth and undisciplined, but essentially good, group of *besprizornye* (evidently played in some cases by actual former *besprizornye*) who passed through a fictionalized institution closely resembling the Gorky Colony or Bolshevo Commune.¹¹⁴ The widespread influence of these communes as both educational and discursive models can be seen in the numerous letters sent to both Makarenko and Pogrebinskii, ranging from “fan letters” (particularly following the publication of *Pedagogicheskaiia Poema*) to other

¹¹³ Makarenko's own writings appeared in wide-circulation newspapers like *Literaturnaia Gazeta* and received broad print runs: see Bowen, 4-12, 150-152. Other Soviet newspapers, including in some cases smaller district newspapers, also featured stories about Makarenko and the Bolshevo Commune, particularly to commemorate the anniversaries of their founding. See, for example, “Nakanune slavnogo desiatiletiiia” [On the Eve of a Glorious Ten-Year Anniversary], *Za udarnye tempi* (Shelkovo, Moscow region) 14 April 1937, TsGAMO f. 916 op. 1 d. 322 l. 35 (on Dzerzhinskii Commune); and “Bolshevskaiia kommuna,” *Pravda* 11 June 1935. Both articles featured some of the same tropes of transformation, reeducation, and gratitude to the Soviet state discussed above.

¹¹⁴ Though the film itself never mentioned either institution by name, various sources have claimed the Gorky Colony or the Bolshevo Commune as the inspiration for the labor colony depicted in the film: see Bowen, 5; *Bolshevo al'manakh*, 161; and Khillig, 77. The film itself was reportedly widely popular with audiences, though surprisingly less so with Soviet critics: see Peter Kenez, *Cinema and Soviet Society 1917-1953* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 120-121. A later Soviet assessment of the film was more positive, highlighting its humanism and its themes of the importance of trust, the collective, and the role of labor in forming the human personality (*lichnost'*). D.S. Pisarevskii, *Sto fil'mov sovetskogo kino* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo “Iskusstvo,” 1967), 47.

pedagogues asking for advice to former pupils offering expressions of gratitude or, sometimes, asking for help. All these letters reproduced some of the same discourse discussed above, reinforcing the notion that these communes demonstrated both that the reeducation of juvenile delinquents and *besprizornye* was possible, and that the organized, collective life practiced in these communes was the means to do so.

Letters from admirers of *Pedagogicheskaiia Poemam* and Makarenko's other works in particular took up the idea that Makarenko's work demonstrated the possibility of remaking troublesome youth through the proper organization of collective life. Enthusiastic fans called Makarenko "the foremost engineer of human souls" and congratulated him on his "heroic victory over people who did not even resemble people" and successes in turning "hooligans and moral freaks (*urody*)" into "real people."¹¹⁵ Another letter spoke of reading *Pedagogicheskaiia Poema* "with tears in my eyes," but "not tears of anguish (*toska*) for the colonists; no, these were tears of tenderness, for I saw them in the near future – as HUMAN BEINGS, as real people who had been baptized by the Gorky Colony from tracings (*kalka*) only resembling something human into people with a bright future, people of the Stalin epoch, the epoch of socialism."¹¹⁶ Many other letters also drew this connection between Makarenko's work and the larger transformation of Soviet society brought about by the construction of socialism, calling Makarenko, for example, "a symbol of our time and the development of our country."¹¹⁷ One letter argued that Makarenko's work again demonstrated the superiority of socialism over capitalism: whereas in capitalist countries a criminal was simply jailed and thus became even more hardened, the Soviet Union offered criminals a chance to be "reeducated, to become not only honest people, but heroes of our country." This achievement showed the correctness of the methods adopted "not

¹¹⁵ RGALI f. 332 op. 1 d. 70 ll. 23, 30, 81.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, l. 54.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, l. 133.

just by Makarenko, but also by our worthy NKVD workers (*narkomvnudelisty*),” a clear allusion to Bolshevo and other NKVD-operated communes (as well, perhaps, to supposedly “corrective” labor colonies and camps).¹¹⁸ In these and other letters, Makarenko’s system was held up as a shining example of what a truly “Soviet” pedagogy should be, and thus a model to be imitated throughout the Soviet Union.

Letters from other pedagogues and workers in children’s homes and communes offered similar praise for the work of these communes, while also asking Makarenko and Pogrebinskii for advice in improving their own institutions or relating their experience with attempting to imitate these models. V.S. Safronov, a former resident of the Dzerzhinskii Commune and now the head of the educational section at a children’s home for “difficult children,” wrote to Makarenko in 1938 that he had implemented Makarenko’s system “with great effect” in his institution.¹¹⁹ In fact, a significant number of Makarenko’s former pupils seem to have themselves become pedagogues or workers in children’s institutions, most famously S.A. Kalabalin (1903-1972), one of the heroes of *Pedagogicheskaiia Poema* (where he was known as Karabanov), his wife G.S. Kalabalina (1908-1999), and Leonid Konisevich (1914-1994), a former resident of the Dzerzhinskii Commune.¹²⁰ A similar letter from former communards now living in Tashkent offered both congratulations and gratitude to Makarenko, thanking him for giving them “a road to life” and asserting that “your labor did not go to waste,” as all the authors were now Stakhanovites, Komsomol members, and other Soviet activists. Two were currently “educating the children of former enemies in an NKVD receiving center” and had not only

¹¹⁸ Ibid., l. 86.

¹¹⁹ RGALI f. 332 op. 1 d. 40 ll. 30-30ob.

¹²⁰ Konisevich described his experience in the Dzerzhinskii Commune in *Nas vospital Makarenko: Zapiski kommunara* (Cheliabinsk: Izd-vo Cheliabinskogo Doma Pechati, 1993). Several former residents of the Bolshevo Commune also worked in other GPU/NKVD labor communes; see the story of Nikolai Nikolaevich Dzevaltovskii, in *Bolshevo al'manakh*, 61-62. A former Bolshevo communard directed in 1934 to establish a similar commune in Chudovo (Novgorod region), Dzevaltovskii was later arrested in 1937, served five years in a labor camp, and then lived in exile until 1956.

enjoyed reading *Pedagogicheskaiia Poema* themselves, but had assigned it to their charges “with great success.”¹²¹ In this way, some of Makarenko’s former pupils also spread his example to other parts of the Soviet Union.

At the same time as Makarenko was beginning to enjoy his literary success, the Bolshevo Commune was also being held up as a model institution throughout the Soviet Union. Indeed, its influence as a model was apparently so great that some workers and residents of other communes continued to write directly to Pogrebinskii requesting that he help them improve their own institutions, despite the fact that Pogrebinskii was no longer in charge of NKVD labor communes after 1930. Thus, in May of 1934, a representative of the *aktiv* in the Leningrad commune (and apparently a former Bolshevo communard), Comrade Kommissarov, wrote to Pogrebinskii to complain about the situation in their commune and request his intervention. The letter railed against the rest of the *aktiv* and the commune leadership, accusing them of being comprised of “all kinds of dirt,” abusing their positions to gain better housing for themselves and their wives, and engaging in endless talk without any real accomplishments.¹²² For such violations, the letter declared, a rank-and-file communard would be “sent to a camp,” yet those in positions of authority had banded together to protect each other. The letter also compared this commune directly (and unfavorably) with Bolshevo, accusing the director of mistakenly trying to establish his own methods rather than follow the example already provided by Bolshevo, with all its “mistakes and successes.” A new director was needed, someone more like Pogrebinskii himself, who would “love the commune, and not look on it as service (*sluzhba*); we need a person whose door will always be open day and night for all members of the commune, and not close at ten or eleven at night, even for the leadership, because the director ‘wants to sleep.’” In

¹²¹ RGALI f. 332 op. 1 d. 40 l. 47.

¹²² Gladyshev, 156.

other words, being the director of a commune needed to be a labor of love – anything less was unacceptable. As a result of these deficiencies, the letter declared, commune residents had begun to run away, people who “with time would [have been] honest workers, loyal to Soviet power.”¹²³ Kommissarov therefore requested that Pogrebinskii write to the communards to improve their spirits, or, better yet, come to visit the commune and show “how this great endeavor should be constructed.”

As this last letter suggests, a significant number of Soviet citizens found their own experiences in various children’s institutions to be wanting in comparison to the celebrated models of the Dzerzhinskii and Bolshevo communes. While this discrepancy will more properly be the subject of the next chapter, a brief examination of some of the letters sent to Makarenko in particular again reveals the degree to which these institutions shaped Soviet citizens’ imagination of what a properly Soviet children’s institution should look like. A letter from a formerly homeless youth, now a commander in the Red Army, recalled his own time in a Soviet children’s home, contrasting the conditions there with those described by Makarenko in *Pedagogicheskaiia Poema*. To escape these poor conditions, the author ran away from the children’s home at the first opportunity every spring. Consequently, it was only after entering the army that he truly learned discipline and embarked on a new path.¹²⁴

A former resident of a different colony, reflecting on the differences between his own colony and Makarenko’s depiction of the Gorky Colony, actually questioned several aspects of Makarenko’s book, a rather rare occurrence among these “fan letters.” How did former *besprizornye*, who tended to be distrusted by all, establish good relations with the surrounding populace so quickly? As the author recalled, in his colony the residents fought almost

¹²³ Ibid., 158.

¹²⁴ RGALI f. 332 op. 1 d. 70 l. 78.

continuously with the neighboring villages. Similarly, the author seemed to hold some doubts about how quickly the Gorky colonists became hardworking and enthusiastic workers; at the author's colony, everyone did their best to avoid work, and for three years it was practically impossible to get any colonist to show up consistently for work.¹²⁵ Finally, another letter went so far as to declare Makarenko's colony essentially the only effective and genuinely "Soviet" children's institution. The author noted that he had also grown up in a children's home, making the subject of *Pedagogicheskaiia Poema* very dear to him. Reading about "the education of a useful person (*lichnost*) for Soviet society," the author declared, "forces every person to think about themselves, about their usefulness for Soviet society." The vast majority of children's homes, however, were failing in this task:

In the [Gorky] colony, they bring in a thief, but he leaves the colony a literate, useful, honest person, able to work in his calling. In a children's home, they bring in an unspoiled child, but he often leaves as a thief, and almost always unprepared for the life of a real person...¹²⁶

The author had completed a seven-year school in the children's home but still did not know his multiplication tables upon "graduation," a fact that called into question whether he had been "prepared for the life of a real person."

All these letters suggested a contrast between the future trajectories of most children's home graduates and their more celebrated peers at the Bolshevo and Dzerzhinskii communes. But what *did* happen to the "real production" of the communes, the living people that Roitenberg insisted were their true legacy? Given the fame of these communes, it is not surprising that the fate of their graduates has attracted some scholarly interest and is therefore better documented than other Soviet children's institutions. Makarenko's fame ensured that his former pupils received a fair amount of attention throughout the Soviet period, with newspaper articles

¹²⁵ Ibid., ll. 179-180.

¹²⁶ Ibid., l. 135.

periodically discussing their reunions, current achievements, or heroism during the Great Patriotic War.¹²⁷ Some even became minor celebrities in their own right – one former communard noted that as soon as local officials had learned he was a former pupil of Makarenko, he was flooded with invitations to speak at schools and given interviews to local newspapers.¹²⁸ Several of Makarenko’s former pupils went on to write their own memoirs, including Kalabalin and Konisevich.¹²⁹ Several Soviet and Russian scholars have also discussed the lives of Makarenko’s former pupils, documenting that a large number did go on to become respected academics, war heroes, professionals, cultural figures, and other successful Soviet citizens.¹³⁰ While the Bolshevo Commune, perhaps due to its fate during the Great Terror (see below), generally received less scholarly attention, the work of the Korolev museum and Svetlana Gladyshev has also begun to illuminate the fates of some former communards. As with Makarenko’s pupils, several went on to become respected Soviet citizens who, when asked about the commune, remembered this as the “best time of our lives.”¹³¹ Overall, these communes seem to have been remarkably successful in rehabilitating homeless children and young offenders and setting them on the promised, Soviet “road to life.”

These documented successes, and the ongoing celebration of Makarenko’s communes in particular, in turn gave rise to a number of “legends” oft-repeated during the Soviet period and beyond, including the claim that no graduate of Makarenko’s institutions was ever arrested

¹²⁷ Makarenko’s fond in RGALI contains an extensive folder dedicated to newspaper articles that mention or discuss his former pupils. RGALI f. 332 op. 4 d. 537.

¹²⁸ RGALI f. 332 op. 4 d. 982 l. 7.

¹²⁹ S.A. Kalabalin, *Brodiachee detstvo: Povest’* (Moscow: Molodaia Gvardiia, 1968); Konisevich, *Nas vospital Makarenko*.

¹³⁰ Lev Chubarov, *Makarenkovtsy* (Moskva, 1994); P.G.Lysenko, *Sud’by vospitannikov A.S. Makarenko: Dokumental’no-biograficheskie ocherki* (Poltava: OGOI “Poltavskii Literator,” 1994).

¹³¹ See K.N. Chaikin, “Kommuna dala mne kryl’ia,” and V.N. Salishchev, “Rodnoe Bolshevo,” in *Bolshevo al’manakh*, 63-68.

again.¹³² Evaluating such a claim is difficult; while the fates of hundreds of graduates from Makarenko's institutions and dozens of Bolshevo communards have been documented, these institutions saw thousands of juvenile delinquents and homeless children pass through their gates. Even if true, this triumphal narrative obscures the fact that several communards were never given the chance to graduate, as those who were considered disruptive, unwilling to subordinate themselves to the collective, or otherwise incapable of being "reeducated" were liable to be kicked out of the commune, or, if they were convicted juvenile delinquents, sent to serve out their sentences in other institutions, including labor camps. Incomplete data from the Dzerzhinskii Commune for 1936 reports that from January to August of this year, twenty-eight communards ran away, while fifty-one were transferred to other institutions, including other labor communes. It is impossible to know how many of these were transferred to serve as advisors or activists in other institutions (as was common for Dzerzhinskii Commune members) and how many were being transferred for disciplinary problems. However, at least two communards were handed over to the Soviet police: one was sent directly to a labor camp to fulfill the rest of his sentence, while the other was listed as being given over to "the investigative organs."¹³³ While still a very small minority of the 805 children listed as commune residents, these examples show that Makarenko was not infallibly successful – a fact that Makarenko himself acknowledged, particularly after another communard apparently committed suicide in February of 1936.¹³⁴ "Difficult" youth who were kicked out of the commune tended to fare

¹³² Chubarov, *Makarenkovtsy*, 1. This claim has endured into the post-Soviet period as well, and recently appeared on one of Radio Ekho Moskvy's blogs lamenting the current state of children's homes in the Russian Federation: see Tugeza, "Pochemu zabyt Makarenko?" 12 April 2012, <http://www.echo.msk.ru/blog/together/879146-echo/>, accessed 17 May 2012.

¹³³ RGALI f. 332 op. 2 d. 14 ll. 4-75.

¹³⁴ In an undated letter from no later than May 1936, Makarenko described the circumstances surrounding this suicide: see RGALI f. 332 op. 2 d. 24 ll. 142-144. The victim had been a "hooligan" when he first arrived at the commune, but had improved dramatically after 1934. His academic work, however, had always been poor, and he expressed little enthusiasm for factory work as well. He had also always been prone to mood swings, Makarenko

poorly. A letter from a former Dzerzhinskii Commune resident to Makarenko, for example, was generally filled with praise for Makarenko's work, but was critical of the policy of kicking commune residents out before they were "fully reeducated," as they were simply likely to become *besprizornye* again. This was the fate of two of the author's acquaintances, who had ended up on the street and been arrested again within one month of being kicked out of the Dzerzhinskii Commune.¹³⁵

Finally, letters from graduates of both the Dzerzhinskii and Bolshevo communes sometimes show the "cracks" in this generally triumphal narrative. Many letters were of course filled with the expected expressions of gratitude to Makarenko and Pogrebinskii and the discourse of transformation, thanking them for "developing my strength and will – everything that helps me everyday," calling the commune a "forge" that had brought about almost unbelievable changes, or expressing love for the commune for "opening my eyes to a new life."¹³⁶ Others, however, suggested that even graduates of these celebrated communes sometimes struggled in their subsequent lives. One former pupil of Makarenko's Gorky Colony discussed his numerous problems after leaving the colony in 1928. Having been accepted into the Komsomol during his time in the colony, he was excluded in 1931 for "right deviationism." In his own words, he "fell into depression" and became reacquainted with street life, a condition that persisted for the next several years. In 1932 he found a job but was fired for drunkenness, and spent four months without work before finding another position. The letter, however, ended on a triumphal note reminiscent of the expected discourse: this experience had prompted him to

stated, and had recently become depressed over a girl, which led to his suicide. Makarenko also described how the whole commune gathered to discuss this event, which he called an "anti-proletarian" and antisocial act. At the same time, it was also a "tragic event" and even a "dire warning" about the need for pedagogues to be vigilant and to understand thoroughly each and every one of their charges. Makarenko also could probably not help but be reminded of Chobot's suicide, though he did not mention this earlier event. I have been unable to find other information on this incident.

¹³⁵ RGALI f. 332 op. 1 d. 70 l. 91.

¹³⁶ RGALI f. 332 op. 1 d. 40 l. 54; op. 2 d. 24 ll. 24-26; Gladyshev, 159.

“recognize the full measure of my mistakes” and “diligently work to correct myself.”¹³⁷ Now the author was happily married, a father, and the leader of his work unit.

A similar letter from a Bolshevo communitarian (nicknamed Grisha Tsygan) to Pogrebinskii also described the author’s struggles with drinking. After thanking Pogrebinskii for his “love for those people for whom society has no use,” the author reported that unfortunately, he had not been able to maintain the “honest path” upon which Pogrebinskii had placed him. Along with sometimes drinking heavily, the author had placed himself in unspecified “circumstances” (*obstanovki*) that threatened to return him to his “previous path, which I trod before you arrived at the prison and tore me from there, giving me the life of an honest worker.” The author therefore pleaded with Pogrebinskii that he be given a different job, which would allow him to “show not only that I can justify your faith in me, but that I can be of much more use to the state than here at the commune,” where, according to this author, the other communards viewed him as an “inept” (*nesposobnyi*) person.¹³⁸ Pogrebinskii apparently honored this request by writing to Iagoda, suggesting that Tsygan be given a “change of circumstances.”

It should be noted, however, that even in describing their struggles, these authors returned to some of the same tropes and language that had shaped the autobiographical narratives discussed earlier, including the language of struggle, self-improvement, the transformative experience of the commune, and the aspiration to become a “useful,” “real” person. Though they had perhaps not yet achieved this transformation, each author situated their lives within this same discourse, while also at times manipulating it in various ways. Grisha Tsygan presented his departure from the “honest path” not necessarily as a failure of the commune’s mission of reeducation, but as a new opportunity for him to prove he could change (while being rather

¹³⁷ RGALI f. 332 op. 1 d. 40 ll. 25-25ob.

¹³⁸ Gladyshev, 150.

vague about his actual circumstances). Even for some who struggled on the “road to life,” the commune’s transformative project, and its discourse, seemed to have an ongoing influence.

Conclusion

By the second half of the 1930s, if not earlier, these communes had achieved widespread influence as both educational models and cultural symbols. The Dzerzhinskii and Bolshevo communes were particularly held up as examples of the transformative power of the Soviet system, of its ability to remake *besprizornye*, “hooligans,” juvenile criminals, and other undesirables into “real people”- i.e. cultured, loyal, hardworking, properly Soviet citizens. These “factories of people” seemed to prove that a properly constructed *kollektiv* could indeed bring about dramatic changes in individual selves, changes that were in turn documented and disseminated in Makarenko’s own writings and *Bolshevtsy*. At the same time, however, the celebrated example of these communes created expectations of what Soviet children’s institutions *should* be able to achieve, expectations that, as we shall see in the next chapter, were not necessarily realistic for the majority of institutions. Many children’s homes found themselves held to a standard they could not hope to meet. They were told to “learn from Makarenko” in their efforts to reeducate and prepare their charges to join the wider Soviet society, but often lacked the financial resources, facilities, trained staff, or expertise to do so. Although these difficulties were acknowledged, the Soviet government most often continued to insist that, with the appropriate “model” and enough dedication on the part of staff, such difficulties could be overcome.

The influence of the Dzerzhinskii and Bolshevo communes as educational and discursive models thus endured beyond their period of actual operations. Indeed, for being such celebrated and influential institutions in their day, both communes met a rather ignoble end in the late 1930s. Much of the Bolshevo staff, along with many communards, was arrested in 1937 and accused of being part of a “terrorist group” under the leadership of Pogrebinskii who, apparently aware of the coming arrests, committed suicide in April of 1937.¹³⁹ In 1939, the commune was liquidated and its facilities reorganized into separated factories (for sports equipment, shoes, fabrics, and woodworking) under the direction of the People’s Commissariat for Light Industry. Though it did not suffer from the Terror to the same degree as Bolshevo, the Dzerzhinskii Commune also was reorganized in 1938 into the Industrial Combine in the name of F.E. Dzerzhinskii. Although commune residents became some of the first workers in this enterprise, the commune effectively ceased to function as an educational institution. Its founder, however, was not forgotten. Makarenko’s own passing in 1939 was accompanied by an outpouring of grief, reminiscences from his former pupils, and ongoing interest in his pedagogical methods that continued throughout the Soviet period.¹⁴⁰ In the years after his death, streets and schools would be named after him in Moscow, Kharkov, and elsewhere, museums would be dedicated to his life and work, and the sub-field of “Makarenko studies” (*makarenkovedenie*) would emerge in Soviet pedagogy.

Makarenko’s system became both a symbol of its time and an enduring influence on Soviet education. Moreover, the post-Soviet years have seen continued interest in Makarenko

¹³⁹ The *Bolshevo al'manakh* lists the names of thirty-four staff members and communards who were arrested in 1937 and presumably executed. This list is also reprinted in Gladyshev, 168-171.

¹⁴⁰ See, for example, the reminiscences about Makarenko collected for publication by his widow, contained in RGALI f. 332 op.1 d. 61; and the articles commemorating his death in RGALI f. 332 op. 1 d. 84.

and debate over the relative merits and applicability of his system in contemporary Russia.¹⁴¹ After all, while Makarenko's system emerged from a shared Soviet ideological heritage, an emphasis on the importance of social environment, and Marxist dreams of the New Man, the questions he addressed were not unique to his time or place. Many states, including contemporary Russia, have experienced troubles with homeless and orphaned children or faced challenges in rehabilitating juvenile criminals, and all states have an interest in raising youth to be obedient, socially conscious (however this is defined), productive citizens. While Makarenko's immediate influence may have most directly shaped efforts to mold specifically Soviet subjects within the broader system of children's homes (the subject of the next chapter), the questions he raised about the relationship between the individual and the collective, the influence of social environment on the self, and the internalization of discipline are relevant to the study of any number of institutions dedicated to the education (or reeducation) and formation of modern subjects.

¹⁴¹ Several organizations in Russia, Ukraine, and elsewhere continue to hold conferences on Makarenko and publish research on Makarenko's pedagogy, including the Mezhdunarodnaia Makarenkovskaia Assotsiatsiia (founded 1991 in Poltava) and the Pedagogicheskii Muzei A.S. Makarenko in Moscow. The latter, for example, publishes the series *Makarenko al'manakh* (Moscow: Narodnoe Obrazovanie). Among the most interesting materials from this museum are discussions of how Makarenko's methods might be applied to social problems in contemporary Russia: see, for example, V.V. Morozov, "Preduprezhdenie ekstremizma v podrostkovoii srede sredstvami vospitatel'noi pedagogiki A.S. Makarenko," http://makarenko-museum.narod.ru/ref/el_ref_Morozov_01.htm (Accessed July 28, 2012).

Chapter Four: The “Road to Life?”

On October 28, 1938, A. Khudaev, a representative of the Komi Autonomous Republic’s Council of People’s Commissars (Sovnarkom), delivered a lengthy report to the council – not on the continuing fears of imminent war, or preparations for the upcoming celebration of the October Revolution, but on a single institution in the region, the Palevitsy Children’s Home. The length of the report and the fact that it was delivered to the Sovnarkom itself indicated the relative seriousness of this situation. Though Khudaev’s report opened with a rather understated declaration that this children’s home was not “fulfilling its basic tasks,” it went on to list a series of specific problems in almost every aspect of this institution. There was widespread “hooliganism,” theft, and hostility between girls and boys. Over half of the students had failed to advance to the next grade. The local population complained of *detdom* children stealing vegetables, fish, and other provisions. Even a former resident on vacation from school had sixty-eight rubles stolen from his pocket. Efforts to organize activity circles and provide entertainment for the children had been derailed by widespread vandalism; when the children’s home purchased a radio and guitars for its residents, they were immediately broken.¹

Most importantly, the report emphasized that the children’s home had adequate resources to feed and clothe its charges, as well as to purchase a number of (soon broken or stolen) amenities. Any failings were thus placed at the feet of the staff. As characterized in this report, they were either completely indifferent to their work, or almost comically incompetent. Khudaev described the head of the educational section as little more than a record-keeper, dutifully noting each incident of theft, card-playing, and other violations in the “punishment

¹ Transcript of report by Komi ASSR Sovnarkom representative A. Khudaev “On the Results of Inspection of the Palevitsy Children’s Home,” 28 October 1938, in *Krest’ianskie deti*, 524-530.

book” (*shtrafnaia tetrad*’, as it was nicknamed by the residents) but doing nothing to stop them. The other two educators were merely “bell-ringers,” since their duties, Khudaev suggested, apparently consisted solely of ringing the bell to announce breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Both admitted that they did not read newspapers or participate in political activities, and one confessed that she did not know what positions the Soviet leaders Kalinin or Kaganovich held. To add insult to injury, the same educator, in response to Khudaev’s question “who are the Spanish people fighting against?” guessed “China.” At least this worker, however, did not put children actively in harm’s way. In an incomprehensibly misguided act, the educator Sivkova, when she previously had served as director of the home, apparently bought hunting rifles and cartridges for some of the boys. The boys promptly used these weapons to “hunt” for girls, firing indiscriminately into their dormitory. Fortunately, the weapons were taken away and the only casualty of this incident was Sivkova herself, who was demoted from director to her current position of educator (*vospitatel’nitsa*). The new director, however, did not seem to be a significant improvement, and had done little to correct these deficiencies. Khudaev wryly commented that, to be fair, he most likely did not know about many of these problems, since he regularly visited the children’s home for only a few minutes each day.²

While this report showed the usual tendency in the Soviet government to blame most problems on individual staff and local officials, the long list of repeated problems (and perhaps the incident of boys “hunting” for girls alone) give a clear impression of a children’s home that was a far cry from the model institutions lauded in the Soviet press and examined in the previous chapter.³ While institutions like the Dzerzhinskii Commune were celebrated as evidence that even juvenile delinquents and hardened *besprizornye* could be reeducated and transformed, many

² Ibid., 524-526.

³ On the tendency to blame shortcomings in Soviet children’s homes on local officials or children’s home staff, see Chapter Two.

other Soviet institutions struggled simply to control their charges, let alone set them on the “road to life.” This chapter explores these efforts to reeducate (*perevospyvat*) former *besprizornye* and orphaned children within the wider system of children’s homes in the 1930s. It begins with an analysis of the “communist upbringing” that was to be provided in every children’s home: the political education and “consciousness,” labor training, and structured emotional life that were intended to transform these orphaned and homeless children into loyal, Soviet subjects.

Unsurprisingly, given the general state of many children’s homes, there were numerous ways in which this process could falter in practice. Yet despite these shortcomings, there is evidence that official discourse still shaped the viewpoints of many of these children, though not always in the manner expected by Soviet authorities. Even as they wrote numerous letters to point out the ways in which their lived experiences did not conform to the images presented in Soviet discourse, children’s home residents seem to have accepted that this discourse defined a reality that did (or at least should) exist for Soviet orphans, a reality that they too desired.

Soviet authorities, of course, also recognized that the reality of many (if not most) children’s homes hardly matched this ideal. Soviet documents were filled with criticisms of the many ways in which children’s homes did not measure up to existing models like the Dzerzhinskii Commune and were failing in their assigned task to “raise the children assigned to us to be socially useful, deeply loyal to their socialist motherland, and examples of the new, healthy, joyous person.”⁴ Inspection reports and other documents from Soviet children’s homes show ample evidence of the wide gap between the theory and discourse of the New Soviet Person (or the even more ubiquitous “happy childhood”) and the realities of how many of these children lived, a gap that will be frequently addressed in this chapter. At the same time,

⁴ NKVD report on the movement of children among receiving centers in the Western Siberian territory, 1 July 1935-1 May 1936, in Syschenko, ed., *Zherty NKVD-deti*, 16. The report declared that this task had been established by the Sovnarkom-Central Committee resolution of 31 May 1935 “On the Liquidation of Child Homelessness.”

however, they reveal the Soviet government's belief in voluntarism: the notion, particularly during the Stalin period, that a proper understanding of Bolshevik ideology, imitation of approved models, and enthusiasm could overcome the challenges of existing reality. It was the responsibility of each children's home worker to raise their own "political-cultural level" and work to bring this ideological vision to fruition: "each children's home educator, like every working citizen of the Union, must know the policy of the party and the government, and be able to bring it to life in practice in a Bolshevik manner."⁵ The calls to "learn from Makarenko" and the repeated assertions, particularly toward the second half of the 1930s, that ongoing problems in children's homes were due to "apathy" or incompetence on the part of staff (instead of financial or structural problems), can be understood as another manifestation of this tendency, along with Stalinism's darker tendency to seek out hidden and supposedly willfully destructive "wreckers" and "enemies."⁶

It was certainly true that many children's homes had incompetent, unqualified, poorly trained, or even criminal staff; numerous examples can be found in Chapter Two and will also be discussed here. The constant emphasis on the need for greater enthusiasm, and the notion that proper comprehension and application of Bolshevik ideology would solve such problems, arguably did little to help genuinely conscientious children's home workers who struggled, with much fewer resources, to meet the standards set by a few model institutions. Such frustrations

⁵ Ibid., 17.

⁶ For examples of suggestions that children's home workers should learn from and utilize the methods of Makarenko, see GARF f. A2306 op. 70 d. 5460 l. 40. For examples of accusations of apathy or incompetence on the part of staff, and demands that they more diligently aspire to equal various model institutions, see materials from the Komi regional Children's Commission on the improvement of children's homes, December 1934, in *Krest'ianskie deti*, 326-329; the VTsIK Children's Commission circular letter "On the Implementation of the Sovnarkom-Central Committee Resolution by Children's Commissions," 9 June 1935, in *Krest'ianskie deti*, 356-358; the Sovnarkom-Central Committee resolution "On the Liquidation of Child Homelessness," 31 May 1935, in *Deti Gulaga*, 183-187; TsGAMO f. 916 op. 1 d. 375 l. 100; and TsGAMO f. 916 op. 1 d. 262 ll. 5-9. For a more sinister-sounding accusation that "only the unbounded gall and limitless hatred of our socialist system on the part of enemies of the people" can explain conditions in the "Krasnye zori" colony, see TsGAMO f. 916 op. 1 d. 367 l. 34.

emerged in a meeting between Nadezhda Krupskaya, who usually appeared more sympathetic to the challenges facing children's home workers, and a delegation of such workers in 1938. One of the workers, Comrade Katiukhina, complained that inspectors from the regional ONO tended to offer only criticisms without clear suggestions of how to improve. At the same time, her residents repeatedly questioned why other nearby children's homes were in better shape, which prompted Katiukhina to promise that conditions would improve after the home received additional funds. According to the transcripts of this meeting, Krupskaya replied that Katiukhina had access to pedagogical literature and should "learn [what to do to improve the home] yourself...you can never wait for someone to come and fix everything." Katiukhina's reply indicates the degree to which this constant emphasis on personal responsibility and the need for "proper" comprehension of Soviet ideology and directives could have a paralyzing effect: "But we are far from the center, we might do something improperly (*neverno*), and after all then they will criticize us for this."⁷ Given the climate of the late 1930s in the Soviet Union, such concerns seem eminently practical, but they also apparently ensured that Katiukhina was afraid to take any actions without official approval.

According to central Soviet authorities, then, children's home workers had already been provided with both a clear task (the communist upbringing and reeducation of *besprizornye*) and the general means to do so (imitation of existing models). As noted previously, this desired communist upbringing derived from the long-standing socialist dream of building a New Man, and continued to be influenced by this intellectual heritage even as the system of Soviet children's homes struggled to cope with a flood of new *besprizornye* in the 1930s. Just as the New Man was imagined to be an internally harmonious subject, in which head, hand, and heart were all to be fully developed and in balance with each other, the ideal communist upbringing

⁷ RGASPI f. 12 op. 1 d. 254 l. 26.

was imagined to combine political education and consciousness, labor education, and a specific emotional life. Of course, a large number of children's homes struggled to put this dream into practice, for reasons beyond the numerous limitations of children's home staff. We will therefore address each of these components of this communist upbringing in turn, examining both the processes that were intended to work together in forging the New Soviet Person, and the ways in which these processes encountered numerous obstacles in practice.

“A Telescope for an Astronomer”: Political Education and the Construction of “Consciousness” in the Children’s Home

First, and arguably predominant, among the elements that comprised the desired communist upbringing was political education and the development of children's “consciousness.” Soviet directives on educational work in children's homes and other institutions presented “political consciousness” variously as a combination of specific political knowledge (like the names and responsibilities of Soviet leaders, current world events, and the provisions of the 1936 Soviet constitution), political narratives and discourse promoted by the Soviet government (such as the USSR as the beacon of world socialism where life was the “most free and joyous”), and a general communist worldview.⁸ Like the Stalin period as a whole, these reports frequently showed a tendency toward dogmatism. A 1931 report on the Karl Marx Pioneer Home declared that political education in this home was inadequate, among other reasons, due to the fact that children were surrounded by “old slogans and outdated posters.”⁹

⁸ See, for example, a report on education in the Ivanovo region, GARF f. A2306 op. 70 d. 5460, especially ll. 25-28; and the transcripts from a 1931 conference on involving *detdom* children in political work, GARF f. R5207 op. 1 d. 471 ll. 126-134.

⁹ TsGAMO f. 916 op. 1 d. 11 l. 87.

Other directives were almost absurd in their tendentiousness. A report from the Moscow region, for example, criticized the poor facilities of one children's home but particularly singled out the "disrespectful attitude to the leaders' portraits" that could be "felt" in the home, since said portraits hung in undecorated, "primitive frames, without glass," and were even "slightly crooked."¹⁰

Slogans, posters, often didactic political lessons, and knowledge of current events (and a specific Soviet interpretation of these events) were important elements of political education in Soviet children's homes. However, in theory, they were only small parts of a larger, more important goal: the development of a general and all-encompassing communist worldview. Kalinin's 1934 speech on the "well-rounded person" specified this distinction: rather than simply being able to repeat political slogans, young people needed to be able to demonstrate their understanding of the principles behind these slogans by relating them in their own words, and by applying them to their own life. The construction of socialism, Kalinin declared, needed educated young people - people who could read, understand, and "bring together revolutionary theory and practice." For the true communist, his worldview was "like a telescope for an astronomer": a tool used to enhance one's vision and understanding of the world.¹¹ Soviet ideology was, in this sense, something to be mastered and utilized.¹² Political education in children's homes might therefore begin with slogans, posters, and specific lessons on Soviet policies and principles, but it was supposed to end with this kind of deep understanding and fully-formed worldview.

Analogous to this notion that political education should encourage a deep understanding of Soviet ideology, rather than a mere parroting of slogans, was the idea that a true communist

¹⁰ TsGAMO f. 916 op. 1 d. 225 l. 84.

¹¹ Kalinin, "Bud'te vsestoronne razvitymi liud'mi," 18-21.

¹² Hellbeck, *Revolution on my Mind*, particularly 11-12.

upbringing should aim toward the development of conscious self-discipline, rather than rely on threats of punishment or promises of rewards to shape behavior. The debate over how best to promote a genuine self-discipline, and whether punishments and incentives could still be useful tools along the way to developing this self-discipline, has been briefly discussed in the previous chapter. The system of Soviet children's institutions in the 1930s utilized many of the same elements as Makarenko's system and indeed was specifically encouraged to do so. These included an emphasis on collectivism and collective responsibility, regular meetings of the children's collective assembly and its council to discuss the affairs of the children's home (particularly violations of discipline), and a system of "self-service" (*samoobsluzhivanie*) that required children to do various chores and other work around the children's home.¹³ All of these elements were intended to promote a sense of responsibility before the collective for one's conduct and actions, and a sense of collective pride.¹⁴ Both were in turn supposed to lead to the desired conscious self-discipline: whereas once one might have behaved simply to avoid the judgment of one's peers, after one had aligned one's interests and thoughts with the collective one would consciously choose to act in the desired way, recognizing that this served the greater interests of the collective.¹⁵

Educators working in children's homes therefore showed a distinct interest in each child's degree of discipline, understood not only as a tendency to follow the rules, but as an internal self-discipline as well. Dossiers on children's home residents almost invariably began

¹³ This commitment to "self-service" work and "self-government" had existed at some children's homes in the 1920s as well, but was particularly encouraged by government directives in the 1930s, and by the example provided by Makarenko's communes. On these policies in the 1920s, see Ball, *And Now My Soul is Hardened*, 162-163.

¹⁴ A report on the Krupskaja Children's Home in the Novgorod region, for example, declared that self-service work was essential for promoting "conscious discipline" (*soznatel'aia distsiplina*), a sense of responsibility for fulfilling one's tasks, and respect for the property of the children's home. State Archive for Contemporary Political History of the Novgorod Region (GANINO) f. 120 op. 1 d. 97 l. 15.

¹⁵ On this notion of conscious self-discipline, see Chapter Three of this dissertation.

by noting their degree of discipline and “development.”¹⁶ While many educators seem to have been most attentive to violations of the rules, and recorded such violations in their notes, they also characterized children as “disciplined,” “undisciplined,” “conscious,” “developed” or “politically developed,” or otherwise affixed labels that were taken to represent not just one’s general behavior, but some inner aspect of one’s personality (*lichnost’*) or character (*kharakter*) as well.¹⁷ Instructions to establish a strict schedule for daily life in the children’s home (the *rezhim*) also emphasized that following this schedule and performing the required duties would help children to develop a sense of self-discipline, and thus aid in the desired communist upbringing.¹⁸ Like Makarenko’s externally imposed tasks, it was imagined that as children followed this schedule, they would eventually begin to perform these tasks without being specifically required to do so, the first step toward being able to discipline their own behavior.

Apart from activities and structures within the children’s home, Soviet schools were also intended to play a key role both in giving *detdom* children a general political education and in the process of developing this conscious self-discipline. Several scholars have already taken a more extensive look at Soviet schools during the Stalin period than will be possible here.¹⁹ This chapter will therefore concentrate specifically on the ways in which attending Soviet schools was supposed to help to develop political consciousness among *detdomovtsy*. For one, Soviet schools supplemented political education lessons in children’s homes in providing specific political

¹⁶ For examples of dossiers on children’s home residents, see GARF f. R5207 op. 3 d. 35 ll. 84-85; op. 2 d. 56; and op. 1 d. 1579.

¹⁷ These individual dossiers in some way resembled Makarenko’s practice of having the council of commanders divide communards into four groups (the “active,” “reserve,” “passive,” and “swamp”) based on their behavior and perceived degree of consciousness: see Kharkhordin, *The Collective and the Individual*, 205-206. An important difference, however, is that these dossiers were prepared by a single educator, while labels from the council of commanders were taken to be representative of the judgment of the collective.

¹⁸ Rules for the Aikinsk children’s home, March 1934, in *Krest’ianskie deti*, 283-285.

¹⁹ On Soviet schools during the Stalin period, see E. Thomas Ewing, *The Teachers of Stalinism*; and Larry E. Holmes, *The Kremlin and the Schoolhouse: Reforming Education in Soviet Russia 1917-1931* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1991), *Stalin’s School: Moscow’s Model School no. 25 1931-1937* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1999), and *Grand Theater*.

knowledge and in promoting Soviet political narratives of history, current events, and other subjects. Narkompros reports and directives instructed that children should, along with their regular schoolwork, be given inspirational stories about the “leaders of the proletariat, the heroes of our age [such as Red Army and Soviet fleet commanders, record-setting pilots, Stakhanovites, and other Soviet celebrities], and figures in the sciences and arts.”²⁰ Other materials and guidelines for Soviet teachers working in schools and kindergartens instructed them to involve children in various activities that promoted Soviet narratives. Sometimes these materials were quite detailed; materials provided in 1930 for teachers working in children’s homes and other institutions in the Novgorod region, for example, provided an extensive list of conversations, excursions, and activities that were intended to involve children in the ongoing anti-religious campaign, oriented toward revealing the “class nature of religion” and that “religion is fairy-tales and inventions used by the clergy, bourgeoisie, and kulaks to deceive the working masses.”²¹

Another packet of materials extensively described a skit that could be performed by children in kindergartens, children’s homes, or primary schools in honor of the May 1st holiday. The teacher should construct four “factories” in the classroom: a Soviet factory (represented as a tractor plant), a German factory (a plant for warplanes or other weapons), an English factory (coal mines), and a Chinese factory (a garment sweatshop in which “the majority of workers should be women and children”). The various characters were to be easily identified: the bourgeois factory owner arriving to oversee his Chinese workers, for example, should “be carrying a bag of money over his shoulder” and “arrive in a rickshaw.” The skit was to play out according to the following script: the English factory owner was to cut his workers’ pay in half for not producing enough coal, the German factory foreman was to receive orders to “prepare

²⁰ GARF f. A2306 op. 70 d. 5460 ll. 25-28.

²¹ GANO f. R1115 op. 1 d. 357 ll. 122-123.

more planes to make war on the communists” and promise to push his workers even harder, while the Chinese factory owner was to lounge about counting his money as his workers toiled. In the Soviet factory, however, things were to be different: the foreman (played, the script suggested, by one of the older Pioneers) was to announce to his workers, “comrades, the collective farms need tractors – do you want to help them?” After a resounding “yes!” the Soviet workers were to “work in a friendly manner (*rabotat' druzhno*)” and sing a working song together. At this point, communist agitators were to appear in each factory, as the leader of the game (again, an older Pioneer) was to speak over the loudspeaker to the workers of the world. A call and response with each group of foreign workers was to follow, with the leader asking the Chinese workers “is it true that from age five your women and children have to work day and night for the bourgeois (*burzhui*)?” (Answer: Yes!). The leader was then to ask the German workers if Germany planned to make war on the Soviet Union (Yes!). But was it the workers who desired war, or the bourgeoisie? (The Bourgeoisie!) And would the German workers go to war against the Soviet Union (No we will not!) After a similar exchange with the English workers, all the participants were to shout “long live the workers of the world!” and sing songs for the May 1st holiday.²²

Such materials provide an interesting window into the culture of Soviet schools and the (rather didactic) way in which they were expected to promote Soviet political narratives. Schools, particularly those in children’s homes, were also encouraged to promote a culture of collective responsibility. The Stalin period overall saw a renewed emphasis on academic standards, grades, and individual achievement in Soviet schools, with the accompanying distinction that those who were not succeeding or disruptive in school could again be expelled (which ironically became another source of unsupervised children and *besprizornye*). This

²² Ibid., ll. 134-138.

emphasis on individual grades and achievement, however, was still often coupled to the idea of collective responsibility – through “socialist competition” between classes and schools, for example, in which each individual’s successes or failures helped or harmed the larger collective effort.

A report from the Ivanovo regional ONO, for example, suggested that other schools consider copying a system implemented at the Piganovo children’s home. The children’s home had created a map of the Soviet Union, and given each class a paper airplane that would fly between the various Soviet republics on the map. If there were no unsatisfactory grades in the class for the day, the plane moved on to the next republic. If there was one poor grade, the plane stayed where it was. If there were two days of poor grades in a row, the plane returned to its hangar in Moscow and needed to start over again. Once the plane had visited each republic and returned to Moscow, the entire class received a Red Banner and official celebration in front of the rest of the children’s home. The report stated that this system had greatly improved education at the children’s home, particularly because “the entire class is particularly outraged when someone receives a poor grade and the plane, having already passed through several republics, is forced to return to the hangar.”²³ In such circumstances, the report claimed, the rest of the children would exert extra effort to help those receiving poor grades. As a result, the success rate (the percentage of passing grades of “three” or higher in the Soviet system) of the children’s home as a whole had been reportedly improved to 98.8 percent.²⁴ This system was held up as an example of how promoting collective responsibility for success could in turn encourage children to improve their own efforts (out of a desire not to be the one who let down the group) and to concern themselves with the success of others.

²³ GARF f. A2306 op. 70 d. 5460 l. 15.

²⁴ Ibid.

Finally, Soviet schools were also intended to play a role in the socialization of children's home residents. Many children's home residents during the Stalin period, due to the isolation of their children's home, lack of space in local schools, or other issues (such as being placed in an institution for "difficult" children), continued to attend school and study at their children's home. In 1936, for example, Narkompros reported that approximately 36 percent of the residents in its school-age children's homes attended school at their children's home, while 58 percent attended outside schools.²⁵ For its part, the Soviet government preferred that *detdomovtsy* attend local schools with other children, not only to defray the costs of maintaining separate schools in children's homes, but also as a means of integrating these children into the wider Soviet society.²⁶ Soviet schools were to be one of the primary locations where *detdomovtsy* engaged with the Soviet world outside of the children's home, and where they encountered this outside world not as homeless *besprizornnye*, but as Soviet citizens in the making.

Education, both general and explicitly political, was therefore seen as crucial for raising children to be "conscious" and disciplined citizens. In practice, of course, many Soviet institutions struggled to meet this goal. Like the Palevitsy Children's Home discussed at the beginning of this chapter, a great number of children's homes were criticized for providing inadequate political education and thus failing in their task of ensuring a "communist upbringing" for their charges. Many of these criticisms, as previously noted, began with the children's home staff. The Palevitsy caregivers were clearly not alone in their ignorance: reports from Narkompros and the Children's Commission throughout this period were filled with

²⁵ GARF f. A2306 op. 70 d. 5331 l. 45.

²⁶ Ball, 131. The 31 May 1935 Sovnarkom-Central Committee resolution "On the Liquidation of Child Homelessness" reiterated this preference, stating that all children in "normal" children's homes should attend local schools. However, the resolution, perhaps in response to complaints about the conduct of "difficult" children in local schools (see below), also specified that children in "closed" homes or homes for "difficult" children should attend school in their own institutions: see *Deti Gulaga*, 184.

lamentations about the poor education, training, and political knowledge of workers at children's homes, including those specifically responsible for political education.²⁷ The Moscow regional ONO complained, for example, that specialized courses for children's home workers had still not been established in 1937, despite a clear need for workers to improve their qualifications. The same report also pointed out that although many children's home workers were also in need of "political enlightenment" (*politicheskoe prosveshchenie*), no workshops on this topic, or even on working with *detdomovtsy* in general, had been held.²⁸ Another report from the Moscow region declared that the staff in one children's home, despite the fact that they were good workers overall, had "lost all authority in the eyes of the children, because these children are more politically developed than the staff."²⁹ Such caregivers, the report noted, could hardly be expected to provide an adequate political education for these children if they did not already possess one themselves (or, at a minimum, the desire and opportunity to improve their own knowledge).

At the same time, some documents called attention to cases where the desired political education was supposedly being undermined by an inappropriate, unintended, or divergent understand of Soviet ideology on the part of staff members. Such was the case in the "Young Builder" Children's Home in the Moscow region.³⁰ An inspector from the regional Children's Commission reported that the head educator at this home, Comrade Krasilnikova, did not allow children to perform "self-service" work because she considered these chores "exploitation of child labor," and had even denounced such work on the local radio.³¹ This stance, the inspector

²⁷ A report on the Shtal'skii Children's Home in the Volga German ASSR, for example, criticized the poor educational level and lack of "enthusiasm" among the various caregivers, concluding that "none of them in any way can give children a communist direction in life, due to their political illiteracy." GARF f. R5207 op. 1 d. 1298 l. 23.

²⁸ TsGAMO f. 916 op. 1 d. 366 l. 5.

²⁹ TsGAMO f. 916 op. 1 d. 107 l. 1.

³⁰ This children's home also appeared in several reports discussed in Chapter Two.

³¹ TsGAMO f. 916 op. 1 d. 301 l. 13.

argued, was contrary both to the spirit and practical uses of self-service work. Not only did these types of chores encourage children to feel responsible for the upkeep of their children's home, they also taught everyday skills (like how to clean clothes, wash floors, and do basic cooking) that would be useful once these children left to live on their own.

Soviet schools also often found the task of providing a general education for children's home residents to be challenging, a challenge that was sometimes complicated by the material circumstances and behavior of *detdomovtsy* themselves. For one, the financial struggles and corresponding poor living conditions of many children's homes, elaborated in Chapter Two, sometimes disrupted educational opportunities for these children. A 1936 letter from a children's home director in the Komi republic pleaded for local authorities to supply more clothing and shoes to the children's home, as those children who lacked adequate shoes and outer clothing were not able to attend the local school.³² Such complaints and observations about inadequate clothing and shoes (a must when attending the local school often required walking several miles), or a lack of necessary textbooks and other supplies, were not uncommon.³³

Other reports from Soviet inspectors blamed local officials or children's home staff for taking a lax attitude towards school attendance on the part of *detdomovtsy*. Undoubtedly some formerly homeless children, particularly those who had spent a significant amount of time on the streets and were used to a certain degree of freedom, had difficulty adjusting to being required to attend Soviet schools. The reports are nevertheless striking: a report on the Kaluga district Children's Commission claimed that due to indifference on the part of these officials, only about

³² Letter from director Tsipanova to Komi regional ONO, 15 March 1936, in *Krest'ianskie deti*, 394.

³³ On the lack of adequate supplies in many children's homes, see Chapter Two of this dissertation. The Ukrainian SSR Children's Commission also specifically drew attention, among other problems, to the lack of notebooks, textbooks, and other school supplies in children's homes: see Protocol No. 95/580 of the Ukraine Central Executive Committee Secretariat, in *Deti Gulaga*, 153. Reports from the Saratov region in 1931 claimed that in some places, up to 40 percent of children's home residents could not attend school due to lack of shoes: see GARF f. A2306 op. 70 d. 5284 l. 61.

50 percent of teenage children's home residents attended school on any given day.³⁴ Another inspection from the Kasimov district similarly blamed staff members for neglecting their duties and allowing children to skip school. The report filed by this inspector stated that the home's director usually left early in the morning to address financial and supply questions, while the head caregiver did not typically arrive before four in the afternoon. Thus, the residents were left to their own devices most of the day, with most of the older children choosing to hang out at the local market, steal, and "be hooligans" rather than attend school.³⁵ This is not to say that all *detdomovtsy* were frequently truant or indifferent to school. In fact, many of the letters written by children's home residents to Soviet luminaries like Nadezhda Krupskaja specifically expressed a desire to study and receive an education.³⁶ Some regions and individual children's homes also boasted impressive (and possibly inflated) official statistics on attendance and rates of passing grades.³⁷ Soviet schools therefore definitely played a role in the future opportunities and political education of many children's home residents, but financial difficulties, lax attendance, and other problems ensured that the desired educational system (including political education) did not reach all *detdomovtsy*.

Soviet schools and children's homes also reported many problems with the behavior of *detdomovtsy* within the classroom and their relationships with their teachers and fellow students. Often children from children's homes and other institutions were accused of disrupting the classroom environment, of being rude to teachers and other students, and of being generally "undisciplined." An extensive report on the Saratov region declared not only that hooliganism was "particularly widespread" among residents of children's homes in Khvalynsk, but that these

³⁴ TsGAMO f. 916 op. 1 d. 225 l. 6.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, l. 30.

³⁶ See the letters contained in Krupskaja's file in RGASPI (f. 12); and those reprinted in *Deti Gulaga*, 165-174.

³⁷ The Ivanovo region, for example, boasted of an overall attendance and rate of passing grades of 90 percent. GARF f. A2306 op. 70 d. 5460 ll. 2-6.

children had “brought their hooliganism to school” as well, leaving the local schools (the Gorky school and School no. 7) in an “exceptionally difficult state.” Residents of the local children’s homes were accused of tormenting the more successful students, beating up teachers, “terrorizing the Pioneers and Komsomol,” and generally disrupting the entire educational process.³⁸ Even if most cases were not so extreme, *detdomovtsy* were regularly accused of being particularly disruptive in class. A school inspector in the Komi region, for example, declared that children from the Dereviansk children’s home “are destroying the work of the teachers and the whole school.”³⁹ His report, however, blamed this situation on the workers at the local children’s home rather than the children themselves, arguing that living conditions in the children’s home were so bad, and discipline so lax, that these children were understandably upset and acting out this frustration in school. Indeed, many documents from Children’s Commission inspectors, school inspectors, and other officials inclined to be sympathetic towards these children often showed a tendency to place the blame for these problems on Soviet officials or even teachers themselves. A report on the “Ilich” Children’s Home in the Moscow region noted that many of its children were in danger of having to repeat the second grade, but declared this to be primarily a problem with their teachers. “The school pedagogues look at these children not as children of the state,” the report stated, “but as ‘*detdom* kids’ (this is their nickname) and ‘difficult children’ – but they should devote even more time to helping these children who have fallen behind.”⁴⁰ Thus, the main problem lay not with the preparation and academic abilities of these children, but in their teachers’ attitudes.

³⁸ GARF f. R5207 op. 3 d. 35 l. 82. Other reports of animosity between children’s home residents and “family kids” were common: see, for example, GARF f. R5207 op. 1 d. 1298 ll. 21-22, which complained of two “camps” in school between these groups of children.

³⁹ Report on Dereviansk school-age children’s home, 31 October 1938, in *Krest’ianskie deti*, 530-532.

⁴⁰ TsGAMO f. 916 op. 1 d. 301 l. 41. In a speech to a group of children’s home workers in 1938, Krupskaja made a similar argument, declaring that teachers, if they wanted to receive respect from *detdomovtsy*, first needed to treat these children with more respect. RGASPI f. 12 op. 1 d. 254 l. 21.

A final word needs to be said about the experience of children's home residents in Soviet schools. While many of the cases above may give the impression that *detdomovtsy* were often truant, disruptive, or struggling as students, the available Soviet documents, taken as a whole, suggest that the experience and degree of success in Soviet schools varied widely for children's home residents. In many schools, students from children's homes were likely to be less successful and lagging behind in grades, due both to the often difficult living conditions in many children's homes and the fact that some of these children had missed months or years of school while living as *besprizornye*.⁴¹ In some schools, however, students from children's homes actually received better grades than the other students. A report from the Ivanovo region in 1940, for example, declared that students from the Melenkov and Noginsk children's homes were "the pride of their schools."⁴² The Komi Republic also showed a wide variance in the rates of attendance and success among its children's homes, with attendance ranging from just 45 percent (in Dereviansk) to reportedly 100 percent in several children's homes, and the rate of passing grades varying from 67 percent in Pyeldino to 99.9 percent in Ust'-Kulom (Dereviansk, surprisingly, was not the lowest at 75.91 percent, though almost half of its students were being held back).⁴³ Overall, the rate of passing grades for the republic was reported as 85.99 percent, while 8.24 percent of students had been held back to repeat a grade.⁴⁴ The same report noted, however, that these numbers could be improved not only by increasing the quality of teachers

⁴¹ Of the 325 residents of the "Mais" Children's Village in 1931, a large number had clearly fallen behind the normal school progression for their age (whether from failing to complete grades or missing school while living on the street is not clear). Thus, while the children's home had ninety-three residents aged fourteen or over, it had only fourteen students in the sixth and seventh grades. GARF f. A2306 op. 70 d. 5281 l. 43.

⁴² GARF f. A2306 op. 70 d. 5408 ll. 1-9. It should be noted that by this time, children's homes were often filled with children of "enemies of the people" arrested in 1937-38, who often tended to be from more educated families than the previous wave of *besprizornye*.

⁴³ Statistics on success rates for children's homes in the Komi ASSR, 1938-39 school year, in *Krest'ianskie deti*, 564.

⁴⁴ Narkompros yearly report on educational work in children's homes of the Komi ASSR, 25 July 1939, in *Krest'ianskie deti*, 557-563.

and workers in children's homes, but by setting up more schools with "special regimes" (i.e. stricter discipline) specifically for difficult students, as many children who had recently been *besprizornye* were not ready to attend regular schools and ended up disrupting the work of others. Thus, while attendance at regular Soviet schools was intended to provide general and political education, and serve as a means for children's home residents to be socialized into the wider Soviet society, these goals coexisted with worries that *detdomovtsy* were potentially so undisciplined that they would disturb and disrupt the overall efforts of these schools.

This question of discipline, and the proper way to encourage desired behavior among children's home residents, remained one of the chief concerns for Soviet officials and pedagogues throughout the 1930s. In the same way that Soviet schools and policies toward *besprizornye* and juvenile delinquents began to show markedly less tolerance by the mid-1930s, the system of Soviet children's homes also placed an increased emphasis on discipline and displayed less tolerance for those considered disruptive or "disorganizers." The 1930s saw a steady expansion of the number of NKVD labor colonies, "closed" children's institutions (which children were not allowed to leave), "special regime" homes, and other institutions for juvenile delinquents and those who "systematically violated the regime of normal children's homes."⁴⁵ Directors of children's homes were increasingly able to remove children labeled disruptive or "difficult" by having them transferred to one of these institutions. The goal of this increased focus on discipline and ability to remove "disorganizers," however, was still to promote, ideally, the development of a conscious self-discipline among the remaining children. Just as the removal of "socially dangerous elements" and other undesirables was seen as contributing to

⁴⁵ Orders to establish new colonies and "closed" institutions often cited a need for more institutions for "difficult" children to divide this group from the wider population in children's homes: see GARF f. R5207 op. 1 d. 682 ll. 5-12; NKVD order no. 205 "On the Organization of Closed Labor Colonies," in *Deti Gulaga*, 229; Kelly, *Children's World*, 230-237; and Shearer, *Policing Stalin's Socialism*, 219-242.

increased harmony within the wider Soviet society, removing “difficult” children or those who seemed incapable of achieving the required degree of discipline, was considered necessary to allow a harmonious collective to flourish. Following Makarenko’s ideas, this collective would then be able to discipline itself, finally leading to the internalization of this collective discipline and the development of the desired conscious self-discipline.

While a harmonious collective of politically conscious, self-disciplining individuals may have been the theoretical aspiration, in the meantime children’s home workers had to deal with everyday discipline problems. The Soviet archives are filled with reports on *detdomovtsy* violating the rules of children’s homes, ranging from the minor (using bad language, dressing sloppily, skipping school, or playing cards) to the extreme (physically assaulting staff or other residents, using the children’s home as a base for a string of robberies).⁴⁶ External disciplinary measures (such as punishments) and positive incentives were therefore considered necessary, but their proper use remained a subject of debate. Makarenko’s system had prompted similar debates among Soviet pedagogues over its use of a semi-militarized organization and drills, Makarenko’s admission of at times turning to physical coercion, and his assertion that it was necessary to pay commune residents for their work.⁴⁷ Makarenko had also recommended leaving the question of punishment up to the collective, but did not hesitate to implement punishments when they were deemed necessary. Soviet children’s home workers instructed to “learn from Makarenko” could therefore find justification within his work for both the use of punishments and incentives. As Catriona Kelly notes, children’s home workers who read about

⁴⁶ A series of reports on various children’s homes in the Novgorod region, for example, often cited incidents of children being “rude” or using bad language as evidence of poor educational work and discipline. At the local receiving center, however, conditions were far worse: a teacher, janitor, and the night caregiver had all been recently attacked by residents. The report noted that the night caregiver was able to save herself only by fleeing from the receiving center. GANO f. R1115 op. 1 d. 357 ll. 11-24. Other Soviet documents also reported incidents where children’s home staff became victims of assaults from (usually older) residents: see GARF f. R5207 op. 3 d. 34 l. 1; op. 1 d. 1081 l. 1; and TsGAMO f. 916 op. 1 d. 375 l. 63.

⁴⁷ See Chapter Three of this dissertation.

Makarenko hitting a troublesome communard with a poker or heard tales of other directors using aggressive means to quell discipline problems might have felt licensed to turn to corporal punishment and other harsh forms of discipline, despite Soviet regulations and rhetoric that forbid physical punishment of children.⁴⁸ Indeed, one does not have to dig into the archives long to find examples of children's home workers being criticized by Soviet inspectors for using disciplinary measures that ranged from the inappropriately harsh to outright cruelty.⁴⁹ At the same time, however, these workers were constantly reminded that they bore "personal responsibility" for conditions in their children's home and even for the conduct of their charges. In places where children's home residents were accused of thefts, hooliganism, and other disciplinary infractions, the children's home staff was almost invariably criticized as well for their "lax discipline," "apathy," or for "tolerating" these violations.⁵⁰

The use of punishment was not the only area in which children's home workers seemed to receive contradictory messages. At the same time as children's home workers were being told to learn from Makarenko's example, an NKVD order specified that its labor colonies should be purged of all "harmful practices," specifically military drills.⁵¹ The use of incentives to encourage or reward good behavior was also prone to ambiguous messages. Makarenko's system, and Soviet directives, supported paying wages for work performed in Soviet labor

⁴⁸ Kelly, *Children's World*, 229.

⁴⁹ In the same reports from the Novgorod district cited above, the staff at the receiving center was criticized for using harsh punishments that only "antagonized" residents, including depriving them of food or locking troublemakers in a cold room with no clothes. As a result, "the children consider themselves insulted and lawless, and the slightest opposition to them prompts an attempt to beat [the offending] worker." GANO f. R1115 op. 1 d. 357 ll. 12-13. In another example, the director of the Ivankovo children's home was convicted of child abuse for disciplining children by placing them in a cold room in only their underclothes. This punishment sometimes lasted days and resulted in one resident having permanent frostbite damage: see TsGAMO f. 916 op. 1 d. 303 l. 2.

⁵⁰ Workers at the "Ilich" Children's Home in the Pushkin district, for example, were accused of being willfully ignorant of the fact that children in their home played cards, drank vodka, smoked, stole various items from the children's home and elsewhere to sell, and that the ringleader of these activities had threatened to stab another resident with a knife. TsGAMO f. 916 op. 1 d. 301 ll. 41-42. For other examples, see TsGAMO f. 916 op. 1 d. 330 l. 89; and d. 256 l. 8.

⁵¹ NKVD Order no. 0132 "On the Direction of Work in Labor Colonies for Juveniles," 17 Oct. 1935, in *Deti Gulaga*, 198.

colonies and children's home workshops, as well as bonuses and extra pay for "shock-workers" (and later, Stakhanovites).⁵² At the same time, however, the "Vozrozhdenie" colony in the Moscow region was criticized for giving out tickets (*talony*) as rewards for good behavior, which the residents could exchange for extra food or tobacco.⁵³ The difference between the former (wages for work and bonuses for "shock work") and the latter (extra rewards for good behavior) was not entirely clear. While Makarenko and Soviet policy had argued that providing incentives like wages was a necessary means to teach *detdomovtsy* the value of work and a step on the way to self-discipline, apparently not all incentives were deemed appropriate.

Such seemingly contradictory messages demonstrated, for one, that the policies and attitudes of various Soviet organizations were not always consistent. Furthermore, while the guiding ideological vision of Soviet children's homes may have been "raising New Soviet People," as apart from their immediate task of simply housing, feeding, educating, and disciplining the masses of homeless and orphaned children, the path from one to the other was not always clear. This was particularly true in the case of encouraging conscious self-discipline: while limited punishments imposed by the children's home staff or, preferably, the children's collective itself were intended to promote and reinforce the development of self-discipline, in practice this process did not always function as desired. For one, establishing the authority of the collective to criticize and punish individuals, and creating an environment in which individual children accepted this punishment and strove to improve their "discipline," was not easy (a fact

⁵² GARF f. R5207 op. 1 d. 1051 l. 1; f. A2306 op. 70 d. 5289 l. 14. Underage workers usually were not trusted with their full pay (even at the Dzerzhinskii Commune) – typically they would receive a portion of their wages as spending money with the rest set aside in a "savings" account. Makarenko discussed the need to pay commune residents to help them overcome their initial distaste for work, among other places, in *Pedagogicheskaia Poema*, 567-568.

⁵³ TsGAMO f. 916 op. 1 d. 11 l. 15. Such incentives do not seem to have been very effective, as the same report characterized relations between staff and their charges as "nightmarish," noting that fights between the two groups were common.

Makarenko himself acknowledged).⁵⁴ Instead of accepting the judgment or authority of the collective (usually represented by its council or general assembly), children sometimes viewed this authority as arbitrary or representative of the will of a few individuals, rather than the whole collective. Aldona Volynskaia, for example, remembered the injustice she felt, as a daughter of an “enemy of the people” excluded from joining the Komsomol, at being subjected to collective criticism at Komsomol meetings:

When we received a “two” (*dvoika* - a failing grade in the Soviet system) we, the non-Komsomol members, would be called to a Komsomol meeting, and every Komsomol member was supposed to explain that my two was hostile (*vrazheskaia*), although they often had seven or eight “Soviet” twos.⁵⁵

This example of hypocrisy and double-standards clearly undermined whatever authority the larger collective was supposed to have for Volynskaia. Thus, while in theory criticism delivered by the core group of activists (*aktiv*) or the collective as a whole was to lead to self-scrutiny and self-disciplining of one’s behavior, in practice this progression could be disrupted by the perception that this criticism was illegitimate, arbitrary, or selectively applied.

Even the *aktiv* at times proved reluctant to engage in this type of self-scrutiny. Such was the case at a meeting of the Komsomol at the unimaginatively named Children’s Home for the Homeless Child in Novgorod. From the very beginning of the meeting, the seven Komsomol members presented, in turn, a litany of complaints regarding one of the home’s caregivers, complaining that he “sometimes beats us for no reason, yells at us, does whatever he feels like...doesn’t observe hygiene rules himself but then yells at us to do so...absolutely doesn’t

⁵⁴ For this reason, the first stage of forming a “collective” for Makarenko involved the pedagogue simply imposing external challenges and disciplinary demands on the group, without worrying about whether the group “consciously” understood these demands. See Kharkhordin, 105-107; and Chapter Three of this dissertation.

⁵⁵ Testimony of A.V. Volynskaia, in *Deti Gulaga*, 322-325.

know how to speak with the lads in a human way (*po-chelovecheski*).”⁵⁶ The Komsomol leader, however, chastised the cell’s members for “counting up all the transgressions of this worker, but you don’t want to pay attention to yourselves and your own shortcomings.”⁵⁷ The leader went on to point out that it was well known that residents of the children’s home stole apples and other produce from surrounding farms, but the Komsomol members had not fulfilled their responsibility in stopping it. Nor had they intervened when, during that day’s lunch, other residents had behaved in a “hooligan manner” and began whistling and shouting at the caregiver in question. This admonishment, however, did not seem to have the desired effect, as it was followed immediately by an interjection from one of the other members: “why did [the caregiver] spook us that we wouldn’t get lunch? He got what he deserved.”⁵⁸ Though the meeting ended with a formulaic resolution that the Komsomol would work to “raise its discipline,” the overall impression from these transcripts is of a cell that served more as a forum for airing grievances than a vehicle for self-scrutiny.

Participation in collective life and “self-service” work also did not always have the desired effect. An inspection of a children’s commune in the Moscow region, for example, reported that its residents only really participated in “self-service” work and self-government (*samoupravlenie*) because it allowed them to have some influence over how food was distributed, and therefore a chance to get extra food for themselves.⁵⁹ Such use of collective structures for one’s personal interests was of course anathema to their intended function. Secondly, even a seemingly genuine sense of solidarity among the children’s “collective” did not necessarily translate into the desired behavior and discipline. A report on the “Ilich” Children’s

⁵⁶ Transcripts from Komsomol meeting at the Children’s Home for the Homeless Child (*Detdom Besprizornogo Rebenka*), Novgorod, 1930, GANO f. R1115 op. 1 d. 357 ll. 40-42.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁵⁹ TsGAMO f. 916 op. 1 d. 108 l. 31.

Home noted that several residents smoked, gambled, drank, or had been involved in thefts. The home's thirty Pioneers, however, had apparently never reported this bad behavior, had no influence on these "disorganizers," and thus, the report concluded, were actually undermining the ability of the caregivers and the collective as a whole to enforce discipline.⁶⁰ Whether these Pioneers refused to report this behavior out of fear of potential retribution, apathy, or a sense of solidarity with their fellow residents, is not clear. Efforts to establish a sense of collective discipline and responsibility of necessity relied on mutual surveillance among the children themselves, as children's home staff simply did not in most cases have the ability to watch all the children all the time. Each member of the collective was supposed to scrutinize both their own behavior and that of their peers, with the core "activists" (*aktiv*) in particular assisting in enforcing disciplinary norms.⁶¹ When such surveillance was absent, or children refused to report on their fellows, this system broke down.

Another clearly troublesome example for Soviet authorities of "collectivism" serving less than desirable ends was the tendency for some *besprizornye* to recreate the types of gang structures, including hostility to outsiders like the children's home staff, that they had experienced during their life on the street.⁶² Whereas once these structures had been seen by some Soviet reformers as evidence of the "natural" collectivism of *besprizornye*, by the 1930s

⁶⁰ TsGAMO f. 916 op. 301 l. 42.

⁶¹ Kharkhordin calls mutual surveillance the "reliable bedrock of Soviet power" and suggests that the plethora of various "commissions" in schools, colonies, and children's homes were in part intended to involve every child in this surveillance. Kharkhordin, 110, 129-130. Makarenko had also specified the need for mutual surveillance, particularly on the part of the *aktiv*, to form a working collective: see Chapter Three of this dissertation.

⁶² In the "Ilich" Children's Home mentioned above, one resident was accused of organizing the other residents to commit thefts: see TsGAMO f. 916 op. 1 d. 301 ll. 41-42. Igor Pol' also remembered his children's home as being dominated by a teenage gang that systematically committed thefts: see "Desiat' let v Alzhire," 83-85. The persistence of this street culture and "gangs" among former *besprizornye* had proven a distinct challenge in the 1920s as well: see Ball, 164-166.

they were viewed in a much more hostile light.⁶³ Even in places where residents were not necessarily involved in criminal activities, a sense of collective solidarity among the residents could manifest itself in unwanted, even hostile ways. One young caregiver, Viktor Rezhov, assigned in 1936 to work in a children's home at the young age of eighteen (a reminder that many of these newly trained caregivers were not that far removed in age from their charges), wrote to Makarenko about his arrival in the children's home. "I knew nothing about real educational work," he wrote, recalling that one of the older caregivers told him on the first day that the most important thing was not to seem "lost" (*rasteriat'sia*). Otherwise, the residents would "give you a *temka*" – that is, they would suddenly cover you with a blanket and beat you. This beating was specifically carried out by a group, "so that all are guilty, and not just one person," which also made it impossible to single out individuals for punishment. Although Rezhov bragged that he had avoided such a fate by showing that he was "not a coward," one of the other new caregivers had received such a beating.⁶⁴ That the residents were in a sense acting as a collective was most likely of little comfort to the beaten caregiver.

In a 1938 public lecture, Makarenko deliberately downplayed the exceptionality of his achievements at the Gorky and Dzerzhinskii communes. Many Soviet pedagogues, he emphasized, had likely also been forming collectives along the same lines, forging yesterday's *besprizornye* into politically conscious "builders of socialism." As Makarenko put it, his only real contribution was the fact that he felt the need to demonstrate these methods to everyone through his writing.⁶⁵ Yet as we have seen, there were many points at which this process of "forging" politically conscious and collectivist subjects could potentially go awry. Children's

⁶³ Gorky, for example, praised the "natural collectivism" of *besprizornye* in his travel memoir *Across the Soviet Union*, excerpts of which can be found in *Makarenko: His Life and Work in Education* (1976), 110-111. The harsher assessment of *besprizornye* that prevailed by the mid-1930s is discussed in Chapter One of this dissertation.

⁶⁴ RGALI f. 332 op. 1 d. 70 ll. 203-207.

⁶⁵ Kharkhordin, 116

home workers who themselves lacked the desired political education could hardly pass this on to their charges. Problems with supplies and discipline kept some *detdomovtsy* from attending or succeeding in Soviet schools. Efforts to promote conscious self-discipline did not always have the desired results, not the least because the imagined path from external discipline (necessary simply to maintain order in the children's home) to collectively imposed discipline to an internalized self-discipline was hardly straightforward. Thus, while Makarenko had once imagined that his methods, properly applied, would allow pedagogues to “stamp” out the desired Soviet personality (*lichnost'*) like a metal press operator, in truth duplicating his results in the wider system of children's homes proved far more difficult.⁶⁶

“Bound to the Machine of Socialist Construction”: Labor Education in the Children's Home

Along with political consciousness and conscious self-discipline, labor education (*trudovoe vospitanie*) and the development of a “healthy attitude to work” were considered another essential part of raising “well-rounded” individuals in Soviet children's homes. Indeed, labor education remained prominent in children's homes even at a time when it was disappearing from Soviet schools and other institutions.⁶⁷ There were both ideological and practical reasons for the continuation of labor education in children's homes, colonies, and communes. As previously noted, the socialist New Man had always been imagined as overcoming the alienation of mental and physical labor through a combination of work and study. Labor education and training for the Soviet industrial workforce was also seen as another method for overcoming the

⁶⁶ Makarenko, *Pedagogicheskaiia Poema*, 574.

⁶⁷ Kelly, *Children's World*, 225.

“social neglect” (*zapushchennost’*) of *besprizornye* and their alienation from the wider Soviet society. As a letter to the Ural ONO in 1931 declared, every children’s home resident (and indeed every child) should be “bound to the big machine of socialist construction with tiny knots” through the work they performed as part of their labor education.⁶⁸ Speeches by Kalinin, Lunacharskii, and others also emphasized the role of labor education in a proper communist upbringing, declaring that only through actual work could young people develop a genuine proletarian consciousness and thus earn a full place in a socialist society.⁶⁹

At the same time, there were many practical reasons for this continuing emphasis on labor training. As previously discussed, many former *besprizornye* and children’s home residents struggled in school, not the least due to often having missed several years of education due to living on the street. Labor education and preparation for the workforce, rather than further academic study, was therefore a practical alternative for many of these children, as it would (at least in theory) provide them with useful skills. Labor education thus was intended to fulfill the needs of the Soviet state economy as well: the 1928 Sovnarkom resolution that ordered all children’s institutions to adopt the “method of labor education” and establish instructional workshops cited the need for qualified workers in Soviet industry and handicraftsmen on collective farms.⁷⁰ Krupskaiia offered a similar reasoning in a 1936 article on labor education, arguing that each children’s home should consult with surrounding enterprises and factories as to what type of workers were needed, and then try to provide these skills.⁷¹ Finally, the establishment of workshops and labor education in children’s homes and colonies was seen as a

⁶⁸ GARF f. A2306 op. 70 d. 5281 l. 21.

⁶⁹ Lunacharskii, “Education of the New Man,” 232-233; Kalinin, “Bud’te vsestoronne razvitymi liud’mi,” 26-29. In another speech, Kalinin emphasized the need for all communist upbringing to serve the needs of class struggle and the Soviet state, including the expansion of the industrial economy. Labor training and the development of a healthy attitude to work were therefore a necessary part of this upbringing: see Kalinin, “O kommunisticheskom vospitanii,” in *O Kommunisticheskom vospitanii*, 69-71.

⁷⁰ GARF f. R5207 op. 1 d. 329 l. 229.

⁷¹ RGASPI f. 12 op. 1 d. 254 l. 10.

means for at least partially alleviating their frequently dire financial situation. Following the example set by the financially self-sufficient Dzerzhinskii and Bolshevo communes, many institutions tried to make their workshops both a place for labor education and a source of goods for sale. A Sovnarkom order establishing several new labor communes in 1928, for example, specified that the workshop production of these communes should be directed toward the goal of eventual self-sufficiency.⁷² Labor education was therefore perceived by Soviet officials as both a crucial component of raising New Soviet People and a practical solution to the growing labor demand of Soviet industry and the financial pressures faced by many children's institutions.

As one might expect, numerous institutions did not live up to this ideal in practice. Though government directives continually called for the establishment of workshops for labor training in all children's homes, Soviet documents regularly reported on children's homes that lacked workshops or, quite often, did not have sufficient space in these workshops to provide labor education for all their charges. The reinforcement of more "traditional" gender roles during the Stalin period, which tended to manifest itself in labor education as a division between the work performed by boys versus girls, complicated this situation.⁷³ At one children's home in the Moscow region, for example, the small size of the sewing workshop meant that children worked in three different shifts, a fairly common solution to the problem of limited space but one that was often disruptive of schoolwork and other activities. Moreover, because this sewing workshop was the only labor training facility, and sewing was considered appropriate training only for girls, none of the home's boys were receiving any labor education.⁷⁴ Finally, the

⁷² GARF f. R5207 op. 1 d. 391 l. 26.

⁷³ On the general turn during the Stalin period toward more traditional gender roles for women, see Wendy Goldman, *Women, the State, and Revolution* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993); and Melanie Ilic, ed., *Women in the Stalin Era* (New York: Palgrave, 2001).

⁷⁴ TsGAMO f. 916 op. 1 d. 225 l. 149. It should be noted that this division of labor training for boys and girls was criticized by some officials.

general problems with the procurement and distribution of supplies and financial support to children's homes affected this planned system of labor education as well.⁷⁵ Many children's homes reported a need to establish or expand workshops to meet these demands for full labor education, but lacked the resources to do so. Others complained that they had established workshops, but at times lacked the raw materials, equipment, or supplies to utilize them to their full extent.⁷⁶

Even when these challenges had been met, most children's homes did not reflect the popular image of former *besprizornye* receiving useful industrial skills and being transformed by their encounter with honest, useful labor. The reality of many children's homes was that their charges at best learned to be unskilled workers or agricultural laborers, not the highly skilled industrial workers and "builders of socialism" depicted in Soviet literature and enshrined in Soviet dreams of the transformative power of labor. Soviet documents regularly lamented the gap between this lofty goal and the existing system of labor education. A Narkompros report on the Ivanovo region, for example, noted that the region's children's homes held thirty workshops and were currently training 931 out of 2514 school-age children, but that many of these workshops "do not meet the demands of industrial training" because they were not sufficiently mechanized or used outdated equipment.⁷⁷ Another report from Kuibyshev (Samara) declared that the majority of work in children's homes (a large number of which were located in rural areas) involved agriculture and animal husbandry, or small chores and housekeeping (*samoobsluzhivanie* and *domovodstvo*). Only one children's home in the region had an

⁷⁵ On frequent problems with supplying children's homes, see Chapter Two of this dissertation.

⁷⁶ GARF f. R5207 op. 1 d. 1051 l. 1.

⁷⁷ GARF f. A2306 op. 70 d. 5460 l. 19.

“acceptable” level of mechanization; thus, although the residents possessed “an enormous interest in technical matters,” there were few opportunities to pursue this interest.⁷⁸

Other documents attributed these criticisms to the children themselves, arguing that they strongly desired to become skilled workers and “builders of socialism” but were being failed by the existing system of labor education. In 1931, a report delivered to the Moscow Oblast ONO on the growing system of labor communes in the region argued that of those children who ran away from labor communes, 45 percent reportedly did so due to the fact that they “work 8-16 hours a day and do not receive any qualifications,” while another 30 percent gave “uninteresting work” as their reason for running away. The reason for this dissatisfaction, the speaker argued, was a lack of mechanization and industrial training: 75 percent of commune residents reportedly desired to work in mechanized industry and learn industrial skills, but complained of being forced to “waste their time with cows.” Such complaints revealed “in a word, that same idiotism of village life – and it still exists wholly and completely in our children’s homes and labor communes.” The root cause of, and solution to, this problem of a lack of mechanized industrial training were not material conditions, though these were important.⁷⁹ Rather, the speaker again framed the question as one of attitude and enthusiasm: “the whole problem is in cadres...in a shortage of people who could take on this matter in the workers’ way (*po-rabochemu*), in the socially conscious way (*po-obshchestvennomu*), in the communist way, in the Bolshevik way.”⁸⁰

Finally, although the system of labor education was envisioned as both a means for imparting useful skills to residents (and, ideally, as one part of their transformation into New Soviet People and “builders of socialism”) and a useful source of much-needed financial support,

⁷⁸ GARF f. A2306 op. 70 d. 5369 l. 4.

⁷⁹ GARF f. A2306 op. 70 d. 5278 ll. 5-22

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 22. Stalin would later immortalize this focus on “cadres” with his 1935 declaration that “cadres decide everything.” On the promotion of new “cadres” under Stalin, see Fitzpatrick, “Stalin and the Making of a New Elite 1928-1939.”

in practice these impulses sometimes came into conflict. There were institutions, other than the lauded Dzerzhinskii and Bolshevo communes, that managed reasonably to balance these tasks (though they sometimes had other deficiencies). The “Prussa” Labor Commune in the Moscow region, for example, in 1936 managed to supply its residents with new shoes produced in its own workshop, as well as earning about 10 percent of its operating budget through selling the products of its workshops – though this was still a far cry from the goal of eventual self-sufficiency.⁸¹ There were numerous incidents, however, where these more commercial endeavors were seen as interfering with the main goal of providing labor education. An accusatory Commissariat of Justice (Narkomiust) report from 1930 declared that its investigation had revealed most labor communes did not conduct any real professional or technical training in their workshops, instead using these facilities only for commercial purposes to supplement their budgets.⁸² A report from the Moscow regional Children’s Commission in 1936 provided a similar conclusion, declaring that only about half of the eligible (age twelve and older) children’s home residents in the region were involved in labor education, and that many children’s homes used their workshops primarily as sources of extra income rather than labor training. More egregiously, many workshops simply employed adult workers to manufacture these commercial products, thus not even pretending to be providing useful training and experience for their charges.⁸³

Other Soviet documents also echoed this idea that commercial concerns (stemming, it should be noted, in part from inadequate financial support from the Soviet government) were

⁸¹ TsGAMO f. 916 op. 1 d. 301 l. 20. It should be noted that this same report declared that despite these achievements, many of the commune’s buildings were in urgent need of repair. Apparently, the necessary repairs were never carried out; a letter from the Moscow regional Children’s Commission in 1938 reported that the facilities in this commune were in such poor condition, and so potentially dangerous for the children, that it needed to be closed. TsGAMO f. 916 op. 1 d. 375 ll. 160-161.

⁸² GARF f. R5207 op. 3 d. 11 l. 74.

⁸³ GARF f. R5207 op. 1 d. 1051 ll. 1-10.

leading to children being insufficiently involved in or even excluded from labor education. The Kolomna Children's Commission, for example, was criticized in 1936 for its operation of a sewing factory intended to provide useful training for older children's home residents and graduates. Despite having worked at the factory for over a year, these teenagers were apparently not being allowed to sit and work behind the sewing machines, instead being used to carry supplies to the adult workers and fold the finished products.⁸⁴ In another example, the Aikinsk Children's Home in the Komi Republic was accused of focusing on such commercial goals at the expense of its own children. Although the children's home had an excellent furniture workshop and was known for supplying quality furniture to the whole region, a critical inspector noted, its own furniture was in very poor condition and in need of replacement.⁸⁵

Soviet attempts to build a thorough system of labor education in children's institutions thus also often fell short of their lofty goals and the model provided by the Dzerzhinskii and Bolshevo communes. While some children's homes and particularly labor communes did manage to involve most of their charges in some kind of labor training, many more either lacked workshop space, needed supplies and machinery, or were limited in the types of training they could provide. Moreover, while labor education was envisioned as an intersection of ideological and practical goals, in practice these goals sometimes came into conflict. Children's home directors, suffering from limited budgets and pressed by officials or circumstances to achieve greater financial self-sufficiency, often turned to workshops as a means to supplement their home's income. At times, this use of workshops as a source of supplementary funds even disrupted their intended educational function, with the lofty goal of building the New Soviet

⁸⁴ TsGAMO f. 916 op. 1 d. 225 l. 68.

⁸⁵ Inspection report for Aikinsk School-Age Children's Home, 22-29 Aug. 1937, in *Krest'ianskie deti*, 489-494.

Person through labor sacrificed to the much more mundane need to provide (and pay for) basic food, shelter, and clothing for their charges.

“Children Need to Feel our Love”: The Children’s Home as an Emotional Regime

The final dimension of this project to raise the New Soviet Person or “well-rounded individual” (in Kalinin’s words) was a concern for the emotional life of these subjects. Indeed, Soviet discourse regarding children’s homes and their task of bringing up a new Soviet generation always included a strong emotional element. Although the image of children’s institutions as “factories of the New Soviet People” might seem to imply a mechanical, unemotional process, Soviet writings continually emphasized the need for and usefulness of emotion in the children’s home, albeit emotion that was properly expressed and directed toward the appropriate objects and goals. This idea of the proper expression and direction of emotion, the “emotional regime” of the children’s home, sought to create a structured emotional life for its residents that served the objectives of the Soviet state and its transformative project.⁸⁶ The children’s home and its collective were presented as a type of surrogate family, in which children would develop both emotional ties to the collective (and through it, to the Soviet state) and learn to cultivate certain emotions while suppressing others. In a familiar turn of events, the reality of many children’s homes did not live up to this ideal image of a loving, surrogate family. Moreover, although Soviet discourse always spoke of the love shown to these orphans by the Soviet state, and desired (or even mandated) that this “love” be returned, in practice the Stalinist state and wider Soviet society often continued to treat orphaned and homeless children with disdain, suspicion, and sometimes outright hostility. As the Stalin period went on, the state and

⁸⁶ On the concept of “emotional regimes,” see Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling*, 124-126.

its institutions, including children's homes, showed less and less tolerance for those perceived to violate the established "regime," to be incapable or unwilling to control their behavior and emotions, or to direct their emotional energies in undesirable directions.

In contrast to some earlier visions that depicted the New Person as a mechanical, perfectly rational and emotionless being, most ideas about raising New Soviet People actually included a place for emotion and discussed how this emotional life should be shaped.⁸⁷ In his discussion of communist upbringing, Lunacharskii emphasized that the New Soviet Person would combine the ability to remake society along rational, collective lines with the energy and enthusiasm characteristic of youth. As with earlier Soviet debates on the relative merits of enthusiasm, spontaneity, and rebellious energy versus consciousness, rationality, and discipline (particularly among youth), Lunacharskii emphasized that this enthusiasm and energy needed to be properly directed.⁸⁸ What was needed, Lunacharskii argued, was a worthwhile goal towards which this enthusiasm and will could be productively channeled – and of course there was no goal more worthwhile than the construction of communism and the forging of the New Soviet Person.⁸⁹ Mikhail Kalinin, in a 1938 speech on the tasks of Soviet education, also argued that the New Soviet Person would not "cease to have human feelings" – rather, the task of Soviet education was to cultivate within this person "all the best human qualities," including emotions.⁹⁰

Lunacharskii and Kalinin also discussed the usefulness of various specific emotions in the development of the New Soviet Person. Both argued for the cultivation of certain emotions

⁸⁷ On this "machine man" in early Soviet culture, see SITES, *Revolutionary Dreams*, 145-164.

⁸⁸ On debates over the merits of enthusiasm and spontaneity versus discipline and consciousness among youth, see GORSUCH, *Youth in Revolutionary Russia*, 12-27. By the end of NEP, while youthful enthusiasm was still celebrated, the ideal activist youth was depicted as disciplined, studious, rational, and mature – i.e. more "adult."

⁸⁹ Lunacharskii, "Education of the New Man," 226-230.

⁹⁰ Kalinin, "Rech na soveshchanii uchitelei-otlichnikov gorodskikh i sel'skikh shkol, sozvanom redaksiiei 'Uchitel'skoi gazety,'" 28 Dec. 1938, in *O kommunisticheskom vospitanii*, 39.

as a means for furthering the Soviet transformative project of building socialism. Lunacharskii, for example, held that honor, despite its “aristocratic” connotations, could be a useful emotion for Soviet society. Having a sense of honor was about being willing to sacrifice oneself for a larger purpose, a principle that still applied to a Soviet society in which the individual needed to be willing to sacrifice himself for common interests and goals. This sacrifice, however, was not to die for a higher principle: “rather, we demand more, we demand that men should live for them, and live every hour of their lives for them.”⁹¹ A properly Soviet sense of honor, therefore, demanded that one at all times place the interests of the collective ahead of one’s individual interests, a principle that was widely emphasized in Makarenko’s communes and other Soviet children’s institutions. The counterpart to this sense of honor was a sense of shame, an emotion that Lunacharskii argued was equally useful. Anyone who had displayed improper behavior – “told a shameful lie, or hindered collective work, or used force against the weak, or shown anti-Semitism” – should “feel shame before all their comrades for their action, as unworthy of a member of that collective.”⁹² As we have seen, Makarenko’s pedagogical system strongly incorporated this principle, relying on criticism and a sense of shame before the wider collective (the detachment or general assembly) to change behavior. Such practices, stemming again from the idea that shame could be a useful emotion, were common in other children’s institutions as well.⁹³

Honor and shame were not the only emotions to be cultivated among the New Soviet People. In the same speech discussed above, Kalinin listed a series of emotions that Soviet

⁹¹ Lunacharskii, “Education of the New Man,” 236.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ A sense of shame in these cases was reinforced by the scrutiny of one’s peers, by the experience of being called to account for one’s misdeeds in front of the group. Kharkhordin discusses this practice in terms of Foucauldian discipline through surveillance and the creation of an accusatory “public opinion” around an individual, but does not explicitly address the emotional dimension of this experience: see *The Collective and the Individual*, 114-117.

educators should encourage among children. First and foremost was love: a love for the motherland, a love for the working masses, and a love for humanity in general. The second among these “best of human qualities” was honesty, followed by bravery. It was bravery, Kalinin argued, that would allow the socialist person to conquer the world; not merely to seize the existing world, but to remake it. Fourth was comradesly ties and a feeling of solidarity, though interestingly (and perhaps indicative of the mood of 1938) Kalinin particularly emphasized that such solidarity would be useful for the Red Army and should therefore be encouraged from a young age. Finally, Kalinin argued that Soviet children needed a genuine love for labor, as well as an understanding of what the slogan “labor is a matter of honor” really meant.⁹⁴ Relating this slogan back to the twin notions of honor and shame, Kalinin stated that children should understand from a young age that “if a person lives, eats, and does not work, then this means he is eating someone else’s labor.”⁹⁵ In other words, he should feel shame that he is benefitting from the labor of another, without making his own contribution. Emotions could thereby be useful for teaching Soviet principles in a way that straightforward political lectures (which Makarenko had derided as “sermons”) could not.⁹⁶

Soviet officials and pedagogues envisioned a structured emotional life in children’s homes that would promote these desirable emotions and make use of emotional ties to bind children to the wider collective. The key basis for this emotional life was to be the idea of the children’s home as a type of surrogate family for children who had lost or been otherwise separated from their biological families. Soviet documents repeatedly invoked the imagery and language of family to describe the ideal children’s home, likening ties between caregivers and their charges to love between parents and children or comparing relationships among the

⁹⁴ Kalinin, “Rech’ na soveshchanii uchitelei-otlichnikov,” 39-40.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁹⁶ On Makarenko’s disdain for political “sermons,” see Kharkhordin, 103; and Chapter Three of this dissertation.

children themselves to those of affectionate siblings. Soviet directives to children's homes and labor communes called for a "living, warm, and caring" relationship between the staff and children, and praised those institutions that had created a "genuine family."⁹⁷ Although reports from inspectors and directives to improve children's homes often lamented the poor formal education and training of many children's home workers, they also declared a "love for children" to be among the most important qualifications for this work.⁹⁸ Awards regularly given to the best children's home workers also specifically praised their "special love and care" for children, often again likening their role in children's lives to that of a loving parent.⁹⁹ Similarly, while children's home residents were supposed to be bound together by ties of "comradely affection," the language used to describe these relationships strongly alluded to family relationships. Makarenko's institutions seem to have again provided something of a model, as they were repeatedly described both by Soviet newspapers and by communards as a "big family," presided over by Makarenko in the role of a stern but loving father.¹⁰⁰ For an institution that was originally imagined as a means to remove children from the harmful influence of the "bourgeois" family, the Soviet children's home of the Stalin period ironically retained much of the emotional discourse and tropes of family life, even going so far as to declare explicitly that the children's home should aspire to form a surrogate family for its charges.¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ NKVD Order no. 071 "On the Organization of Work on the Liquidation of Child Homelessness," 7 June 1935, in *Deti Gulaga*, 188; TsGAMO f. 916 op. 1 d. 108 l. 103. For examples of this discourse in Soviet newspapers, see "Zdes' liubiat detei" [Here Children are Loved], *Kommunar Tula* 28 Jan. 1937, and "Malakhovskii detskii dom," *Liubertsy Moskovskoi oblasti* 23 May 1938, in TsGAMO f. 916 op. 1 d. 322 ll. 34, 141.

⁹⁸ TsGAMO f. 916 op. 1 d. 250 l. 47; d. 108 l. 104. Nadezhda Krupskaiia also reiterated this idea in a 1938 meeting with children's home workers: see RGASPI f. 12 op. 1 d. 254 l. 21.

⁹⁹ TsGAMO f. 916 op. 1 d. 250 l. 47.

¹⁰⁰ Letters from former communards, and particularly speeches and reminiscences delivered after Makarenko's death, often referred to Makarenko as "our dear father." For letters, see RGALI f. 332 op. 2 d. 52. See also the speech delivered by former communard Tubin at Makarenko's funeral, RGALI f. 332 op. 4 d. 537 l. 29.

Konisevich's memoirs would also later describe the Dzerzhinskii Commune as a "big family": see Leonid Konisevich, *Bol'shaia sem'ia* (Cheliabinsk: Izd-vo "Pogranichnik," 1980).

¹⁰¹ Radical Bolsheviks like Alexandra Kollontai and Nadezhda Krupskaiia had initially imagined a system of children's homes that would, eventually, raise all children in a collective setting, thus relieving women of the

This surrogate family was in turn intended to be a stepping-stone to encouraging the wider “love” described by Kalinin above: a love for one’s socialist motherland, for the “working masses,” for “the people” in general, and, by implication, for their representatives in the Soviet state (including Stalin). As a 1936 report on children’s homes in the Volga region argued, “the whole environment of the children’s home should be such that children love the children’s home and feel that the whole proletarian state and Soviet society cares for them.”¹⁰² Krupskaja echoed this sentiment in 1938, declaring to a gathering of children’s home workers that “children in children’s homes need to feel our love for them, and not just in words.” The Soviet state had promised a “happy childhood” for all; it was the responsibility of children’s home workers to see that this promise was fulfilled.¹⁰³ In this way, the desired love between the children’s home staff and their charges was to be part of a wider emotional discourse, in which the Soviet state showed its love for these orphaned and homeless children by sheltering, feeding, and educating them on the way to making them productive, full Soviet citizens - in short, by giving them the proverbial “road to life” depicted in Makarenko’s writings and the 1931 film of the same name.¹⁰⁴ At the same time, as will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter, this love was not unconditional, but rather came with very distinct expectations, namely that these children would return this “love” by professing their gratitude to the Soviet state and by conducting themselves as loyal and dedicated citizens.¹⁰⁵ The emotional life of the children’s home aimed at producing two interconnected senses of emotional belonging: first to the surrogate family of the children’s

traditional burden of child-rearing. See, for example, Alexandra Kollontai, “Communism and the Family,” in *Selected Writings of Alexandra Kollontai*, trans. Alix Holt (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1977), 256-260; and Krupskaja’s lament that this dream had not come to fruition in “The Children’s Home for Waifs,” RGASPI, f. 12 op. 1 d. 252 ll. 16-21.

¹⁰² GARF f. R5207 op.1 d. 1298 l. 42.

¹⁰³ RGASPI f. 12 op. 1 d. 254 l. 21.

¹⁰⁴ See Chapter Three of this dissertation.

¹⁰⁵ This can be considered another example of the “economy of the gift” in Stalin-era discourse: see Brooks, *Thank You Comrade Stalin*, 83-105; and Chapter One of this dissertation.

home, and secondly to the wider Soviet society. In this way, the collective of the children's home served as a mediator between the individual and society in both a social and emotional sense.

Along with fostering this emotional connection, Soviet children's homes also sought to build a specific emotional personality among their charges, characterized by many of the same emotions discussed by Lunacharskii and Kalinin above and embodied in the disciplined, enthusiastic, decisive, and committed young communards represented in popular depictions of the Dzerzhinskii and Bolshevo communes. Makarenko also described the type of personality (*lichnost'*) he sought to produce, stating that while this individual should be educated, brave, a collectivist, and honest, he should also be conscious of his proletarian duty and, above all, possess a "feeling of responsibility (*chuvstva otvetstvennosti*)."¹⁰⁶ These desired attributes encompassed both reason and emotion, as they stemmed not simply from a reasoned, conscious understanding of how one's individual interests should coincide with the collective, but from a feeling of pride, shame, and responsibility before the collective. Caregivers and particularly the head of the educational section (*zavuch*) were therefore supposed to concern themselves not only with the behavior and conduct of their charges, but also with their emotional states, attitudes, and other aspects of their emotional lives.

Children's homes kept short dossiers on each of their charges, typically written by the head of the educational section and often composed when assessments of each child were requested, such as when children were to advance grades in school or be transferred to another institution. The dossiers available in various archives contain notes on the general conduct, academic record, and talents of each child, as well as their emotional states, general level of "enthusiasm," and other elements of their personality, indicating the relative importance placed

¹⁰⁶ Makarenko, *Pedagogicheskaiia Poema*, 576.

on both of these aspects. A few illustrative examples of such dossiers give some indication of the types of emotional expression encouraged in the children's home, as well as those seen as problematic:

Table 5: Dossiers from the Khvalynsk Children's Home, 1936

[boy, age seven]: Discipline is mediocre. Does not like to spend time in a group...does not have a zest for life (*nezhiznoradostnyi*), loves to be by himself, but does not cause harm to the collective. More than anything is scared of the older boys. Neat (*akkuraten*) and polite in his relations with adults. Restless, becomes fed up with things quickly and expresses his dissatisfaction by crying...

[boy, age eight]: Recent arrival from Khvalynsk children's home. Has not attended school. Discipline is good. Loves and tries to respect adults...tries to maintain order in his room...Listens attentively to what caregivers say. Has a small vocabulary, has trouble telling stories and answering questions, is not developed and is timid. Loves to play with a pencil and paper...

[another boy, age not indicated]: Illiterate, discipline could not be worse, is a disorganizer (*dezorganizator*). Mean (*zloi*), capable of killing someone when upset. Vengeful and rude...loves to exert authority. Other children are afraid of him and submit to what he says. Loves to make things from iron, pound nails, and so on. Untidy. Has somewhat improved recently.

Source: Dossiers on new arrivals from Khvalynsk children's home (1936), GARF f. R5207 op. 3 d. 35 ll. 84-85.

While many dossiers were not as vivid in their descriptions, most made a similar effort to give some sense of each child's personality and typical emotional state. Along with obviously praising those children characterized as "disciplined," dossiers also praised "enthusiastic," "bold," "decisive," and "determined" children who "loved work," were "respectful" to comrades and staff, and who were "open," outgoing, socially involved, and committed to the collective. In turn, dossiers on problematic children not only outlined their behavioral problems and disciplinary infractions (such as stealing, fighting, smoking, or skipping school), but also labeled them as "undisciplined," "rude," "easily bored," "indifferent to work," "characterized by a

hooligan manner,” “sarcastic,” lacking in willpower, slovenly, or quick to anger and argue with instructors.¹⁰⁷

Such dossiers therefore also played a part in the emotional regime of Soviet children’s homes. Documents from Soviet children’s homes expressed worries about the disruptive potential of uncontrolled emotions or “inappropriate” emotional expression, and drew connections between behavior, “character,” and emotion. Often, inappropriate or undesirable behavior was considered indicative of a larger, troubled emotional state, an emotional personality at odds with the collective life of the children’s home, or, most disturbingly for Soviet authorities, a potentially “anti-Soviet” orientation. Of course, the problems associated with outright violent young men, homeless youth who replicated their gang structures in children’s homes, or older children who abused younger children, are fairly obvious. Beyond such outright violations of the rules and order of the children’s home (which, Soviet documents complained, still existed in many places and were not being adequately addressed), however, Soviet officials were concerned about any behavior and emotional expression that seemed to indicate their charges were directing emotional energies in ways deemed inappropriate or antithetical to the ideal of a harmonious collective life in the children’s home.

This concern sometimes took the form of discussion, criticism, and even attempted intervention in the romantic relationships of children’s home residents. Such was the case with the “Ira K. affair,” a scandal in one children’s home that stands out for being unusually well-documented among the archival records of the Moscow region. A closer look at this case reveals several interesting aspects of the emotional regime in this particular children’s home, suggesting

¹⁰⁷ For examples of mostly positive descriptions, see the dossiers of former *besprizornye* now working at a factory school operated by the VTsIK Children’s Commission, GARF f. R5207 op. 2 d. 56. Dossiers on teenagers now housed at a children’s home for “difficult” children were, as might be expected, much more critical: see GARF f. R5207 op. 1 d. 1579.

again that for Soviet officials, any behavior that seemed to indicate an orientation toward one's private self or individual desires over the collective, or threatened to disrupt the emotional life of this collective by sparking jealousy, lust, or other undesired emotions, was considered potentially threatening.¹⁰⁸

According to a lengthy report written in 1931 by one of the group leaders at the “Young Republic” children’s village (*detposelok*), Ira K. arrived at the children’s home in 1927 and immediately began “to attract the attention of the other children and the pedagogical personnel with her behavior.” Behaving in a “coquettish” and “unseemly” manner, Ira K. was accused of trying to “win her group leader’s heart”; when he ignored her, she attempted to “get revenge” on him by carrying on affairs with other older teenage boys. Other residents of the children’s home had observed her in Moscow’s Park Kultury with two teenage boys “in a pose completely unfitting for a public place.” According to this document, Ira K. also had an inappropriate interest in sex and had told “obscene things” to some of the younger children. She had also been accused of stealing small objects or clothes from other girls, a charge that she denied. Both these accusations and her amorous behavior had been discussed several times at the girls’ general assemblies, but her behavior had apparently not changed. Recently, the now seventeen-year-old Ira had been observed to not return to the girls’ dormitory at night, or to return very late, implying that she was continuing to carry on affairs.¹⁰⁹ As further evidence, this archival file included various love letters written to Ira K. by at least four different male admirers.¹¹⁰

Concluding that she was unwilling to change, the report declared that the children’s general

¹⁰⁸ This concern with the potentially troublesome influence of private life and individual desires, particularly among youth, had preoccupied revolutionary activists and Soviet thinkers both before and after 1917. On concerns about private life and romantic entanglements among youth, see Gorsuch, *Youth in Revolutionary Russia*, especially 96-115.. On the threat imagined from private life, see Christina Kiaer and Eric Naiman, eds., *Everyday Life in Early Soviet Russia: Taking the Revolution Inside*, 1-18.

¹⁰⁹ TsGAMO f. 4341 op. 1 d. 673 ll. 27-33.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, ll. 35-40, 68-73.

assembly had decided Ira K. should finally be removed from the children's home and sent to a factory school (FZU), a recommendation it endorsed.

Such concerns over teenagers' romantic entanglements and sexual experiences were of course nothing new for Soviet children's homes, or indeed for any institution in which teenagers lived in close proximity to each other without parental supervision.¹¹¹ Such concerns were magnified by the fact that many homeless girls had been involved in prostitution during their time on the street or otherwise had what were termed "inappropriately early sexual experiences."¹¹² Although often somewhat prudish in their language, Soviet documents from children's homes make it clear that sexual encounters between teenage boys and girls within children's homes were not unheard of.¹¹³ What is interesting about the "Ira K." affair, and suggestive of concerns beyond the usual unease with precocious teenage sexuality, was the way in which this affair was framed as a disruption of the whole emotional life of the children's home and, potentially, its mission to raise collectivist, dedicated future Soviet citizens. As the report stated, "before Ira K. arrived relationships between the sexes in our home were normal and comradely – flirting was not observed."¹¹⁴ Now "all the boys, with rare exceptions, are enamored with her," as also evidenced by the numerous love letters Ira K. received. As characterized in this report, Ira K.'s flirtatious behavior had disrupted the "comradely" ties of the children's home, introducing jealousy, lust, infatuation, and a host of undesirable emotions.

¹¹¹ Ball briefly discusses such concerns in the 1920s: see *And Now My Soul is Hardened*, 165.

¹¹² A 1931 report from the Moscow Children's Commission claimed that 65 percent of the capital's prostitutes were teenagers. TsGAMO f. 916 op. 1 d. 11 l. 8. Some of these teenage prostitutes were sent to a special institution established by Narkompros specifically for rehabilitating young prostitutes, the "New Life" Commune, described in P.V. Potalak, *Institut trudovogo vospitaniia "Novaia zhizn'" Narkomprosa RSFSR* (Moskva: Gos. Uchebno-pedagogicheskoe izd-vo Narkomprosa RSFSR, 1940). Interestingly, Makarenko in 1934 also expressed some of the same concerns about a group of older girls, some of whom "had an early sexual development" and continued to cause a "sexual problem" (*polevaia problema*) at the Dzerzhinskii Commune. Makarenko recommended that they be introduced to communards who had married and formed families, as this example of "love with responsibility" would have a positive influence. Makarenko, letter on the state of the Dzerzhinskii Commune for 1934, RGALI f. 332 op. 4 d. 297 ll. 5-7.

¹¹³ GANO f. R1115 op. 1 d. 357 ll. 24, 54; GARF f. R5207 op. 3 d. 27 l. 168; GARF f. R5207 op. 3 d. 34 l. 1.

¹¹⁴ TsGAMO f. 4341, op. 1 d. 673, l. 27.

Moreover, “her bad behavior has been observed not only in our *detposelok* but also by the surrounding populace,” implying that the institution’s reputation among its neighbors was in danger of being damaged as well.¹¹⁵ Ira K.’s conduct was therefore presented not just as unseemly or overly promiscuous, but as a violation of the whole “emotional regime” of the children’s home. Interestingly, this behavior had apparently been ongoing for several years before the decision was made to send Ira K. to the FZU (which, according to Soviet regulations on children’s homes, could have taken place earlier), suggesting perhaps a certain optimism that she could indeed be “reeducated” and would eventually change her conduct. In the end, however, it appears her behavior was finally considered too much to tolerate.¹¹⁶

As in the case of “Ira K.,” removal or expulsion of those who disrupted the “regime” of the children’s home was sometimes viewed as the only way to preserve the harmony of the collective. Indeed, the tolerance for such disruptions seems to have decreased as the Stalin period went on, reflected in the expanded system of “closed” children’s homes and labor colonies for “difficult” children, and the increased tendency for problematic cases to be shipped off to “closed” institutions and even, in some cases, to Gulag camps.¹¹⁷ The reformers, pedagogues, and policy makers who comprised the Children’s Commission, however, often lamented that such actions undermined the redemptive and transformative mission of the children’s home and hardly lived up to the ideal of providing a loving surrogate family for these

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 28.

¹¹⁶ I have been unable to locate any further documents or information on her transfer to the FZU or fate after leaving the children’s home.

¹¹⁷ See Chapter One of this dissertation and p. 19 of this chapter. As Catriona Kelly notes, even before this increased emphasis on discipline and the expansion of NKVD labor colonies, these colonies were being used as a catch-all for any “hard cases” or those deemed too difficult to educate in “normal” children’s homes. Between 1935 and 1940, more than half of the *besprizornye* sent to these labor colonies had never been processed by Soviet courts. Kelly, *Children’s World*, 232-233. With homeless youth increasingly labeled as “socially dangerous,” a large number rounded up in mass operations were also sent directly to closed labor colonies or even, if convicted of a crime, directly to the Gulag: see Shearer, *Policing Stalin’s Socialism*, 231-237; and Paul Hagenloh, *Stalin’s Police*, 313-321. The number of inmates under eighteen years of age in Gulag camps thus increased in the late 1930s: see J. Arch Getty, Gabor T. Rittersporn, and Viktor N. Zemskov, “Victims of the Soviet Penal System in the Pre-War Years,” *The American Historical Review* 98, no. 4 (Oct 1993): 1017-1049.

children. Workers and directors at children's homes were accused in a number of cases of abusing this option – rather than working to understand and reform children with behavioral and emotional problems, they supposedly preferred simply to label these children “difficult” (*trudnye* or *trudnovospituemye*) and request that they be transferred to NKVD colonies. The administration at Children's Home no. 4 in the Orekhovo-Zuevo district, for example, were accused of “completely perverting the meaning of socially neglected [*sotsialno-zapushchennye*] children” in order to send challenging or disruptive, but “normal,” children to labor colonies.¹¹⁸ To be fair to these workers, most were poorly paid, poorly trained, overworked, and expected to provide for, reeducate, and transform their charges with very limited resources. In many cases, simply removing a problematic child was most likely seen as the best option for the children's home as a whole – and this was an option, after all, explicitly provided by Soviet law and undoubtedly encouraged by the increased emphasis on discipline, order, and harmony in Stalin-era discourse and policy.

Documents from the Children's Commission and various inspectors, however, often presented these incidents as evidence of a wider problem of “apathy” among children's home workers. In this sense, the emotional regime of the children's home extended to staff members as well. Workers and directors were accused of not possessing or demonstrating sufficient love for their work or for the children for whom they were responsible. In one of the most egregious cases, two caregivers from a children's home in the Moscow region were accused of standing by idly while one of their charges drowned in a nearby river. According to documents delivered to the procurator (with a recommendation that criminal charges be filed), the other children shouted that one of their fellow Pioneers was drowning. The caregivers at first responded “that's not one of ours,” and then were reportedly too scared to enter the river. Several of the other Pioneers

¹¹⁸ TsGAMO f. 916 op. 1 d. 225 l. 149.

attempted a rescue but failed.¹¹⁹ As a result, the two caregivers were put “on trial” but, according to a newspaper article describing this incident, did “not learn anything from this.” Two months later, while on a hike with the same caregivers, another girl from the children’s home also drowned. As reported in this article, several other children saw this girl drowning and tried to get their caregiver’s attention, but were again ignored. Both caregivers were therefore scheduled to be brought to trial again.¹²⁰ For good measure, this newspaper article presented this latest death as the culmination of a history of neglect, inappropriately harsh discipline, and general apathy towards these children.

While the case discussed above was an extreme example, it was indicative of a larger pattern in which almost all incidents could be blamed on supposed “apathy” and insufficient enthusiasm on the part of children’s home workers. Such accusations may have had some merit in many cases, as with directors who reportedly spent only a few minutes each day at the children’s home or caregivers who worked only half of their assigned shifts and left their charges mostly to their own devices.¹²¹ Of course, this is not to mention incidents in which children’s home staff were convicted of outright criminal behavior, such as embezzlement of funds or abuse of their charges.¹²² There were cases, however, in which these accusations of “apathy” seem rather unfair, or at least one-sided. One director in the Moscow region, for example, was accused of “having no love for his work,” the evidence of which was the fact that he tended to be absent from the children’s home and concerned himself with “economic matters”

¹¹⁹ TsGAMO f. 916 op. 1 d. 262 l. 117.

¹²⁰ “Kto vinovat v smerti Pionerki Shury Ulanovoi?” [Who is to blame for the death of Pioneer Shura Ulanova?], *Nabat* 27 Aug. 1936, TsGAMO f. 916 op. 1 d. 262 l. 44.

¹²¹ Such accusations were leveled at workers in the Palevitsy children’s home in the report that began this chapter: see Dobronozhenko and Shabalova, eds., *Krest’ianskie deti*, 524-530. For other documents declaring that children’s home workers regularly skipped their shifts, showed up late and left early, left children alone for extended periods of time, or were otherwise “apathetic” to their work, see inspection reports of various children’s homes in Dobronozhenko and Shabalova, 428-429, 435-437, 471-472, 515-520; and GANINO f. 120 op. 1 d. 97 l. 15.

¹²² See Chapter Two of this dissertation. See also TsGAMO f. 916 op. 1 d. 303 l. 2, in which two caregivers were apparently brought up on criminal charges of abuse and the rest of the staff fired for tolerating this abuse.

(*khoziastvennyye voprosy*) all day.¹²³ As we saw in Chapter Two, however, such economic questions were vital to the survival of children's homes, and many directors were essentially forced by unreliable supplies and financial support to seek their own solutions to finding food and other necessities. Similarly, workers at the Kuznetsov children's home were accused of not caring about improving the lives of children, but only about their own pay. As evidence, this document cited the fact that the director and several workers were also teaching classes at the local school to earn extra money.¹²⁴ Yet given their very low pay overall, it is hard to fault these workers for trying to find extra sources of income. Of course, without further evidence we cannot fully judge the merits of these accusations. These charges of "apathy" and "insufficient love," however, often seemed to reflect the idealized image of the children's home as a loving, surrogate family presided over by dedicated and tirelessly enthusiastic workers (an image encouraged by public celebration of model institutions like Makarenko's communes) rather than a realistic assessment of the challenges faced by children's home personnel.

Cases of (supposedly) apathetic workers, however, were hardly the only way in which some children's homes scarcely resembled a loving, surrogate family. Many Soviet reports were also filled with stories of animosity, conflict, and even violence between residents in children's homes. Some of the most well-known examples, to be discussed more in the next chapter, were conflicts between children of "enemies of the people" and other orphaned children, who often called the former "Trotskyites" or other terms of abuse, sometimes apparently with the tacit consent or encouragement of staff members.¹²⁵ Reports of conflict and violence among former *besprizornnye* and other residents of children's homes, however, were fairly frequent throughout

¹²³ TsGAMO f. 916 op. 1 d. 225 l. 30.

¹²⁴ TsGAMO f. 916 op. 1 d. 301 l. 50.

¹²⁵ For examples of this animosity toward children of "enemies of the people," see Chapter Five of this dissertation.

the Stalin period (and earlier).¹²⁶ In the worst cases, some children's homes were compared to "bandit hideouts" where *besprizornye* and juvenile delinquents simply continued the gangs, thievery, and violence they had known during their lives on the street.¹²⁷ Many other inspectors reported on boys' proclivity for fighting and unhealthy fascination with weapons in various children's homes. A 1935 report on the city of Moscow noted that in some children's homes, boys used the workshops to make home-made knives and pistols, which some had subsequently used to commit robberies or harm other residents.¹²⁸ Boys also did not have to be involved in criminal activities to display an enthusiasm for weapons and fighting. There were reports of organized "Chapaev battles" following the 1934 release of the popular film *Chapaev*, in which children divided themselves into "reds" and "whites" and fought with makeshift weapons. One particularly dedicated group even fashioned a home-made cannon filled with ball bearings, which fortunately failed to fire.¹²⁹ While inspectors condemned such violence, it should be noted that the political education provided in children's homes (and for that matter Soviet schools) likely encouraged this type of fighting. Having recognized that boys tended to be particularly interested in heroic stories of the Civil War and other adventurous subjects, children's home educators were specifically encouraged to show patriotic war movies like *Chapaev*, to encourage

¹²⁶ Ball, 164-174. Soviet reports mentioned incidents of violence fairly frequently, which usually consisted of mild fist fights, but sometimes ranged to threats or attempts at murder; TsGAMO f. 916 op. 1 d. 262 l. 5; GANO f. R1115 op. 1 d. 375 l. 76. Several memoirists also recall fights as being fairly common in their children's homes; see Nikolaev, *Kto byl nichem*, 49-50; and Igor Pol', 75-78.

¹²⁷ See Chapter One of this dissertation.

¹²⁸ GARF f. R5207 op. 3 d. 27 l. 137. This was not the only incident of youth arming themselves in Soviet institutions; see the story of the uprising at the Kleimenovo children's village, GARF f. R5207 op. 3 d. 34 ll. 46-52, discussed more in Chapter One.

¹²⁹ Lewis Siegelbaum and Andrei Sokolov, *Stalinism as a Way of Life: A Narrative in Documents* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 399-400.

war-themed games for young boys, and to have older children participate in paramilitary exercises.¹³⁰

Rape and sexual assault were also not unheard of, though reports of such incidents appear less frequently in Soviet documents. Reports on one overcrowded receiving center in the Novgorod region in 1930 noted two incidents of rape or attempted sexual assault, including one that involved a seven-year-old girl. As these reports lamented, overcrowded conditions and lack of adult supervision made such crimes possible: one assault had taken place in the bathroom that boys and girls shared due to overcrowding. Moreover, these assaults were presented as part of a larger problem of relations between the sexes; as noted in this report, teenage boys regularly “aggressively propositioned” girls at the receiving center, suggesting that future incidents were likely if conditions were not improved.¹³¹ Such crimes could be devastating to the reeducational mission of children’s homes. In one home in the Central Black Earth region, eight girls ran away in 1931 after another girl was raped by a group of residents, which also prompted the remaining girls to barricade themselves within their dormitory.¹³² Since that time, they had apparently refused to participate in any kind of activities and had completely isolated themselves from the home’s boys.

It hardly needs to be said that these children’s homes were a far cry from the comradesly collectives desired by Soviet authorities. Even in places where violence, theft, “hooliganism,” and other disturbing behaviors were not observed, however, Soviet officials sometimes expressed concerns over animosity between boys and girls. Apart from such extreme incidents

¹³⁰ The Kuibyshev ONO, for example, in 1938 encouraged educators to show war films and organize formal “war games” between children’s homes: see GARF f. A2306 op. 70 d. 5369 l. 4. This suggestion was undoubtedly in part also prompted by the talk of war in the Soviet press in the late 1930s and the Soviet government’s insistence on military readiness. A similar report from the Ivanovo region in 1940 stated, with approval, that all children’s homes were conducting some kind of mass war games, which included home-made (non-functional) weapons. Girls were also included in the role of nurses. GARF f. A2306 op. 70 d. 5460 l. 32.

¹³¹ GANO f. R1115 op. 1 d. 357 ll. 24, 54.

¹³² GARF f. R5207 op. 3 d. 11 l. 149.

as the “hunting” for girls discussed at the beginning of this chapter, several Soviet reports criticized children’s homes for tolerating or not effectively correcting a tendency toward antagonism between the sexes. In a few incidents, staff members were even accused of promoting this antagonism. Several staff members at a children’s home in the Moscow region were charged with encouraging conflicts by stating that “boys are better than girls,” and, more disturbingly, by propositioning the older girls themselves.¹³³ This concern about antagonism between the sexes was not simply anxiety over undesirable or even criminal behavior, as disturbing as some of these incidents were. Rather, Soviet officials and pedagogues were also concerned about the ways in which a divide between boys and girls seemed to undermine Soviet narratives of gender equality, comradely relations, and the surrogate family of the children’s home. After an inspection of children’s homes in the Ulianovsk region, for example, Narkompros directed these homes to end the practice of assigning boys and girls to different work and labor training (such as metalworking vs. sewing), and to “struggle with the sharp division in life, work, games, and other activities between boys and girls.”¹³⁴ Krupskaia also argued that she had observed an undesirable tendency for boys and girls to engage in separate activities and games in Pioneer palaces and children’s homes, as if they were “two nations.”¹³⁵ Such divisions, if tolerated, seemed to challenge assertions about the successful establishment of gender equality in the Soviet Union and the possibility of genuine “comradely relations” between the sexes.

Finally, the emotional discourse surrounding the *detdom* was challenged by the fact that a significant number of children’s homes enjoyed strained or even antagonistic relations with the

¹³³ TsGAMO f. 916 op. 1 d. 362 l. 18.

¹³⁴ GARF f. A2306 op. 70 d. 5479 l. 33.

¹³⁵ N.K. Krupskaia, “Vospityvat’ dostoinuiu smenu,” in *O Kommunisticheskom vospitanii: Izbrannye stat’i i rechi* (Moscow: Molodaia Gvardiia, 1956), 383-384.

surrounding populace. Many orphans and other children's home residents (particularly those who had previously spent significant time on the streets) were far more accustomed to experiencing suspicion and hostility than the "love of the whole Soviet society." Prejudices and suspicions directed toward *besprizornye* were often extended to children's home residents as a whole, with the term "*detdomovtsy*" sometimes carrying a similar pejorative context.¹³⁶ To be fair, such suspicions were often warranted, as reports were fairly common of children's home residents being engaged in petty theft and other crimes, particularly in the first half of the 1930s as the Soviet state struggled to address the new tide of orphaned and homeless children.¹³⁷ Even in the late 1930s, complaints about thefts and "hooligan" behavior by children's home residents were frequent; in one exceptional but not unique case, eleven out of seventy-eight residents of the Aleksandrov Children's Home (Ivanovo Oblast) were convicted and sentenced for various crimes in a short period of 1938.¹³⁸ Many Soviet reports, and some memoirs from residents of children's homes, suggest a climate of mutual suspicion and hostility between *detdomovtsy* and the surrounding populace. Igor Pol, for example, recalled that the boys from his children's home, who were required to walk through the neighboring Tatar settlement on their way to school, would never walk alone if possible. Those who did were liable to be beaten, and not without reason, since Pol also noted that the boys took every opportunity to steal from this settlement.¹³⁹ However, several documents from Soviet inspectors, perhaps out of sympathy

¹³⁶ GARF f. R5207 op. 1 d. 1298 ll. 21-22 contains examples of some of the other insults applied to children's home residents, usually implying a criminal connection: "bandits," "gangsters," etc. On the general suspicion of *besprizornye*, see Chapter One of this dissertation.

¹³⁷ Reports of petty thefts by children's home residents were very common: see, for example, GARF f. R5207 op. 3 d. 27 l. 137; the reports on various children's homes in Vilenskii, et al., *Deti Gulaga*, 143-144, 205-207; and TsGAMO f. 916 op. 1 d. 330 l. 89. In this last case, children's home residents stole a pig from a local farm and 1500 rubles worth of laundry, which they sold to buy cigarettes and wine. The residents then threw a "drunken party" (*pianka*) at their children's home, roasting and eating the stolen pig.

¹³⁸ Report from Head of OTK NKVD SSSR L.M. Iatskevich to Narkompros RSFSR, 23 March 1938, in *Deti Gulaga*, 281-282. The report does not specify this time frame beyond declaring it "a comparatively short period."

¹³⁹ Pol', 86-87.

with these orphaned and homeless youth, suggested that such conflicts were often a result of existing prejudices toward *besprizornye* rather than specific actions on their part. One report lamented that the Raisemenovsk children's home had "lost all authority among the local population" and that consequently they were quick to blame (unjustly) any thefts on the *detdomovtsy*.¹⁴⁰ In another incident, children from the "Young Builder" Children's Home were accused of repeatedly vandalizing a local church (with the encouragement of their director). One suspects that, given the antireligious climate of the time, such accusations may very well have been true. An investigation by the Moscow regional Children's Commission, however, claimed that there was no evidence children from the *detdom* were involved, accused members of the church of conducting "anti-Soviet propaganda," and seemed to suggest that the *detdomovtsy* were being employed as a convenient scapegoat.¹⁴¹

Such support for *detdomovtsy* on the part of inspectors and other officials did not stop such conflicts from at times becoming violent. A report on the "Prussa" Labor Commune, for example, discussed a series of escalating incidents between residents of the commune and the surrounding populace, particularly Pioneers visiting a nearby camp. The Pioneers regularly called labor commune residents "*besprizorniki*" (a term for homeless children that sometimes held pejorative connotations) and "bandits," and finally beat up one of communards. Commune residents were in turn accused of robbing a woman and "knocking an old man off his feet," incidents that the report listed as "not supported by facts." In another incident, a local man shot at commune residents with a rifle, to which they responded by throwing bricks, striking his wife. The ongoing fights between local Pioneers and the commune residents finally ended in tragedy. While most of the residents and caregivers were in the forest collecting mushrooms, the

¹⁴⁰ TsGAMO f. 916 op. 1 d. 375 l. 100.

¹⁴¹ TsGAMO f. 916 op. 1 d. 265 ll. 42-43.

remaining residents spotted one of the Pioneers who had beaten up their friend, and began throwing bricks at this boy. A Komsomol member accompanying this Pioneer apparently returned fire with a rifle he was carrying, fatally wounding one of the communards.¹⁴² Such conflicts did not need to end in a Komsomol member shooting one of the imagined “New Soviet People” of the future to give the distinct impression that Soviet children’s institutions were not fulfilling their tasks of reeducating *besprizornye* and “forging the New Soviet Person.” If the conduct of children’s home residents was supposed to be outward indicators of this inner transformation, then incidents of theft, animosity, and violence between children’s home residents and the wider Soviet society caused some to doubt this supposed transformation.

Though there were numerous ways, detailed above, in which children’s homes might fail to live up to their idealized image, it should be remembered that there were children’s homes that did indeed become something of a surrogate family for their orphaned charges, though not always in the way imagined by official Soviet discourse. Several former *detdomovtsy* expressed happy memories of their children’s home in memoirs and other writings, and continued to return for summer vacations and, later, reunions.¹⁴³ Those whose families had been dekulakized or suffered from famine, including Polina Pakhomova, Stepanida Paleeva, and Mariia Belskaia often remembered that, in comparison to a life of begging and near-starvation, the children’s home seemed wonderful. Sometimes it was even characterized by the kind of loving relations and “happy childhood” promised in Soviet discourse: as Belskaia wrote, “they loved Irochka [her younger sister] and me at the children’s home, and we loved them with all our heart.”¹⁴⁴ Finally, letters written by former children’s home residents, although not necessarily numerous compared

¹⁴² TsGAMO f. 916 op. 1 d. 11 l. 85. The report is frustratingly silent about the aftermath of this incident, simply listing that the commune resident died of his wounds 8 hours later.

¹⁴³ See, for example, Tenenbaum, “Iskliuchenie iz pravila,” 26-27.

¹⁴⁴ M.K. Bel’skaia, “Deti Ariny: Vospominaniia,” in *Zhenskaia sud’ba v Rossii*, ed. B.S. Ilizarov (Moskva: Rossiia molodaia, 1994), 56.

to the hundreds of thousands of children who passed through these institutions, also provide indication that some did find a surrogate family in the children's home. Letters to G.S. Kalabalina (wife of Semyon Kalabalin and head educator – later director – of a children's home in Moscow), like many letters to Makarenko himself, were filled with the language of family, calling Kalabalina “our dear mother,” or simply “mama,” and celebrating the “big family” of the children's home.¹⁴⁵ The authors of these letters also expressed gratitude to their “father and mother” for their upbringing and the chance to become the kind of brave, loyal, and selfless young people needed to defend their country. In these and other letters, former *detdomovtsy* often thanked their caregivers and educators for giving them the chance to become full citizens of Soviet society.¹⁴⁶

Many children's homes clearly did not match the standards set by celebrated institutions like the Dzerzhinskii and Bolshevo communes. Nor did they always provide the desired “communist upbringing” that was intended to bring about the transformation of orphaned and homeless children into New Soviet People, a fact recognized and lamented by Soviet officials and inspectors. At the same time, however, there is evidence that the image of the Soviet children's home as a place where orphaned and formerly homeless *besprizornye* enjoyed both a “happy childhood” and the opportunity to become full Soviet citizens, served as a powerful point of reference for these children. As suggested by the examples above, the available letters written by children's home residents were often filled with the familiar tropes and language of Soviet

¹⁴⁵ Several letters to G.S. Kalabalina were reprinted in 1943 in *Uchitel'skaia gazeta*, RGALI f. 332 op. 4 d. 537 l. 1. According to this article (“Galina Kalabalina”) she received 546 letters from her former charges during the war, particularly after she wrote an article about the death of Fedor Kleshchuk, another of her pupils (“Syn” *Uchitel'skaia gazeta* 14 April 1943).

¹⁴⁶ Of course, these letters represent only those who decided to write and maintain contact with their former children's homes, and were therefore to some extent self-selecting. For those who grew up in terrible children's homes or suffered abuse there, it is doubtful that they felt much desire to maintain these ties. Even Svetlana Obolenskaia, who experienced a rather good children's home, remembered feeling no desire to remain in contact or revisit these years : see “Iz vospominanii,” 66. Obolenskaia's case will be discussed more thoroughly in Chapter Five.

discourse. This was true even of the numerous complaints written by *detdomovtsy* to various Soviet authorities, complaints that often contrasted conditions in their children's home with the image promoted in Soviet discourse. The next section will therefore further explore this use of Soviet discourse among children's home residents, suggesting that despite the numerous failings of many children's homes, and clear examples of children behaving in undesirable ways, the terms in which many children's home residents viewed their experiences, whether good or bad, were often formulated in relation to the idealized children's home that existed in Soviet public culture.

“Great People Can Also Be Made From *Besprizornye*”: the Letters and Language of *Detdomovtsy*

The residents of many children's homes could not help but notice the disparity between the children's homes depicted in Soviet newspapers and propaganda, with their loving surrogate families and “happy childhood” for all, and the reality that they experienced. Soviet newspapers were filled with stories, ostensibly written by former *besprizornye*, communards, and children's home residents, celebrating the joyous life enjoyed by *detdomovtsy*. Newspaper articles depicted these children attending Pioneer camps, participating in cultural activities, performing plays, playing sports, and otherwise enjoying the happy childhood promised in Soviet discourse.¹⁴⁷ Other articles and letters written to newspapers adopted the discourse of transformation, marveling at the changes wrought by Soviet institutions and embracing the idea becoming the “new Soviet person.” In an article titled “I Was Raised by the Komsomol,” a former

¹⁴⁷ See, for example, the articles “Schastlivo zhivem, pliashchem, i poem,” “Khorosho nam zhit' v detdome,” and “Zdes' liubiat detei,” in TsGAMO f. 916 op. 1 d. 322 ll. 14, 34.

besprizornyi, Sasha Naidenov, declared “Now I cannot recognize myself. I have grown cultured and political, and I have a complete life and a future.”¹⁴⁸ A poem written by N. Kliukhin expressed a similar notion, listing all the various activities now enjoyed by his fellow residents at the Serpukhov NKVD labor colony (tennis, *gorodki*¹⁴⁹, soccer, reading, writing), describing the conditions of his colony (clean, bright, pleasantly decorated), and declaring that these activities and surroundings were indicative of a deeper, more profound change:

We play in the orchestra We have quite a few activity circles In which we raise our culturedness In order to become people instead of thieves.	В оркестре духовном играем, Не мало есть у нас кружков, Где мы культурность повышаем, Чтоб выйти в люди из воров.
We will be completely different Not those people we once were We will all forget about our pasts And live as we have been taught.	Мы совсем другими будем, Не те, какими раньше были, О прошлом все мы позабудем, А будем жить, как нас учили.
Thieves (that is what we were!) and hooligans We will also help To forget how to pick pockets We will take up the task of reeducating them.	Ворам (то было!), хулиганам, Мы тоже будем помогать, Отучим лазить по карманам, Возьмемся их перевоспитать. ¹⁵⁰

Thus, this poem declared not only a commitment to transforming one’s own life, to being “completely different,” but also to helping others to do the same.

Such articles suggest that some *besprizornye*, orphans, and residents of children’s homes did embrace the desired language of transformation and gratitude to the Soviet state – at least within these letters.¹⁵¹ Of course, the fact that such declarations were printed in Soviet newspapers, undoubtedly precisely because they echoed the desired image of the Soviet

¹⁴⁸ “Menia vospital Komsomol,” *Nabat* 20 May 1936, TsGAMO f. 916 op. 1 d. 262 l. 121.

¹⁴⁹ A Russian game that bears some distant resemblance to bowling and involves throwing a long stick at various arrangements of wooden blocks.

¹⁵⁰ N. Kliukhin, “My sovsem drugimi budem,” [We will be completely different], *Nabat* 1 Jan. 1937, TsGAMO f. 916 op. 1 d. 322 l. 20.

¹⁵¹ In her survey of letters and petitions written to various newspapers and Soviet officials, Sheila Fitzpatrick notes that Soviet citizens writing to the authorities almost always adopted the language of these authorities. Fitzpatrick, *Tear off the Masks!*, 156.

children's home, raises important questions of how they should be properly understood. Such letters, poems, and articles were ostensibly written by children's home residents themselves, but it is difficult to know what role the editors of newspapers, or even the staff at various children's homes, played in encouraging and shaping these texts. At the very least, the editors of these newspapers undoubtedly chose or even solicited letters and articles that conveyed the desired image of children's homes as places where formerly hopeless *besprizornnye* enjoyed a happy childhood and were being transformed into joyful (and grateful) Soviet citizens. Such questions about these texts' "authenticity" can probably never be fully answered. What seems clear, however, is that these types of writing, which appeared in Soviet newspapers ranging from small district papers to *Pionerskaia Pravda*, had an influence in shaping the imagination of Soviet children as to what a children's home should be.

Numerous letters from children's home residents employed some of the same language and tropes to ask why their children's home, their experiences, or their opportunities did not coincide with those depicted in Soviet newspapers, speeches, and other public culture. The central premise of these letters, and what gave them their rhetorical force as petitions, was the notion that these two *should* be congruent. A letter sent to the newspaper *For the New North (Za novyi sever)* by residents of the Komi Republic stated, likely without realizing implication of this observation, "We read various interesting books and newspapers. More than any other we are interested in and read *Pioneer Pravda*. They write very well in it about the lives of Pioneers and children in Moscow. We also want to live like that. We want to study physical education, but we do not have a trainer."¹⁵² Other letters were more explicit in contrasting their situation with that typically depicted in Soviet newspapers:

¹⁵² Letter to newspaper *Za novyi sever*, 15 July 1935, in *Krest'ianskie deti*, 412.

In Pioneer newspapers they describe how Pioneers in our country live happy and joyfully, and also how their leaders (*rukovoditeli*) take care of them, but in our children's home things are different: specifically, we do not have occasion to rejoice and be happy, but rather we think about whether we will be clothed, shoed, and fed enough...¹⁵³

The letter went on to describe how the children's home leadership "does not treat us like they should," and how the children had taken to answering this rudeness in kind and even begun acting like "hooligans" as a sign of protest. Out of desperation, these children had now decided to write to the Supreme Soviet of the Komi Republic for help, "so that we can live joyfully and happily, like all Pioneers in our country."¹⁵⁴

Many other letters employed a discourse of self-improvement and transformation through education, particularly when writing to dignitaries like Nadezhda Krupskaja. In this way, these letter writers cast themselves in the role of self-improving, dedicated, future Soviet citizens – precisely the type of people who were supposed to be produced by children's homes.¹⁵⁵ A letter from two residents of a children's colony, for example, began by describing the isolation and boredom of their colony, before being sure to mention that they were nevertheless involved in political activities at their children's home (and that they had lost their fathers in the Civil War). The letter then expressed these boy's "great desire to study" and asked Krupskaja, "as the oldest comrade of our dear leader" to help them obtain books on poetry and art supplies. The letter ended by stating that they were "on the track to a laboring and cultured life" but needed help to fulfill their desire to further educate themselves.¹⁵⁶ Like many other letters, this letter also adopted a familiar, even familial language. Letters from children to Krupskaja in particular often called her "our dear mama," "auntie Nadia," or sometimes the more formal "senior comrade

¹⁵³ Letter of complaint from Pioneers of the Okvadskii Children's Home, no earlier than 10 July 1939, in *Krest'ianskie deti*, 553-554.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid. The date of this letter (1939) suggests that its authors may have been children of parents arrested as "enemies of the people," though the letter gives no indication that this was the case.

¹⁵⁵ On the idea of letters as a sort of performance, drawing on existing rhetorical conventions and cultural tropes, see Fitzpatrick, *Tear off the Masks!*, 172; and Maynes, Pierce, and Laslett, *Telling Stories*, 86-87.

¹⁵⁶ RGASPI f. 12 op. 1 d. 736 l. 83.

(*starshii tovarishch*).”¹⁵⁷ Letters from former *besprizornye* also often emphasized in particular the idea of transformation and becoming a different person within Soviet institutions. A letter from a fifteen-year-old former *besprizornyi* studying in the eighth grade in the Donbass region complained that while he had successfully completed the seventh grade at his old children’s home, he had recently been transferred to a receiving center where conditions were much worse. According to this letter, the caregivers were rude to their charges, treated them like “crooks and hooligans,” and responded to complaints by yelling that anyone dissatisfied should leave. The letter ended with a similar aspiration to self-improvement: “I am trying, N. Konstantinovna, to study well, but it is beyond my strength. I am now a Pioneer and Komsomol member and want to finish the tenth grade in such a way to show that great people can also be made from *besprizornye*.”¹⁵⁸ Another letter from children’s home graduates drew on the importance placed on education in Soviet discourse to reinforce its complaints about conditions in their factory dormitory. After complaining about the poor food and not having enough clothing, the letter argued that “when we sit in class in school, we don’t think about the current lesson, but about how to earn more money so that we can dress more acceptably (*poprilichnei*).”¹⁵⁹ As presented in this letter, these young people wanted to study, but were being prevented by their poor material circumstances and living conditions from achieving this goal.

This letter also made use of another common trope of Soviet discourse at this time: the young generation as future “builders of socialism.” The letter asked Krupskaiia to “give serious attention to our young growing (*podrastaiushchee*) generation...that might carry on the task of

¹⁵⁷ Letters to N.K. Krupskaiia from residents of children’s homes, receiving centers, and colonies, in *Deti Gulaga*, 164-174.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 169.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 170.

the party in building socialism.”¹⁶⁰ Numerous other letters took up this discourse as well, complaining that existing living conditions in children’s homes were inadequate and that children, as the future of the Soviet Union, deserved much better (and indeed had been promised such by the Soviet government). Sometimes these letters, following a common trope about the difference between Tsarist and Soviet institutions, complained that their children’s home did not fit the image of a modern, Soviet institution where children were treated with kindness and reeducated with care instead of force. A complaint to the Komi regional ONO from Aikinsk asked for assistance in “establishing discipline in our children’s home” and complained that the director “educates (*vospityvaet*) us with old methods, beats us with a stick and so on.”¹⁶¹ The complaint asked that this director be replaced, which, after an inspection confirmed some of these complaints, apparently did take place.¹⁶² In appealing to the oft-cited “break” with the past that had supposedly occurred in all aspects of Soviet life, these letters sought to utilize the frequent denigration of all “remnants of the past” in Soviet discourse to bring about improvements in their institutions.

Finally, some letters adopted the Soviet language of class to criticize the ways in which existing children’s homes did not measure up to the image promoted by Soviet discourse. In April of 1933, a children’s home resident wrote to the Komi regional ONO to complain about conflicts and animosity between groups of children:

Among the residents there are classes (*klass*): a class of boys and a class of girls. But among the boys there are the kulak class and non-kulaks. In my opinion, tov. Kolerova, there should not be any classes where proletarian children are being raised, and soon we will all arrive at a classless society, but there should not be [classes] in children’s homes. The lads who are children of settlers (*pereselentsev* – i.e. deported peasants) are half-starved, people torment them, steal their boots, and if you say a word – they beat you.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 171.

¹⁶¹ Complaint from residents of the Aikinsk School-Age Children’s Home, not later than 17 August 1937, in *Krest’ianskie deti*, 478.

¹⁶² Inspection report for Aikinsk School-Age Children’s Home, 22-29 Aug. 1937, in *Krest’ianskie deti*, 489-494.

Soon it will be the First of May, and proletarian children will attend this holiday like *besprizornye*.¹⁶³

Alluding to the triumphal declarations that socialism was being built, that a classless society was imminent, and that social problems like *besprizornost'* were thus disappearing, this letter made an ironic contrast with the reality of discord and group conflicts among “proletarian” children. The last line in particular suggested the ways in which the author’s children’s home departed from the model institutions celebrated in Soviet newspapers and rhetoric: far from being transformed by their new life, these proletarian children, the supposed future of the Soviet Union, would be attending a holiday celebrating the achievements of socialism looking little different than when they had lived on the street.¹⁶⁴

At this point, the reader may be tempted to question again the authenticity of such letters. Is it not possible that these children were “coached” in what to say in their letters, perhaps by their educators and caregivers at the children’s home (the same workers who had at times expressed frustration at a perceived lack of support)? It is certainly possible, as appealing to the welfare of children was a common trope in a wide variety of complaints written to the Soviet government.¹⁶⁵ There are several reasons, however, that this question of “authenticity” is of secondary importance. First, many of these letters contained pointed complaints about the actions of children’s home staff, living conditions, and food – all of which were considered the responsibility of the staff and the director in particular. Conflicts between staff members within children’s homes, or between staff and directors, did occur, and could perhaps have led to some disgruntled staff encouraging their charges to write such complaints. Such tactics, however,

¹⁶³ Letter from resident of Okvadskii Children’s Home to Komi regional ONO, April 1933, in *Krest’ianskie deti*, 222-223.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 223. It is also possible that this letter was suggesting that if conditions in the children’s home did not improve, its residents would begin to run away and return to a life on the street, as was relatively common for formerly homeless children to do: see Chapter One.

¹⁶⁵ Kelly, *Children’s World*, 111-112.

could be rather risky, as enough complaints from children would likely bring an eventual inspection of the entire children's home and staff. Secondly, even if these children were coached and assisted in their complaints by staff members, these adults were still providing instructions and models of how to utilize Soviet discourse; in other words, they were performing, in a slightly roundabout way, their task of educating children in Soviet ideology. Following from this, it is wholly conceivable that children receiving such instruction and ideological education could learn to utilize this ideology without explicit coaching in writing their letters. This reasoning is further supported by the fact that most of these letters (when the author included their age) were written by children's home residents who were 13-15 years old – certainly old enough to compose a decently written, “ideologically-sound” letter.

All these letters employed the language and tropes of Soviet discourse to criticize the ways in which children's homes failed to live up to their representation in this same discourse. These residents of Soviet children's institutions, despite the problems that often hindered Soviet dreams of raising New Soviet People, had therefore arguably learned at least one essential skill for living under Soviet socialism: the ability to “speak Bolshevik.”¹⁶⁶ The way in which these letters often contrasted the author's situation with the “happy childhood” depicted in Soviet public culture, in effect taking the latter as the true measure of what Soviet reality should be, suggests that this went beyond simply a manipulation of established tropes and clichés. Letters may not be able to tell us directly what their authors “really thought,” but they do, in the words of Mary Jo Maynes, “memorialize a single performance of the self [and] reveal the terms which made that performance intelligible.”¹⁶⁷ For these letter writers, these terms were defined by the existing Soviet discourse; while they may have questioned why their particular situation did not

¹⁶⁶ Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*, 198-237.

¹⁶⁷ Maynes, Pierce, and Laslett, 87.

correspond to this image, they did not necessarily seem to challenge the basic proposition that, for example, “all Pioneers live joyfully and happily.” This is not necessarily surprising, as even those children whose parents were arrested (to be discussed more in the next chapter) do not often remember seriously questioning oft-repeated Soviet narratives (such as the presence of hidden enemies or the “happy childhood”) until after leaving the children’s home. For all the various failings observed by Soviet officials in the political education provided in children’s homes, it seems that some children’s home residents did indeed learn to speak about themselves and their lives in terms broadly defined Soviet discourse and public culture.

Conclusion

This ability to “speak Bolshevik” no doubt would prove invaluable as these children grew up and moved on into the wider Soviet society. In this sense, Soviet children’s homes can be considered to have achieved some qualified success in their attempts to provide a “communist upbringing,” though not always in the ways expected by Soviet authorities. Few children’s homes seem to have matched the successes of the Dzerzhinskii and Bolshevo communes in reeducating former *besprizornye* and juvenile delinquents. Even fewer approached the ideal of “forging the New Soviet Person” and transforming their charges into harmonious, “well-rounded” subjects, a fact that was rather clear to Soviet authorities as well. Poorly educated staff could hardly be expected to provide the desired political education. Various collectivist institutions did not always have the desired effects. Labor education suffered from the same financial troubles and lack of supplies that plagued children’s homes on the whole. While some children’s homes did become something like the desired surrogate family, others continued to be

marked by animosity between boys and girls, residents and staff, or the children's home and the surrounding populace.

Yet for all these shortcomings, there is some evidence that for many *detdomovtsy*, Soviet promises of a “road to life” for *besprizornye* and a “happy childhood” for all Soviet children continued to dictate how they imagined their lives could and should be. In this way, the transformative promise of Soviet children's homes remained real. This promise, however, would soon face a new challenge, in the form of a new “cohort” of orphans: the hundreds of thousands of children who found themselves in children's homes after their parents were arrested as “enemies of the people” in the terror that swept the Soviet Union in the second half of the 1930s. Whereas Stalin had once famously dictated that “the son does not answer for the father,” Soviet policies soon made clear that this applied only to social origins, and not to those tainted with the specter of potential political opposition.¹⁶⁸ Family members of those deemed “enemies of the people” could themselves be arrested, their children taken away and placed in children's homes (or worse). While there were no hard and fast divisions between the experiences of earlier *besprizornye* and these children of “enemies of the people,” the latter, in general, tended to remember the *detdom* not as holding the potential for transformation or a “road to life,” but as an ordeal to be endured on the road to being reunited with the remnants of one's family and rebuilding one's life. The next chapter will therefore examine how these children of “enemies of the people” experienced and remembered Soviet children's homes, and how the state's continued suspicion of any imagined opponents again raised the question of who could be transformed, and who was irredeemable.

¹⁶⁸ Frierson and Vilensky, *Children of the Gulag*, 139-140.

Chapter Five: The “Strange Orphans”

For the contemporary visitor familiar with its imposing façade and contingent of uniformed guards shooing curious tourists away from important government buildings, it is easy to conjure up an image of the Stalin-era Kremlin as a foreboding seat of dictatorial power. For Svetlana Valerianovna Obolenskaia (b. 1925) and the children of other important Soviet officials living in the Kremlin palace, however, it was remembered as a playground. For the first decade of her life, Svetlana roamed the Kremlin grounds with the other children of the Soviet elite, exploring the Kremlin gardens and climbing on the enormous “Tsar-Cannon.” As the daughter of the prominent official and “Old Bolshevik” Valerian Valerianovich Obolenskii (Osinskii), the young Svetlana enjoyed a life of privilege and relative luxury, particularly compared to the majority of the Soviet population. This life was shattered, however, by the arrest of her father on October 14, 1937. Three days later, Svetlana’s mother was also arrested, leaving Svetlana and her two brothers to a strange interlude in which they continued to occupy the family’s recently acquired apartment in the Government House (the “House on the Embankment”) for months, until finally being rounded up by the NKVD, processed at the Danilov receiving center, and sent to a children’s home in the city of Shuia.

Looking back years later, Obolenskaia recalled the shock that accompanied not only losing her parents, but being placed in an institution and environment that so strongly contrasted with the family life she had known:

The children’s home! It is impossible to understand what this is, if you have not lived in one as long as we did (for me, this was four and a half years)...Children grow up without parents’ kindness. No one embraces or kisses you, like your mother or father would, and no one speaks kind words to you. It would seem that (*po vidimosti*) this is replaced by the friendship of comrades and the attention of the caregivers. But it is

unceasingly difficult afterwards to be affectionate and open yourself, because you will be hesitant...severity, dryness (*sukhost'*), and reserve can become part of your character (*kharakter*). Children in the children's home are unprotected. They have everything, and the caregivers, of course, are ready to protect them. But all the same they are not protected – first of all from themselves, from the difficulties and even horrors of adolescence, from the discoveries that they must make on their own. They are not protected from their comrades, with whom they must spend all their time, and hear everything that they say. They are not protected from the vulgar (*gruboe*) truth of relationships. They unexpectedly find themselves out in the cruel and clear world, tossed by winds against which the parental home would have gently shielded them. They feel that they have to defend themselves, and learn to do this, but this does not improve them – alas, no.¹

Obolenskaia was fortunate in that conditions in the Shuia children's home were better than in many places: the staff and particularly the director were kind to the children, Obolenskaia was able to remain together with her brothers (in contrast to the common NKVD practice of separating siblings), and was given the opportunity to complete her secondary education. Nevertheless, Obolenskaia remembered her time in the children's home as an emotionally painful experience, in which she had struggled to adjust to a new and “unnatural” environment, and to come to terms with the profound changes in her own life largely without the benefit of parental guidance.

Obolenskaia's reflection eloquently encompasses the way in which many of the “strange orphans” (to use Ilya Ehrenburg's term)² remembered their time in a Soviet children's home after the arrest of their parents. Chief among these memories was the emotional upheaval of this experience: not only the trauma and ongoing grief of losing one's parents, but also the sense of being deprived of human kindness and emotional intimacy. Another was the dramatic transition from life in a family to the collective life of the children's home. Losing the stability and sense

¹ Obolenskaia, “Iz vospominanii,” 60. This passage is also quoted in Frierson and Vilensky, *Children of the Gulag*, 195.

² Elena Bonner attributed this term to Ehrenburg and used it to designate those children who lost their parents to Stalin's political repressions. Elena Bonner, *Mothers and Daughters*, trans. Antonina W. Bouis (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), 214.

of security provided by the family, these children found themselves in an unfamiliar and even “alien” environment, living together with dozens and sometimes hundreds of other children from many different backgrounds. Along with the usual difficulty of fitting in with a new social group, these children faced the additional challenge of constantly existing within this social environment. Unlike school, for instance, there was no home life to provide a reprieve from the social pressures of the collective. Finally, Obolenskaia communicated a sense of transformation that extended beyond one’s circumstances and surroundings to one’s “character.” Looking back on their childhood, many of these children felt that growing up in a children’s home had molded their personality and outlook on life, often in detrimental ways.

This chapter focuses on the experiences and, more so, the remembered experiences of children of “enemies of the people” in Soviet children’s homes.³ Both Soviet documents of the time and later memoirs demonstrate that the traumatic loss of one’s parents sparked powerful and long-lasting emotions among these children. Children’s homes tried to manage and redirect these emotions toward the goal of raising loyal, enthusiastic, “Soviet” children. At the same time, however, Soviet authorities often suspected sinister, potentially “anti-Soviet” motivations behind these emotions, thus calling into question whether these children could really be reeducated or transformed within the children’s home. Soviet efforts to manage and control these emotions will form the focus of the first section of this chapter. While the emotional

³ I use the term “children of enemies of the people” here to designate the large cohort of children whose parents were arrested during the years of political repression and terror (usually dated from the murder of Leningrad party boss Sergei Kirov in 1934 to the removal of NKVD head Nikolai Ezhov in 1938), typically for alleged anti-Soviet activities (Article 58 of the RSFSR criminal code). This categorization is imperfect, but it does serve a useful purpose of making a general distinction between this group and the earlier “wave” of *besprizornye* (a distinction that these “children of enemies of the people,” as we shall see, often made themselves). In Soviet documents of the time, however, these children were more often called “children of the repressed” (*deti repressirovannykh*): see, for example, NKVD Order no. 00309 (20 May 1938), GARF f. R9401 op. 1a d. 20 l. 199. I prefer “children of enemies of the people” to convey the sense of an ongoing stigma and suspicion not captured by the more sterile term “repressed.” On the state’s continual suspicion of “enemies” and their children, and the lasting effects of being a child of “enemies of the people,” see Frierson and Vilensky, 139-140, 224-226, 352-384.

regime of the children's home may have curbed some of the emotional outbursts and upheavals that most prompted this anxiety, the memories of children of "enemies of the people" make it clear that for most, these painful emotions never really disappeared.⁴

Along with the emotional upheaval of one's parents' arrest, most memoirists recalled the transition to the social environment of the children's home as another profound shock. The second section of this chapter will therefore investigate social world of these "strange orphans," and the uncomfortable transition from family life to life in a "collective." As we shall see, it was often this social world, which encompassed social relations among *detdomovtsy* and attempts to maintain family ties, that featured most prominently in the memories of these children of "enemies of the people." Far from embracing life in the collective and "surrogate family" of the children's home, most of these memoirists remembered this collectivism as having a profoundly disruptive influence on their social relations and sense of self.

This chapter will therefore conclude with an examination of how these memoirists reflected on and assessed their years in the children's home, and its lasting effects. In Soviet discourse, children's homes were places of transformation, where various potentially threatening young people (originally *besprizornye* and juvenile delinquents, now children of "enemies of the people" who were imagined to also be potential "enemies") were to emerge as loyal, New Soviet People. Yet the actual experience of living in a children's home was often remembered as a disruption of what had been a comfortably "Soviet" identity. Despite this disruption, however, the majority of these memoirists, with one notable exception, do not recall seriously questioning their loyalty to the Soviet government even after the arrest of their parents.⁵ This does not mean,

⁴ On the concept of "emotional regimes," see Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling*, 124-126.

⁵ The exception among the memoirists addressed in this chapter was Aleksandr Vasil'evich Voiloshnikov, whose autobiographical novel portrayed himself and other children of "enemies of the people" as turning against the "counterrevolutionaries" of the NKVD after their parents' arrest. Voiloshnikov, *Reportazh iz-pod koleza istorii*

however, that their parents' arrest and their subsequent life in a children's home did not have a profound influence. Although most remembered remaining loyal Soviet citizens, they also saw their time in a *detdom* as having a life-long, detrimental effect on their personality, relationships, or sense of self.

This chapter thus follows the rest of the dissertation in seeking to understand how children subjectively experienced the *detdom*. While some documents from the late 1930s, such as letters and dossiers, will be utilized to discuss the experience of children of "enemies of the people," this chapter relies mostly on *post facto* memoirs. This chapter consequently introduces new questions of how these children later remembered their life in a Soviet children's home, how they evaluated this experience, and what they saw as the lasting consequences of what was, for most, remembered as a difficult and often traumatic time. It treats memories not simply as a record of lived events but as objects of investigation in their own right. Scholarship on oral history, autobiography, and memory has long recognized the vagaries of memory and the challenges of relying on memories for a definitively "true" account of the past.⁶ It is precisely the subjective dimensions of these personal narratives, however, that will be the focus here. These include the meanings attributed to memories of the children's home, emotions remembered and emotions raised by the act of remembering, and the ways in which these memoirists discussed how living in a children's home affected their sense of self in the past and

(Anapa: Severnyi Kavkaz, 1995), 49-55. Voiloshnikov also wrote a much shorter memoir with the same title that can be found in the archives of the Memorial Society in Moscow, f. 2 op. 3 d. 6-7. These two works are sufficiently different that I will treat them as separate sources. Voiloshnikov's story of this "loss of faith" will be discussed more in Chapter Six.

⁶ On the specific challenges of using memory sources and oral histories in the Soviet Union and Russia, see Daria Khubova, Andrei Ivankiev, and Tonia Sharova, "After Glasnost: Oral History in the Soviet Union" in *International Yearbook of Oral History v. 1: Memory and Totalitarianism*, ed. Luisa Passerini (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 89-102; and Daniel Bertaux, et al., eds. *On Living Through Soviet Russia* (New York: Routledge, 2004). On Russian and Soviet memoirs, see Irina Paperno, *Stories of the Soviet Experience: Memories, Diaries, Dreams* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009); and Beth Holmgren, ed., *The Russian Memoir: History and Literature* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2003).

at the time of writing. In reading these personal narratives, the efforts of these narrators to “speak the truth” as they remembered it need to be taken seriously, while at the same time acknowledging that any personal narrative is a complex product of individual subjectivity, social relations, and cultural conventions.⁷ This chapter will therefore relate these narrator’s stories, seeking as much as possible to preserve their own voices, yet also seek to provide careful analysis and interpretation as to where children of “enemies of the people” seem to have shared common experiences and, perhaps more importantly, common memories and judgments about their time in a children’s home.⁸

Before beginning this work, a final caveat is necessary. Just as the conditions and quality of the staff varied widely in different children’s homes, so did the experiences of children of “enemies of the people.” This diversity of experiences began with the fact that Soviet policy toward these children was hardly unambiguous. NKVD operating order no. 00486, which outlined Soviet policies toward “families of traitors to the motherland,” contained a clause that allowed for children of arrested parents to be placed with relatives who had not been repressed. In practice, overcrowding in many children’s homes and the fact that the NKVD had significantly underestimated the number of children to be placed meant that many of these children were taken in by relatives, or spent a short time in a children’s institution before being released to the care of relatives, oftentimes grandparents.⁹ At the same time, NKVD orders

⁷ See Maynes, Pierce, and Laslett, *Telling Stories*, especially 40-41, 147-153.

⁸ Though they came from all different parts of the Soviet Union, the major memoirists discussed here were, interestingly, almost all of a similar age (from 9-12 years old) when their parent(s) were arrested. The exception was Mikhail Nikolaev, who did not remember his parents and grew up almost entirely in a children’s home. Based on his memories, Nikolaev would later guess that his parents had been arrested in 1932 or 1933. See the Appendix for more biographical details of these memoirists.

⁹ Frierson and Vilensky, 157-162. NKVD circular no. 4 (1 Jan. 1938) further established guidelines for transferring children from institutions to the guardianship of relatives: see Frierson and Vilensky, 167-68. For examples of children removed from children’s homes to the care of relatives, see Figes, *The Whisperers*, 320-328; Kelly, *Children’s World*, 237-238; Igor’ Pol’, “Desiat’ let v alzhire,” 94; V.I. Velikanov, *Sud’by liudskie: Semeinaia*

allowed for older children and those deemed “socially dangerous” or “capable of anti-Soviet activity” to be deported to different regions, sent to NKVD labor colonies (like juvenile criminals), or even sent to GULAG camps.¹⁰ Of those placed in children’s homes, some found themselves in homes specifically organized for the “special contingents” (as children whose parents had been arrested were sometimes called), while many others were simply placed into the general population of existing children’s homes.¹¹

Treatment of children of “enemies of the people” also varied widely in Soviet children’s homes. Whereas some, like Obolenskaia and Viktor Tenenbaum, remembered there being little distinction made between themselves and other orphaned children, others, like Igor Pol and Aleksandr Voiloshnikov, remembered children of “enemies of the people” being subjected to taunts (such as the popular “Trotskyite”) and verbal abuse from other children and the staff.¹² Similarly, many recalled being pressured to denounce their “enemy” parents, or forced to endure constant harangues against “enemies of the people,” while others did not remember these pressures (or at least did not mention them).¹³ Interestingly, this inconsistency was actually noted by the NKVD, which reported, somewhat euphemistically, that many children’s homes

khronika (Moscow, 1998); and N.I. Zaporozhets, “Iz vospominanii,” in *Dodnes’ tiagoteet v. 1*, ed. S.S. Vilenskii (Moscow: Sov. Pisatel’, 1989), 532-538.

¹⁰ Frierson and Vilensky, 156-162.

¹¹ A letter from Molotov and the Sovnarkom to Narkompros in 1938 ordered that the latter prepare another 5000 places in children’s homes for children of “repressed parents,” in addition to the reported 17, 355 children of “repressed parents” currently in children’s homes. Given the scale of political repression at this time, this seems a significant underestimate. GARF, f. R5446 op. 22a d. 95, ll. 11-13. Among the memoirists prominently discussed in this chapter, Nelli Tachko was placed in a children’s home specifically for the “special contingent,” while Viktor Tenenbaum’s children’s home at first held some older former *besprizornye* but was almost exclusively made up of children of “repressed parents.” Svetlana Obolenskaia, Igor Pol, and Olgerd Volynskii found themselves placed in the general population.

¹² Tenenbaum, “Iskliuchenie iz pravila,” 13; Obolenskaia, 78; Pol’, 75-80; Voiloshnikov (Memorial), 7-9.

¹³ Voiloshnikov and many of the children of “repressed parents” who later wrote to Memorial remembered being constantly subjected to lectures on the danger of “enemies of the people” or pressured to denounce formally their parents. Others, like Obolenskaia, Tachko, and Tenenbaum, do not mention these pressures, though Tenenbaum recalled that he was forced to acknowledge the “guilt” of his parents before joining the Komsomol. See the letters of children of “repressed parents” in Vilenskii, et al., *Deti Gulaga*, 241-252; Voiloshnikov (published), 51-52; and Tenenbaum, 25.

had not created the “proper political education” and “healthy Soviet conditions” for these children, thus resulting in “hostility to children of repressed parents” and even “outright mockery (*izdevatel'stvo*).” At the same time, the same report claimed that in some children’s homes, children of “repressed parents” were actually being treated better than other children, a practice that it also demanded be stopped.¹⁴ Thus, while this chapter will often discuss commonalities in the remembered childhoods of these memoirists, the diversity of experiences among children of “enemies of the people” should be noted as well.

“I Had Been Torn Apart by Sobbing”: Emotional Upheaval and Emotional Regimes

Despite this diversity of experiences, there were many common elements among the memories of these children of “enemies of the people,” including the emotions surrounding the devastating loss of one’s parents. Memories of the arrest of one’s parents were infused with emotions recalled from childhood and those accompanying the later process of reminiscing and committing memories to paper. The overlap between these two general categories was significant, as memories of childhood grief were expressed in these memoirs alongside notions of a life-long yearning (*toska*) for one’s departed parent(s).¹⁵ Emotion served as a bridge between past and present, tying together the recalled emotions of childhood loss (grief, confusion, despair, anger) and those of the present (grief, nostalgia, anger, regret) into a single narrative. Memories of childhood experiences and the emotions surrounding them became

¹⁴ NKVD order no. 00309, “On the Elimination of Irregularities in the Maintenance of Children of Repressed Parents,” 20 May 1938, GARF f. 9401 op. 1a d. 20 l. 199.

¹⁵ Most of the memoirists discussed here, with the exception of Mikhail Nikolaev, lost one parent (usually their father) to arrest and execution, and were placed in a children’s home after the arrest of the other. Most would eventually be reunited with this surviving parent, though often not for many years: see the Appendix of this dissertation.

intimately intertwined with the meaning and significance later attributed to these experiences. The contours of this narrative and the shared emotional discourse that helped later to bring together children of “enemies of the people,” will be discussed more thoroughly in the next chapter. This chapter will instead focus on the immediate emotions brought on by the loss of one’s parents, emotions that followed these children into Soviet institutions and were to be “managed” by the emotional regime of the children’s home. This division is admittedly somewhat artificial, as this chapter is of necessity rather reliant on memories of emotions experienced in the children’s home, memories that were no doubt in part influenced by later reflections on one’s childhood. Nevertheless, these memories of past emotions, combined with Soviet documents that reported on the emotional state of children of “repressed parents,” allow us to examine the emotional consequences of this political repression and its influence on how these children subjectively experienced life in a children’s home.

The devastating emotional trauma of losing one’s parents is evident throughout the memoirs of these “strange orphans.” Many memoirists described their parents’ arrest primarily in terms of its emotional impact, as if their ability to recall this singularly important event had been overwhelmed by the powerful emotions (predominantly grief) that accompanied it. Viktor Tenenbaum, for example, remarked that he could not recall the night of his mother’s arrest, nor exactly what happened in the days immediately afterwards, only remembering “how my chest ached after I had been torn apart by sobbing (*posle razryvshykh menia rydanii*).”¹⁶ In the immediate aftermath of their parents’ arrest, many recalled feeling isolated as they struggled individually with grief, anger, despair, and other emotions. Some tried to avoid outright expressions of grief in an attempt to resume their “normal lives.” Others found their sense of

¹⁶ Tenenbaum, 12.

isolation exacerbated by the reactions of former friends and neighbors, who often broke off contact with the families of those arrested.¹⁷

While each author may have experienced the loss of their parents as a devastating, personal blow, the fact that they were clearly not alone in suffering this loss, and that most would soon be brought together with other children in similar circumstances (in receiving centers and children's homes), brought a collective dimension to these emotions as well. Igor Pol at first did not even know his father had been arrested, as this arrest took place while he was attending Pioneer camp. Upon returning home, news of his father's arrest initially "stupefied" Pol, but as he remembered, "time heals, especially for children, and soon I became accustomed to this grief, learned to live with it, and continued with my summer vacation."¹⁸ Pol noted, however, that he did not remember this period well, and that his mother years later described how he became more serious, much less social, and more withdrawn after his father's arrest. Pol's memories give the impression that the young Igor did not know how to express his grief "properly" during a time when former friends and acquaintances began to ignore and desert these "members of the family of a traitor to the motherland."¹⁹ After the NKVD subsequently arrested his mother as well, Pol lived in a receiving center for several months with other children (ages 8-16) of arrested parents. Although he remembered that the children usually avoided discussing the fate of their parents, preferring to believe that they would soon be reunited, there was a sense of collective grief that existed unspoken among the children.

This grief was finally given open expression during the "shock" (*potriasenie*) brought on by learning the fate of their arrested fathers. Pol's receiving center was mostly isolated from the outside world; however, the children did manage at one point to acquire a copy of the local

¹⁷ See, for example, the memories of S.P. Seredina, in *Deti Gulaga*, 159; and Figes, 286-288.

¹⁸ Pol, 31-32.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 24-30.

Soviet newspaper, *Zabaikalskii Rabochii*, which contained the disturbing front-page headline “The Sentence for Enemies of the People Has Been Carried Out.” As this paper was passed from person to person, the children learned that 116 individuals (among them Pol’s father) had been executed as “traitors.” As Pol described:

The reaction to this sorrowful (*gorestnoe*) news was varied. Those who were younger could not fully comprehend the meaning of what had happened, and silently looked to the older children with frightened and bewildered eyes, some with tears. But [the older children] were significantly more shocked, and their first subconscious emotions were wild anger (*zloba*) and rage (*iarost*) toward everyone and everything. They realized their helplessness and feeling of doom (*obrechennost*), pain and resentment boiled within them, and only one outlet for these emotions remained: to destroy everything that was nearby and accessible. With wild, hysterical cries they began to overturn the beds, tear up the sheets, break everything they could get their hands on...seeing them, others joined in this act of spontaneous protest, and this insanity (*bezumie*) became shared, seizing all the rooms...²⁰

This outpouring of collective grief and anger was cut short only by the intervention of the local police, and several of the older boys were put in isolation cells. As Pol recalled, the children continued their “protest” in a less dramatic fashion at dinner, refusing to eat or answer the staff. Surprisingly, these actions apparently did not bring any punishment, and the children eventually calmed down and went to bed. As Pol reasoned later, most of the staff must have taken this outburst as an understandable reaction to this disturbing news, as the older boys were released from isolation the next morning.

Soviet documents also recorded various disturbances, emotional outbursts, and acts of protest in children’s homes from children whose parents had been arrested. A report from one children’s home director, for example, noted that one child had begun uncontrollably crying after receiving a letter from her arrested father, while one of the younger children continued to ask

²⁰ Ibid., 50.

tearfully when her parents would be released and come to collect her.²¹ Others reported more serious disturbances, protests, and ongoing emotional problems. In the Ardatovsk children's home, one sixteen year old girl suddenly quit school and began reportedly threatening "if my parents are going to be in jail, then I don't want to live and will kill myself."²² Dossiers prepared by children's home directors made special note of children who refused to follow rules or to study, reportedly "as an act of protest against the arrest of their parents."²³ Reports to the ONO and NKVD also often attributed disturbances and breaches of discipline to a desire to take revenge for the arrest of one's parents. An inspector's report on the Sychevsk children's home, for example, reported that one group of boys had quit school, "organized regular smoking," beat up other children, and "threatened to take revenge on the adult [workers] for their arrested parents."²⁴ In another case, Masha G. (age seventeen) was accused of organizing a collective protest among the other children's home inhabitants, according to the dossier prepared by the director:

[Masha G.'s] mother and father were arrested as enemies of the people. From the time she arrived in the children's home Masha G. has conducted herself very secretively (*skrytno*) and cautiously. She has foreign ties. She hates Soviet power. Despite all efforts to convince her otherwise, she still presently believes that her parents were improperly arrested and imprisoned... initially she made several attempts at sabotage, organizing all children from the special contingent to refuse to do anything or carry out any instructions.²⁵

²¹ Report from director F.I. Ivanov of the Gorky Children's Home in the Name of the Leninist Komsomol, 21 Nov. 1937, in Guseva, "Spasibo tovarishchu Stalinu," 120-150, 141. This article contains reprinted documents from the State Archive of the Nizhnyi-Novgorod Region f. 2732 op. 2 d. 108, and op. 3, d. 176, on the children of "repressed parents" in the region's children's homes.

²² Report from director O.A. Vishnevskaiia to head of Gorky regional NKVD, 13 Jan. 1938, in Guseva, 144-145.

²³ See examples of such dossiers in Syshenko, ed., *Zhertvy NKVD-Dei*, 155-156, 159.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 124.

²⁵ Dossier for resident of the N.K. Krupskaiia school-age children's home (Semenov village), "Masha G.", in Guseva, 147-148. For this and other documents where names of minors are included, I have used aliases.

This dossier noted that after several discussions with the director, Masha G. had improved her behavior, become a model student, and began to help the children's home staff with their work. It did not, however, report that she had ever accepted the supposed guilt of her parents.

The attention shown to the emotional reactions and emotional states of these children in these documents demonstrates several important dimensions of the emotional regime of the Soviet children's home in the late 1930s and the way it responded to the influx of "strange orphans." As previously noted, the 1930s had seen a general increase in the emphasis on discipline and "order," both in school and in children's homes.²⁶ This emphasis on discipline and order extended to the physical regime (the *rezhim*, comprising the rules, schedule, and structure) and the emotional regime of children's homes as well. In both cases, children were expected, ideally, to integrate themselves into this regime to the point that they would discipline their own actions and emotions. Children of "enemies of the people" found themselves subject to this same regime but also presented a specific challenge to the stated mission of the Soviet children's home. In its essence, the idea of reeducation (*perevospitanie*) in the children's home was predicated on the principle that nearly anyone, even juvenile delinquents and homeless children (*besprizornye*), could be brought into the Soviet fold and "re-made." Even as confidence in this idea declined in the mid-1930s (as evidenced by increasingly harsh treatment of juvenile criminals and *besprizornye*) it remained a fundamental mission of the children's home, whatever its deficiencies in practice. The influx of "strange orphans" raised a new question, however: could this mission of reeducation be effectively applied to those already "stained" by (supposed) political opposition, the most unforgivable crime in the Stalinist system? Despite Stalin's oft-quoted assertion that "the son does not answer for the father" and the

²⁶ On the emotional regime of Soviet children's homes, see Chapter Four. On the increasing emphasis on discipline and order in the 1930s, see Chapters One and Four of this dissertation; and Kelly, *Children's World*, 93-129, 221-257.

practical necessities that allowed many children of “enemies of the people” to remain with relatives, the very fact that some children had been placed in children’s homes or arrested themselves simply for being the offspring of those accused of political crimes seemed to confirm, at the least, that these children were potentially dangerous and needed to be carefully watched.

Soviet documents and reports were thus often quick to attribute “anti-Soviet” motivations or a “desire for revenge” to transgressions of the emotional regime and discipline of the children’s home by these children of “enemies of the people.” In the case of Masha G. discussed above, for example, the director’s report concluded that she “hates Soviet authority,” seemingly based on her initial protests and refusal to acknowledge the supposed guilt of her parents.²⁷ The report also saw fit to note, however, that Masha G. was “secretive” and “cautious,” suggesting that those who were not open with their emotions and unquestionably part of “the collective” were viewed with suspicion. The dossier on sixteen-year-old Pavel B. offered a similar appraisal, noting that although an excellent student and even a Komsomol member, he was “very untrusting, always very serious, and considers himself better than others.” The dossier went on to describe how Pavel B. doubted the “achievements of our country,” considered political repressions to be “mistakes” and “misunderstandings,” and enjoyed authority among the collective but used this authority to “spread dissatisfaction.”²⁸ In both these cases, connections were drawn between the emotional “character” of the subject, his or her actions, and attitudes toward Soviet authority. What seemed particularly disturbing for the authors of these dossiers was the way in which these teenagers had, from their perspective, tried to organize or influence the other children, again raising the fear of some kind of organized, political opposition.

²⁷ Dossier on “Masha G.,” in Guseva, 147.

²⁸ Dossier on “Pavel B.,” in Guseva, 147.

The degree to which such organized opposition among children of “enemies of the people” existed is still mostly unknown. Aleksandr Voiloshnikov’s autobiographical novel portrayed hatred for the Soviet government and NKVD in particular as being widespread among these children, with all the boys in his receiving center forming a secret organization and swearing an oath to combat the NKVD.²⁹ Many more memoirists, however, remember the arrest of their parents as a traumatic event, but one that they (at least at first) assumed was a mistake or at worst the actions of a small section of the Soviet government, thus leaving their general faith in Stalin and the Soviet regime relatively intact.³⁰ While these children may have later become critics of Stalinism and the Soviet government’s treatment of the Stalinist past, most remember feeling confused, angry, and grief-stricken after their parents’ arrest, but not necessarily “anti-Soviet.” This fact did not stop the NKVD from expressing its fear of revenge in its orders regarding these “children of repressed parents.” Among the instructions for placing these children in education or industry after they had left the children’s home was this ominous instruction:

5. Children of repressed parents who present a social danger, systematically violate order and discipline, engage in hooligan behavior and do not submit to correction (*ispravlenie*) in the conditions of a normal children’s home shall be held responsible and sent to NKVD labor colonies and camps according to the established procedure.³¹

As with several other NKVD orders, this instruction expressed an inherent suspicion that violations of order in the children’s home indicated some deeper, anti-Soviet orientation or “social danger.”

²⁹ Voiloshnikov (published), 47-67.

³⁰ Numerous memoirists and interview subjects from among the children of “enemies of the people” have noted this fact: see Figes, 273-279; and Frierson and Vilensky, 222-225. This question of continuing loyalty and faith in the regime will be discussed more extensively later in this chapter.

³¹ NKVD order no. 0144 “On the Procedure for the Release and Placement of Over-age (*Pererostki*) Children of Repressed Parents,” 3 Aug. 1938, GARF f. 9401 op. 1a d. 22 l. 109.

Nor was this an idle threat. Soviet documents contain several examples of children being arrested by the NKVD, sent to closed labor colonies, or even sent to the Gulag for allegedly anti-Soviet activities, which included making “anti-Soviet” statements or holding “anti-Soviet” beliefs. Four children of “enemies of the people” from a children’s home in the Irkutsk region were arrested for “anti-Soviet statements,” while four others in the Sverdlovsk region were arrested for harboring “terrorist intentions against the leaders and the Party, as an act of revenge for their parents.”³² In the latter case, the NKVD order specifically alleged that these individuals had attempted to conceal their counter-revolutionary activities by joining the Komsomol. As expected, the specter of organized political opposition commonly provoked the strongest response, coupled with the ongoing suspicion that difficulty in adjusting to life in the children’s home, or continuing emotional distress over the arrest of one’s parents, masked deeper, hardened anti-Soviet feelings. Questioned about a third case involving inhabitants from the III International Children’s Home in Gorky (Nizhnyi Novgorod), the director delivered the following report:

I consider that at first the counterrevolutionary activities of Fyodor Z. [one of the accused] were directed toward the corruption (*razlozhenie*) of the children’s home residents, the corruption of discipline and the disruption of the residents’ education... Every day Fyodor Z., Kirill G., Alyosha K., and Valia P. could be seen huddled in a circle and engaged in whispering. Fyodor Z. told the caregivers Malisheva and Kirillova, that he could organize a Trotskyite circle among the older children and had a great desire to smash the children’s home to pieces...³³

Fyodor Z. and Kirill G., along with a third individual, Andrei D., were arrested and accused of organizing a counter-revolutionary group that planned sabotage in Soviet industry and terrorist actions against Soviet leaders.³⁴ Their eventual fate is unknown.

³² GARF f. 9401 op. 1a d. 20 l. 199.

³³ From the testimony of the director of the III International Children’s Home, in Guseva, 131.

³⁴ Conclusion to the investigation of case no. 17553, in Guseva, 133.

Such arrests for alleged anti-Soviet activities represented the extreme consequences of the regime's suspicion that a larger number of these children of "enemies of the people" desired revenge for their parents, and that the lingering emotional problems associated with this loss (anger, grief, depression, withdrawal from the collective) might be indicative of more troublesome, "anti-Soviet" tendencies. The emotional regime of the children's home therefore demanded that children of "enemies of the people" overcome such emotions and build a new emotional life within the collective. In its broad contours, this emotional life resembled that encouraged among the earlier wave of orphaned children and *besprizornnye*: children were expected to triumph over the emotional traumas of their past experiences, to cultivate a new, disciplined and enthusiastic emotional self, and to transfer their love and affection to the surrogate family of the children's home staff and the *kollektiv*. In the case of the "strange orphans," the question of emotional ties to the past, including continuing grief over one's parents, held particular significance, as did the question of integration into the collective life of the children's home. Various dossiers and reports on children of "enemies of the people" prepared by children's home staff therefore devoted particular attention to these questions.

Detailed reports on three seven-year-old children from the Kulebaki children's home give a good indication of what emotions and behavior were desired among these younger children. Gleb S. was praised for being "very active," "diligent," and immediately making friends with children from the older group.³⁵ Aleksandr K. was similarly lauded for immediately participating in various games and "even becoming the initiator of these games."³⁶ In contrast, the fact that Alyona S. was at first "very passive," did not like to play with "the collective," and spent the first five days mostly hovering near the director was noted with some concern, although

³⁵ Dossier for "Gleb S." (age seven), Kulebaki preschool children's home, in Guseva, 127-128.

³⁶ Dossier for "Aleksandr K." (age seven), Kulebaki preschool children's home, in Guseva, 131.

she “gradually has begun to converse with the other staff and children.”³⁷ Along with observations of how these children participated in collective life and related to others, each report devoted specific attention to how these children remembered or discussed their previous lives. Gleb often remembered his sister Marina and expressed either a desire to return home to live with her, or for her to join him in the children’s home, but did not talk much about his mother and was quoted as stating “I have begun almost to forget mama completely.”³⁸ Though not entirely abandoning the past, Gleb had begun to consider the children’s home as a surrogate family, calling the director “Uncle Vanya,” and reportedly stating “I am your nephew. Right now I am a guest at your dacha, and later you can go with me to visit our dacha.”³⁹ Though less detailed, the report on Aleksandr also briefly noted his continued sense of pride in his parents (a former soldier/factory worker and a doctor), while mostly describing his interactions with the other children.⁴⁰ Finally, the report on Alyona again expressed some concern that the young girl was not letting go of her past: she often reminisced about her dacha and the “many nice foreign toys” it had contained, and had confidently asserted “soon my parents will come to collect me.” In response to the last statement, the director noted that he had tried to change the subject to have Alyona talk about flowers, a topic on which she was quite knowledgeable. Although later notes in this report expressed more apparent confidence about Alyona’s participation in collective life, including games, dances, and other activities with the other children, the overall impression was of lingering concern over her continued attachment to memories of her past.⁴¹

Dossiers on older children expressed similar concerns, with a particular emphasis on actions and attitudes considered disruptive of discipline and order, or indicative of latent “anti-

³⁷ Dossier for “Alyona S.” (age seven), Kulebaki preschool children’s home, in Guseva, 129-130.

³⁸ Dossier for “Gleb S.,” in Guseva, 128.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Dossier for “Aleskandr K.,” in Guseva, 130.

⁴¹ Dossier for “Alyona S.,” in Guseva, 129.

Soviet” feelings. Dossiers commented favorably on children’s “discipline,” “love for work,” “desire to study,” participation in group activities, political activity, friendly relations with comrades and staff, and organizational skills and “authority” among other children. At the same time, concerns were expressed over children who were “undisciplined,” disruptive, or considered “disorganizers” (*dezorganizatory*), were rude to other children and staff, kept to themselves or otherwise did not participate in group activities, did not show the desired enthusiasm for work or school, or were prone to emotional outbursts.⁴² As with the NKVD documents and reports addressed above, these dossiers were often quick to identify “anti-Soviet” tendencies among those children who showed ongoing emotional problems, failed to display the desired discipline, or seemed unable or unwilling to submit to the physical and emotional regime of the children’s home. The dossier on Lara B., for example, described how after her parents’ arrest in 1938, Lara had shown “extremely irregular behavior,” had not progressed from the sixth to the seventh grade due to the fact that she was “hostile to everything” and refused to study, had attempted to “disorganize” the other girls, had not responded to educational measures (*mery vospitaniia*), and had thus had “done much to show that she is completely hostile to Soviet power.”⁴³

Excessive shyness or reluctance to participate in “the collective,” or too many ties to one’s “previous life,” were also noted as causes for concern. After the arrest of his father and the death of his mother, Mikhail A. had apparently spent some time living on the street. His dossier therefore made special note that although the fifteen-year-old Mikhail was well-behaved and declared that he enjoyed living in a children’s home, he also continued to receive letters from his “former comrades” that were “full of cursing and reminiscences about his former life without

⁴² See the numerous short dossiers of children of “enemies of the people” from the Altai territory in Syshenko, ed., *Zherty NKVD-deti*, 154-205.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 160.

supervision.”⁴⁴ Finally, dossiers on children of “enemies of the people” continued to emphasize the transformative power of the children’s home, despite the inherent suspicion of these potential “enemies” in NKVD documents and Soviet discourse. Numerous dossiers spoke of behavioral and emotional problems that had been corrected or improved through individual discussions with the director or head of the educational section, collective assemblies, or other measures.⁴⁵ Consequently, however, those children who failed to change their behavior or were perceived as failing, or refusing, to respond to “educational measures” were particularly likely to be characterized as harboring “anti-Soviet” feelings.⁴⁶

It should be noted that there was rarely anything overtly sinister about these dossiers, with the notable exception of cases when such reports led to arrest by the NKVD. Indeed, most seem to have been written with a genuine concern for these children and a desire to help them adjust to their new life in the children’s home. While fears of potential revenge or anti-Soviet activities were ever-present in discourse and policies surrounding children of “enemies of the people,” some individual caretakers and directors showed a much more lenient attitude and genuine attention to the emotional well-being of their charges. Some memoirists, such as Aleksandr Voiloshnikov, remembered staff members as being verbally abusive and intolerant of the slightest breaches of discipline, particularly in the case of children of “enemies of the people.”⁴⁷ Many others, however, remember particular directors or caregivers making a sincere

⁴⁴ Ibid., 154.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 181, 185.

⁴⁶ This seems to have likely been the case with both “Lara B.” and “Tania Z.” Dossiers for both girls noted the efforts that had been made to engage them in conversations with the director or head of the educational section, and noted that these efforts had only been met with “rudeness,” “cursing,” and ended (in the case of Tania Z.) with the girl suddenly leaving the room and slamming the door. Both also categorically refused to continue with their studies. In both cases, this behavior seems to have been more an understandable emotional outburst that stemmed from ongoing grief over one’s parents, rather than the result of a committed “anti-Soviet” political stance. In the case of Tania Z., another document records her earlier desire to continue studying at summer school, and disappointment that this would not be possible. Guseva, 139-140, 144-145.

⁴⁷ Voiloshnikov (published), 51-52.

effort to make them feel better after the traumatic arrest of their parents and ease their emotional adjustment to the new environment of the children's home. Svetlana Obolenskaia, for example, remembered the efforts of the director and Pioneer leader to cheer her up on the day of her arrival, after she had been overcome by a feeling that "everything in the past is gone and never will return" and broke down into uncontrollable crying.⁴⁸ Even Igor Pol recalled that the staff at the NKVD receiving center seemed to treat the disturbance in the boys' dormitory as an understandable reaction to hearing that their fathers had been executed.⁴⁹

For these children of "enemies of the people," the arrest of their parents was a profound emotional shock, but it was only the beginning of an ongoing period of emotional upheaval. Some expressed their confusion, grief, and anger over the loss of their parents through emotional outbursts within children's homes, outbursts that the Soviet regime often suspected might harbor more troublesome, "anti-Soviet" tendencies. Others remembered directors and caregivers who took a more tolerant attitude and tried to ease some of this emotional pain, though none of these efforts could fully erase the ongoing grief and sense of loss experienced by most of these children. The emotional regime of the children's home was in theory supposed to help manage and reshape these emotions; in practice, it seemed just as often to find "anti-Soviet" motivations in what were understandable reactions to the loss of one's parents. As will become clear in the next section, the actual experience of living in a Soviet children's home often further contributed to this sense of shock, loss, grief, and disorientation. While still trying to deal with the emotional consequences of their parents' arrest, these children were suddenly thrust into an unfamiliar and sometimes frightening environment.

⁴⁸ Obolenskaia, 62-63. Cathy Frierson also discusses Obolenskaia's arrival at the Shuia children's home more extensively in *Children of the Gulag*, 194-195.

⁴⁹ Pol, 51.

“Two Worlds Colliding”: Soviet Identity and the Social World of the “Strange Orphans”

From its very origins, the Soviet children’s home had been imagined as a new type of children’s institution, in which an organized, collective social environment would transform bourgeois “family” children into the conscientiously socialist New Soviet People. This utopian vision had always faced challenges from the practical realities of life in the new Soviet Union, many of which have been examined in previous chapters.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, the core idea remained intact: that a new, more collective social environment could serve the purposes of individual transformation and raising properly “Soviet” children. The environment of the children’s home was to be intentionally different from that of the family, although this difference was marginally blurred in the 1930s as the children’s home became increasingly represented as a type of surrogate family.⁵¹ For most children of “enemies of the people,” these differences remained stark, with the shock of losing their parents compounded by the additional shock of being forced to confront a “different world” from the one they had known. As Obolenskaia noted in the excerpt quoted at the beginning of this chapter, this new environment was strange and even “alien,” impossible to comprehend until it was actually experienced. The children’s home indeed seemed a wholly different environment from the family, but the reaction to this difference was usually not that desired by the Soviet regime. For most of these children, the children’s home compared quite unfavorably with the family life they had previously known – a

⁵⁰ As discussed in Chapter Two and Chapter Four, many Soviet children’s homes faced budget difficulties, lack of supplies, inadequate food, cramped spaces, poor sanitation, and insufficient medical care. The prevalence of these problems meant that many homes struggled simply to provide adequate food, clothing, and shelter for their charges. The generally poor pay and challenging working conditions made finding qualified staff difficult as well. There were dedicated directors and educators who worked hard to provide a home and education for orphaned children, but their efforts were still often hampered by budget constraints and a general lack of resources. As a result, few children’s homes lived up to the idealized image presented in the Soviet press and other public culture.

⁵¹ See Chapter Four of this dissertation.

comparison that at times prompted complaints that, as Soviet children guaranteed a “happy childhood,” they deserved better.

This initial reaction is captured in letters and reports from Soviet children’s homes, as well as in the memories of those who spent time in these homes after their parents’ arrest. For many, the poor material conditions in numerous Soviet children’s homes prompted an immediate outcry. One report from the Gorodets children’s home described how the newly arrived children of “repressed parents” refused to eat and complained that “we used to feed our dogs better than this.”⁵² In another, children complained to a Soviet inspector of being “smothered in oatmeal,” a menu that never varied.⁵³ Letters from other new arrivals to children’s homes complained of a lack of reading materials, interesting activities, and other ways in which their children’s home did not live up to the promise of a “happy childhood.” Daniil K. complained in a letter to his brother that life in the children’s home was “boring” and “not sweet” (*ne sladko*), and that the food was so bad that he had lost enough weight to be “unrecognizable.” As proof, he related the menu for the previous day, which included “fetid water under the name of tea.” His new life was made more tolerable, however, by the fact that he had made numerous friends among the other children.⁵⁴

Some caregivers and other Soviet officials in turn tried to dismiss these complaints by declaring them “capricious” or implying that they were the grumblings of spoiled, not sufficiently “Soviet” children. They also asserted that such complaints were a source of annoyance to the other, more disciplined and proletarian children. One report from the director of a children’s home in Gorky (Nizhnyi Novgorod) on several newly arrived children of

⁵² Report from Head of Educational Section D.S. Sokolov to Director A.Ia. Demshin (Gorodets children’s home) on the mood of inhabitants, 18 Sep. 1937, in Guseva, 124.

⁵³ Report from VTsIK Children’s Commission inspector on the fulfillment of the 31 May 1935 resolution “On the Liquidation of Child Homelessness” in the Komi Republic, 1938, in *Krest’ianskie deti*, 515-518.

⁵⁴ Letter from “Daniil K.” (resident of the Gorodets children’s home) to his brother, V.K., 1937, in Guseva, 126-127.

“repressed parents” described one boy as “unstable, impudent (*derzkii*), and always dissatisfied with everything,” declaring that all the other children “complain about his rudeness.” It also noted, however, that this boy complained of being constantly called a “Trotskyite” at school, perhaps providing some explanation for his antagonistic relationship with many of the other children. Several others among the new arrivals had also complained about the food and material conditions in the children’s home, to which the report responded “the other children do not like their whims (*kaprizy*) and demands.”⁵⁵ In another case, Ilya V., a new arrival to the Gorodets children’s home, was criticized for his complaints about food, for his declarations that he would soon be leaving the children’s home to live with his aunt, and particularly for his refusal to participate in labor education. According to this report, Ilya had announced that he did not want to labor (*truditsia*) and planned to finish his ten-year secondary education in order to work in management. He had also reportedly declared he “would never stand for the rights of working people,” thus revealing that he held a “completely alien understanding of the working class.” As with the previous case, the report also portrayed the majority of the children, and staff, as being annoyed by these new arrivals and their complaints: “our caregivers say these children should not disgrace our children’s home...our residents say ‘why are you creating good conditions for them, maybe they are from some kind of Trotskyite families?’”⁵⁶ In both cases, the clear implication was that these complaints should not be taken too seriously, as they came from “capricious,” spoiled, and even “anti-Soviet” children.

For their part, children of “enemies of the people” often reasserted their status as Soviet children within their complaints, employing Soviet discourse about the rights of children to argue

⁵⁵ Report from the director of the Gorky Children’s Home in the name of the Leninist Komsomol, 16 Oct. 1937, in Guseva, 136-137.

⁵⁶ Report from head of educational section of the Gorodets Children’s Home in the Name of V.I. Lenin, 18 Sep. 1937, in Guseva, 124.

that conditions in children's homes, and the treatment of children of "repressed parents," did not meet these standards. Letters and other complaints also often implicitly or explicitly referred to Stalin's maxim "the son does not answer for the father," arguing that the treatment of children of "enemies of the people" in many children's homes was a clear violation of this idea. Two children from a children's home in Gorbatov, for example, wrote to the head of the Gorky regional ONO, A.P. Gorchakov, to ask to be transferred to another children's home, citing their intolerable current circumstances. The letter reported that Gorchakov's previous reassurances, life in the children's home had not improved:

As soon as we arrived in this dismal children's home, a crowd of the boys spit in my face and someone hit me in the side, and again threats and insults have rained down on us...here they call us such nicknames, for example, Trotskyites. But for what are we to blame, that we ended up in such a children's home, for what do we suffer – can we really answer for the deeds of our parents?⁵⁷

In other letters and complaints, children of "enemies of the people" turned the charge of "anti-Soviet" behavior back on the caregivers, staff, and even other children. Another report on Ilya V. declared that he had particularly shown his "dissatisfaction with the present situation" when told to present his letters for censorship. Ilya V. had reportedly hurled accusations at the head of the educational section, stating, "You have been appointed by spies. You are a Gestapo agent." He also argued that the Soviet constitution did not allow for opening another's mail, and that this censorship was therefore a violation of the democratic rights of the people and an indication that this was not "Soviet power, but anarchy." Rather chillingly, this report declared that "such behavior is clearly unacceptable in our country" and that "Ilya V. is not worthy to be in a

⁵⁷ Letter from residents of Gorbatov children's home to Gorky regional ONO head A.P. Gorchakov, 12 Oct. 1937, in Guseva, 134.

children's home, moreover, since he has openly stated that prison would be much more pleasant."⁵⁸

The fact that such behavior and complaints could indeed lead to dire consequences is heartbreakingly illustrated by the case of Vladimir Moroz.⁵⁹ After the arrest of his parents in 1937, the then sixteen-year-old Moroz was placed in a children's home in Annekovo (Kuibyshev region). Moroz immediately expressed his dissatisfaction with this children's home and his anger over the arrest of his parents in a letter to his brother, as well as the pages of his diary. Both texts are filled with Moroz's despair over his own situation, along with his conviction that something terrible had taken place in the Soviet Union. In his diary, Moroz complained of his own unfair treatment by local schoolteachers at the same time as he decried the ongoing arrests of "all the previous leaders of the party and the government" by the "villains" and "beardless idiots" who had "seized power."⁶⁰ In a letter written to his brother in January of 1938, Moroz took up the language of revolution, resistance, and martyrdom:

The anguish (*toska*) is impossible. I'll write such a letter to the NKVD soon, that they'll put me away in a secure place. Let them, I'll be glad!!! They want me to become stupid, so that I can't fight against evil...[but] I will struggle, shout, make phone calls! I will speak everywhere of their cruelty, their outright violence. I am no longer afraid of them. Down with fear! Long live struggle!⁶¹

Moroz in this way presented himself in the idealized role of the Russian intelligentsia or the original revolutionaries, speaking truth despite the consequences and prompting "the people" to action. Moroz even allowed himself to hope for just such an event in his diary, writing

⁵⁸ Report from head of education section A.S. Sokolov of the Gorodets Children's Home in the Name of V.I. Lenin, 19 Sep. 1937, in Guseva, 125. There is no other information on "Ilya V.'s" fate included among these documents.

⁵⁹ The materials from this case, including court documents accusing Vladimir Grigorevich Moroz of counterrevolutionary activities, the transcript of his interrogation, excerpts from Moroz's diary (apparently used as evidence in his trial), and a letter written from Moroz to Stalin, were copied from the FSB (formerly KGB) archives and reprinted in Vilenskii, et al., eds., *Deti Gulaga*, 283-293. English translations of these documents are available in Frierson and Vilensky, *Children of the Gulag*, 199-210.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 292.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 291.

“thousands of people have become embittered, terrifyingly so. This bitterness will explode and an enormous wave will sweep away all this filth.”⁶²

Moroz’s anguish seems to have increased when he learned of his brother’s arrest in January of 1938. In a letter written to Stalin in February, Moroz played a different role: that of the downtrodden supplicant, desperate for intervention from on high. The same despair was present, however, as Moroz declared:

Blow upon blow has fallen on my head, misfortune after misfortune. I patiently endured. Then they sent me to Annekovo. Imagine my situation in the children’s home. My head is full of gloomy thoughts. I have become some type of misanthrope: I am frightened of people, I see in everyone some hidden enemy, I’ve lost all my faith in people. Why am I alone? Only because the general intellectual level of the wards of the children’s home and those studying in the school is so much lower than my own. This is not bragging... You might think that I am too delicate, sentimental. No, not at all. I only demand (*trebuiu*) happiness, real, solid happiness. Lenin said, “In the Soviet nation there should be no deprived children. Let there be young, happy citizens.” But am I happy? No.⁶³

In this letter, Moroz deployed a familiar trope, declaring that he only wanted the “happy childhood” so frequently promised. Why, Moroz asked, did this happiness only seem to belong to the new “golden youth,” the children of prominent officials who spent their time drinking and engaging in debauchery, who receiving “disgusting” grades, even though they enjoyed all the necessary advantages to succeed?⁶⁴ At the end of his letter, Moroz pleaded to Stalin, “Save me, help me, do not let me perish!”

Such pleas were in vain. After being accused by his home’s Pioneer leader of possessing “anti-Soviet” notes, Moroz was arrested sometime in April of 1938 and interrogated by the NKVD. In the chilling transcripts of this interrogation, Moroz declared that “I did not engage in counterrevolutionary activities” but ultimately confessed to harboring “hatred for Soviet power

⁶² Ibid., 292.

⁶³ Ibid., 290.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

and the leaders of the Communist Party.”⁶⁵ Interestingly, Moroz’s dossier from his children’s home was included among these materials as further evidence of his supposedly anti-social and anti-Soviet attitudes. This dossier stated that Moroz “kept himself apart from the collective of other residents,” “did not participate in socially useful work,” “deliberately did not fulfill the tasks of the children’s self-government,” refused to follow rules or work in the workshop, and was generally disrespectful of “teachers and his elders.”⁶⁶ Moroz was duly convicted of “counterrevolutionary activities” and sentenced to Kuznetsk prison, where he died in 1939.⁶⁷

In the midst of Moroz’s despair, he drew on an existing language of struggle and revolution (along with an appeal to the ubiquitous “happy childhood”) to cast the NKVD and the current government in the familiar roles of counterrevolutionaries, persecutors of “the people,” and decadent, illegitimate rulers. Such complaints and redeployment of Soviet ideology and discourse serve as a reminder that for most of these children of “enemies of the people,” their identity as Soviet citizens had only recently been called into question by the sudden arrest of their parents. The notion that there were enemies lurking, preparing to harm the Soviet Union, had been emphasized in their classrooms, in their Pioneer groups, and in other Soviet institutions throughout their childhood, as had Soviet patriotism, the malevolence of the capitalist world, and adoration of Stalin. The ideological environment and political education provided in the children’s home was thus hardly unfamiliar. Nelli Tachko’s description of her childhood in the Stalin years could apply equally to life within the children’s home or without:

Turn your head to the left – a bust of Lenin, to the right – a bust of Stalin, you look forward – a sculpture of Lenin, you glance backward – a portrait of Stalin. Everything was placed in the service of praising the leaders and turning them into idols, and us into idol-worshippers and even fanatics.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Ibid., 286.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 284.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 288.

⁶⁸ Tachko, 25-26.

What had changed for these children, then, was not the surrounding ideological environment, but the fact that their parents (and by extension, they themselves) were now numbered among these “enemies,” and the replacement of family life with the collective life of the children’s home. In the letters examined above, children of “enemies of the people” reacted to these dramatic changes by appealing to the familiar tropes of Soviet discourse regarding children: that children lived (or should live) better in the Soviet Union than anywhere else, that all Soviet children enjoyed a chance for an education and a “happy childhood,” and that abuse, mistreatment, and neglect of children was explicitly forbidden in Soviet society. Unfortunately for many, the realities of life in a children’s home often did not match this discourse.

This in turn might help to explain why the social environment of the children’s home became the most memorable and defining feature for many of the memoirists addressed here. Years later, when seeking to convey what life had been like in a Soviet children’s home, most of these authors devoted much more attention to describing the social environment and interactions among the *detdomovtsy* than to political education or ideological “indoctrination.” Certainly ideology was a constant presence in the children’s home, and served as a guiding vision for the practices and structures that were supposed to provide a communist, collectivist upbringing for these children. The social world of the children’s home thus cannot be fully separated from this ideological influence. At the same time, the actual social environment that these children experienced and remembered was never exclusively defined by Soviet ideology or even Soviet policies. For the memoirists examined in this chapter, it was this social environment, which included both the disruption of earlier family relationships and the collective life of the children’s home, that had the greater influence on these individuals’ recollections of these years and sense of themselves. This social environment was defined in the memories of these children

by its collectivism, both in the sense of the explicitly collectivist practices that structured life in a Soviet children's home, and in the sense that cramped conditions, limited resources, and the circumstances that had thrown together children from various walks of life essentially forced these children to live "collectively." For many, this new social environment, and the feeling of a forced relationship with one's fellow *detdomovtsy*, proved a source of discomfort.

Svetlana Obolenskaia and Nelli Tachko, for example, remembered the transition from their relatively sheltered family lives to the "collective" of the girls' dormitory to have been a type of "torture" and a source of constant embarrassment. Tachko stated, "Our parents did not make us grow up before our time. For this reason, although I was 13-14 years old and already a grown girl, I remained a genuine child, even among my contemporaries."⁶⁹ As Tachko remembered, this sense of being naïve and less knowledgeable about important matters caused her embarrassment and invited ridicule from some of the other girls. Obolenskaia was more straightforward in explaining why the "collective conversations" that took place in the girl's dormitory were initially "torture." The topic of these conversations ranged from sentimental dreaming to politics to sex, but it was this last topic that provided the most amusement for the other girls. Those who were perceived as being ignorant and sheltered, like Obolenskaia, were mercilessly teased, and the others delighted in sharing shocking and "rude" information on this subject.⁷⁰ Obolenskaia and Tachko's first experience of "the collective" in the children's home was therefore associated with a sense of discomfort, and only served to reinforce their sense of not fitting in with the others.

Although she would go on to make friends among the other children, Obolenskaia remembered her other first experiences of "collectivism" to have been a kind of torment as well.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 39-40.

⁷⁰ Obolenskaia, 61.

In part, Obolenskaia credited this to her background: as a child from a privileged family, she had learned few practical skills, which made her an object of ridicule among the other children. Obolenskaia related how she initially did not know how to wash floors properly or make a bed, and was too embarrassed to ask for help. As a result, her first *dezhurstvo* (where one or two children were responsible for cleaning up the common sleeping or eating areas) was “a disaster.”⁷¹ Any kind of manual labor was also difficult for Obolenskaia, and the older children, with more experience in Soviet children’s homes, were consistently amused by her complaints about food or work. Apart from trying to teach Obolenskaia some of the necessary skills, the caregivers generally refused to intervene in this situation, reasoning (correctly, Obolenskaia noted) that intervention would probably only make things worse for Obolenskaia among the other children. Thus, Obolenskaia’s first several months, in which she slowly adjusted to collective life in the children’s home, were “unbearably difficult.”⁷² Along with the ongoing emotional difficulties of dealing with the arrests of her parents, Obolenskaia faced the additional awkwardness of being a teenaged girl trying to fit in with a new social group in a new home.

Many others also remember this awkwardness and sense of social pressure to conform, to make oneself part of the larger group. In Soviet pedagogical theories, collective life was to go hand-in-hand with individual development: only through collectivism would an individual realize their full potential and forgo selfish personal interest in favor of the well-being of the group. For most of these memoirists, however, collective life in the children’s home was remembered as isolating, lonely, and oftentimes stifling rather than liberating. Obolenskaia, for example, argued that collectivism, as it actually existed, encouraged children to be even more withdrawn, lonely, and introverted, due to the fact that one’s “comrades” and caregivers could

⁷¹ Ibid., 66-67.

⁷² Ibid., 66.

never really take the place of family relationships. At the same time, one could never truly be alone, being constantly involved in collective work and group activities, and spending one's evenings with twenty other girls in a shared dormitory. The only possible solution was to "make the life of the collective your own life"; until one had been accepted as "our own" (*svoi*) by the other children, one could only suffer alone. To be accepted, however, required one to "submit" and "dissolve" into the collective, until "all the old humiliations are forgotten, and you stand with everyone in one row."⁷³ As Obolenskaia's put it, this was "not the worst thing," and indeed Obolenskaia herself eventually found friends among the other children. She was ultimately unsure, however, whether more had been gained or lost through this process, arguing that those who grew up in a children's home retained a tendency to be guarded, socially withdrawn, and suspicious of others. Rather than flourishing within this collective environment, Obolenskaia seemed to suggest that children lost some of their individuality and distinctive personalities by being socially pressured to make themselves part of a larger whole.

Mikhail Nikolaev argued even more forcefully that children's homes stifled individual identity in the name of encouraging collectivism. Individual birthdays were not celebrated, and everyone was treated the same, "forced to be like everyone else and do what everyone else does, rather than what you want and can do."⁷⁴ One could never truly be alone, and always fell under the gaze of either one's "comrades" or the caregivers. For Nikolaev, this was unnatural and a source of discomfort: hence, one of the favorite activities for these children was to make one's own "house" out of a mattress and bedclothes in order to find some temporary solitude.⁷⁵

Nikolaev remembered being a shy, isolated, and literary child, more interested in reading books by himself than in participating in sports, games, and other group activities. He therefore found

⁷³ Ibid., 62.

⁷⁴ Nikolaev, *Detdom*, 46.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 29.

the collective life of the children's home particularly oppressive, not only because one was constantly surrounded by other children and could rarely find solitude, but also because policy and social pressure demanded that one constantly take part in various group activities.

Both Obolenskaia and Nikolaev argued, however, that this pressure to fit in and be part of a group did not encourage genuine collectivism; in fact, quite the opposite. The loneliness of having lost one's parents might be ameliorated somewhat by friendships with other children, Obolenskaia noted, but it never really disappeared. Moreover, the trauma of finding oneself suddenly "unprotected" and thrust into a new social environment forced one to "grow spines," to become quick to defend oneself, and to keep others at a distance.⁷⁶ Nikolaev also argued that the social environment of the children's home created a sense of mistrust and constant competition that could hardly be called true "collectivism." Nikolaev wrote:

I slowly became a wolf pup, ready at any moment to bite, to defend myself...the collective? Friendship, camaraderie, fraternity, about which we shouted at every turn? I don't know, I never noticed it. We were more like a pack of wolf pups, assembled temporarily for a certain task.⁷⁷

This "wolf pack," for example, would regularly work together to steal food from surrounding gardens. Local children were also wary of antagonizing any of the "*detdom* kids," because it was well known that all the boys from the children's home would fight together against "family kids."⁷⁸ Yet within the children's home, the boys fought amongst themselves and displayed little real "collectivism." Rather, like any boys, they were drawn to a strong leader, in this case, an older boy nicknamed "Hitler." Nikolaev wrote, "Through our 'Hitler' I saw that in any 'collective' there is a dominant leader; that is, the collective is a mass, a gathering (*sborishche*), a

⁷⁶ As Obolenskaia argued in the passage quoted at the beginning of this chapter, these adjustments were likely to become a permanent part of one's personality, making it harder to form relationships even after the children's home. Obolenskaia, 60.

⁷⁷ Nikolaev, *Detdom*, 40.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 26.

crowd that needs to submit to someone.”⁷⁹ Thus, in Nikolaev’s mind, the collectivism of the children’s home took several forms, alternatively emerging as an oppressive lack of individuality, a hollow slogan, or a mindless conformity.

It should be noted that much of this assessment was undoubtedly influenced by Nikolaev’s later history as an active political dissident, Gulag prisoner, and political émigré to the United States. Nikolaev’s commentary on the environment and objectives of the children’s home bore more than a passing resemblance to the totalitarian model of the Soviet state.⁸⁰ Nikolaev noted, for example, that his American friends often expected to hear stories of abuse, squalor, and other scenes of horror from the children’s home. In response to this, he emphasized that task of the children’s home, in creating the “new Soviet person,” was both more subtle and more insidious, in that it sought to “strip people of any human particularities” and take away people’s ability to reason and think for themselves.⁸¹ This goal could be accomplished without outright abuse: as Nikolaev remembered, he felt socially isolated but generally was content and even “happy” in the children’s home, and had no doubt during his childhood that Soviet children did indeed live better than anywhere else in the world.⁸² While the young Nikolaev did not enjoy the “collectivism” of his children’s home and apparently recognized the ways in which it did not measure up to the ideal image presented in Soviet propaganda, he did not really see this as a glaring flaw or indicative of larger problems with the Soviet system and its ideology. It was only later, after he had begun to lose faith in the Soviet system, that Nikolaev would decide that his time in the children’s home had been a case of “moral” abuse that left him damaged for life.⁸³

⁷⁹ Ibid., 40-41.

⁸⁰ On the history of the idea of totalitarianism, including the ways in which Soviet and Eastern European dissidents adopted this term, see Abbott Gleason, *Totalitarianism: The Inner History of the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

⁸¹ Nikolaev, *Detdom*, 94.

⁸² Ibid., 48.

⁸³ Ibid., 94-102. This “loss of faith” will be discussed more thoroughly in Chapter Six of this dissertation.

In both these cases, what these authors remembered most strongly about their time in the children's home was the social environment and their relationships with the other children. "Collectivism" in this case was often embodied more in the general social pressure to be "part of the group" and the interpersonal dynamics of a large group of children living together, than an overbearing, explicitly ideological presence. It was usually only years later that some, most notably Nikolaev, came to see the social pressures and dynamics of the children's home as being connected to a larger collectivist ideology or an explicit effort to create the New Soviet Person. Of course, as has been explored in previous chapters, collectivist practices and structures in the *detdom* were indeed shaped by a guiding vision of raising politically conscious, collectivist New Soviet People. When seeking to relate what they found most memorable, important, or troubling during their time in the children's homes, however, the majority of these authors still focused most intently on the difficulty of adjusting to this new social environment and their relationship with their fellow *detdomovtsy*.

Along with the difficulty in transitioning from life in a family to life in a "collective," children of "enemies of the people" often recalled another challenge presented by the social environment of the children's home: the encounter (and sometimes confrontation) with children from backgrounds very different from their own. Although some memoirists were placed in children's homes predominantly with other children of "repressed parents," others were placed with orphaned and abandoned children from the earlier wave of *besprizornye*, many of whom were older, possessed "street" experience, and were sometimes involved in petty crime. Various memoirs and Soviet documents give different perspectives on this "mixing" of earlier orphans and the "strange orphans." Nelli Tachko's children's home originally exclusively consisted of children of "enemies of the people;" after a new contingent of older orphans was transferred to

their home, Tachko reasoned that the Soviet government must have been uncomfortable with children of “enemies of the people” being exclusively concentrated in one place.⁸⁴ On the other hand, Georgii Mikhailovich Nosikov remembered that when evacuated children from Leningrad arrived at his children’s home in 1942, he and other children of “enemies of the people” were transferred to another children’s home in order to prevent contact between the two groups, as if these “enemy” children could somehow contaminate the wartime evacuees.⁸⁵

Relations between the two groups varied as well. Viktor Tenenbaum, for example, recalled that the older *besprizornye*, most of whom had been in the children’s home long enough to be placed in positions of responsibility, treated him with kindness.⁸⁶ Obolenskaia also noted that although only about twenty of the roughly 150 children in her children’s home were children of “enemies of the people,” they were not mistreated and, apart from her initial shock at the more “worldly” teenage girls, distinctions were not really made between these two groups.⁸⁷ Other authors remembered a “natural” social division that existed between children of “repressed parents” (or, as Olgerd Volynskii called them, “children from ‘good’ families”) and the other residents, most of whom were children of dekulakized peasants, former *besprizornye*, or other orphans from several years earlier. As Volynskii recalled, this latter group spent much of their time being hooligans, stealing, or otherwise involved in questionable activities, something that the “upstanding” (*poriadochnye*) children avoided. Apart from this tendency to stick together with “one’s own,” however, there is little sense of animosity between these two groups in Volynskii’s memories.⁸⁸

⁸⁴ Tachko, 46.

⁸⁵ Letter from Georgii Mikhailovich Nosikov (Egor Mikhailovich Toliakov) to Memorial, in *Deti Gulaga*, 117-118.

⁸⁶ Tenenbaum, 13. Tenenbaum also noted that by 1939, this had become mostly a moot point, as most of these earlier *besprizornye* had left the children’s home and been replaced by children of “enemies of the people.”

⁸⁷ Obolenskaia, 78.

⁸⁸ Ol’gerd Volynskii, interview with Eva Beberyush, “Golos iz Gulaga,” Arkhiv MILO “Vozvrashchenie,” 20-21.

For Igor Pol, however, the children's home was initially a shocking and unwelcoming place, where children of "enemies of the people" were treated with disdain by the other residents.⁸⁹ Pol spoke of "two worlds colliding" as he and seven other children from a "wholly different life" were thrown together with former street children, *besprizornye*, and juvenile delinquents. Further complicating this situation was the fact that the majority of the inhabitants of Pol's children's home were Tatars, while he and the other new arrivals were Russians. Although Pol did not mention incidents of ethnic strife among the children's home inhabitants, there were numerous tensions with the local Tatar population.⁹⁰ Pol and the other seven children of "enemies of the people" were initially treated as "white ravens" (outcasts), subjected to various insults and torments. During the first few weeks in the children's home none of the other boys would address them by name, instead employing the title "damn Trotskyite."⁹¹ This continued until the oldest of the "white ravens," Ivan (given the nickname "grandpa"), beat up several of the tormentors and earned the respect of the other *besprizornye*. For Pol, this demonstrated an important fact about his new environment: here, only strength and the ability to defend oneself were really respected. As the youngest and smallest of the "children of enemies of the people," Pol initially had the hardest time adjusting, and was often the target of painful practical jokes like the "balalaika."⁹² Nor was Pol the only victim; as he remembered, the children took great delight in perpetrating such torments not out of any real malice toward

⁸⁹ Judging from Soviet documents and other memoirs of children of "enemies of the people," this was not an uncommon experience. See Vilenskii et al., eds., *Deti Gulaga*, 241-251, 254-255; Liudvig Voislavskii, *Vospominaniia iz proshedshego stoletii* (Kharkov: Folio, 2002); and I.R. Peterson and M.R. Peterson, "Sud'ba sem'i," in *Kommandanty kremlia v labirintakh vlasti*, ed. N.S. Cherushev (Moscow: Veche, 2005), 355-421.

⁹⁰ Pol, 76-77.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 80.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 80-81. In this particular torment, the boys would glue pieces of paper between the fingers of their sleeping victim, then light them on fire. The victim, of course, would wake up and try to shake off these burning scraps, thus "playing" the balalaika for the amusement of the group.

individual victims, but simply as a form of entertainment. Having had their fun with one victim, they were just as likely to turn around and invite this boy to participate in their next “joke.”⁹³

The relative lack of supervision in Pol’s children’s home gave the boys frequent opportunities to engage in these various “nasty things” (*merzosti*). Indeed, Pol’s memoir described a children’s “society” seemingly left mostly to its own devices:

The one thing I absolutely do not remember is the adults of the children’s home. It is clear that there were adults – after all, someone needed to feed, clothe, teach, and raise these wards, and keep the established order. But I don’t remember a single concrete example of our caregivers...as if they were not there at all...As for upbringing (*vospitanie*) and order, the caregivers and the director didn’t play any role at all, and the undisputed master of the children’s home, the legislator of its internal life and the high judge of its inhabitants was an ‘ataman’ by the name of [M. N.].⁹⁴

As Pol characterized him, this “ataman” (a nickname) enjoyed unquestioned authority over the other children, reinforced by a small group of other older boys (ages 15-16) who had spent most of their lives as *besprizornye*. Ultimately, fear was the basis of this authority, as it was rumored that this “ataman” had once been part of a criminal gang and still maintained these ties, or that he secretly carried a knife and pistol. Even the caregivers were reportedly afraid of these various legends, and generally left the boys’ dormitory alone.⁹⁵ With this lack of supervision, the “ataman” and his cronies established their own social order, in which the “cult of strength” was predominant, and in which those who were not strong (like Pol) learned to be “passive” and “cowardly.” Thus, when Pol spoke of entering a different world in the children’s home, he clearly had in mind not only the encounter between children of “enemies of the people” and earlier *besprizornye*, but also the shocking transition from being a “mama’s boy” in a family

⁹³ Pol noted a similar dynamic with the gradual disappearance of the epithet “Trotskyite” and the eventual acceptance of the new boys into the larger group- though this acceptance was always tenuous. As Pol described, the label “Trotskyite” disappeared mostly because the other boys grew bored of using it and tried to think of more clever insults or nicknames, following the custom among *besprizornye* of referring to each other by aliases. *Ibid.*, 80.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 79.

environment, to being one of the youngest boys in an environment where, in his words, “children’s natural cruelty” was given free reign.⁹⁶

Like Nikolaev, Pol saw the effects of this new environment as being predominantly detrimental. In Pol’s case, however, these negative consequences were not an effect, intended or not, of an officially encouraged “collectivism.” Rather, they stemmed from the fact that the social environment of this children’s home, like many, was nowhere near the Soviet ideal of a structured, disciplined collective guided by skilled and authoritative pedagogues. As Pol put it, his children’s home often resembled a thieves’ hideout more than anything else. As was the case with many long-term *besprizornye*, many of the boys at Pol’s children’s home were involved in petty theft. Pol was also pressured to participate in these activities, but discovered that he had no real talent as a thief.⁹⁷ His talents as an artist and musician, however, helped him gain a place among the other children. One of the predominant activities in the children’s home was to play cards, but these were sometimes hard to come by. After the other children saw his drawings, Pol found a “job” making decks of cards for a small fee. Due to his musical talent, Pol was also involved in another favorite pastime of the *besprizornye*: the creation of amusing, “criminal” (*blatnye*) songs. Pol’s task was to write down the best of these songs in a special “album” kept in the boy’s dormitory.⁹⁸ Years later, this experience provided Pol with his own amusing joke: to suddenly begin singing these songs (some of which were quite vulgar) for various friends who had no idea of his past. On the whole, however, Pol felt that his encounter with this world of *besprizornye*, petty theft, and criminal slang (*blatnyi zhargon*) had “left its mark” in a detrimental sense, compounding the difficulties he later faced in resuming a “normal” life and reconnecting with his relatives.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 80.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 86.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 87.

Pol's experience was an extreme, though certainly not unique, example of a children's home in which the adult staff played a mostly negligible role and "educational work" was practically non-existent.⁹⁹ For others, various adults, particularly the director or a favorite caregiver or teacher, played an important role both in helping them to adjust to life in the children's home and in their memories of this time. For some lucky children, the children's home staff was comprised of dedicated individuals whose love and attention to their charges did make them into something of a surrogate family. Viktor Tenenbaum, for example, remembered the director of his children's home, Mark Romanovich Maliavko, with clear affection. As director, Maliavko showed a devotion to his charges and an impressive talent for stretching his budget to acquire extra food, school supplies, clothes, musical instruments, and other amenities for the children. Maliavko also apparently tried to use his connections to bring siblings together in his children's home, often successfully. These new arrivals related stories of hunger, frequent thefts, and other problems at other children's homes, which to Tenenbaum at the time seemed "wild and implausible."¹⁰⁰ Another favorite adult was the head of the educational section, Aleksandra Iakovlevna Khlebtsevich, one of the only educators in the children's home who, simply by her example, enjoyed unquestioned authority. As Tenenbaum remembered her, Khlebtsevich was strict and demanding, allowing no rude words or behavior in class, but never raised her voice and never resorted to berating these children of "enemies of the people," as some of their other teachers did. In Tenenbaum's words, her example "made us want to be better, smarter, more clever."¹⁰¹ Thanks in part to the example of these dedicated adults, Tenenbaum became so attached to life in his children's home that he commented "if one of my

⁹⁹ See other examples in Chapter Four of this dissertation.

¹⁰⁰ Tenenbaum, 17-18.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 20.

relatives had arrived to take me away, I would not have gone with them.”¹⁰² Nor did this attachment disappear after leaving the children’s home: after finishing school and moving to Moscow to pursue higher education, Tenenbaum nevertheless returned each summer to work as a caregiver and Pioneer leader in his old children’s home.

Many of these children also fondly remembered those adults who gave them the opportunity to pursue further education or other means of advancement, thus helping them attempt to overcome the stigma associated with being children of “enemies of the people.” Emma Aleksandrovna Grabovskaia described the director of her children’s home in Volchansk, Leontii Eliseevich, as “very strict” but noted that he did not berate or yell at the children, despite the fact that “we were not such good [children]. Everyone was offended, insulted, and angry - we did not understand why our parents had suffered (*postradali*).”¹⁰³ Among the most important reasons for her affection for Leontii Eliseevich, however, was that he allowed these children the chance to finish the full ten years of secondary school – a chance that, as Grabovskaia noted, far from every child received, whether they were from a family or children’s home. Grabovskaia still wrote with a tinge of disbelief: “I even managed to enroll in the Kharkov medical institute – me, a *detdom* girl, the daughter of an enemy of the people.”¹⁰⁴ The fact that this opportunity seemed so improbable made it that much more memorable.

The importance of educational opportunities is repeated often in the memories of children of “enemies of the people,” as are expressions of gratitude to those who made these opportunities possible.¹⁰⁵ Education often served as the path for these individuals’ re-integration into wider Soviet society, though this re-integration was frequently still hampered by the powerful stigma

¹⁰² Ibid., 17.

¹⁰³ Letter from E.A. Grabovskaia to Memorial, in *Deti Gulaga*, 250.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ See, for example, Frierson and Vilensky, 219-222; and Figes, 294-298.

attached to the label “children of enemies of the people.” Svetlana Obolenskaia, for example, found that her history as the daughter of an “enemy of the people” prevented her from being accepted into graduate school, despite passing all her entrance exams with the highest possible grade.¹⁰⁶ Regardless of this setback, she found work as a teacher, a career that gave her great satisfaction. Finding work, getting married, and growing older, Obolenskaia recalled, finally gave her a sense of stability and “belonging” that she had been lacking ever since her parents’ arrest.¹⁰⁷ She was even nominated for the local election commission, though when she mentioned her family history her nomination was withdrawn.¹⁰⁸

Unsurprisingly, then, adults who treated these children with kindness and respect had much more success in encouraging them to be the loyal, productive Soviet citizens desired by the regime than those who condemned them as “enemies of the people” (real or potential).¹⁰⁹ As previously noted, Soviet discourse of the time, let alone actual policies, was rarely consistent in its treatment of children of “enemies of the people:” were they potential dangers to be isolated and, if necessary, imprisoned (as implied by the very fact that relatives of “enemies of the people” could be arrested and imprisoned simply for being related to an “enemy”)? Or did they “not answer for their fathers” and deserve the same opportunities as other children? These contradictions were reflected in the varying memories and experiences of these children. What is clear is that *detdom* directors, educators, and staff who adhered to the spirit of the earlier, pedagogical (rather than punitive) approach to orphaned children enjoyed much more authority and success among their charges. The example that they set in their relationships with children

¹⁰⁶ Obolenskaia, 181, 197-98.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 227.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 196.

¹⁰⁹ Kelly, *Children’s World*, 239; Frierson and Vilensky, 222-225.

was often remembered more clearly, and as holding more influence, than any questions of ideology, political education, or a formal pedagogical system.

Tenenbaum's recollections of the director Maliavko again provide a good example. Maliavko had been director of the Kardymovo children's home since he had informally founded it in 1920, yet had never joined the Communist Party (which had become almost required for children's home directors by the mid-1930s). As Tenenbaum related, when asked about this, Maliavko replied, "Why should I join the party? I've always been a communist."¹¹⁰ In Tenenbaum's portrayal, Maliavko was indeed a genuine communist, devoted to the welfare of others but uninterested in personal advancement or the privileges and perks of party membership. Tenenbaum therefore noted, with some irony, that Maliavko was technically not allowed to attend meetings of the children's home's Komsomol group, though he often did so. At most meetings, Maliavko was content to sit quietly, but after one particularly lively discussion, he reportedly stated, "I will never believe that the parents of these children are enemies of the people."¹¹¹

That those adults who treated their charges simply as children in need of love, support, and guidance, rather than children of "enemies of the people," enjoyed the most influence and were remembered with the most affection in turn indicates an important desire on the part of these children at the time: the desire simply to be treated as normal, "Soviet" children. Grabovskaia recalled this desire when she wrote that Leontii Eliseevich "had realized long ago that we were just typical (*samye obyknovennnye*) children, that there was nothing hostile in us."¹¹² Some of this desire may have been related to the social pressure to be "part of the group" discussed earlier, as children and teenagers often feel particularly self-conscious about anything

¹¹⁰ Tenenbaum, 16.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 18.

¹¹² Letter from E.A. Grabovskaia to Memorial, in *Deti Gulaga*, 251.

that makes them stand out or seem different. Undoubtedly the constant attacks on “enemies of the people” in the Soviet press only made this situation worse. At the same time, however, this desire reflected the importance of some kind of perceived continuity in a life that had been wholly upended by the loss of one’s parents. Many children of “enemies of the people” spoke of the great importance they placed on preserving some key aspects of their lives before the children’s home. For Svetlana Obolenskaia, a desire to pursue further education and a love for music became “a way to preserve what had been given to us in our parents’ house.”¹¹³ For others, it was a physical memento of their past life: Nelli Tachko recalled saving several of her mother’s things, only to have them stolen (presumably by one of the newly transferred *besprizornye*) in the children’s home.¹¹⁴

This concern with preserving some connection to one’s life before the children’s home in turn relates to a final important consideration about the social world inhabited by these children, namely, the fact that this world was never exclusively limited to the children’s home. The rules and “regime” of the children’s home may have tried to control the social environment of these children, but it did not encompass all their interactions. Children of “enemies of the people” maintained ties with friends, relatives, and even their arrested parent(s) through correspondence, despite the fact that such correspondence was subject to censorship.¹¹⁵ For many children of “enemies of the people,” these letters became a treasured connection to both their family and their life before the children’s home. Nelli Tachko remembered missing her mother so much during her first months in the children’s home that she would hold imaginary conversations with her and lived “like in a dream. I didn’t care what happened to me.” As other children wrote

¹¹³ Obolenskaia, 90-91.

¹¹⁴ Tachko, 46.

¹¹⁵ Letters from camp inmates were obviously censored, while letters from children’s home residents had to be turned over to an educator for censorship, a fact that raised some cries of protest. See, for example, the previously mentioned case of “Ilya V.,” in Guseva, 125.

letters to their arrested mothers, however, Tachko would ask them to inquire briefly if anyone had encountered her own mother in the camps. When she finally did receive a letter from her mother, Tachko remembered reading it over and over, savoring each word. For the rest of the day, she “literally flew” as she performed her chores: “It was my own holiday. I returned to life. Now I would endure, bear, and tolerate anything, if I could only see my mother sooner.”¹¹⁶ Even Svetlana Obolenskaia, who had a much more strained relationship with her mother, remembered waiting with anticipation for each of her letters.¹¹⁷ Viktor Tenenbaum may have been an exception: he recalled noticing that he was the only one in his children’s home who did not receive letters from a parent, but did not remember being bothered by this fact, instead devoting his energies to his “new life” rather than “the past.” Reflecting on these memories years later, however, Tenenbaum saw this attitude as a defensive reaction to the psychological blow of his mother’s arrest, in which the pain and loss he felt could not be comprehended consciously and was therefore subsumed into his unconscious.¹¹⁸ Receiving notice of his mother’s posthumous legal rehabilitation brought back this flood of emotions, sparking the kind of longing (*toska*) for his mother that he did not remember feeling in the children’s home.¹¹⁹

After the trauma of losing their parents, relationships with one’s siblings also took on an even greater importance, and many children of “enemies of the people” struggled mightily to maintain contacts with their siblings. This was not always possible, as the usual NKVD policy at various receiving centers seems to have been to separate siblings and assign them to different children’s homes. The general disorder of this process and need to place children quickly in any available spaces, however, meant that it was sometimes possible for siblings to remain together.

¹¹⁶ Tachko, 43-44.

¹¹⁷ Obolenskaia, 42.

¹¹⁸ Tenenbaum, 18.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 33.

Olgerd Volynskii, for example, managed at least to be sent to the same city (Ulianovsk) as his sister by deliberately omitting the fact that his sister had already been placed there.¹²⁰ These siblings who remained in close contact sometimes took on new roles. Nelli Tachko remembered feeling a great sense of responsibility for her younger brother, and diligently reported on his behavior and progress in her letters to their mother (a fact that caused her mother affectionately to praise Tachko as “my little mama”).¹²¹ Other older siblings also remembered feeling a new sense of responsibility or a need to take on a different role in the absence of their parents.¹²² Requests to be transferred to other children’s homes in order to be placed with siblings were common, and many of these requests emphasized both the need and value of having an older sibling present to assist in the proper upbringing (*vospitanie*) of the younger. Vadim L. stressed this role in his request to be transferred to Gorodets to be with his brother, Tolia:

You can understand my request, having read Ilya V.’s letter.¹²³ Tolia never used to swear in front of me, behaved calmly, and only received excellent grades. He only listened to me and never fell under any other kind of influence. He is a very impressionable child, and misses me, and this has no doubt had an influence on his psychological state. I also miss him very much and cannot live peacefully while receiving such letters. After all, my brother has become this way only recently.¹²⁴

In his request, Vadim L. balanced an appeal based on his responsibility as an older sibling with a suggestion that Tolia’s behavior would improve under his influence. While this behavior was no doubt of genuine personal concern to Vadim, his letter also clearly sought to appeal to officials’ desire for discipline and order within children’s homes.

¹²⁰ Volynskii, 17-18. The two siblings had originally been separated when Olgerd fell ill and was placed in isolation for two weeks, during which time his sister had already been transferred to a children’s home in Ulianovsk. Although not placed in the same children’s home, the two siblings were able to meet frequently in the city.

¹²¹ Tachko, 44.

¹²² See Figes, 324-329.

¹²³ This is the same “Ilya V.” as mentioned earlier. In an earlier letter to Vadim L., Ilya had complained about the conditions in his children’s home and mentioned that Tolia, apparently under the influence of a girl (whom Ilya called a “complete prostitute”) had begun to swear, behave badly, and tell vulgar stories. Guseva, 125.

¹²⁴ Request from “Vadim L.” to head of the section for children’s homes of the Gorky region, 20 Oct. 1937, in Guseva, 137.

Finally, those siblings who were separated geographically still tried, whenever possible, to remain in contact through letters, often playing some of the same roles through their correspondence. V.K., a student in Moscow, offered the following advice to his brother after receiving the latter's complaint about his children's home: "Life's misfortunes are a small thing, there is no reason to pay attention to them - from everything bad you need to pull out the good in it. I'm sure that you are one of those people who will not give up."¹²⁵ Whether this advice made his brother's experience in the children's home more tolerable is impossible to know. What is clear throughout all these letters, however, is the importance that these children continued to place on maintaining existing family ties. Unsurprisingly, these ties remained crucial after the children's home as well. Some children of "enemies of the people" spent months or even years afterward trying to track down lost siblings or arrested parents, not all of them successfully.¹²⁶ In the end, any efforts in the children's home to have children forget their family life, or replace this life with the "surrogate family" of the collective, had to contend with the powerful desire among almost all these children to hold onto their existing family.

Friendships and social connections formed within the children's home and without also proved of lasting significance for these children. Regardless of their attitudes toward the "collective," all of the memoirists examined here eventually adjusted to life in the children's home, made some friends, and became part of its social milieu. Even Igor Pol spoke of forming some friendships, though these were rather tenuous and often overshadowed by the criminal atmosphere of his children's home. For most of the others, however, these friendships helped in some way to mediate the isolation and pain of losing one's parents. In some cases, the children's

¹²⁵ Letter from V.K. to his brother, "Daniil K.," 1937, in Guseva, 127. This is the same "Daniil K." discussed on p. 23 of this chapter.

¹²⁶ See Tachko, 77; A.F. Mosina, "Moi milye roditeli," in *Gulag: ego stroiteli, obivateli, i geroi*, ed. I.V. Dobrovolskii (Moscow: Mezhdunarдноe obshchestvo prav cheloveka, 1999), 379-381; and I.D. Namruev, "Sirote bylo vdvoine tiazhele," *Bol' pamiati*, ed. P.O. Godaev (Elista: Dzhangar, 2000), 193-198.

home did indeed become a sort of surrogate family for these children, though not always in the way imagined by the Soviet regime.¹²⁷ Nelli Tachko, for example, remembered how the older children in her children's home took on the responsibility of caring for the younger children, much like older siblings. This relationship took on critical importance during the wartime years, as Tachko's children's home was haphazardly evacuated and several staff members simply disappeared. During the evacuation, groups of approximately a dozen children were quickly evacuated with only one or two of the older (14-15 years old) residents sent along to take care of them.¹²⁸ Friendships that had formed in the children's home played a significant role in Viktor Tenenbaum's life as well. During his time in the children's home, one of his friends, a daughter of "enemies of the people" and former resident of the children's home, was promoted to being the head of the education section (*zavuch*). When it came time for Tenenbaum to apply to various institutes of higher education, this director wrote the required dossier for him, but intentionally omitted the fact that his mother had been arrested.¹²⁹

Many of these social connections continued to be important after the children's home. After being separated from her brother and losing contact with him during the war, Tachko relied on her former friends and acquaintances from the children's home to try to locate her brother, which she did successfully in 1945.¹³⁰ Tenenbaum also later drew on the social ties he had formed in the children's home. After arriving in Moscow to apply to various institutes of higher education, Tenenbaum stayed with the older sister of a fellow resident, while the husband of another former resident tried to assist him in his applications.¹³¹ Nor, as previously noted, did Tenenbaum lose his own ties to the children's home. Of course, not every former children's

¹²⁷ On the children's home as a "surrogate family," see also Chapter Four of this dissertation.

¹²⁸ Tachko, 51.

¹²⁹ Tenenbaum, 26a.

¹³⁰ Tachko, 77.

¹³¹ Tenenbaum, 27.

home resident was eager to maintain these ties, particularly those who, like Igor Pol, had experienced many of the worst aspects of Soviet children's homes. Others, like Svetlana Obolenskaia, showed a more ambivalent attitude toward the friendships and connections they had made in the children's home, coupled with an apparent reluctance to revisit these oftentimes painful years. While she remembered forming some important friendships in the children's home, Obolenskaia also noted that after leaving she "never sought out anyone from those years," despite knowing that several (including her friend Tamara) also lived in Moscow.¹³² Yet at the same time, when a reunion of the Shuia children's home was organized in 1985, Obolenskaia remembered that "I did not hesitate for a minute in deciding to go." The opportunity to "return to those long-gone, bitter years, and see everyone – forgotten and half-forgotten," would have been "frightening" and "unforgiveable" to miss.¹³³ In the same way that the social environment of the children's home had often been the most influential and memorable aspect of life in the children's home, friendships and social connections both helped to mitigate the shock of this new environment, and often proved one of the only aspects of these years that these "strange orphans" were eager to remember and preserve.

"I am Happy that Fate Was So Rough": Assessments of the Children's Home

Despite the important role played by friendships (and, for some, by the adult staff) in the children's home, this "surrogate family" never replaced existing family ties for these children. Correspondence with one's arrested parents, maintaining ties or locating lost siblings, preserving values and even objects given by one's parents – all retained a central importance. For the

¹³² Obolenskaia, 66.

¹³³ Ibid., 69. This reunion will be discussed more in Chapter Six of this dissertation.

majority of these children of “enemies of the people,” their years in a children’s home were often characterized by an attempt to retain the past, rather than transform oneself or build a “new life.” Beyond the clear confusion and trauma caused by the arrest of their parents, these children experienced the children’s home itself, with its “alien” social environment, as a disruption of their previous, often acceptably “Soviet,” family life. The idea of “transforming” themselves or fashioning a new identity within the children’s home thus often held little appeal. This is not to say that Soviet discourse, with its talk of a “happy childhood” for all and implicit promise that all *detdomovtsy* could become full Soviet citizens, did not play an important role. For the “strange orphans,” however, the question of their status as Soviet citizens was often more about preserving the past as well, by demonstrating that they (and their parents) should never have been numbered among the ranks of supposed enemies.

The arrest of one’s parent(s) as “enemies of the people,” and the experience of being placed in a children’s home, certainly introduced a potential challenge to one’s faith and trust in the Soviet government. Many of these memoirists, however, remembered responding to their parents’ arrest in the same way as most Soviet citizens: assuming that some terrible mistake had been made, or that these arrests were being perpetrated by an overzealous or rogue element that would soon be dealt with.¹³⁴ The arrest of one’s parent(s) was thus not necessarily the end of a faith in Stalin or the Soviet system as a whole, though it often introduced an element of doubt. Viktor Tenenbaum, for example, recalled:

I had no strong answer to the question of whether my mother was guilty or not. This was a cursed question for all of us. The majority strongly did not believe in the guilt of their parents. Yet this did not affect their unshakeable faith in Soviet power, the party, and

¹³⁴ For some, the announcement of NKVD chief Ezhov’s own arrest seemed to confirm this assumption, and they eagerly awaited the release of those arrested: see Figes, 279-280. Many Soviet citizens also remember holding doubts about the legitimacy of some arrests while still holding a general faith in Stalin, the Soviet government, or the idea that the Soviet Union was threatened by “spies” and “wreckers:” see Figes, 272-279; and Frierson and Vilensky, 224-225.

Stalin. Everybody took the unfortunate incident (*neshchast'e*) to have been a monstrous mistake. And the brain refused to accept the obvious: the enormous quantity of such mistakes...¹³⁵

Thus, although this seed of doubt had perhaps been planted, it was still able to be reconciled with a continued, general faith in Stalin, the party, and Soviet power. Tenenbaum recalled how he even entertained the idea that his mother might have been guilty. After years of being warned by Soviet propaganda that there were spies everywhere, that counter-revolutionary groups were plotting their schemes throughout the Soviet Union, hidden among one's friends and neighbors, Tenenbaum was continually troubled by an off-hand remark his mother had made immediately before her arrest. When speaking with an acquaintance about the widespread arrests of various Polish emigrants, Tenenbaum's mother had made the remark "I am the only one left from our group."¹³⁶ As Tenenbaum recalled, these words, "from our group," stayed with him for many years in the children's home: could they have referred to a secret, counter-revolutionary organization made up of Polish expatriates? Only later did Tenenbaum come to the conclusion that his mother was innocently referring to the group of other Polish refugees that had crossed the Soviet border with the Tenenbaums, and with whom his mother had maintained close ties. For Tenenbaum, the ideological climate of the time, in which messages about the constant threat of spies, saboteurs, "enemies of the people," and other hidden dangers were repeated *ad nauseum*, allowed an innocent remark to take on a seemingly sinister significance.

Indeed, many memoirists recalled taking the existence of saboteurs, spies, and other hidden enemies for granted. The arrest of their parents therefore most often led not to a questioning of the idea that "enemies of the people" were indeed a genuine threat, but the conviction that in this specific case, a mistake had clearly been made. Voiloshnikov remembered

¹³⁵ Tenenbaum, 17.

¹³⁶ Tenenbaum, 10.

feeling little surprise that his father's friend, professor Volskii, had been arrested, since he and his friends had long ago guessed that Volskii was a "spy," based on his knowledge of foreign books, his elegant dress, and his general air of being "foreign."¹³⁷ It was only when Voiloshnikov's own father was arrested that he truly began to question the validity of these reports of widespread enemies. Nikolaev also recalled his children's home as a place where the existence of hidden enemies was largely taken for granted. Children played games like "border guards and saboteurs," the memories of which caused Nikolaev to reflect wryly, in light of his subsequent political dissidence, "which was I?"¹³⁸ The children also followed the purges with interest, with one boy taking particular pleasure in crossing out the faces of arrested Soviet officials in his school textbook.¹³⁹ Many of the children even tried to do their part to uncover spies and anti-Soviet sabotage. As young Pioneers, they revealed a secret message in the slides that held their kerchiefs, in which the symbol for the Third International was actually code for "Trotskyite-Zinovievite band (*shaika*)."¹⁴⁰ As older children, they played capture-the-flag and other war games in the woods at night, imagining they were training to track down and capture saboteurs and German spies.¹⁴¹ Few of these children remembered questioning the idea that the Soviet Union was under threat from without and within, and that they needed to do their part to defend it.

What is perhaps surprising is that many of the memoirists addressed here do not recall such messages being explicitly applied to their own parents, at least within the children's home. In the same way that conditions in Soviet children's homes often varied widely during the 1930s, the attitude toward children of "enemies of the people" also differed from place to place. While

¹³⁷ Voiloshnikov (published), 28.

¹³⁸ Nikolaev, *Detdom*, 19.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 58.

¹⁴⁰ Nikolaev, *Kto byl nichem*, 118.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 89-92.

some, like Voiloshnikov, remembered being subjected to constant verbal abuse and told to denounce and forget their “traitorous” parents, many others, like Obolenskaia and Tenenbaum, remembered being treated the same as other children.¹⁴² This variable treatment may help account for why some of these memoirists were apparently able to reconcile a continued faith in Stalin and the Soviet regime with the arrest of their parents. Despite the widespread venomous rhetoric regarding nefarious “enemies of the people” and “traitors to the motherland,” many of these individuals recalled feeling that such labels certainly did not apply to their own parents. As with wives who wrote letters to Stalin pleading for their husband’s release (as Igor Pol’s mother did), these children were convinced that a terrible mistake had been made that Stalin would rectify.¹⁴³ Though they could not entirely avoid the question of their parents’ supposed guilt, many were not forced to address this question directly (as in a formal denunciation of their parents, for example).

The actions and examples of kind caregivers also sometimes facilitated this apparent reconciliation between a faith in both Stalin and the innocence of one’s parents.¹⁴⁴ Despite having never known his parents, and the fact that his family name had been changed to eliminate any ties to them, Nikolaev was told by the director on the eve of his “graduation” from the children’s home that his parents “were good people” and that he “should never be ashamed of them.”¹⁴⁵ Others remember similar messages that seemed to contradict the idea that their parents were genuinely “enemies of the people.” The kindness of some children’s home directors and workers, like Tenenbaum’s relationship with director Maliavko, also seemed to confirm the regime’s stated concern for children’s welfare. Such children’s homes created an environment

¹⁴² Voiloshnikov, 8-9 (Memorial), 53-54 (published); Obolenskaia, 78; Tenenbaum, 17.

¹⁴³ Pol’, 30.

¹⁴⁴ Catriona Kelly makes a similar point in *Children’s World*, 238-239.

¹⁴⁵ Nikolaev, *Kto byl nichem*, 140.

where the conviction that one's parents were innocent could still (sometimes tenuously) coexist with faith in Stalin and the Soviet regime.

In places where children of “enemies of the people” were constantly reminded of their tainted status, ridiculed, or abused, reconciling these two beliefs was more problematic. For some, it was apparently impossible. Voiloshnikov related the story of another boy in his receiving center, nicknamed Riabchik, who constantly struggled to preserve both his faith in the Soviet regime and his parents. As Voiloshnikov portrayed this situation, Riabchik was “prepared to hate everything and everyone,” even other “children of enemies of the people,” except for Stalin and Soviet power (*sovetskaia vlast'*). At the same time, however, Riabchik could not accept that his parents, whom he loved and trusted, were “enemies.” As a result of this ongoing internal struggle, Riabchik eventually committed suicide.¹⁴⁶ While it is possible that Voiloshnikov's autobiographical novel embellished this story for dramatic effect, the story of Riabchik captured a real psychological struggle faced by many children of “enemies of the people.” Many had been raised in prominent families, with parents who had been part of the Soviet government or even the ranks of “Old Bolsheviks.” Being forced to “choose” between one's parents and one's faith in the Soviet regime was therefore a particularly painful dilemma. One possible reaction was to make oneself even more “Soviet,” devoting one's time and energy wholeheartedly to volunteer work, the Pioneers or Komsomol, and other approved activities. By consistently proving their own loyalty and “Sovietness,” these children sought to clear their parents' name as well, by raising the question of whether genuine “enemies of the people” could have raised such loyal, conscientious, and ideologically committed children.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁶ Voiloshnikov (published), 49.

¹⁴⁷ Ol'ga Adamova Sliozberg discusses a similar phenomenon among children of “enemies of the people” who had themselves later been arrested. O.L. Adamova-Sliozberg, “Put',” in *Dodnes' Tiagoteet t. 1*, 114.

Another possible reaction to this dilemma was to “denounce” the current Soviet regime rather than one’s parents, while still trying to hold on to genuine Soviet socialist values. According to Voiloshnikov, this was the reaction of the *cheisery* (from ChSIR, “member of the family of a traitor to the motherland”) with whom he endured the NKVD receiving center. They reasoned that since Old Bolsheviks, military officers, and others of the “best people” had been arrested and declared “enemies of the people,” to be a *cheiser* was actually an honor. The declared themselves to be a genuine collective, composed of the “sons of real revolutionaries,” and dedicated to opposing the counter-revolution of the NKVD and other “officials” (*sotrudniki*). To enhance their credentials as the “real revolutionaries,” this group of orphans sang the old revolutionary songs of 1917, and supposedly swore a secret oath to “never forget what had happened to our parents” and to save Russia from the Communist Party. One of the group’s leaders, nicknamed Makaron, summed up this position to the young Voiloshnikov: “I too dream of real communism. But I refuse to help those who would use this dream to deceive the people.”¹⁴⁸ In this formulation, the current Soviet regime became a counter-revolution and a perversion of genuinely revolutionary, communist values. To remain loyal to its “enemies” (i.e. one’s parents) was therefore a confirmation of one’s own revolutionary identity. In this way, the ideological discourse that permeated Soviet schools and children’s institutions became repurposed into an attack on the current Soviet regime.

Questions of loyalty and a general faith in the Soviet government were therefore distinct from how these children experienced and reacted to the *detdom* as an explicitly collectivist institution intended to bring about a transformation in the very “selves” of its subjects. For the most part, these “strange orphans” remained loyal Soviet citizens, but few seem to have undertaken the desired project of self-transformation and conscious forging of a new “self.” To

¹⁴⁸ Voiloshnikov (published), 56.

the extent that a change in one's self had indeed taken place within the children's home, it was almost universally decried as detrimental and a source of ongoing problems. The sense of being placed in an "unnatural," incomprehensible environment contributed to the sentiment, expressed by many of these memoirists, that their time in a children's home had irreversibly changed their lives and left lasting impressions on their personalities. Rarely was this the type of transformation and formative experience posited by Soviet pedagogical theories. Igor Pol' succinctly captured the disconnection between the environment he experienced and the idealized children's home of Soviet discourse when he wrote, "I still have no idea what a children's home should be like, if it truly deserves the name."¹⁴⁹ Many of these memoirists, among them Mikhail Nikolaev, saw themselves as having been permanently scarred by their time in a children's home. Nikolaev spent almost his entire childhood in a Soviet children's home and considered much of his "character" to have been formed by this experience. Rather than a selfless and conscientious collectivist, however, Nikolaev believed the actual experience of growing up in a children's home had raised him to be selfish and insensitive, always ready to grab the best piece of food for himself and to ignore the feelings and needs of others.¹⁵⁰ This was the irony of the children's home for Nikolaev: in an environment that emphasized collectivism and often ignored individual differences, children actually became more selfish and inconsiderate as they fought with each other for attention, food, and other needs.

Nikolaev also emphasized the "unnatural" character of the children's home, arguing that children were deprived of the normal connections with other people (i.e. family) that create a normal, healthy worldview. Children did not feel love and did not learn to love, and thus had no

¹⁴⁹ Pol', 76.

¹⁵⁰ Nikolaev, *Detdom*, 98.

trust for anyone in their lives.¹⁵¹ This made them particularly susceptible to the binary worldview promoted by Soviet ideology, in which the whole world was divided into “Reds” or “Whites,” and the Soviet Union was full of hidden enemies waiting to strike.¹⁵² Whereas children from families knew that “Uncle Petia is mama’s brother, and a friend...and aunt Masha is also a friend, and there are no better people on the earth than grandmother and grandfather,” those in the children’s home were fully ready to believe that enemies were everywhere and no one could be genuinely trusted.¹⁵³ This for Nikolaev was the most harmful aspect of growing up in a children’s home. Although Nikolaev never remembered being physically abused or harmed in the children’s home, and even remembered being generally happy, he later saw his childhood there as inflicting irreparable “moral damage” that affected the rest of his life.¹⁵⁴

Other children of “enemies of the people” related similar stories of being scarred, damaged, or otherwise negatively affected by their experience. The traumatic loss of their parents and the shock of being thrust into a new, sometimes frightening social environment contributed to the feeling among many of these memoirists that they were forced to grow up too quickly, were exposed to harsh truths about the world too early, and thus began to feel abandoned, alone, and able to depend only on themselves. Obolenskaia argued that children in a children’s home were “defenseless,” in the sense that they were not protected from the harsh realities of the world, the cruelty possible between humans, and other difficult truths that parents often work to hide from their children.¹⁵⁵ As a result, these children were forced to protect themselves, to “grow spines,” and became harder, more cynical, and lost their “natural joy.” Igor Pol also spoke of being “hardened” by his time in the children’s home, declaring that this

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 47-48.

¹⁵² Ibid., 19, 94-96.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 49.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 101.

¹⁵⁵ Obolenskaia, 60.

experience had “ruined” him and made it difficult to readjust to living with relatives.¹⁵⁶ Later, after finally being reunited with his mother, Pol also had difficulty rebuilding their relationship as well. They were “like two people who had lost everything in a fire (*dva pogoreltsy*),” and had “to start everything over.”¹⁵⁷ Pol blamed this fact both on their long separation, and on the changes that had taken place during their respective times in the children’s home and labor camp. In a sense, both Pol and his mother had become different people in the intervening years, to the point that they could hardly recognize each other, let alone immediately resume their previous lives.

Both Pol and Obolenskaia saw their future lives and even their personalities as being negatively influenced by their time in a children’s home, a sentiment they shared with many others. There is a sense in both memoirs, however, that being forced to “grow up” and become independent, although a painful process, was not entirely detrimental. At the time that he entered the children’s home, Pol was a self-proclaimed “typical mama’s boy” and not prepared for life on his own.¹⁵⁸ His time in the children’s home acquainted him with the “seamy side of life” (*iznanki zhizni*) but also forced him to become more independent and self-reliant. By the time he left the children’s home, Pol had at least somewhat adapted to the life of the *besprizornye* who surrounded him, and had learned to hold his own, for better or worse. This independence and self-reliance was not always conducive to reestablishing his former life; Pol’s teachers, for example, complained about his behavior and lack of “discipline,” although Pol continued to succeed academically.¹⁵⁹ Obolenskaia was even more explicitly conflicted in her assessment of the Shuia children’s home and the results of her experience there. Throughout her memoir,

¹⁵⁶ Pol’, 107.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 137-138.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 52.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 111-112.

Obolenskaia referred to the time before her parents' arrests as a "happy childhood," but also characterized her childhood self as being naïve, spoiled, and even somewhat "bourgeois (*burzhuika*)."¹⁶⁰ Although Obolenskaia declared that what happened to her was "terrible," she saw a slim "silver lining":

...I came to this conclusion long ago – when, I do not remember. What happened was cruel, it cost the life of the closest person to me [her father], and it cost me much suffering as well, but I am happy (*shchastлива*) that fate was so rough (*grubo*), and tore me and my brothers out at the roots from that life, and never gave me a chance to become a fashionable and spoiled girl...¹⁶¹

In contrast to her earlier, privileged life, Obolenskaia's time in the children's home taught her that the world was "indifferent," that only those who were self-reliant and worked hard could achieve what they wanted, and that her previous life had equipped her with few of the skills needed to live on her own.¹⁶² These were harsh lessons, and Obolenskaia remembered being very unhappy for the first several months in the children's home as she adjusted to these new realities. At the same time, however, Obolenskaia was not necessarily sorry that she had been removed from privileged Soviet society and forced to make her way in the "real world."

Here, perhaps, there are some hints of the type of socialist subjectivity described by Hellbeck.¹⁶³ Like those socialist subjects who struggled against their "inner bourgeoisie," Obolenskaia disparaged her previously "bourgeois" self, whose life trajectory had been to become "fashionable" and "spoiled." Of course, Obolenskaia at that time was also a member of the Soviet elite, living in the very heart of Soviet power. Criticizing the privileges of the Soviet elite was not incompatible with support for socialist principles or a sense of oneself as a true socialist. Indeed, some of the anger generated by these privileges among average Soviet citizens

¹⁶⁰ Obolenskaia, 37.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 33.

¹⁶² Ibid., 66-67, 83-84.

¹⁶³ Hellbeck, *Revolution on my Mind*, especially 76-112.

stemmed from the way they so very clearly seemed to contradict the egalitarianism espoused in Soviet socialist discourse.¹⁶⁴ Obolenskaia hardly emerged in her own narrative, however, as the master of her own destiny or creator of her own self (“socialist” or otherwise). Rather she was the object of a “rough fate,” “torn out at the roots” from her previous existence, thrown into an unfamiliar social world and forced to adapt herself to the “collective.” She managed to accomplish this “alignment” with the “life of the collective,” but never seemed particularly comfortable with this process or its results. For Obolenskaia, then, her time in the children’s home was experienced and remembered primarily as a disruption of her previous identity, a disruption that had ongoing consequences for the rest of her life.

Conclusion

This sense of disruption is echoed in the memories of other children of “enemies of the people,” who also recalled the confusion, grief, and anger brought on by their parents’ arrest, the difficulty of being suddenly placed in an alien environment, and the changes in their worldview and sense of self wrought by their time in a children’s home. Most remembered struggling in some way against these changes, trying to maintain some semblance of their previous life. Soviet identity and subjectivity therefore differed somewhat for these “strange orphans” than it had for the juvenile delinquents and *besprizornye* examined earlier in this dissertation. Both were encouraged (or forced) to forget their past lives in the children’s homes, but for the “strange orphans,” their identity as Soviet citizens was almost invariably tied up with their past life. These children arguably did not see themselves as becoming “Soviet” in the children’s home –

¹⁶⁴ See, for example, Sarah Davies, “Us Against Them: Social Identity in Soviet Russia, 1934-41,” in *Stalinism: New Directions*, 47-76.

they (and their parents) had been “Soviet,” and were now reasserting this fact. The arrest of one’s parents was therefore, for many, not as disruptive of one’s loyalty to the Soviet state as we might expect, though there were certainly cases, and perhaps many cases, in which these arrests were the catalyst for a turn against the Soviet government.

For many of these memoirists, however, the most influential and memorable aspect of their time in a Soviet children’s home was not these questions of belief and loyalty, but the “collective” social environment and its stark departure from the family life they had known. Some did indeed find something of a surrogate family in the children’s home, but never forgot their ties to their biological family. Most remembered this new and at times harsh social environment as having a detrimental effect on their personality and sense of self, effects that were, in some cases, perceived as life-long in their consequences. Even in cases where life in the children’s home was remembered with some fondness, and did provide a path to further education and advancement (like Viktor Tenenbaum), the memories of this time were infused with a sense of upheaval, instability, and disruption. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine anyone remembering the loss of their parents otherwise. The memories of this loss and upheaval often provided a lens through which these individuals viewed the rest of their lives, and continued to shape their sense of self and their place in Soviet society. The next chapter will therefore turn its attention to these life narratives, examining how these individuals discussed the life-long consequences of their time in a children’s home, and how their sense of themselves, their lives, and the Soviet system changed in the years after the children’s home.

Chapter Six: “How Things Had Really Been”

In 1985, Svetlana Obolenskaia made the journey from Moscow to the small town of Shuia to attend her first children’s home reunion. Obolenskaia was simultaneously nervous and excited: nervous to return to a place that held as many bad memories as good, but excited to reconnect with old friends and share stories of their subsequent lives after the children’s home. Amid the usual Soviet-era speeches, toasts, and enthusiastic proclamations, Obolenskaia remembered being troubled by a persistent question:

What should I say to these people? The truth or not the truth? Everyone in this crowded hall was expecting to hear, and had already heard, touching words and sweet reminiscences, but I wanted to burst out with the truth. We had sat right here, lost children from Moscow and Leningrad, who had not known what to say about our mothers and fathers, why we were not with them, what had happened to them...but none of us here and now was brave enough to remember this, instead of stating that we had been happy, saw much kindness, and grew up, left, and worked all our lives...¹

Although Obolenskaia did not dare to speak “the whole truth,” she remembered how intently the crowd listened as her friend Slava, the son of a biologist arrested in the late 1930s, got up to speak. Suddenly she was overcome with the feeling that “we were needed, and we were among our own (*sredi svoikh*). All the horrors of our lives – the arrest and exile of our parents, the children’s home, the arduous years (*tiazhkie gody na chuzhikh khlebakh*), the war – disappeared somewhere.”² In this moment, Slava seemed to “dissolve” in the general attention and goodwill, “forgot how everything had really been, and was so happy.” Obolenskaia herself felt the effects of this general goodwill and the desire to forget “how things had really been” (i.e. why she and other children of “enemies of the people” had been placed in the children’s home in the first place). By the end of the reunion weekend, despite her usual dislike for the sentimentalism that

¹ Obolenskaia, 76.

² Ibid., 77.

generally accompanied such official “celebratory gatherings,” Obolenskaia recalled being genuinely moved by the reunion and its “atmosphere of a real united family.”³

Obolenskaia’s experience at the Shuia children’s home reunion suggests a complex relationship between history, memory, narrative, and self-understanding that will be explored in this chapter. As discussed in the previous chapter, Obolenskaia saw her time in the Shuia children’s home as an emotionally scarring experience, irrespective of the fact that conditions there were better than in most Soviet children’s homes. The arrests of her parents, the loss of her father, the difficult transition to living in a collective rather than a family, and the years spent growing up without her parents all left Obolenskaia feeling as if her personality and character had been permanently damaged. Needless to say, these memories and judgments did not conform to the narrative of the “happy childhood” that dominated the depiction of orphans in Soviet public culture. Almost fifty years after her parents’ arrest, Obolenskaia was still unsure as to what stories could, or should, be told publicly about the past, to what degree she and other children of “enemies of the people” should ignore “how things had really been” and pretend that they had indeed enjoyed the happy childhoods celebrated in Soviet newspapers, literature, and official ceremonies. Yet Obolenskaia also experienced the appeal of this narrative. In joining with the general chorus of “touching words and sweet reminiscences,” it was as if the horrors and tribulations of the past had indeed temporarily disappeared, and these former orphans were the type of “united family” Obolenskaia did not recall experiencing during her actual time in the children’s home.

This chapter examines the act of remembering in the years after the *detdom*, focusing on the ways in which children of “enemies of the people,” through the act of writing memoirs, both claimed the historical significance of their personal histories, and also established a sense of

³ Ibid., 77.

belonging to a wider community of victims of Stalinist repression. After a brief discussion of these memoirists' lives in the immediate years after the children's home, and the challenges they often faced, it will examine how, in particular, two of these memoirists, Aleksandr Voiloshnikov and Mikhail Nikolaev, explained their turn away from their childhood faith in the Soviet government. While this process of disillusionment is interesting in and of itself, it is also indicative of how the act of remembering helped to shape the content and contours of these memories. Voiloshnikov and Nikolaev set out to write the story of how they became opponents of the Soviet regime and, in Nikolaev's case, the entire "Soviet idea." In doing so, their memories became filtered through the lens of this oppositional identity, with remembered childhood experiences, for example, becoming invested with political significance or presented as further evidence of the flaws of Soviet socialism (even if, at the time, these authors were not entirely "conscious" of these flaws). Though Nikolaev and Voiloshnikov presented different narratives of how they came to recognize these flaws, what their memoirs shared was a sense that their individual lives had revealed an important truth about the Soviet regime that needed to be shared. In this way, their personal narratives became invested with a sense of historical importance as well.

Most of these memoirists, however, seemed less concerned with such outright political questions as belief in Soviet socialism or support for the Soviet regime than simply with documenting the history of their family and how they suffered from the Stalin-era repressions. Yet, as we shall see, these stories of the Stalinist past, and the act of relating these stories, also became invested with a sense of historical importance that stemmed, in part, from the realization that one's family history was far from unique. These memoirists formed a sense of community based on their shared memories, including a shared emotional discourse for discussing the

ongoing pain of losing their parents.⁴ Through the act of writing their memoirs, these children of “enemies of the people” both contributed to building a collective memory of the Stalinist repressions, and created an identity for themselves as members of a wider community of victims of Stalinism. This chapter therefore seeks to illuminate the nexus of history, memory, and community that was created and shaped by the act of memoir writing, and which in turn helped provide structure and meaning for these authors’ memories. Memories of the past and the act of recording these memories formed a type of Mobius strip: just as the emotionally-charged memory of a traumatic past experience (the loss of one’s parents and growing up in a children’s home) provided the impetus for writing a memoir, the act of writing and publicly articulating these memories helped shaped how the past was recalled and, more importantly, what meanings it held for these authors. A sense of common experiences and emotions from the past created a sense of community in the present, while this community, and the feeling that one was speaking to the experiences of a whole generation that had suffered under Stalinism, in turn gave weight and importance to the act of recording individual lives.

Remembering Life After the *Detdom*

Though their lives followed different trajectories, these memoirists often recalled some of the same struggles in the years after the children’s home. Like so many of their generation (including other *detdomovtsy*), the lives of these memoirists were all in some way touched by the titanic conflict of the Second World War. Most would experience the violence and terror of war

⁴ This chapter therefore follows other works on the history of emotions in seeking to understand the cultural codes, social conventions, and other factors that help govern emotional expression. In particular, my thinking about a shared emotional discourse among these children of “enemies of the people” and the wider perceived community of “victims of Stalinism” has been shaped by Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling*; Steinberg and Sobol, eds., *Interpreting Emotions in Russia and Eastern Europe*; and Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages*.

firsthand. Nelli Tachko's children's home in Berezki near Odessa, for example, scrambled to evacuate as the Germans advanced and joined a column of fleeing soldiers, refugees, and other evacuees streaming eastward, enduring frequent bombardments from German planes. After reaching Zaporozhie in the Caucasus, Tachko was conscripted to dig anti-tank ditches before being sent to a collective farm, only to be evacuated again to Central Asia in 1942. Here, Tachko finished the ten-year school and entered higher education, while also assisting nurses at a military hospital.⁵ Obolenskaia also did not escape the violence of war, as her brother was killed fighting as a volunteer in the "people's militia" (*narodnoe opolchenie*) near Leningrad.⁶

For young men from the *detdom*, whether former *besprizornye*, children of dekulakized peasants, or children of "enemies of the people," some kind of military service was almost inevitable, and most seem to have sought out this service. Mikhail Nikolaev volunteered for the Red Army in 1943 despite being underage (as he recalled, mostly to escape his current industrial work, which he hated), and would go on to experience the invasion of Germany as part of a tank battalion.⁷ Toward the end of the war, he was selected for training at a school for reconnaissance and sabotage (*razvedchiki-diversanty*), a great source of pride at the time. Later, Nikolaev would speculate that this selection was based precisely on his status as an orphan; with no family and no one to worry about him, he would be more likely to accept the dangerous tasks assigned to reconnaissance groups.⁸ After fleeing from his children's home and spending several years as a *besprizornye*, Aleksandr Voiloshnikov was drafted in 1943 and also served in the Red Army until the end of the war. Igor Pol spent the wartime years training at a military school for

⁵ Tachko, 51-63.

⁶ Obolenskaia, 99-103.

⁷ Nikolaev, *Kto byl nichem*, 276-282. After his first tank battle, Nikolaev was transferred to an anti-aircraft regiment that guarded the Soviet headquarters, a move that he speculated may have saved his life, as he participated in no other attacks during the campaign.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 296.

railroad workers in Chita, but his uncle (with whom Pol lived after returning from the *detdom*) was drafted and sent to one of the infamous “punishment battalions” (*shtrafbatony*) reserved for deserters, former POWs, “enemies of the people,” and others not trusted by the Stalinist state.⁹ Viktor Tenenbaum both lied about his age in the hopes of joining the army and attempted to enroll in artillery school during the war (like several of his friends from the children’s home), but was rejected. By the time he was eligible to be drafted in 1944, the government allowed those with excellent grades (like Tenenbaum) to finish the full ten-year school and apply for higher education, which he did.¹⁰

In the years after the war, these memoirists would go on to establish careers, marry, raise children, and in other ways seem to become part of the wider Soviet society – the clear exception being Nikolaev, who was arrested for “counter-revolutionary activities” in 1950 and would spend altogether almost fifteen years in camps and prisons before emigrating in 1978. Yet in many ways the sense of disruption discussed in the previous chapter continued. Children of “enemies of the people” soon learned that their family histories could attract unwanted attention and problems. Obolenskaia, Tenenbaum, Pol, and many others all faced setbacks in being accepted into higher education due to their backgrounds.¹¹ Moreover, several were approached to become informants at some point, an often frightening experience for those whose lives had already been shattered by arrests.¹² Most soon learned that it was better to keep one’s family

⁹ Pol’, 120-122. After being wounded in battle, Pol’s uncle was allowed to transfer to the regular artillery.

¹⁰ Tenenbaum, 24-26.

¹¹ Obolenskaia, 197-198; Tenenbaum, 25; Pol’, 115-116. Other children of “enemies of the people” also reported being refused admission to higher education or other Soviet institutions on account of their family background: see Frierson and Vilensky, 224-255.

¹² Obolenskaia, 181; Pol’, 129-132. Obolenskaia was asked by the director of her institute to report on the conversations of other students regarding material difficulties and price increases in the post-war Soviet Union, but was not pressed when she did not do so. In fact, the director advised that she should avoid such topics of conversation in the future. Pol was called into the NKVD in 1946, questioned about his parents, and pressured into signing a document confirming his “voluntary” collaboration as an informant. Pol was supposed to meet weekly with an NKVD officer to provide information on the other cadets at his academy. Pol portrayed this period of his

history, as much as possible, a secret. This sense of disruption was also frequently exacerbated by the difficulty of reconnecting with family members after years of living apart. Both Igor Pol and Svetlana Obolenskaia remembered struggling to rebuild their lives and relationships with parents who had returned from the Gulag or with other surviving relatives, a challenge that was made more difficult by the sense that, in their time at the children's home, they themselves had become different people.¹³

There were a number of social and cultural pressures that also often made children of “enemies of the people” (and others who had suffered from state violence and political repression) reluctant to discuss their pasts. For one, an ongoing suspicion of children of “enemies of the people” coexisted with a widespread general prejudice against *detdomovtsy*.¹⁴ Though these pressures were most acute before Stalin's death in 1953, they continued after “de-Stalinization” as well. Many sought to avoid this prejudice and social stigma by concealing their family history for years, even after Stalin's death. To talk of one's time in the children's home was often to invite uncomfortable questions. Nikolaev spoke of feeling constant “shame” that he was from a children's home, and sought to hide this fact for years afterward.¹⁵ Others, like Igor Pol, invented fictitious stories about the fates of their parents and repeated these stories for years

life as a kind of moral torture, and spent much of his time trying to find excuses to avoid these meetings or come up with “harmless” information to give the NKVD. Fortunately for Pol, after a few months he graduated from the academy and moved away from Chita, ending this “voluntary” collaboration.

¹³ Obolenskaia, 44-49; Pol, 135-136. Other children of “enemies of the people” also at times reported struggles to rebuild relationships with returned parents: see Frierson and Vilensky, 301-321. On the challenges faced by Gulag returnees, including, at times, troubles reconnecting with family members, see Nanci Adler, *The Gulag Survivor: Beyond the Soviet System* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2002), 109-150.

¹⁴ On the general cultural prejudice against *detdomovtsy* and their association with homeless children and juvenile crime, see Chapter One. Though the public representation of orphans improved somewhat in the post-war years (as they were presented as a symbol of the wider “Soviet family” and rebuilding after the war), orphans were often still associated in the popular imagination with juvenile delinquency and petty crime: see Rachel Green, “There Will Not be Orphans Among Us,” 139-150.

¹⁵ Nikolaev, *Detdom*, 13.

or decades.¹⁶ Opportunities for reinventing one's family history or seeking to adopt a new identity arose in particular during the wartime years. After a hasty evacuation had resulted in the destruction of most of the records from his children's home, Viktor Tenenbaum seized the opportunity to claim that his mother had been killed in the war, and thus try to join the more acceptable category of war orphans, rather than children of "enemies of the people."¹⁷ Although Tenenbaum's attempt was ultimately not successful (when applying to the Komsomol, a check on his family's history revealed that his mother had been arrested), it spoke to the widespread desire among many orphans, children of "enemies of the people," and former children's home residents to avoid potential social stigma and other problems by concealing or avoiding mention of their family histories.

Secondly, even after Stalin's death, Khrushchev's amnesty for Gulag prisoners, and de-Stalinization, public culture in the Soviet Union continued to support the idea that orphans had enjoyed a "happy childhood" in Soviet institutions, while downplaying the arrests, deportations, and other state violence responsible for orphaning so many children. Newspaper articles followed the usual pattern of expressing orphans' gratitude to the Soviet state, often emphasizing the tragedy of the loss of these orphans' parents (in the case of war orphans) or conspicuously omitting this detail (in the case of those whose parents had been arrested by the same Soviet state). A 1959 article on the thirtieth anniversary of the Podelsk children's home, for example, related how many orphans had gone on to work in various industries, or to receive a higher education, but "none have forgotten their children's home, where they passed their childhood. The postman often brings letters, in which they write warm and grateful words for the caregivers

¹⁶ Pol', 107-110. Pol noted that even some of his oldest friends did not know about his parents' arrests or that he had spent time in a children's home.

¹⁷ Tenenbaum, 24.

and children.”¹⁸ In 1970, a similar article in the newspaper *Red Banner* repeated almost the exact same message, stating that the former director of the Loemsk children’s home continued to receive letters expressing gratitude for helping numerous orphans “become worthy members of Soviet society.”¹⁹ In 1967, the Soviet journalist Mikhail Leshchinskii published a collection of profiles on former orphans and *besprizornye* who had gone on to become war heroes, engineers, doctors, scientists, artists, performers, and other successful Soviet citizens. All these stories followed a similar pattern, in which Soviet institutions took in troubled children and, through a combination of hard work and kindness, gave them a chance at a “happy childhood” and bright future.²⁰

A similar discourse dominated reunions and other official events commemorating various children’s homes.²¹ As Obolenskaia noted at the beginning of this chapter, even in 1985 there was still an uncertainty about which memories could or should be made public, and which narrative of her time in the children’s home would be acceptable. Though Obolenskaia believed that the gathered crowd of children’s home graduates did recall “how things had really been” (i.e. the repressions that had resulted in so many orphaned children in the first place), they preferred to remember the children’s home as a place of friendships, camaraderie, and happiness. In the intervening years, the narrative of the “happy childhood” had apparently lost little of its influence, at least in terms of determining the public articulation of memories. Given the ongoing pressure to conceal one’s family history, and a public discourse that only made room for certain memories, it is not surprising that many chose to remain silent about the arrests of their

¹⁸ “Detskomu domu 30 let” (on the Pod’el’sk children’s home), *Komi kolkhoznik* 19 Feb. 1959, in Dobronozhenko and Shabalova, eds., *Krest’ianskie deti*, 695.

¹⁹ “Net rodnei cheloveka” [There Is No Dearer Person], *Krasnoe znamia* 1 Sep. 1970, in *Krest’ianskie deti*, 700-705.

²⁰ Mikhail Leshchinskii, *Kto byl nichenem* (Moscow: Sovetskaia Rossiia, 1967). Leshchinskii would also publish a follow-up to this work, *Dvazhdy rozhdennye* (Moscow: Sovremenniki, 1985).

²¹ See, for example, “Nezabyvaemoe vremia” [An Unforgettable Time], *Ugyd tui* 21 Apr. 1979, in *Krest’ianskie deti*, 705-706.

parents and not to contradict, at least openly, the idea that they had indeed enjoyed a “happy childhood” in the children’s home.

Many of these children of “enemies of the people” therefore hesitated to share their stories for many years. Why, then, did they eventually commit their memories to paper, and why did they move to share these memories, whether by donating their memoirs to archives or seeking to have them published? Certainly, the increased public discussion of political repressions, the relaxation of state censorship, and the overall greater freedom to debate the past during *glasnost* provided an important opportunity to share these memories. Yet several of these memoirists began writing slightly before *glasnost*.²² That the opportunity to share one’s memories became available also does not explain why these memoirists chose to do so. Various motivations were given within these texts. Some, like Obolenskaia, wrote initially for their children or grandchildren. Some memoirs, like Nikolaev’s, began as answers to questions from friends regarding one’s childhood. Yet what united all these authors was a sense that one’s memories were of historical significance and therefore needed to be shared. The sources of this sense of historical importance varied between these memoirs, but tended to align with one or both of the following ideas: 1) a conviction that one’s memories and experiences, particularly the memories of losing faith in Stalin and the Soviet government, had revealed an important truth not just about the crimes of the past, but about the very nature of Soviet socialism; and 2) the conviction that, as a victim of political repression, one was speaking in a sense for the experience of a whole generation that had suffered under Stalinism, thus making one’s own memories a part of this larger history. Though interrelated, some memoirs emphasized one or both of these aspects more than others. We shall therefore address each of these aspects in turn, beginning

²² While it is not entirely clear when each of these memoirs was written (not all are specifically dated), Obolenskaia dated her memoir to 1984-86, Nikolaev wrote in the early 1980s, and Voiloshnikov apparently began his memoir in 1986. Tenenbaum, Tachko, and Pol seem to have written their memoirs sometime after 1988.

with the way that Nikolaev and Voiloshnikov used the stories of their own loss of faith to offer a larger commentary on the history and nature of Soviet socialism.

“I Believed These Slogans More than Myself”: Narratives of Belief and Apostasy

As noted in the previous chapter, all the memoirists discussed here remembered the arrest of their parents as a profound emotional shock. Yet at the same time, few recalled seriously questioning their faith in Stalin or the Soviet government while living in a children’s home. Curiously, apart from noting the perseverance of this childhood faith within the *detdom*, most of these memoirists did not address this question further, and very few explicitly discussed the process by which they came to reevaluate the Stalin era, their own past, and their attitude toward the Soviet regime. The years after their parents’ arrests and particularly after the children’s home were more often narrated as a procession of important events and life milestones (education, marriage, entrance into a profession, etc.) than a discussion of changing attitudes or musings about Stalin, Soviet socialism, or the Soviet regime. The exceptions to this pattern fall into two general categories: 1) the seminal events of Soviet history, and particularly the history of the Stalin era (Victory Day, Stalin’s death, Khrushchev’s “secret speech”) and 2) key events surrounding the fate of their parents, such as the return of arrested parents from the Gulag, the process of rehabilitation, and the search for information about those who had been executed.

In discussing these events, memoirists sometimes hinted at a changing attitude or struggle to come to terms with the Stalinist past. Obolenskaia declared that in the years after the children’s home, she had often felt as if she was living a “double life.” Like the hero of Gorky’s *The Life of Klim Samgin*, Obolenskaia perceived herself as playing a role for the outside world,

masking her doubts and questions, and recalled being troubled by a sense of not being “genuine.”²³ It is likely that this memory was in part colored by the process of reflecting back on her past during the late Soviet years (Obolenskaia dated her memoir to 1984-86), a time in which the notion of a “double life” was becoming an increasingly frequent way to describe life in the Soviet Union.²⁴ Yet we also should not dismiss this memory out of hand. After her mother’s release from the Gulag in 1945, Obolenskaia reasoned that they must have discussed “what was going on around us” (i.e. the difficulties for former prisoners and fear of a second arrest, the renewed persecutions in the late 1940s) but stated “this has completely disappeared from my memory.” At the same time, however, the news of Stalin’s death apparently prompted the same anxiety for Obolenskaia as for most Soviet citizens. Obolenskaia remembered asking “how would we live without our dear father (*rodnoi otets*),” a question that provoked incredulous surprise from her mother, who was overjoyed at this news.²⁵ Yet apart from these small sections, there were few places where Obolenskaia explicitly discussed her attitude toward Stalin and the Soviet regime, or how this attitude might have changed over time.

Among the memoirists discussed here, only Aleksandr Voiloshnikov and Mikhail Nikolaev devoted significant attention in their memoirs to questions of belief in Stalin, the Soviet regime, and Soviet socialism. The reasons for this distinction can be found, perhaps, in the purposes for which these memoirs were written and the sense of self that these memoirists developed as they wrote. All these memoirists on a basic level chose to record their lives

²³ Obolenskaia, 149. In Gorky’s novel, *Klim Samgin*, conceived of by Gorky as a “typical *intelligent*,” is portrayed as being a spectator to the revolutionary events surrounding him, unable to commit himself emotionally or intellectually, who often parrots various opinions and ideas without strongly adhering to any of them: see Richard Freeborn, *The Russian Revolutionary Novel: Turgeniev to Pasternak* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 174-179.

²⁴ Several other late Soviet memoirists used the idea of a “double life” or tried to present a strong distinction between their “public” face and a hidden, “private” self: see Paperno, *Stories of the Soviet Experience*, 18. This notion of a strong public/private divide was prominent in dissident literature and Western scholarship influenced by this literature as well. Krylova, “The Tenacious Liberal Subject in Soviet Studies,” 132-136.

²⁵ Obolenskaia, 50.

because they felt these lives held a wider, historical meaning and needed to be shared. For the majority of these memoirists, this sense of historical meaning derived from their family's status as victims of Stalinism and a perceived need to document and remember the violence that had affected so many lives in the Soviet Union. This intersection between history, memory, and community will be explored more in the second half of this chapter. Voiloshnikov and Nikolaev, however, also saw their own lives and memories as offering an important commentary on the Soviet regime. In presenting the story of how they broke away from their childhood faith in Stalin and the Soviet government, these authors sought to expose the truth (as they saw it) about how Soviet citizens had been blinded by their faith in Soviet socialism. Both memoirs became what I shall call "narratives of apostasy," in which stories about a loss of faith in the Soviet regime became vehicles for questioning the very nature of this regime and the ideology it professed.²⁶

These two narratives took different forms, though both were ultimately concerned with questions of belief. For Voiloshnikov, the arrest of his parents was presented as the catalyst for a profound, seismic shift in his attitude toward Stalin and the Soviet regime. The grounds for this shift had already been prepared by the frequent discrepancies between the regime's rhetoric and actions. Voiloshnikov remembered being confused as a child by the deportations of ethnic Koreans and Chinese from the city of Vladivostok, which seemed contradictory to "the friendship of the peoples" extolled by his Pioneer leader.²⁷ These small moments of doubt, however, did not affect his basic faith, shared with the other children of his Pioneer group, that Stalin was the "kindest and wisest father" of the "most wonderful country in the world."²⁸ Any

²⁶ In this sense, they resembled a mirror-image of the "Communist conversion" autobiographies discussed by Igal Halfin in *Terror in My Soul*, 49-58.

²⁷ Voiloshnikov (published), 31.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 35.

potential misgivings about this fact were dismissed as being the result of his young age and presumed deficiency in understanding. It was only after the arrest of Voiloshnikov's own parents that this edifice reportedly shattered. Suddenly, the young Voiloshnikov was tormented by a flood of questions: If those arrested were genuinely criminals, why were most not put on trial? How could dedicated revolutionaries and veterans of the Civil War, like uncle Misha, suddenly be "enemies"? And why did these NKVD officers, the representatives of the proletariat, seem to have nothing in common with the noble and good "working people" (*trudiashchie*) he had been told about at Pioneer camp? Voiloshnikov retrospectively claimed that he formulated his answer soon after his parents' arrest, in the NKVD receiving center. This answer was simple: Stalin was himself a criminal who, along with his supporters in the NKVD, had seized power in the Soviet Union. Suddenly, everything could be explained: the arrests of innocent people, the rabid search for "enemies of the people," and all the other "absurdities that surrounded this."²⁹ Voiloshnikov compared this sudden realization to the shift from the geocentric Ptolemaic cosmos to the heliocentric Copernican system. An increasingly convoluted and even contradictory system, full of rationalizations and mental gymnastics designed to preserve a familiar and comfortable worldview, had given way to a single simple, powerful, but profoundly disturbing explanation.³⁰ For Voiloshnikov and others in his NKVD receiving center, the simple faith in a "good and just Soviet system" that they had imbibed since childhood was "destroyed forever," as the ability to rationalize away one's doubts suddenly collapsed.

In Voiloshnikov's narrative, his apostasy took place in a single moment, a sudden realization that it was, in fact, Stalin and his NKVD henchmen who were the true

²⁹ Ibid., 49.

³⁰ Ibid.

“counterrevolutionaries.”³¹ Nikolaev, in contrast, presented his apostasy as being a much more drawn out but, ultimately, more profound break with the Soviet regime and its ideology. Nikolaev’s memoir is of particular interest precisely because it discussed this process of disillusionment explicitly and in detail. This is not to say that Nikolaev was necessarily more reflective or insightful than other memoirists. The question of subjectivity and belief in the Soviet system, however, was a central part of Nikolaev’s thoughts on his own life. All reflections on the course of an individual’s life tend to operate to some extent from teleological premises (“How did I get to this point? How did I become the person I am today?”). In Nikolaev’s case, this question was particularly interesting: how did an orphan, raised almost entirely in Soviet institutions, become a political dissident, emigrant, and eventual resident of the Soviet Union’s chief rival? Nikolaev’s memoir *Detdom* and its continuation *Kto Byl Nichem* were shaped in large part by his own fascination with this question of “how Soviet power forms the necessary person for a ‘socialist society’, and how and why I did not become that person.”³² Reflecting back on his childhood in the light of his dissident activities and exile, Nikolaev sought out the “roots” of his eventual rebellion, attributing important political and ideological significance to almost every aspect of life in the *detdom*. Nikolaev’s preference for being by himself in the children’s home, for example, was presented as an indicator both of his own individualist streak and of the problems inherent in collectivism.³³

Nikolaev’s assessment of his time in the children’s home was, therefore, in a way a continuation of the politicization of *detdom* life inherent in Soviet discourse. Just as Soviet public culture had always presented the supposed “happy childhood” of *detdomovtsy* as an

³¹ See the case of V.G. Moroz in Chapter Five of this dissertation for another example of a young man who drew on existing cultural tropes of revolution, counter-revolution, and hidden enemies to attack the Stalinist regime (though not, it should be noted, Stalin himself).

³² Nikolaev, *Kto byl nichem*, 9.

³³ Nikolaev’s assessment of this collectivism is discussed more in Chapter Five of this dissertation.

affirmation of the Soviet state's beneficence and righteousness, Nikolaev made his memories of the children's home and the years afterward into a judgment of the whole Soviet system.

Nikolaev's tale of his childhood faith and eventual disillusionment thus was presented as indicative of larger, fatal flaws in this system and even the whole "Soviet idea" (in Nikolaev's words). Nor did Nikolaev limit this indictment to the years of Stalinist repressions. In the first chapter of *Detdom*, for example, Nikolaev railed against those who saw the victims of Stalin's Great Terror, the "Leninist guard" or the "poor marshals" as innocent martyrs, asking, "Did they not all participate in the same activities, up until [Stalin] destroyed them?"³⁴ In this way, Nikolaev sought to go beyond the tendency to condemn only Stalin or the Stalinist era, and instead call into question the entire history of the Soviet Union and the "Soviet idea."

Ironically, Nikolaev's memoir was at first a testament to the relative "success" of the children's home as an institution for producing loyal, "Soviet subjects." While Nikolaev remembered never being particularly enamored with the forced collectivism of the children's home, or considering himself part of a true collective, he also recalled feeling genuine Soviet pride, believing that Soviet socialism had indeed produced "the greatest country in the world."³⁵ Removing children from the family environment and placing them in collectivist institutions had indeed created "blank slates" on which the "new Soviet person" could be imprinted: on this point, Nikolaev agreed with Soviet pedagogues and ideologues.³⁶ Nikolaev, of course, considered this social engineering unnatural and even malicious, but did not dispute its relative effectiveness. As evidence of this fact, Nikolaev offered his own childhood faith in the Soviet system, as well as the example of his friends' parents. Having grown up in Soviet children's homes after being orphaned in the 1921-22 famine, these older orphans were convinced for the

³⁴ Nikolaev, *Detdom*, 8.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 48.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 47.

rest of their lives that they owed their survival to the Soviet government, never pausing to consider that, in Nikolaev's words, "if there had been no Soviet government, their own parents would have never died in the famine, and they would have grown up to live a normal village life."³⁷

As described in his memoir, Nikolaev's childhood and adolescence were characterized by a slow accumulation of moments of doubt regarding the Soviet regime, particularly the disparity between his own experiences and the images and messages presented in Soviet propaganda. Like the Soviet subjects described by Jochen Hellbeck, however, Nikolaev remembered experiencing these moments of dissonance as failures of his own understanding or enthusiasm.³⁸ Under the rubric of labor education, residents of the children's home, beginning at age eleven, worked four hours per day in addition to school. Nikolaev worked in the home's sewing shop making sweaters, a job he quickly came to hate, wondering "what did I need these sweaters for? All I understood was whether I wanted to or not, I had to work in a noisy workshop for four hours, trying to fulfill the norm."³⁹ Surrounded by slogans declaring that work was a matter of "honor, valor, and heroism," Nikolaev remembered feeling ashamed of his dislike for manual labor. "All I felt was tired," Nikolaev wrote, "but I believed these slogans more than myself."⁴⁰ He consequently tried to rationalize his boredom and dislike for work by noting that he was still rather young and small; when he was older and grown up, he would undoubtedly learn to love this "heroic labor."

³⁷ Ibid., 49.

³⁸ The most discussed example is Stepan Podlubnyi's struggle to "remake" himself, extensively explored by Jochen Hellbeck in "Fashioning the Stalinist Soul," in *Stalinism: New Directions*, especially 88-89, 103-110; and *Revolution on My Mind*, 165-221.

³⁹ Nikolaev, *Detdom*, 86.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 87.

An excursion to a textile factory, however, did little to allay these misgivings. Instead of the joyful, fully mechanized and modern labor depicted in popular Soviet films, all the work was done by hand in dirty, even “frightening” conditions:

There was such an awful noise that people yelled to each other but did not hear anything. We passed by each station, and everywhere there was the same thing: dirt, dust, noise, people’s tired faces...and when I saw all this, I was not just surprised – I was horrified. I thought: how can people work here? Because from literature and films I had never been able to imagine that work was so horrible...they said that labor was wonderful, but in reality it was frightening...⁴¹

Although Nikolaev never learned to feel the desired, Soviet love for work, for much of his young life he attributed this perceived shortcoming to his own personality and lack of “enthusiasm” for manual labor. Only later did he begin to believe that this revulsion for manual labor was a legitimate complaint about working conditions in the Soviet Union, rather than a personal defect.

Nikolaev’s life after the children’s home was also presented as a steady progression of further moments of doubt. The most serious of these doubts emerged during the Second World War, as Nikolaev remembered becoming increasingly aware, and increasingly critical, of the ways in which Soviet discourse failed to correspond to the reality that he observed. Like most of the young men in his children’s home, Nikolaev had grown up playing war games and enjoying war movies in which the heroic Red Army decisively defeated all enemies who dared to threaten the Soviet Union. He therefore recalled being confused by the rapidity of the German advance. Nikolaev remembered nights spent on watch (*dezhurstvo*) at the children’s home, sitting with a map of the Soviet Union and marking the steady progression of cities that had fallen to the Germans.⁴² At the same time, Soviet newspapers reported continuously on the enormous losses supposedly suffered by the German army, to the point that their entire army, according to Nikolaev’s arithmetic, should have ceased to exist: how then could the Germans still be

⁴¹ Nikolaev, *Kto byl nichem*, 113.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 210.

advancing? Following this line of reasoning, Nikolaev began to doubt what he read in Soviet newspapers, eventually concluding that there seemed to be “almost no correlation” between what appeared in these newspapers and reality:

When these thoughts appeared, I began to look at life with different eyes. I began to notice what was around me – and it was the same as with the military statistics: in the newspapers and magazines they wrote that our Soviet people were valorous, kind, and so on, but I saw all around me thieves, deceivers, and liars...⁴³

In this way, these small doubts began to build on and reinforce each other, to encourage Nikolaev to begin questioning what he had learned in the children’s home and what he read in contemporary newspapers.

Although these doubts were becoming significant, they were still, in Nikolaev’s words, only the “beginnings of understanding.”⁴⁴ As with his earlier dislike for work and doubts about its “heroic” nature, Nikolaev was usually able to explain away these misgivings without challenging his loyalty to the Soviet government and basic faith in the Soviet system. Working and social conditions that failed to correspond to the idealized images of Soviet propaganda were the “remnants of capitalism” that would soon be eliminated. This explanation also applied to Soviet officials who behaved in a decidedly “un-proletarian” manner; after all, many had been born before the revolution or raised by “bourgeois” parents.⁴⁵ In most cases, the dissonance between Soviet discourse and reality could be reasonably attributed to the shortcomings of individuals, or even institutions, thus leaving one’s faith in these ideals relatively intact.

It was only during his own service as a volunteer in the Red Army, Nikolaev recounted, that his faith in the “Soviet idea” began to crumble. He recalled noticing the disparity between Soviet rhetoric and observed reality more and more. The fact that this disparity extended even to

⁴³ Ibid., 214-215.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 215.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

the Red Army seems to have particularly affected the young Nikolaev. Despite his growing doubts about the truth behind Soviet rhetoric, and the fact that he volunteered in part to escape the industrial work he so detested, Nikolaev still considered himself a Soviet patriot. Moreover, he remembered hoping to find the kind of “honesty” that seemed lacking in other Soviet institutions: the army, in Nikolaev’s words, “would be difficult, and dangerous, but everything there should be honest (*vsë po-chestnomu*).”⁴⁶

Instead, Nikolaev discovered the same inequalities, the same gulf between rhetoric and reality that he had observed elsewhere. Growing up, Nikolaev had always been told that the Red Army differed from the armies of capitalist countries, in which the poor became cannon fodder for the imperialist ambitions of their oppressors, constantly abused by their officers and other representatives of the ruling class. The Red Army, in contrast, was supposed to be based on comradely relations. Here there could be no abuse, no oppression, and no exploitation because officers and soldiers were truly brothers in arms, drawn from the same laboring classes.⁴⁷

Nikolaev was thus struck (quite literally) by the way in which his army experience failed to live up to this ideal:

A lie is when one thing is said and another thing is done, when they say during assembly, in newspapers, in political education classes that our Soviet soldier is the best soldier, the most free, and so on...this cannot be true, if your commander suddenly drags you to the latrine and starts to beat you.⁴⁸

Nikolaev began to notice more and more of these lies, such as the way that officers claimed to be “comrades” to the enlisted soldiers, yet treated them with disdain or as personal servants. The principles of discipline and following orders were necessary for any army to function, but Soviet officers abused these principles by ordering their soldiers to perform menial and exploitative

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 267-268.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 271.

tasks, such as running errands for the officers' wives. The unjust privileges enjoyed by officers, the verbal and physical abuse, the hierarchy and exploitation – all these elements that were supposedly characteristic only of the older Tsarist army or the armies of capitalist countries were clearly present in the Red Army as well. Even in the face of this evidence, however, Nikolaev still did not make the cognitive leap to seeing these problems as systemic, rather than the faults and flaws of individuals. As Nikolaev remembered, he still felt that corrupt individual officers were responsible for such problems, and imagined that if he could simply report this “disgrace” (*bezobrazie*) to the higher-ranking leadership, it might be corrected.⁴⁹

The relative freedom of the wartime years, and Nikolaev's first encounters with the world outside the Soviet Union, accelerated Nikolaev's disillusionment. As Nikolaev recalled, it was after his army unit crossed into East Prussia that he began to doubt the entire Soviet government and the ideology it professed. These doubts stemmed in part from conversations with other soldiers, and in part from the experience of viewing the foreign West for the first time. Reminiscences of life before the war and speculations about life after the war were among the favorite conversation topics for these Soviet soldiers. All agreed that people in the Soviet Union had lived well before the war, but this would be nothing compared to the life they would enjoy after the war.⁵⁰ Yet a tiny, nagging question remained in the back of Nikolaev's mind: had not the Soviet government continually told its citizens how poorly the capitalist, fascist Germans lived? And yet, all around was evidence that this was not true: well-maintained roads, stately stone farmhouses and barns, elegant decorations, and luxuries about which the rural population of the Soviet Union could only dream. Almost the entire city of Pokrov, where Nikolaev had grown up in the children's home, had lacked running water, but in East Prussia even small rural

⁴⁹ Ibid., 271-272.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 290.

settlements enjoyed this convenience.⁵¹ From this question emerged others: why, then, had the Soviet government continually told this lie? What did it have to hide? While Nikolaev did not have immediate answers for these questions, he began to experience serious doubts about the nature of the Soviet regime. Up until this point, Nikolaev recalled, he had generally supported the “Soviet idea,” despite his misgivings about the small injustices, lies, and corruption he had noticed.⁵² Whatever its shortcomings in practice, this idea remained “noble” and “wonderful.” After observing the scale to which the Soviet government had lied about the capitalist West, however, Nikolaev began to express a pointed skepticism toward the entire Soviet government and even the very nature of Soviet socialism. Though he could not pinpoint the exact moment in which he stopped believing in the “Soviet idea,” this skepticism lay at the heart of Nikolaev’s disillusionment and eventual turn to dissident politics.⁵³

Reflecting back on this process of disillusionment, Nikolaev considered his experiences both “atypical,” in that his life experiences and eventual ideological break set him apart from the “normal” Soviet citizen, and illustrative of an important, widespread characteristic of the “Soviet mindset,” namely the ability to rationalize and explain away any number of doubts. When recalling the numerous times he had dismissed or downplayed his own doubts, Nikolaev saw both evidence of his own intellectual immaturity and something more sinister: a distinct tendency among Soviet citizens to dismiss the evidence of their own reason and senses in favor of the simple answers offered by ideology and propaganda. For Nikolaev, this was a form of mental “slavery”:

...this was the most frightening part of our upbringing, and not just in the children’s home: [the belief that] our country is the only good country, we are surrounded by enemies, the whole rest of the world is bad and wants to destroy us. This is slavery (*eto i*

⁵¹ Ibid., 291.

⁵² Ibid., 289.

⁵³ Ibid., 289, 314-315.

est' rabstvo): today the master says one thing, and tomorrow the exact opposite – and you believe it...today you can be sent to the camps for loving German literature, and tomorrow it turns out that Germany is our greatest friend, and in the newspapers our leaders are embracing the Germans...⁵⁴

The single most “distinguishing” characteristic of the Soviet person, Nikolaev concluded, was the ability to rationalize and explain for oneself any number of these apparent logical contradictions. Indeed, “[the Soviet person] can explain for himself everything: about Germany, and why there is no meat, and why there is a line for the toilet in his communal apartment, and why his pay is so small...”⁵⁵ The continuing power of Soviet ideology thus lay in its ability to provide a simple worldview that nevertheless offered ready-made answers for any number of questions.

Nikolaev and Voiloshnikov, despite their different narratives of how they came to oppose the Soviet government, thus shared something in their assessment of the power and influence of Soviet ideology. For both, the key to understanding the continued power (and, ultimately, failure) of Soviet ideology lay in its ability to shape perceptions and provide appropriate rationalizations for any apparent contradictions between observed reality and the explanations offered by this ideology. Both remembered a series of rationalizations that allowed one to dismiss these observed contradictions, including questioning oneself as too young or possessing insufficient understanding, or blaming these contradictions on specific individuals. The young Nikolaev and Voiloshnikov, as described by their older selves years later, consequently bore some resemblance to the rationalizing Soviet subjects characterized by Jochen Hellbeck.⁵⁶ Whereas Hellbeck emphasizes the ideological agency of these subjects, and the way in which “rationalization” should be understood not as an attempt to explain away doubts, but as a call to

⁵⁴ Ibid., 216.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 216.

⁵⁶ Hellbeck, *Revolution on My Mind*, especially 11-12, 103-112.

align one's thoughts and perceptions with ideology, Nikolaev and Voiloshnikov clearly saw their possibilities for clear thinking and perception as being constrained by Soviet ideology. Other memoirists also briefly suggested a similar assessment, though none took up this question to the same extent as Nikolaev and Voiloshnikov. Tenenbaum spoke of how every child considered the arrest of his or her parents a "mistake," but refused to recognize the huge numbers of such "mistakes."⁵⁷ Nelli Tachko remarked that "events open up one's eyes" (i.e. about the Stalinist past) but, unfortunately, "still not for everyone."⁵⁸ Olgerd Volynskii argued how difficult it was for individuals "to cut their internal connection with communism." Many considered themselves so tied up with "this movement" that even after being arrested and spending years in the Gulag, they immediately resumed various party and administrative positions and continued the same work as before their arrests.⁵⁹ In all these cases, Soviet ideology was presented as limiting one's ability to perceive and understand surrounding reality, until somehow the contradictions between reality and ideology became too great to rationalize and explain away.

In another sense, however, Soviet ideology continued to exert a powerful influence over the perceptions of these authors. In reacting and arguing against this ideology, both Nikolaev and Voiloshnikov took up many of its premises and ideas: attempting to refute some, pointing out the ways in which their experiences failed to conform to others, but in almost all cases taking the claims of this ideology seriously. In this way, they resembled the "dissident" type discussed by Alexei Yurchak, who challenged the Soviet regime and its official discourse and ideology, while accepting the basic premise that the content of this discourse should correspond to

⁵⁷ Tenenbaum, 17.

⁵⁸ Tachko, 26.

⁵⁹ Volynskii, 14-15. Nanci Adler analyzes this phenomenon in her recent *Keeping Faith with the Party: Communist Believers Return from the Gulag* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2012).

reality.⁶⁰ That is, both Nikolaev and Voiloshnikov accepted the notion that the Soviet Union was, or should be, governed by a socialist ideology that sought to build a genuinely egalitarian, collective, harmonious society. Voiloshnikov's explanation for Stalinist terror, for example, was a mirror image of the Stalinist regime's own rhetoric, with the NKVD and Stalin in the role of "counterrevolutionaries" and Voiloshnikov and his fellow *chaisery* as the defenders of genuinely revolutionary principles.⁶¹ Although it had been cynically used by the Communist Party to deceive "the people," "real communism" in this formulation remained something of a legitimate dream.⁶²

Nikolaev also treated the claims of Soviet ideology quite seriously, including the idea that Soviet children's institutions should encourage genuine collectivism and produce the desired New Soviet Person. Nikolaev therefore showed a tendency to attribute particularly "Soviet" meaning or ideological significance to almost every aspect of his experience in the children's home. In this way, his memoir mirrored the Soviet government's own reports, which attributed an ideological or transformative purpose to every facet of life in the children's home, while at the same time lamenting how many homes failed to achieve these goals. Games like "border guards and saboteurs" taught children that the world was strictly binary, divided into "us and them, Reds

⁶⁰ Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), especially 86, 106-108. This is not surprising in the case of Nikolaev, as he was indeed involved in dissident politics and eventually exiled from the Soviet Union. In Yurchak's argument, the majority of citizens in the late Soviet Union no longer read Soviet ideological discourse literally or for "constative" meaning: that is, for facts, to determine true or false statements, or as a description of reality. Rather, what was important was the performative dimension (the various rituals and forms that had to be replicated) that allowed different meanings to be produced. Dissidents, however, were marked (like the regime's own activists) by the fact that they did take this authoritative discourse at face value, engaged in comparisons of this ideological discourse to reality, and called upon their fellow citizens to reject "official falsities." Given that the "performative shift" that Yurchak credits with allowing this separation of constative and performative meanings took place after Stalin's death, it may be that this tendency to take the content of ideology and authoritative discourse seriously was more broadly characteristic of those who grew up under Stalinism, or perhaps, of those who were affected by the very serious consequences (such as state violence) that were fueled in part by this ideology and discourse.

⁶¹ Many scholars have observed this shared discourse between the Soviet regime and its opponents. See, for example, the interviews with Igal Halfin and Jochen Hellbeck in *Ab Imperio* no. 3 (2002), 217-260; and Hellbeck, *Revolution on My Mind*, 7-8, 20-22.

⁶² Voiloshnikov (published), 55-56.

and Whites.”⁶³ Nikolaev’s own introverted nature and preference for solitude became seen as evidence that the collective life of the children’s home was not just uncomfortable, but “unnatural,” and that the true purpose of the children’s home was to “strip people of any human particularities,” take away their ability to think for themselves, and make everyone the same.⁶⁴ If Soviet propaganda extolled the supposed virtue and heroism of manual labor, then for Nikolaev manual labor was outright “disgusting.”⁶⁵

Both Nikolaev and Voiloshnikov’s “oppositional” autobiographies were thus in a sense framed precisely by what they opposed. In establishing their opposition to the Soviet regime or “Soviet idea,” both ended up doing so in rather Soviet terms, utilizing (though often reversing) the standard tropes of Soviet discourse and ideology. We can therefore understand these autobiographies as something of a mirror-image of the autobiographies examined earlier in Chapter Three of this dissertation. Both earlier groups of *besprizornye* and children of “enemies of the people” were encouraged to create a Soviet identity for themselves within the children’s home. Many did so by adopting and personalizing elements of a standard discourse or “script,” modifying or adapting these tropes as they wrote their own story but also in process “fitting” their personal history to an accepted script. Nikolaev and Voiloshnikov’s autobiographies were in many ways an inversion of this process. This is not to say that Nikolaev and Voiloshnikov only drew on “Soviet” discourse in framing their autobiographical narratives, as Nikolaev, for one, clearly drew on his experiences as an émigré in America as well. Nevertheless, in the same way that writing a “Soviet” autobiography marked oneself as a member of a revolutionary, progressive society and thus gave one’s individual life a historical meaning, these oppositional

⁶³ Nikolaev, *Detdom*, 19.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 94.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 88.

autobiographies achieved the same sense of historical importance by making one's own life indicative of the flaws and false claims of this society.

***Glasnost'* and the Nexus of Memory, History, and Community**

Nikolaev's experiences as a Gulag prisoner, political dissident, and eventual exile helped shape this sense of a greater purpose in his memoir. By exposing the contradictions between his lived experiences and the claims of Soviet ideology, Nikolaev saw himself as attacking the whole Soviet system: not just the current Soviet government, but the "Soviet idea" that had once seemed wonderful but had revealed itself as terrible in reality. Although other memoirs were often less directly concerned with questions of ideology and politics, they shared this search for a sense of meaning or significance in one's remembered experiences. The act of organizing and putting these memories to paper was itself in some way an attempt to find and articulate this meaning. For many, this sense of meaning became tied to their identity as victims of Stalinism. What began for most as a personal effort to record their "broken" family history became perceived as part of a wider effort, particularly during *glasnost'*, both to fill in the "blank spots" of history and to come to terms (as individuals and as a society) with the Stalinist past.

For most, the impulse to write seems to have begun as a personal attempt to "recover" one's family history. This perceived need to recover and, in a sense, rebuild one's family history in turn shaped the content of these memoirs and the meanings attributed to their stories. All these memoirists described their family as having been broken, shattered, or otherwise traumatically damaged by the arrest of their parents. Many spoke of their lives as being irrevocably split into two parts: a "happy childhood" that had been prematurely ended by state

violence, and a period afterwards that, whatever their future accomplishments, was always marked for these memoirists by a sense of grief and loss.⁶⁶ Their memoirs almost always began with a sense of “calm before the storm,” opening with descriptions of family outings, visits to the countryside, evenings spent reading and enjoying music, and other memories of domestic contentment. Nelli Tachko declared, “We grew up in the happiest family in the world.”⁶⁷ Igor Pol asserted, “I had the proverbial (*preslovutoe*) happy childhood. Our family was friendly, mother and father lived in love and harmony, and I never remember them having difficult relations.”⁶⁸ For Svetlana Obolenskaia, her relationship with her subsequently arrested father was remembered in glowing terms. Despite holding significant government responsibilities and working long hours, her father found the time to teach the young Svetlana a love for music and songs, and leave “an unforgettable impression...of a father who gave his children incomparable joy.”⁶⁹

Interestingly, Obolenskaia explicitly recognized that this was something of an idealization. While Obolenskaia never doubted that her father was a good man and caring father, the descriptions of her “happy childhood” came tinged with a degree of self-consciousness. She noted that writing about such happy memories could be seen as “shameful (*styдно*)” in some way, since her parents (and particularly her father, as an important government official) undoubtedly knew the full details of the horrible events, such as forced collectivization, the 1932-33 famine, and dekulakization, that were occurring at the very same time.⁷⁰ Later in her memoir, Obolenskaia also talked openly about her parents’ sometimes strained relationship with

⁶⁶ This tendency to remember an idyllic childhood or youth in the 1920s and 30s, particularly in contrast to what followed (the political repressions and the Second World War), has been noted as a feature of many other life stories as well: see Sheila Fitzpatrick and Yuri Slezkine, eds., *In the Shadow of Revolution: Life Stories of Russian Women from 1917 to the Second World War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000).

⁶⁷ Tachko, 39.

⁶⁸ Pol, 4.

⁶⁹ Obolenskaia, 13.

⁷⁰ Obolenskaia, 24.

each other, and her own difficult relationship with her mother. Obolenskaia's father did not hide the fact that he had another lover for many years, a situation that clearly bothered her mother but never led to outright divorce.⁷¹ Obolenskaia remembered her family as being affectionate and close as a whole, but also questioned "whether I ever really loved my mother."⁷² Even before her mother's arrest, Obolenskaia recalled tensions between them, though she speculated that these memories might have also been shaped by their later difficulties in reestablishing a relationship after eight years of separation.⁷³ Memories of her departed father could in a sense exist in a pristine, undisturbed state, whereas memories of her mother had to be reconciled with the real person who returned from the camps. Obolenskaia's reflection on this tendency to idealize one's childhood, which was understandable given the pain that these orphaned children would experience after their parents' arrest, nevertheless suggests an element of choice and selection in how one's childhood was remembered in these memoirs.

Preserving an idealized memory of one's childhood and parents served as a means of reclaiming this history, of wiping away the "stain" of the label "enemy of the people."⁷⁴ Many of these memoirists expressed the desire, either stated explicitly or simply implied, to restore the "good name" of their parents through their memoir. Nelli Tachko challenged the perverse logic that continued to color popular perceptions of "enemies of the people" ("they were arrested, so it must have been for something") by declaring that her memoir would show the fate of a wholly

⁷¹ Ibid., 38. As Obolenskaia remembered, her mother once left the family (along with her oldest brother) but eventually returned and reconciled with her father.

⁷² Ibid., 37.

⁷³ Ibid., 44-49.

⁷⁴ Despite the rehabilitation process initiated for some under Khrushchev, many Soviet citizens continued to believe that the majority of those persecuted under Stalin were indeed guilty, even if they believed that a mistake had been made in certain specific cases. Catherine Merridale, for example, noted during her interviews with survivors of the Stalin-era camps in the late 1990s that several were adamant about their own innocence, but did not question the mass arrests in general. Merridale, *Night of Stone*, 191-192. On the lasting stigma associated with the label "enemy of the people," arrests, and the Gulag, see Adler, *The Gulag Survivor*, 151-198.

innocent family.⁷⁵ This goal sometimes intersected with intensely personal motivations and emotions as well. Obolenskaia recalled that she began writing her memoir with the story of her mother, partly in order to address some of the guilt she felt about their strained relationship.⁷⁶ The result was a very personal story about Obolenskaia's parents that depicted them as occasionally flawed, but loving and devoted to their children, and hardly "enemies of the people." This desire to tell the "real story" of one's parents also shaped the structure of many other memoirs, most notably Igor Pol's. Pol alternated each chapter between his personal history and that of his mother (which, of course, he had not learned until after she had been released from the Gulag in 1947), creating two parallel narratives that, like their protagonists, were eventually brought back together. Pol's memoir, therefore, became as much about his mother's memories of Soviet prisons and the Gulag as about his own struggles after her arrest.⁷⁷

The devotion to preserving or restoring an unblemished memory of one's parents also contributed to the distinct, almost obsessive importance granted to the process of rehabilitation in many of these memoirs. Though not all of these memoirists pursued legal rehabilitation for their parents with the same zeal, almost all expressed an overwhelming desire to obtain the truth about their eventual fate. This process itself was highly emotionally charged. Svetlana Obolenskaia spoke of openly weeping when she learned of her father's rehabilitation, and that "reading this word [rehabilitation] to this day brings tears to my eyes."⁷⁸ Igor Pol remembered an obsessive need to learn more about his father's death after his mother and father had been unexpectedly

⁷⁵ Tachko, 74, 82. Tachko also noted that her mother placed such stress on the process of rehabilitation because she wanted to prove specifically to her children that she and her husband had been innocent, and thus not to blame for what happened after their arrest.

⁷⁶ Obolenskaia, 236.

⁷⁷ In this way, Pol's memoir resembles some of the "relational" autobiographies that Paul John Eakin examines in *How Our Lives Become Stories*, 43-98. Eakin argues that such autobiographies, which often focus on a key relationship between the author and other(s) (such as parents), reflect a more fundamental sense in which our identity and sense of self are formed through relations with others.

⁷⁸ Obolenskaia, 230.

rehabilitated in 1957. After eventually receiving a death certificate (with the place and cause of death crossed out), Pol remarked, “This is all that remains of my father, not counting his good name, and fond memories.”⁷⁹ At the end of his memoir, Pol noted that he did not even know the location of his father’s grave. Many people in Chita believed that those executed in the late 1930s were taken to Sukhaia Pad’ and dumped into pits, but he suspected that this was a local legend born of a “torturous wish” to know anything about the fate of loved ones, and desire to have any kind of physical evidence of their existence and eventual fate.⁸⁰ This was not necessarily unique to the Soviet case, as other victims of state violence have also spoken of a similar psychological need to have physical evidence of their loved ones’ life and death, or to be able to mark their graves.⁸¹

For many, simply not knowing the whole truth about what had happened to their mother or father was among the most painful and emotional aspects of the ongoing process of “rehabilitation.” Viktor Tenenbaum recalled the pain of having received a false death certificate for his mother after her rehabilitation, and remarked “from that time I begin to pine for my mother, and I miss her to this day.”⁸² Nelli Tachko also remembered writing numerous letters to Soviet leaders in the postwar years (Voroshilov, Kaganovich, Molotov, Kalinin) looking for any kind of information about her father. Like many others, she eventually received a series of falsified death certificates: the first claiming her father had completed his prison term and died unexpectedly in 1945, and the next claiming that he had died of a heart attack while under arrest. Only after 1991, after Memorial made inquiries in the secret police archives, did Tachko receive

⁷⁹ Pol’, 155.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 166.

⁸¹ State violence that has deliberately obscured this evidence, such as the Soviet sentence of “ten years without right to correspondence” (in reality execution) and unmarked mass graves, or the Argentinean military regime’s “disappearance” of supposed subversives, has therefore often caused ongoing pain for victims’ relatives. On efforts to uncover the past in Argentina, see Arditti, *Searching For Life*.

⁸² Tenenbaum, 33.

documentation that her father had been executed in 1938.⁸³ In the absence of real information about their eventual fate, remembering one's childhood and one's parents in glowing terms often became perceived as a duty, as part of preserving their "good name" (to use Pol's words).

It was often these efforts to obtain rehabilitation for one's relatives and to "reclaim" one's family history that seem to have led to a sense that one was part of a wider group with shared memories and emotions. For one, the efforts to obtain legal rehabilitation for one's parent(s), and the struggles to obtain the truth about their eventual fate, for many exposed the ways in which the Soviet state, even well after the Stalin period, was still reluctant to acknowledge fully the crimes that had been committed.⁸⁴ Many children of "enemies of the people" thus turned to informal channels in their attempt to recover and document their family history. These inquiries sometimes brought them into contact with political dissidents, *samizdat* networks, budding societies for survivors of Stalinist repressions (like "Vozvrashchenie") and activist groups (like Memorial), and other facets of the informal, "shadow culture" (to use Thomas Rigby's term) that was developing in the late Soviet Union.⁸⁵ As children of "enemies of the people" and others "repressed" under Stalinism sought out more information about the fates of their family members, they began to become aware of the scale of political violence in the Stalin era (though not necessarily the full scale) and of the many others who shared a similar history.

Both this sense of a shared history, and the connections formed through efforts to document this history, in turn contributed to a growing sense of community among these

⁸³ Tachko, 74.

⁸⁴ In the years after Khrushchev's "secret speech" in 1956 and the beginnings of the rehabilitation process, the Soviet state always downplayed the extent of Stalinist persecutions and the nature of their victims, mostly focusing on the elite victims of the Great Purges and the "cult of personality," for example, and ignoring for decades the far more numerous victims of collectivization and dekulakization, the "mass operations," and other state violence. As pointed out by Kathleen Smith, the formal rehabilitation process also failed to acknowledge fully the crimes of the Stalinist state. Smith, *Remembering Stalin's Victims*, 43-59, 134-140.

⁸⁵ Thomas H. Rigby, *The Changing Soviet System: Mono-Organizational Socialism from its Origins to Gorbachev's Restructuring* (Brookfield, VT: E. Elgar Pub., 1994), 214-19. See also the history of the Memorial society in Smith, 78-104.

memoirists. As we have seen, there were social and cultural pressures that for many years limited the sharing of these stories. As *glasnost*' expanded the possibilities for sharing these memories publicly, these memoirists added their stories to a growing surge of writing and discussion of the Stalinist past. These memoirs can therefore be examined as part of a larger trend of memoir writing, interest in memories of the past, and debates about the crimes and legacies of Stalinism that seized the Soviet Union and Russia in the late 1980s and early 1990s.⁸⁶ My intention here is not simply to point out the ways in which these memoirs of children of "enemies of the people" can be placed within this wider trend, though it is important to recognize what they shared with other late Soviet memoirs, namely a sense of the historical importance of their individual lives. Rather, I want to address the various intersections of memory, history, and community that encouraged the writing of memoirs and granted these memoirs a sense of historical importance. In sharing the stories of their lives, these memoirists simultaneously helped to build a collective memory of Stalinist repression and an identity for themselves as victims of Stalinism. More importantly, these processes were mutually reinforcing: claiming membership in the wider community of victims (the "repressed") lent weight and significance to one's memories of the past, while also strengthening the sense that the most significant aspect of one's past was precisely the ways in which one's life had been touched by Stalinist violence.

The first intersection between memory and community can be found in the way that these memoirists presented themselves as part of a group, children of "enemies of the people," that was defined by a sense of sense of shared experiences and, moreover, a sense of shared emotions

⁸⁶ This interest in memories and discussions of the Stalinist past has been both reflected in and examined by various scholarly works, notably Luisa Passerini, ed., *International Yearbook of Oral History v. 1: Memory and Totalitarianism*; Catherine Merridale, *Night of Stone: Death and Memory in Twentieth-Century Russia* (New York: Penguin Books, 2000); Kathleen Smith, *Remembering Stalin's Victims*; and, more recently, Irina Paperno, *Stories of the Soviet Experience*.

stemming from memories of these experiences.⁸⁷ In articulating these emotions in their memoirs, these authors reinforced their perceived bonds with others who had experienced similar feelings of loss, grief, and anger.⁸⁸ The power of their stories and their “right” to speak derived in large part from these emotions as well. This sense of shared emotions manifested itself in two distinct ways in these memoirs: as memories of a shared grief or anger that had brought children of “enemies of the people” together in children’s homes, and as a sense of common, ongoing grief over one’s parents and the tragedies of the past that united these authors in the present day.

Aleksandr Voiloshnikov’s autobiographical novel strongly exhibited both these tendencies. As already discussed, Voiloshnikov vividly described the anger and hatred for the NKVD that had bound together (or so he claimed) the boys in his receiving center, giving them a sense of common identity and purpose rooted in their opposition to the “officials” (*sotrudniki*).⁸⁹ More importantly, Voiloshnikov saw this anger and hatred as ongoing, serving to delineate a distinct group, *cheisery*, throughout the remainder of the Soviet period, including during the Second World War (or Great Patriotic War, as it was known in the Soviet Union) and after de-Stalinization. Voiloshnikov wrote:

There were many of us – millions! Millions of boys branded with a frightening word-*cheiser*. Such a label guaranteed we would have no civil rights. But fate decided otherwise – almost all these boys perished with weapons in hand. The majority remained nameless – some died under different family names, and others no one cared about, since they had died taking up arms against their stepmother–the Motherland. But many of us

⁸⁷ Though I use the broad term “children of enemies of the people” here, these memoirists used a variety of terms to refer to themselves. Some, like Tachko, called themselves “a daughter of an enemy of the people” (14). Others, like Pol’, used variants of “the repressed” or “victims of repression” (1). Voiloshnikov used the term *cheiser* (“member of a family of a traitor to the motherland”) specifically for the children of those arrested. See also Chapter Five, footnote 3.

⁸⁸ Though formulated to address a quite different context, Barbara Rosenwein’s concept of an “emotional community,” with its own emotional discourse and “rules” for articulating emotion, would seem appropriate here. For these children of “enemies of the people,” however, this sense of community was as much defined by a sense of shared emotional experiences as it served to provide an emotional discourse for discussing these experiences. Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities*, 20-25. On the shared emotional discourse used to describe memories of the arrest of one’s parents, see Chapter Five of this dissertation.

⁸⁹ Voiloshnikov (Memorial), 7-9.

took up arms to defend our Motherland, no matter how she was. We had to break everything in our soul: our worldview, formed under the hysterical curses directed at us and those dearest to us in the name of the people and the state; our scorn for our own people, which we associated with the dark masses; our hatred for the NKVD; our raging anger at the Great Leader of these masses. We even had to overstep our love for our parents, the political prisoners of Stalinist camps. In the case of our victory, there was the possibility our parents would become perpetual prisoners, and we would be social outcasts with no rights. This was, for us, the shining victory. But these boys gave their lives not for such a victory, but for the Motherland. For that enormous abstraction in space and time, which is not so much a geographical or historical understanding, but an emotional one.⁹⁰

For Voiloshnikov, to be a *cheiser* was to struggle with powerful, sometimes conflicting emotions: love for one's parents and scorn for "the people" who rushed to condemn them, or love for one's "Motherland" and hatred for the government and officials that ruled it.

Voiloshnikov's invocation of the Great Patriotic War reinforced this notion of a community defined by its emotions and attitudes as well as its experiences. In tying this idea of an ongoing emotional struggle among children of "enemies of the people" to the single most defining event for his generation, and the late Soviet Union in general, Voiloshnikov seemed to suggest that only an existential threat of this magnitude could have caused the millions of *cheisery* to set aside their hatred and other emotions, to "break everything in our soul," and to fight to defend the Soviet Union. There was little sense in this passage, however, that the Soviet state's original crime, and the emotions it provoked, had been forgotten or forgiven.

While not all memoirists possessed Voiloshnikov's flair for the dramatic, many expressed a similar sense of belonging to a group that was defined by the experience of losing their parents and the ongoing emotions that surrounded this traumatic event. Interestingly, this emphasis on shared emotions and attitudes may provide another explanation for why several memoirists, notably Svetlana Obolenskaia, seemed reluctant to place their experiences within a larger context or narrative of "Soviet orphans" – what was important was not necessarily the fact that they were

⁹⁰ Ibid., 50.

orphans, but *how* they had been orphaned and how they continually recalled the devastating emotional impact of this loss. In her description of the 1985 Shuia reunion, for example, Obolenskaia noted that despite the fact that she had formed friendships within the children's home (and was somewhat eager to see these friends again), and despite the appeal of the "happy childhood" narrative that permeated this reunion, she could never fully embrace this narrative. Whatever its appeal, it was not "how things had really been" - i.e. how the arrest of their parents had brought twenty frightened, confused, and lonely boys and girls to an unfamiliar and often intimidating place where the kindness of caregivers and eventual friendships with other orphans could never replace the family they had lost. Even as she genuinely enjoyed the reunion, Obolenskaia still saw herself, along with the other children of "enemies of the people," as being set apart in some way from the rest of the children's home residents by the memory of her parents' arrest and the emotions that still accompanied it.⁹¹

These memoirists more often presented themselves as belonging to a wider community of the "repressed," defined as victims of political persecution by the Stalinist state, than as "Soviet orphans," defined simply by the loss of one's parents. There were many reasons for this other than those discussed above: the general (though not absolute) differences in social background, family history, and "street experience" between these memoirists and the earlier wave of *besprizornye* and orphaned children, discussed in the previous chapter; the varying amount of time spent in a children's home; and the fact that many were eventually reunited (though usually not for many years) with a surviving parent or taken in by relatives, and thus subsequently had somewhat different experiences than those whom the Soviet state called "full orphans" (*kruglye sirot'y*). All could potentially work against a sense of solidarity with one's fellow children's home residents (and sometimes, as in the case of Igor Pol, these fellow orphans were

⁹¹ Obolenskaia, 75-78.

remembered mostly as tormentors and aspiring criminals). This is not to say that such distinctions were clear or firmly established. The children of dekulakized parents, famine victims, and deported peasants that formed the “second wave” of homeless children and the bulk of the children’s home population in the 1930s were clearly also victims of the Stalinist state, and sometimes represented themselves as such in later memoirs, letters to Memorial, and other sources.⁹² What brought all these authors together, however, was a shared emotional narrative of lives being (often permanently) shattered and broken by state violence, and childhood abruptly and cruelly ended by the same government that supposedly guaranteed a “happy childhood” for all. This narrative in turn placed them among the wider ranks of “the repressed,” which included all those who had been victims of Stalinism and continued to carry the memories of this troubled time.⁹³

Up until this point, we have been discussing this community as a kind of “imagined” community created textually and in public discourse in the late Soviet Union. Memoirs (published and unpublished), letters printed in newspapers, revelations of the Stalinist past exposed in liberal journals like *Ogonek*, and other public discussions during *glasnost* not only began to reveal the staggering extent of Stalinist “repressions,” but also created a widespread sense among victims of these repressions that their experiences and memories were far from unique.⁹⁴ Behind this “imagined” community, however, existed a web of social ties, correspondence, and other informal connections that brought individuals together as well.

Memorial developed initially from discussion clubs formed by former political prisoners in

⁹² See letters from children of dekulakized peasants to Memorial in Vilenskii, et al., eds., *Deti Gulaga*, 114-118; Pakhomova, “Moe raznoe detstvo,” 26-27; and Paleeva, “Tak pogibla nasha sem’ia,” 212.

⁹³ This sense of being part of a wider group of victims of Stalinist repression provides another explanation as to why several memoirists, most notably Igor Pol, devoted as much space in their memoirs to telling the story of their parents (including, in Pol’s case, his mother’s experience in the Gulag) as to their own stories.

⁹⁴ As Catherine Merridale notes, it was common among those who had lost family members to the purges to feel alone or isolated in this experience. The more public discussion of Stalinist terror in the 1980s began to reveal just how many families had similar stories to tell. Merridale, 6-7.

Moscow that were given a legal existence by Gorbachev's 1986 law on "informal" organizations (*neformaly*).⁹⁵ Organizations like Memorial and Vozvrashchenie collected archival documents, letters, and manuscripts (including many of the memoirs addressed here) as part of their efforts to document and commemorate victims of Stalinism; as part of this process, some of these memoirists became personally acquainted, corresponded with each other, or otherwise became involved in the commemorative activities of these organizations.⁹⁶ Before formally founding Vozvrashchenie in 1989, Semyon S. Vilenskii had long been involved in the collection of memoirs and manuscripts from former prisoners of the Gulag throughout the 1960s and 1970s, hiding these manuscripts with trusted friends. These manuscripts, received from authors or from mutual acquaintances, would eventually form the initial base of a memoir archive still housed in Vilenskii's Moscow apartment. Though Vozvrashchenie would be involved in political petitions and major publications of memoirs, poetry collections, and other writings from the victims of Stalinist repressions, it never fully lost its basis in personal ties surrounding its founder.⁹⁷ Thus, we can speak of a community of "repressed" or victims of Stalinism that was in a sense created through public discourse and sharing memories of Stalinist repression, but was also held together in many instances by small networks of personal ties as well.

It should also be noted that the term "victims of repression" has become, in post-Soviet Russia, a legal category as well. In October of 1992, the Russian legislature passed a law declaring the full rehabilitation of all "victims of political repression," with "repression" being broadly defined as deprivation of life or freedom, forced exile or deprivation of citizenship,

⁹⁵ Smith, 80-84.

⁹⁶ Thus, while the formal membership of Memorial and other organizations was not necessarily extensive, their efforts to collect oral histories, publish letters, and gather testimonies created a web of informal ties between those who shared their stories (including providing copies of memoirs for these organizations' archives). For a discussion of Memorial's various commemorative efforts, see Smith, especially 105-173.

⁹⁷ On Semyon S. Vilenskii and Vozvrashchenie, see Adler, *The Gulag Survivor*, 125-133.

deportation to special settlements, forced labor, and “any other deprivation or limitations of rights and freedoms of people who were declared to be socially dangerous to the government or political structure.”⁹⁸ Moreover, the law stipulated that such victims would be entitled to “the return of confiscated property, the right of return to former residences, financial compensation based on the number of months spent in incarceration or exile, priority access to housing and medical care, and free legal services for problems in respect to rehabilitation.”⁹⁹ Millions of former Gulag prisoners and other victims of repression thus gathered the required documents to obtain this legal designation (and the rights it provided). This need to document one’s official status as a victim might partially account for the tendency, observed by oral history researchers at Memorial and Vozvrashchenie, for their subjects frequently to produce documents during these interviews, as if to supplement or “prove” their personal stories.¹⁰⁰ Finally, it must also be noted that Memorial, as part of its efforts to assist victims of repression, explicitly includes the children of “the repressed” among these victims. The Memorial website advises those who, due to the arrest of their parents, were placed in Soviet children’s homes that they also can be considered to have been targeted for political reasons and subject to “other deprivations or limitations of rights and freedom,” thus making them eligible to apply for legal notice of rehabilitation.¹⁰¹ While this law and official status did not exist during the time that the majority of the memoirists discussed here began writing, the efforts of Memorial and other organizations to define “victims of political repression” in the broadest terms arguably grew out of a similar

⁹⁸ Quoted in Smith, 200. Smith offers a much more extensive assessment of this law than that provided here. The full text of this law can also be found on Memorial’s website, <http://www.memo.ru/rehabilitate/laws/zakon94.htm> (last accessed 2 August 2012).

⁹⁹ Ibid., 201.

¹⁰⁰ On this tendency, see Frierson and Vilensky, xiv.

¹⁰¹ “Recommendation to Children of Repressed Parents,” <http://www.memo.ru/rehabilitate/recom.htm> (last accessed 2 August 2012).

tendency to see all who had suffered from state violence as comprising a single community of victims.

The sense of belonging to a larger community of victims of Stalinism in turn reinforced the idea, present in most of these memoirs, that one's individual life held great historical significance. As Irina Paperno argues, memoir writers in the late Soviet Union and post-Soviet Russia, whether ultimately supportive or critical of the "Soviet experience," almost all agreed that they had lived through extraordinary times.¹⁰² Moreover, this sense of historical significance derived precisely from the way in which individual and even private lives had been reshaped, deformed, crushed, or otherwise affected by the Soviet state. With its eschatological claim to embody the inevitable progression of human society toward a communist future, the Soviet state became the stand-in for History (in its Hegelian sense); those who became victims of state violence often spoke of being crushed or maimed by History itself, of "standing in History's way."¹⁰³ To relate one's memories and experiences, to discuss how the Soviet state had crushed, mangled, or shattered one's family and even one's self, was thus to leave a historical record. The fact that so many others could share similar stories only served to heighten this sense that the story of one's life held a wider historical importance.

It is not surprising, then, that many of the memoirs of children of "enemies of the people" addressed in this chapter make direct claims for the historical significance of their lives and memories. The title of Voiloshnikov's autobiographical novel, *A Report from Under the Wheel of History*, derived from a Soviet poster that he remembered as being ubiquitous in the NKVD receiving center, which depicted the red "wheel of history" crushing all opposition to Soviet

¹⁰² Paperno, 1-49.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 14-15, 160-61.

communism.¹⁰⁴ Of course, after his parents' arrest, Voiloshnikov numbered himself among these opponents. He recalled that once, as a prank, he and several other boys found a large tire, painted "the wheel of history" on its side, and rolled the tire into a Soviet demonstration. In choosing this title for his memoir, Voiloshnikov alluded to the Soviet state's own claims to embody the movement of History, while also purporting to speak for those "crushed" by this state. Thus, although Voiloshnikov's prank had employed the idea of a "wheel of history" in an ironic sense, his memoir made very serious claims for the historical importance of the experiences of a whole generation of children of "enemies of the people."

Many of these memoirists also searched for "lessons" or historical understanding in the memories of their traumatic past. Toward the end of his memoir, Igor Pol remarked that he had often been troubled by the question: "Could all this horror somehow be repeated during our lifetime?" Though he could not offer a definitive answer, he was convinced that the act of remembering was crucial:

In order to prevent this misfortune, so that it does not occur among us or among our children and grandchildren, we need to know everything about that frightening time and always remember it, having fully assessed and extracted its lessons. For this reason I have told the story of our family – a typical (*obychnyi*) Soviet family, one of those that are usually called simple (*prostym*). And there were millions of these simple [families]...¹⁰⁵

On the one hand, Pol's family was "simple," and sadly, "typical," in that they, like so many other Soviet families, had been torn apart by violence. Yet the perceived need to remember constantly this history, to learn its lessons in the hope of that this history would never be repeated, made Pol's family anything but typical. In the notion that the story of his family might hold lessons for future generations to avoid the tragedies of the past, Pol tied together both a sense of having

¹⁰⁴ Voiloshnikov (Memorial), 14.

¹⁰⁵ Pol', 153.

lived through frightening but important events, and the idea that memories of these events were of lasting historical significance.

Others echoed this sense of having lived through extraordinary times, a sense reinforced by both the memories of extraordinary events, and the intense emotions recalled and stirred up by the past. Svetlana Obolenskaia began her memoir with a citation from the revolutionary writer V.G. Korolenko: “The past has a special power over the soul, and moreover, everything in the past has this power, even unmistakable sufferings.” She followed with a quotation from Blok that succinctly expressed this sense of having lived through troubling but historically significant times: “we are children of Russia’s frightening years.”¹⁰⁶ In both citations, Obolenskaia established a sense of connection between her personal emotions and the “frightening” history of her country, a connection that would be repeated at several points throughout her memoir. This connection appeared in her conclusion as well, where Obolenskaia expressed a desire, common among memoirists, to leave a record for posterity (in this case her grandsons):

God grant them to be interested in us – even this demands the work of the mind and the feelings – to understand us, and to solve the riddles of our time. Maybe they will succeed in unraveling the tangled ball of our misfortunes (*neschastii*), our passions, our disappointments and hopes, our pains and joys, our falls and flights, our whole life that for them is already gone.¹⁰⁷

Understanding the lives of Obolenskaia’s generation and what they experienced under Stalinism required “the work of the mind and the feelings” – in other words, reason and emotion. For Obolenskaia and others who experienced this traumatic past, emotion was an important part of both their memories of this time, and any serious effort to understand this past, to solve “the riddles of our time.” Though Obolenskaia could not necessarily offer full answers to these

¹⁰⁶ Obolenskaia, 1.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 236.

riddles, she was convinced that her generation had lived through events of great historical importance that needed to be remembered and, hopefully, eventually understood.

Conclusion

Many elements served to bind these memoirists together into a wider community of victims of Stalinism, including a sense of shared memories of past experiences, and the powerful emotions that continued to accompany these memories. More than anything else, however, they shared a sense of the historical importance of their individual lives. For Voiloshnikov and Nikolaev, this importance lay in what their lives had revealed about the nature of the Soviet regime. Though they related different narratives of how their “apostasy” occurred, both shared a tendency to view their earlier lives through this oppositional lens, as a prelude of sorts to this revelation. In this way, though they had rejected, in Nikolaev’s words, the “Soviet idea,” it continued to hold great significance for how they understood their lives. The political positions of the other memoirists (Obolenskaia, Pol, Tenenbaum, and Tachko) are more difficult to determine. Indeed, what seemed to matter most for these memoirists was their family’s personal history, and the possibility of recovering or reclaiming this history through writing. Yet, in many ways, each viewed their family’s history as more than just a personal story. Through a sense of shared memories, and a shared emotional discourse for describing the lasting pain of their parents’ arrests, these memoirists made themselves part of a wider community of victims of Stalinism. In this way, their personal histories held a wider historical significance as well, as they spoke to the experiences and memories of a whole generation that had grown up, and often suffered, under Stalinism.

As witnesses and victims of the violence perpetrated by Stalinism, sharing their personal histories served to document the crimes of the past, while at the same time suggesting that this past had never really been put to rest. While the process of official rehabilitation was quite important for these memoirists, it could not make up for the ongoing grief surrounding the loss of their parent(s), not the least because of the Soviet state's continual half-measures and half-truths during this process (such as falsified death certificates). In a sense, then, even for those memoirists who did not take an explicit political stance, their stories challenged the legitimacy of the Soviet state. This state had always based its claims to legitimacy first and foremost upon the "laws of history" and the supposedly inevitable triumph of communism. At the same time, it claimed legitimacy as an anti-capitalist welfare state that guaranteed, among other things, a "happy childhood" for all. Relating the story of how their "happy childhood" was ended by this state challenged this narrative. Whether this challenge was intentional is not always clear. What is clear, however, is that each memoirist believed that their status as a victim of Stalinism lent historical weight to their family's story. In this sense, these memoirists did share one fundamental aspect of Soviet subjects, in that their personal identity was strongly tied to the history of the Soviet state and the historical movement it claimed to represent. Like others of the generation who grew up under Stalin's rule, they held a strong sense of having lived through a revolutionary and important time, for better or (usually) for worse. The historical movement of Soviet socialism – whether embodied in or betrayed by Stalinism – continued to cast a long shadow over their lives. In trying to make sense of their lives, in the act of remembering "how things had really been," these memoirists made their life stories a part of (and in some cases, a judgment on) the entire historical trajectory of the Soviet Union.

Conclusion

“The person who gave happy lives to millions of people- the leader, the teacher, the friend of the workers, has gone...Our party has been orphaned, the Soviet people have been orphaned, the working people of the whole world have been orphaned.”

-declaration from workers at a rubber factory in Moscow after Stalin’s death (1953)¹

I have a father – Stalin
 And the Soviet motherland is my mother
 But this is why I’d finally like to
 Become a full orphan!

- rhyming couplet (*chastushka*) from children of “enemies of the people” in NKVD receiving center (1938)²

The history of Soviet orphans during the Stalin period is often heartbreaking. Unlike the orphaned and homeless children (*besprizornnye*) of the 1920s, these orphans were unquestionably victims of the Soviet state’s own policies, the consequences of which the Soviet regime nevertheless usually denied. Having been deprived of their family by state violence, these orphans were then told to make themselves a part of the larger “Soviet family,” presided over by its wise father, Stalin. Many indeed tried to do so, though few forgot the pain and emotional trauma of the loss of their parents. The history of these orphans reveals much about the Stalinist regime’s use of violence and its lasting consequences, how the regime formed or sought to form its own subjects, and the interrelationship between the two. For many who became victims of the Stalinist regime, this violence dominated their memories of the Stalin period and would have a life-long influence on their sense of self.

¹ Quoted in Merridale, *Night of Stone*, 260-261.

² *Est’ u menia i Stalin- otets/ i Sovetskaia rodina – mat’/ no ot chego zh ia khochu, nakonets/ kruglym sirotkuiu stat’!* Voiloshnikov, *Reportazh iz-pod koleasa istorii* (published), 54.

The Soviet experiment aimed at the total transformation of society and the people who inhabited it. The years of Stalin's "great break" and the first Five-Year Plan, with its accompanying breakneck industrialization and collectivization campaign, were an attempt to force this transformation in a radical and frequently violent manner. Millions of orphaned children of dekulakized peasants, deportees, and other targets of political repression became additional victims of this paradoxical effort to engineer a harmonious, socialist society through violence. They then became the subjects (some might also say the victims) of a second process, the effort to raise these children to be properly Soviet citizens. Within the system of communes, colonies, and children's homes, orphans, homeless children, and juvenile delinquents were "reeducated" and encouraged to transform themselves, to adopt a more acceptably Soviet identity and, ultimately, to create a more Soviet self. Thus, the goal of Soviet children's homes at this time extended beyond housing, feeding, and educating these children to encompass a desire to remake their very selves.

From the beginning, this project was hindered by the numerous practical limitations that often characterized Soviet state institutions. Having declared child homelessness (*besprizornost'*) a thing of the past, the Soviet state was ill-prepared to address the new wave of homeless children produced by its own policies (predominantly forced collectivization, dekulakization, and the accompanying famine). The existing system of children's homes was largely overwhelmed and became desperately overcrowded in many places. Far from making a concerted and coordinated effort to collect and house these new *besprizornyye*, Soviet authorities in different regions and departments often ended up working at cross-purposes, at times seeking to fulfill their own responsibilities at the expense of other locales. As Soviet authorities in the first half of the 1930s continued to struggle to deal with this new wave of child homelessness,

concern about the potential “social threat” represented by homeless youth and juvenile delinquents grew, culminating in the *de facto* criminalization of child homelessness in 1935. Thus, in its treatment of *besprizornye* in the 1930s, the Stalinist state again revealed both its productive and exclusionary dimensions. For those *besprizornye* who entered Soviet institutions (and accepted their demand for discipline), the state promised a “road to life” and “happy childhood.” Those who remained on the streets, however, were seen as social threats, subject to the same suspicion and constant possibility of arrest as recidivist criminals and others perceived to have no place in the new, more “harmonious” society.

Those who found themselves placed in children’s homes (*detdoma*) often encountered conditions that were a far cry from the “happy childhood” depicted in Soviet newspapers or the popular 1931 film *The Road to Life*. Many children’s homes were characterized by limited and overcrowded facilities, shortages of food and other supplies, financial difficulties, and other persistent problems. While the Soviet state was well aware of these problems through the efforts of the Children’s Commission and other inspection organs, its response was often limited in its extent and effectiveness. Although the financial situation and general condition of children’s homes does seem to have improved slightly in the second half of the 1930s, Soviet authorities always combined measures to address these problems with a long-standing tendency to place the majority of blame on local officials or children’s home staff. There were some justified reasons for this, as the difficulty and low pay of work in a children’s home ensured that many staff were poorly educated, inadequately trained, or those unable to find a job elsewhere. However, this was also reflective of a key characteristic of the Soviet bureaucracy, and Soviet culture as a whole, at this time. Far from being egalitarian, the Soviet state in the 1930s often instead supported and celebrated a number of model institutions (or individuals such as Stakhanovites)

and demanded that others, usually with fewer resources, live up to their example. That most did not or could not was frequently presented as a failure of “enthusiasm” and will on the part of the workers themselves, rather than an inherent problem with demanding that all workers and institutions live up to the standard set by a few, well-supported models.

The system of Soviet children’s institutions therefore tended to be divided into a handful of celebrated models, like the Bolshevo and Dzerzhinskii communes, and a large number of other institutions that varied widely in quality. This variance in turn played a part in the process and results of reeducation (*perevospitanie*) in these homes. Institutions like the Bolshevo and Dzerzhinskii communes could point to numerous successes in rehabilitating former *besprizornye* and juvenile delinquents, successes that made them both pedagogical and discursive models for other institutions. Yet to what extent were these successes the product of the fact that these institutions enjoyed facilities, financial self-sufficiency, amenities, and opportunities for leisure activities (including sports, music, and travel) that most *detdomovtsy* would have envied - in short, all the trappings of the “happy childhood” so often depicted in Soviet public culture? As the numerous letters of complaint written by children’s home residents to Soviet authorities attest, they also wondered about this disparity between the image presented in Soviet newspapers and other public discourse and the real conditions of many children’s homes. At the same time, however, such letters also reflected the power of this idealized image, as they seemed to accept the basic idea that this ideal defined what reality for children in the Soviet Union could, or should, be.

The efforts to reeducate children and, more ambitiously, to forge the New Soviet Person within Soviet children’s institutions thus reveal much about the power, reach, and limits of Soviet ideology as well. Studies of Soviet subjectivity, including this one, have shown the

important role played by ideology, particularly its personalization, in the formation and self-fashioning of Soviet subjects. The subjectivizing practices of colonies and children's homes, and the variable results of these practices, however, serve as a reminder that this process was not abstract and did not take place solely on a discursive level. Rather, the formation of Soviet subjects took place, to a significant extent, within concrete institutions like children's homes. These institutions had their own limitations as well as their own social dynamics, and thus did not always serve the ideological functions for which they were intended. Ideology was always a presence in these children's homes, but was not limited to the sometimes clumsy, and at the least often very didactic, process of political education. Ideology helped shape a number of practices intended to produce Soviet subjects, practices that were also influenced by Makarenko's pedagogical system. These included collectivist living arrangements and structures, such as the division of colonies and children's homes into groups or detachments, and the promotion of collective over individual interests (what Makarenko called the "tyranny of the collective"). They also included practices intended to inculcate self-discipline and a sense of attachment to the collective, such as the practice of collective punishment and shame, or the requirement to perform "self-service" work. Finally, they included practices aimed at developing the "well-rounded" or "harmonious" individual, which included labor education and the emotional regime of the *detdom*. Together, these practices were intended to raise children with a conscious commitment to the interests of the collective and a sense of being part of a wider revolutionary society; in other words, to raise Soviet subjects.

As we have seen, these subjectivizing practices did not always function as intended. The structured collectivism of the children's home was intertwined with social dynamics that, far from being specific to the Soviet case, often seemed characteristic of any group of young people

living together. When the children of “enemies of the people” examined in Chapter Five remembered the collectivism of the children’s home, they often recalled a sense of social discomfort or a difficulty in “fitting in” with a different group of people. This difficulty was sometimes influenced by their pariah status as children of “enemies of the people,” but was also simply a product of the challenging transition from family life to life among a large group of teenagers, many of whom had formerly been homeless *besprizornye*. Collective institutions also lost some of their authority if they became (or were perceived to be) vehicles for individual interests, grudges, personal squabbles, and other interpersonal tensions. Labor education sometimes became hijacked by the financial struggles of many children’s homes, as workshops became more of a source of financial support than instruction. Finally, the emotional regime of the children’s home both tried to encourage a certain personality (characterized by desired emotions like enthusiasm, boldness, and comradely affection for other residents) and a “love” for the wider “Soviet family.” Yet for many, the surrogate family of the children’s home could not, of course, replace the family they had lost. Moreover, those who seemed unable to accommodate themselves to this regime faced the possibility of being excluded from the children’s home – thus defeating its original, transformative purpose.

Apart from these structures and practices, Soviet ideology and discourse also shaped the ways in which former *besprizornye*, orphaned children, and residents of children’s institutions were supposed to talk about their lives. The Bolshevo and Dzerzhinskii communes were discursive as well as social projects, in which residents were encouraged or required to narrate a new, more Soviet identity for themselves. In doing so, they personalized elements of a common “script,” both adopting these elements to describe episodes in their lives (such as their arrival at the commune) and in turn fitting their life story to this shared narrative. Many spoke of a “great

break” within their own lives when they joined the commune, of a profound internal change that had set them on the path to a full Soviet life. Others recounted their struggles to continue this path, with the understanding that this struggle would eventually result in the triumph of their new selves. This process was thus “transformative” both in the sense that the narrative of this new, more Soviet self was dominated by a discourse of radical transformation, and in the sense that the act of publicly repeating this narrative (in “evenings of remembrances,” for example) was itself intended to further this transformation and reinforce this sense of a new self. In personalizing this ideological discourse and narrating the story of their transformation, these communards created an identity for themselves as committed collectivists and builders of socialism.

Clearly some of these communards did make an effort to create a new, more Soviet self within the commune. Children in some other institutions wrote letters to claim that they wished to become Soviet citizens and even New Soviet People, but were being prevented from doing so by poor conditions or lack of educational opportunities in their children’s homes. Others, particularly children of “enemies of the people,” seem to have experienced the children’s home primarily as a disruption of their sense of self and previously Soviet identity. Of the memoirists discussed in Chapters Five and Six, several (though not all) discussed a change in their selves that occurred in the children’s home, but saw this change as primarily detrimental. Far from becoming the enthusiastic collectivists desired by the Soviet regime, these memoirists often spoke of becoming antisocial, withdrawn, overly selfish, or unsure of oneself. Some, like Nikolaev, even seemed to accept the notion that there was a particular type of Soviet self produced in these institutions, but saw this self as being characterized by a host of undesirable

qualities, including a simplistic and binary worldview, a disinclination to ask questions, and an ability to rationalize away one's doubts rather than trust one's own judgment and senses.

These various understandings of how Soviet children's institutions did or did not create a particular "Soviet self," and the different notions of what constituted this self, in turn suggests a certain need for caution in trying to locate and describe a singular type of Soviet subjectivity or Soviet self. Previous works on Soviet subjectivity have criticized the tendency to assume that Soviet citizens behaved as calculating, liberal subjects, and instead suggested the need to recognize a socialist, illiberal counterpart.³ Some of the orphaned children and youth examined here, particularly the Bolshevo communards, did bear some resemblance to the Soviet subjects described by Igal Halfin and Jochen Hellbeck.⁴ Like these subjects, their worldview and sense of self, at least as presented in their autobiographies, seemed particularly shaped by Soviet ideology and discourse. Like these Soviet subjects, they spoke of trying to align their own lives with a revolutionary movement. Yet we should again proceed with caution. For one, we are limited by the nature and availability of our sources. While these autobiographies may tell us much about the self that these communards created in these specific texts, they do not reveal how these communards understood themselves in different contexts. Communards created these textual selves through a process of adapting and personalizing a shared script and discourse. Other sources, however, suggest that these sophisticated "Soviet selves" may have been the exception rather than the rule among communards and *detdomovtsy*. While the Dzerzhinskii Commune was celebrated for its achievements in rehabilitating juvenile delinquents and

³ Anna Krylova, "The Tenacious Liberal Subject in Soviet Studies"; Jochen Hellbeck and Igal Halfin, "Rethinking the Stalinist Subject," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 44, no. 3 (1996): 456-463.

⁴ Hellbeck sees these Soviet subjects as being defined by an aspiration to be part of a revolutionary collective, to transform one's self to be more aligned with an ideological vision, and to eliminate troublesome divisions between one's "public" and "private" self. Hellbeck, *Revolution on my Mind*, 2-12. Halfin also argues that these Soviet subjects engaged in a Communist self-fashioning in which they tried to script their lives to fit models provided by Soviet ideology. Halfin, *Terror in My Soul*, 4-19.

besprizornye, few of the available autobiographies from this institution show the same level of care, attention, and effort to fashion a Soviet self as the texts from Bolshevo.

Moreover, the memoirs of children of “enemies of the people” suggest ways in which their sense of self was shaped by many factors beyond Soviet ideology. For many, social and peer relationships, the memories of their family and a desire to preserve these family ties, the awkward transition from family life to collective, and the lasting traumas of state violence seem to have had as much of an influence on their sense of self as any officially-encouraged, Soviet ideological narrative. Yet in many ways, the sense of self created in some of these memoirs did show an interaction with these narratives: not in the desired sense of adapting or “scripting” one’s life to fit these narratives, but in the sense of defining one’s life and self precisely in opposition to this Soviet narrative or ideology. Both Nikolaev and Voiloshnikov created an oppositional “self” in their memoirs that then defined how they remembered and presented their childhood. Nikolaev, for example, saw his life story as demonstrating the ultimate bankruptcy of the “Soviet idea.” Almost all aspects of his childhood, then, became invested with some kind of meaning *vis a vis* this “Soviet idea.” Thus, in a sense, the self Nikolaev created in his memoir could be considered “Soviet” – though hardly the type of Soviet self desired by the Soviet regime. Finally, Nikolaev recognized a distinction between his remembered self, his current self, and the “self” he was “supposed to become” (but somehow did not).⁵ Again, the complexities of subjectivity in this case seem irreducible to a single model of the “Soviet self.”

This “case study” of Soviet orphans in the 1930s, therefore, suggests that it may be more accurate to speak in the plural, to address questions of subjectivity in terms of multiple “Soviet selves.” Indeed, throughout our discussion we have already seen some of these multiple selves, including textual selves created in autobiographies, dossiers, and questionnaires, “storied” selves

⁵ Nikolaev, *Kto byl nichem*, 9.

that seem to follow existing “scripts,” and remembered or created in memoirs.⁶ The latter case in particular indicates the necessity of recognizing the possibility for multiple “selves.” Most children of “enemies of the people” remembered the arrest of their parents and their time in a children’s home as a profound disruption of what had previously been a comfortably “Soviet” identity. Yet the distinction that can be made here is not necessarily between a “Soviet” self existing prior to these arrests and a different “self” afterwards, as both of these selves were in part the products of memory. Both were remembered selves, constructed within the memoir’s text. As such, they were a reflection of important changes in these memoirists’ lives and sense of self, but still a reflection and textual creation. Other textual selves (such as those presented in autobiographies) present a similar challenge, in that these selves are again a construction within a text and should not necessarily be assumed to be congruent with the author’s “real self.”

This position may appear unsatisfying, as it might seem to preclude the possibility of drawing genuine conclusions about the nature of the self or subjectivity, whether among Soviet orphans of the 1930s or elsewhere. This pessimism, however, is not necessarily warranted. The human subject or self is fantastically complex – but this is also what makes it an endlessly interesting topic of investigation. Investigations of the nature of the human self have often suggested that human beings both contain and create multiple “selves,” with each of these selves being related to others but encompassing only some aspects of the whole.⁷ Recognizing these multiple selves thus does not mean that we cannot describe and understand various subjectivities

⁶ On “storied selves” that seem to follow or adapt existing cultural narratives, see Maynes, Pierce, and Laslett, *Telling Stories*, 132-136.

⁷ Eakin’s *How Our Lives Become Stories* provides an accessible overview of work in cognitive studies, neuroscience, and other fields that suggests the possibility of multiple selves or multiple aspects of self within a single individual: see especially pp. 22-23.

in different contexts – only that we should be wary of reducing the whole complexity of the human subject to a single model or “self” that we seem to have discovered.⁸

Moreover, by comparing these multiple selves, we can begin to determine what was indeed shared across multiple selves articulated in the same general context. In the case of orphans under Stalinism, examining the selves presented in autobiographies, memoirs, and other texts allows us to sketch an understanding of what was specifically “Soviet” about their sense of self. Thus, however many “selves” were presented in these various texts, they did tend to be defined, ultimately, in broadly similar ways. For those who lost their parents to political repression and state violence, this repression colored how they viewed the whole of their lives. In writing their memoirs, they made themselves part of a wider perceived community of victims of Stalinism. The sense of self, or selves, they presented in these memoirs therefore still tended to be related, in the end, to the Soviet state, its ideology, its history, and its use of political violence. To the extent that it is possible to speak of a shared “Soviet self,” then, this was its defining characteristic: the connection between one’s individual experience and the particular Marxist-Leninist historical narrative, and the tendency to view one’s personal history as a part of, and a comment on, the history of the Soviet state.

This question of a “Soviet self” (or, more accurately, selves) in turn contains wider implications for our understanding of Soviet and post-Soviet history. By the end of the 1990s, much of the initial optimism for change that had characterized post-Soviet Russia had waned.

Some researchers, notably the late sociologist Yuri Levada, began to speak of a persistent

⁸ This has been one of the more consistent criticisms of previous work on Soviet subjectivity, along with questions about the wider applicability of such models beyond a small number of cases. Naiman, for example, has cautioned against over-privileging ideology and ideological narratives in our understanding of subjectivity in the Soviet Union, or of reducing human subjects to two-dimensional caricatures in our pursuit of theoretical coherence: see Naiman, “On Soviet Subjects,” 311-315. This criticism has appeared also in the forum in *Ab Imperio* in 2002 (“Forum: Analiz praktik sub’ektivizatsii v rannestalinskom obshchestve”), particularly in an article by Svetlana Boym, “Kak sdelana sovetskaia sub’ektivnost’?,” 285-296; and, most recently, in a review article on models of the Soviet self, Chatterjee and Petrone, “Models of Selfhood and Subjectivity,” 980-986.

“Soviet Man” that had outlived the polity that birthed him. This “Soviet Man” was characterized by a specific set of personality traits, political attitudes, and psychology that Levada saw as being reproduced among the post-Soviet Russian population – even those who had been born at the very end of the Soviet era.⁹ In this sense, the Soviet Union was seen to have left difficult legacies not just in the institutions and political culture that it bequeathed to post-Soviet Russia, but in the mentalities of Russian citizens as well. It should be noted, however, that the characteristics of “Soviet Man” identified by Levada, including apathy and a cynical disdain for politics, as well as, in some cases, a willingness to cheat others and especially the state while at the same time expecting the state to provide a full range of welfare benefits, seem more characteristic of the stereotypes of Brezhnev-era “stagnation” than the Soviet subjects described by Hellbeck and Halfin. Of course, different varieties of subjectivity and “selves” existed in the same time period as well.¹⁰ It may be that what subjectivity we find depends a great deal upon where we look.¹¹ Rather than assume a persistent Soviet subject, “Soviet Man,” or “Soviet self,” then, we need to understand further how Soviet subjectivity could, and did, change over time. It is likely that Soviet subjects and “selves” of the Khrushchev era differed from their Stalinist predecessors, and that the intervention of the Gorbachev era and *glasnost*’ makes drawing a straight line between the “Soviet Man” of the Brezhnev era and Levada’s “Soviet Man”

⁹ L.D. Gudkov, “‘Soviet Man’ in the Sociology of Iurii Levada,” *Sociological Research* 47, no. 6 (Nov.-Dec. 2008): 6-28; Iurii Levada, “Soviet Man Ten Years Later 1989-1999,” *Russian Social Science Review* 42, no. 1 (Jan.-Feb. 2001): 4-28.

¹⁰ The Stalin era also saw problems with citizens pilfering from the state, for example, or with drunkenness and absenteeism at work – particularly among peasants. See, for example, Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Stalin’s Peasants: Resistance and Survival in the Russian Village after Collectivization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

¹¹ See, for example, the debate between Jochen Hellbeck and Svetlana Boym over Soviet subjectivity in “Forum: Analiz praktik sub’ektivizatsii,” *Ab Imperio* no. 3 (2002): Hellbeck, “Sovetskaia sub’ektivnost’: Klishe?,” 397-402; and Boym, “Kak sdelana ‘sovetskaia sub’ektivnost’?,” 285-296. Boym accuses Hellbeck of not recognizing the often clichéd language of these sources or the possibility that individual authors could conceptualize a divide between their private selves and the selves they presented in these texts; Hellbeck responds by accusing Boym of inappropriately transplanting to the Stalin period a type of public/private divide or ironic detachment from politics and ideology more characteristic of late Soviet intellectuals.

problematic, whatever their immediately apparent similarities.¹² The question of a specifically Soviet “self” or subject, then, is hardly settled, and it is time to begin expanding the investigation of this subject beyond the past focus on the 1920s and 30s, and to individuals and groups not previously considered.¹³

Similarly, Soviet childhood needs to be integrated further into the wider world history of childhood. Soviet efforts to build a new society and transform all existing social structures meant that childhood in the Soviet Union, as in, of course, other Marxist-Leninist-Maoist polities, was politicized to a high degree.¹⁴ Nowhere was this more true than in children’s homes, which were tasked with not only housing and caring for orphaned and homeless children, but with bringing about their transformation into dedicated Soviet subjects and “builders of socialism.” Yet this was far from the only case in which childhood has been invested with overtly political significance. Soviet efforts to socialize children to a particular political and social order, and to a particular end, were also far from unique, as all modern states and societies have done so to some degree or another. Finally, even the emotional trauma and lifelong consequences of losing one’s parents to mass violence has been, sadly, all too common in the modern world.¹⁵

Further understanding of subjectivity in the Soviet Union, Soviet childhood, and the specific subjectivities of Soviet orphans would therefore open up an avenue of comparative

¹² Levada also recognized this difficulty, arguing that Soviet institutions failed to produce this “Soviet Man” in large numbers during the late Soviet period, thus contributing in part to the end of the Soviet regime. His research was therefore in part motivated by the question of why this “Soviet Man” seemed to have revived in post-Soviet Russia. See, for example, Iurii Levada, “Homo Sovieticus Five Years Later,” *Russian Social Sciences Review* 37, no. 4 (July-August 1996): 3-17; and “Soviet Man Ten Years Later.”

¹³ Yurchak’s fascinating study of the “last Soviet generation” investigates subjectivity among those who came of age under Brezhnev, but much more work is needed, particularly in describing the shift from the Stalin era to the Khrushchev years. Yurchak, *Everything was Forever*, particularly 10-16, 40-42.

¹⁴ See, for example, the documents from children in a variety of communist states and movements in Glennys Young, *The Communist Experience in the Twentieth Century: A Global History Through Sources* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 41-79.

¹⁵ See, for example, Stearns, *Childhood in World History*, chapters 7-9.

research that promises not only to further our understanding of modern childhood, but also to help determine what was indeed historically distinctive about the Soviet case. Moreover, developing this comparative understanding holds implications for fields beyond history. The notion of the “universal child,” commonly employed in the laboratory experiments and developmental models of psychology, has been criticized for ignoring historical, cultural, and social variations that influence children’s development, personality, and socialization.¹⁶

Anthropology and history have often tended in the other direction, making cultural context paramount. More dialogue between these two approaches can only lead to a better understanding of how children “grow up,” both in a physiological (and hence universal) and cultural/social sense. In other words, what is needed first, at least in the field of history, is to understand these different variations before returning to the question of what has indeed been shared across much of modern childhood.

¹⁶ Glen Elder, Jr., John Modell, and Ross D. Parke, eds., *Children in Time and Place: Developmental and Historical Insights* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Willem Koops and Michael Zuckerman, eds., *Beyond the Century of the Child: Cultural History and Developmental Psychology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003).

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APPENDIX

Biographical Sketches of Memoirists

Mikhail Ivanovich Nikolaev (1929?-1997)

Nikolaev did not know the exact date of his birth, just as he did not know his parents or even, with any confidence, his birth name. Nikolaev suspected that “Mikhail Nikolaev” may have been a pseudonym given to him in the children’s home, just as he suspected that his official date of birth listed in his personal file, 1926, was incorrect (Nikolaev once managed to glance at a note in his file that listed him as being four years old in 1933). This disparity in his age would have several consequences for the course of his life, as it allowed Nikolaev to be sent to work in Soviet industry at only age twelve, and serve in the Second World War at age fifteen.

Nikolaev grew up in Soviet children’s homes in Pokrov, in the Orekhov-Zuevo district of the Moscow Oblast. (Pokrov is now in the Vladimir Oblast). Nikolaev’s first memories were of arriving in the Pokrov Children’s Home no. 1 in the summer of 1933, leading him to believe that his parents were arrested sometime in 1932 or 1933. Nikolaev remembered being a shy, bookish boy growing up, and always felt uncomfortable in the collective environment of the children’s home. In particular, Nikolaev disliked when, at age eleven, he was transferred to Children’s Home no. 4 and began to participate in labor education in a sewing factory. Nikolaev would credit the experience of working four hours a day in what differed little from an “adult” factory with giving him a lifelong dislike of manual labor.

When Germany invaded the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941, Nikolaev expected, like most Soviet citizens, that the Red Army would soon triumph. Nikolaev would later remember this time as “the end of my childhood.” Released from the children’s home with a small amount of money, Nikolaev was sent to work in Soviet industry. As the Germans approached Moscow, Nikolaev was evacuated to the city of Gorky. The strain of working twelve-hour shifts in difficult conditions soon made Nikolaev desperate to escape this industrial labor. In November of 1943, he volunteered for service in the Red Army.

Nikolaev would go on to serve in a tank brigade, participating in several battles and the Soviet invasion of East Prussia. Nikolaev later credited this experience of seeing the capitalist world for the first time with solidifying his ongoing doubts about the Soviet government. In the years after the war, Nikolaev became a political opponent of the Soviet regime. In 1950, he was arrested for protesting against Soviet elections.

Nikolaev would go on to spend almost fifteen years in and out of the Gulag. Along the way, he would become acquainted with the writer Andrei Sinyavsky and, through him, other cultural figures and dissidents. In 1978, Nikolaev and his wife, Viktoria Shveitser, emigrated to America. Nikolaev found work at Amherst College in Massachusetts with the assistance of William and Jane Taubman, and often participated in conversations with American students studying Russian. Although his wife remembered that Nikolaev, having long idealized America, was ultimately somewhat disappointed with the reality, they were always glad that their daughter, Marina, would have a chance to grow up in a democratic society.

Svetlana Valerianovna Obolenskaia (b. 1925)

Svetlana Obolenskaia's father, Valerian Valerianovich Obolenskii (Osinskii) was an "Old Bolshevik" and colleague of Lenin, who served in various posts in the Soviet government. Obolenskaia grew up in the Kremlin palace before moving to the famous "House on the Embankment" (formally known as the Government House). On October 14, 1937, Obolenskaia's father was arrested, followed three days later by her mother (Ekaterina Mikhailovna Obolenskaia, nee Smirnova). Her father would be executed in September 1938 in connection with the show trial of Bukharin and Rykov. For six months after their mother's arrest, Obolenskaia and her siblings lived with their grandmother in the same apartment in the Government House in a kind of limbo existence.

In April of 1938, they were finally collected by the NKVD and sent to children's homes. Obolenskaia and her brothers were sent to Children's Home no. 2 in the city of Shuia (Ivanovo Oblast). Obolenskaia remembered the first several months in the children's home as being very difficult, as she struggled to adjust to this new environment. Obolenskaia eventually adjusted to this life and dedicated herself to becoming a successful student. During her time in the children's home, she also maintained correspondence with her mother, who had been transferred between several different camps, eventually ending up in Solikamsk.

During the Second World War, Obolenskaia's brother Valia volunteered for the people's militia and was killed fighting near Leningrad in the fall of 1941. Around the same time, Obolenskaia was allowed to leave the children's home to live with her aunt and uncle in Moscow. Obolenskaia remembered the wartime years as a time of hunger, difficult work, and other challenges, but also of widespread patriotism.

In 1944, Obolenskaia traveled to visit her mother in Solikamsk, their first meeting since her mother's arrest. Having not seen each other for seven years, Obolenskaia found it difficult to recognize her mother. Obolenskaia returned to her studies in Moscow and finished her higher education in 1947. Although she dreamed of graduate study, she realized that, with her "tainted" biography, this would be difficult. Obolenskaia therefore was content to work as a history teacher in Zapadnaia Dvina, where she would spend the next fourteen years. After her mother's release from the Gulag, she would also come to live with Obolenskaia, though they found it initially difficult to rebuild their relationship. In 1955, Obolenskaia's mother was officially rehabilitated and allowed to move back to Moscow. Her father's rehabilitation followed in 1957. Obolenskaia herself would apparently move back to Moscow in 1961.

Despite noting that she did not seek to maintain ties with other children from Shuia, even those who lived in Moscow, Obolenskaia decided to attend a reunion of Children's Home no. 2 in 1985. Obolenskaia dated her memoirs to 1984-86, suggesting that her decision to attend this reunion was also connected to a new willingness to "revisit my family's history" - a subject that, as she noted, she had avoided for many years.

Igor' Leonidovich Pol' (b. 1926)

Igor Leonidovich Pol was born in Chita, the son of Leonid Emil'evich Pol' (an office worker) and Kapitalina Nikolaevna Pol'. Pol's father was arrested in 1937, followed by his mother, who would be sent to the Akmolinsk Gulag camp for wives of "traitors to the motherland (ALZhIR)." After their arrests, Pol was sent to a NKVD receiving center, where he

learned that his father had been executed. Pol remembered that the receiving center erupted into a spontaneous “pogrom” after hearing this news, which was quieted only by the intervention of the local police. Pol was then sent in November 1937 to Children’s Home no. 3 in the Novo-Tukovskii district of Magnitogorsk.

Pol remembered this children’s home as filled with *besprizornye* who were left mostly to their own devices by the (perhaps frightened) staff. These *besprizornye* were “ruled” over by an “ataman” who tormented the other children and organized them into what was essentially a criminal gang. Though Pol never showed any promise as a thief, he managed to find something of a place within this “children’s society” by using his artistic talents to produce homemade cards.

In the fall of 1938, Pol’s grandmother submitted a petition to be allowed to remove him from the children’s home. This petition was not granted until January of 1939, however, when Pol was allowed to travel to Tomsk to join his grandmother. This reunion, however, was not entirely successful. As Pol put it, his grandmother was expecting the same “good boy” he had been years earlier, but he had been too “spoiled” by the children’s home. Pol was therefore sent to live with his uncle in Chita, who took up the task of “disciplining” Pol.

When war began in 1941, Pol applied to the Chita military technical academy, intentionally omitting the fact that his parents had been arrested. Pol’s uncle was subsequently drafted and, as the relative of an “enemy of the people,” placed in a punishment battalion. Though his uncle would survive, Pol’s family would be touched by the tragedy of war when his grandmother died (apparently of starvation after losing her ration card) in 1944. In 1945, as a child of “enemies of the people,” Pol was approached by the NKVD to become an informant.

Pol finished the military academy in 1946 with a specialty as a military railroad engineer and traveled to Akmolinsk to visit his mother for the first time. Pol’s mother would be released in the next year, but subject to residency restrictions. Ignoring these restrictions, she came to live with Igor in Sverdlovsk. In 1957, Pol’s mother and father were officially rehabilitated. As part of this process, Pol and his mother received an official death certificate with the cause of death crossed out.

Pol spent the rest of his career as an engineer. It is unclear when exactly his memoir was written, but it was likely sometime in the 1980s.

Nelli Stanislavovna Tachko (b. 1925)

Nelli Tachko was born in Moscow, the daughter of Stanislav Frantsevich Tachko (head of the AKhO post office) and Lidiia Iakovlevna Borel’ (an office worker at the Academy of Communications). Tachko’s father was arrested in March of 1938, while her mother was continually pressured to denounce him. Tachko’s father was executed in May of 1938, and her mother given one last chance to denounce him. After refusing to do so, she was sentenced in June of 1938 to five years in the Gulag. Nelli and her brother Gennadii (then five years old) were taken first to the Danilov receiving center, and then after one month placed in a children’s home in the village of Berezki in the Odessa Oblast.

Tachko remembered her difficult transition to the children’s home being eased by the director, Libermann, who treated the children with kindness. Unfortunately, he was replaced after a few months, reportedly for objecting to the usual policy of splitting up siblings (perhaps explaining why Nelli and her brother were able to remain together). While at the children’s

home, Tachko learned that her mother had been sent to the Akmolinsk Gulag camp (ALZhIR) and began corresponding with her. For Tachko, the most difficult part of the children's home was missing her mother, to the point that Tachko would often hold imaginary conversations with her.

In 1939, Tachko finished the seven-year school and, as an exceptional student (*otlichnitsa*) was allowed to continue her studies at the Odessa Financial-Economic Technical College (*tekhnikum*). Tachko, however, wanted to finish her ten-year schooling and, with the help of the Berezki children's home's director, was allowed to transfer to a children's home in Voznesensk with a ten-year school. Though this new children's home allowed Tachko to continue her studies, the new director was "mean and cruel." The chance to continue school, however, made this new situation tolerable.

When the German army advanced on the Ukraine, Tachko's children's home was evacuated in a haphazard manner. The home's director fled, leaving the remaining staff to organize evacuation as best they could. Tachko and other older children were sent with groups of younger children to try to make their way east. They joined a huge column of refugees, fleeing soldiers, and other evacuees, enduring strafing attacks from German aircraft. Tachko eventually reached safety and was placed in a children's home in the Caucasus, where she was also conscripted to dig defensive fortifications. When the Germans again advanced in the summer of 1942, Tachko was evacuated to Central Asia.

Here, Tachko was finally able to finish the ten-year school, and also assisted nurses at a nearby hospital for wounded soldiers. In 1943, Tachko's mother completed her sentence but was not allowed to leave Akmolinsk. Instead, she received permission for Nelli to visit her. Tachko would visit her mother several more times over the next few years, as she studied at the evacuated Leningrad Electro-Technical Institute in Tashkent.

Tachko also began looking for her brother, with whom she had lost contact during the war. Drawing on contacts from her fellow *detdomovtsy*, she successfully found him in 1945. As it turned out, Gennadii had been sent to industrial training at age twelve during the war, and within a year and a half was already working in an aviation factory.

In the postwar years, Tachko also began trying to learn more about the fate of her father, writing several letters to Soviet officials. The answers she received claimed that he had completed his prison term and died of a heart attack. It was only much later, after making inquiries to the KGB with the assistance of Memorial, that Tachko learned of her father's execution. Tachko's father and mother were both rehabilitated in 1956, after which, Tachko remembered, her mother finally began to talk occasionally about her years in the Gulag.

The exact years in which Tachko's memoir was written are not clear, though it seems to have been sometime after 1991. Her memoir was published by Memorial in 2003.

Viktor Oskarovich Tenenbaum-Mushinskii (b. 1928)

Tenenbaum was born in Lvov, in what was then Polish territory, the son of Oskar Mandel' (a Jewish member of the Polish Communist Party) and Tsilia Khornik. In 1929, Tenenbaum's father was arrested by the Polish police and sentenced to five years in prison. The police also frequently detained his mother, causing her to flee variously to Austria, France, and Germany. In 1932, Tenenbaum and his mother illegally entered the Soviet Union (apparently by stowing away on a boat) and traveled to Stalino (Donetsk). At this time, his mother changed her

name to Viktoria Stanislavovna Tenenbaum and renamed her son Viktor Tenenbaum (from his father's party pseudonym).

Tenenbaum's mother found work as a teacher of German, and they regularly corresponded with Tenenbaum's father in Poland. Their social circle consisted largely of other Polish emigrants, though the young Viktor also made friends with the Russian children living in his apartment complex. Tenenbaum remembered initially struggling to learn Russian, though he soon adjusted to this new life.

In 1936, the first arrest struck their apartment complex. Tenenbaum's mother was the second to be arrested, in August of 1937. From correspondence with other Polish emigrants, she had already been aware of the series of arrests targeting Poles. Unknown to Tenenbaum, his mother was shot soon after her arrest.

Tenenbaum was taken first to the receiving center in Stalyno. The receiving center was mostly empty, holding only a few older homeless youths. Surprisingly, Tenenbaum remembered that these older youths treated him well. After a few weeks, a large "special contingent" (other children of arrested "enemies of the people") arrived. In late September, the first group of these children was scheduled to be sent to the Kardymovo children's home in the Smolensk Oblast. At the last minute, Tenenbaum was also placed in this contingent by the director of the receiving center. He would later speculate that the director, having learned that Tenenbaum's mother had been shot and that he was now a "full orphan," had deliberately arranged to send Tenenbaum to Kardymov, which had a reputation as a good children's home. This reputation would be borne out: Tenenbaum would later title his memoir "The Exception to the Rule" precisely because conditions in Kardymovo were so much better than in other places.

Tenenbaum in particular credited these conditions to the home's director, Mark Romanovich Maliavko, who treated the children with kindness and reportedly once declared that he could not believe that the parents of such children could be "enemies of the people." Maliavko also specifically tried to reunite siblings by having them transferred to Kardymovo. Tenenbaum also had several other favorite staff members, including the head of the educational section, Aleksandra Iakovlevna Khlebtsevich, and Olga Pavlovna Volochkova, a teacher.

When war began in 1941, Tenenbaum and the other children were evacuated to the Tambov region. Most of the older children were sent off to industry, to labor in agriculture, or to the army. Tenenbaum alone was allowed to finish the full ten-year school. Taking advantage of the wartime confusion, Tenenbaum omitted the fact that his mother had been arrested when applying to the Komsomol. This deception was discovered, however, and his application was denied. In 1943, Tenenbaum attempted to enroll in an artillery school (like many of his fellow children's home residents), but was also denied.

In 1945, Tenenbaum traveled to Moscow to apply to higher education. Upon leaving the children's home, he was given an official dossier that specifically omitted his mother's arrest and declared him a "full orphan." With assistance from the siblings of several acquaintances from the children's home, Tenenbaum sought to apply to higher education, but was unsuccessful in Moscow. He was successful in applying to the Saratov Judicial Institute, and began studying to become a lawyer. In 1949, he was accepted into graduate study at the Law Institute of the USSR Academy of Sciences. After defending his dissertation, Tenenbaum would enjoy a long career as a legal scholar and teacher of law.

In 1951, Tenenbaum married a woman whose father had also been "repressed" and moved to Odessa. The mix of Jews, Ukrainians, and Russians in Odessa, along with the "Doctor's Plot," reportedly made Tenenbaum much more aware of his Jewish heritage.

Tenenbaum noted that although since childhood he had thought of himself as Polish, he now considered himself Jewish (from his heritage) and Russian (from his upbringing).

After Khrushchev's "Secret Speech," Tenenbaum received notice of his mother's rehabilitation and began to make inquiries about the fate of his father as well. In 1979, he learned that his father had emigrated from Poland in 1957 to Paris. In 1980, Tenenbaum traveled to Paris to be reunited with his father. After learning that his father had changed his name to Mushinskii in honor of a friend who had died in the war, Tenenbaum adopted this surname as well. Tenenbaum's memoir ends with this meeting of father and son in Paris, and was dated to 1992.

Aleksandr Vasil'evich Voiloshnikov (b. 1926)

Aleksandr Voiloshnikov was born in Vladivostok, the son of two specialists in China and Japan at the Far East State University, Vasilii Aleksandrovich Voiloshnikov and Iuliia Vasil'evna Voiloshnikova. Growing up, Voiloshnikov read of the various exploits of Soviet heroes and of the Spanish Civil War, and also dreamed of going to Spain to fight the fascists. Voiloshnikov reported being confused, however, by the sudden arrests of various adults, particularly "Uncle Misha," a kind neighbor who had served in the Red Army in the Russian Civil War.

In November of 1937, Voiloshnikov's own father was arrested, followed sometime after by his mother. In April of 1938, Voiloshnikov's father would be sentenced to death. In July of 1938, Voiloshnikov's mother was sentenced to five years in the Gulag as a wife of a "traitor to the Motherland."

Voiloshnikov was sent to a special children's home for children of "repressed parents" operated by the NKVD in Okeanskaia station near Vladivostok. The staff at this children's home was verbally abusive, constantly threatening these children with punishment or even arrest. According to Voiloshnikov, the boys in this children's home formed a secret organization dedicated to resisting the NKVD and other "officials" (*sotrudniki*), considering themselves and their parents to be "true revolutionaries." While in this children's home, Voiloshnikov compared himself to the Count of Monte Cristo, biding his time for a chance at revenge, and was given this moniker as a nickname by the other boys.

In August of 1938, Voiloshnikov managed to run away from this children's home and became a homeless, wandering "waif" (*besprizornyi*). For three years, Voiloshnikov wandered the Soviet Union as part of a "band" (*shaika*) of other homeless youths, learning to steal and pick pockets. From 1941-1943, Voiloshnikov worked in Sverdlovsk, before being drafted into the Red Army. From 1943 until the end of the war, Voiloshnikov served in the Red Army and participated in several battles. Later, Voiloshnikov would comment on how difficult it was for children whose parents had been arrested and condemned to take up arms to defend the Soviet state.

After the war, Voiloshnikov applied to the Ural Polytechnical Institute and completed his degree as an engineer. He would continue to work as an engineer in Sverdlovsk until retiring in 1986 and devoting himself full-time to writing his memoir. During *glasnost'*, Voiloshnikov donated the first copy of his memoir to the Memorial Society. A further version of his memoir would be published in 1996. In 1997, Voiloshnikov joined the Russian Writers' Union.

VITA

Andrew B. Stone grew up in the Twin Cities of Minnesota, but has called Seattle and the University of Washington his home for the past eight years. He has also lived in Velikii Novgorod, Moscow, and Saint Petersburg, siding with Petersburg in the endless “Moscow or Petersburg?” debate. Velikii Novgorod, however, will always be the Russian city closest to his heart. His work has been published in *Russian Review* and *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*. At St. Olaf College, he earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in History and Russian, before completing a Masters of Arts degree in History at the University of Washington. In 2012, he earned a Doctor of Philosophy degree at the University of Washington in History.