

From Stalingrad to Volgograd: De-Stalinizing Soviet Civilization, 1943-64

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Abstract

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The Battle of Stalingrad (1942-43) left the Soviet city of its namesake in ruins. The two decades-long reconstruction of Stalingrad was a shared project between residents and the state that strove to create a modern socialist metropolis while honoring the heroic efforts of those who fought and died in the war. The restoration of the city took place first under Joseph Stalin, and later during the political and cultural upheaval of de-Stalinization unleashed by his successor, Nikita Khrushchev. By examining the choices of Soviet urban planners and the “everyday” experience of residents within the city through the communist party’s local newspaper, this study seeks to explore how de-Stalinization transformed Soviet civilization through a tightly focused urban case study. This dissertation argues that Khrushchev’s reforms significantly altered Soviet life in Stalingrad through initiatives aimed at providing mass-housing, revitalizing the planned economy, expanding agricultural production, and bringing an end to state terror, all while supplanting the party’s legitimizing narrative previously contained within Stalin’s “cult of personality” with a newly expanded war myth and an updated vision of communist modernity.

For Joyce and Howard,
my proletarian roots.
Who helped to instill in me the value
of education and hard work.

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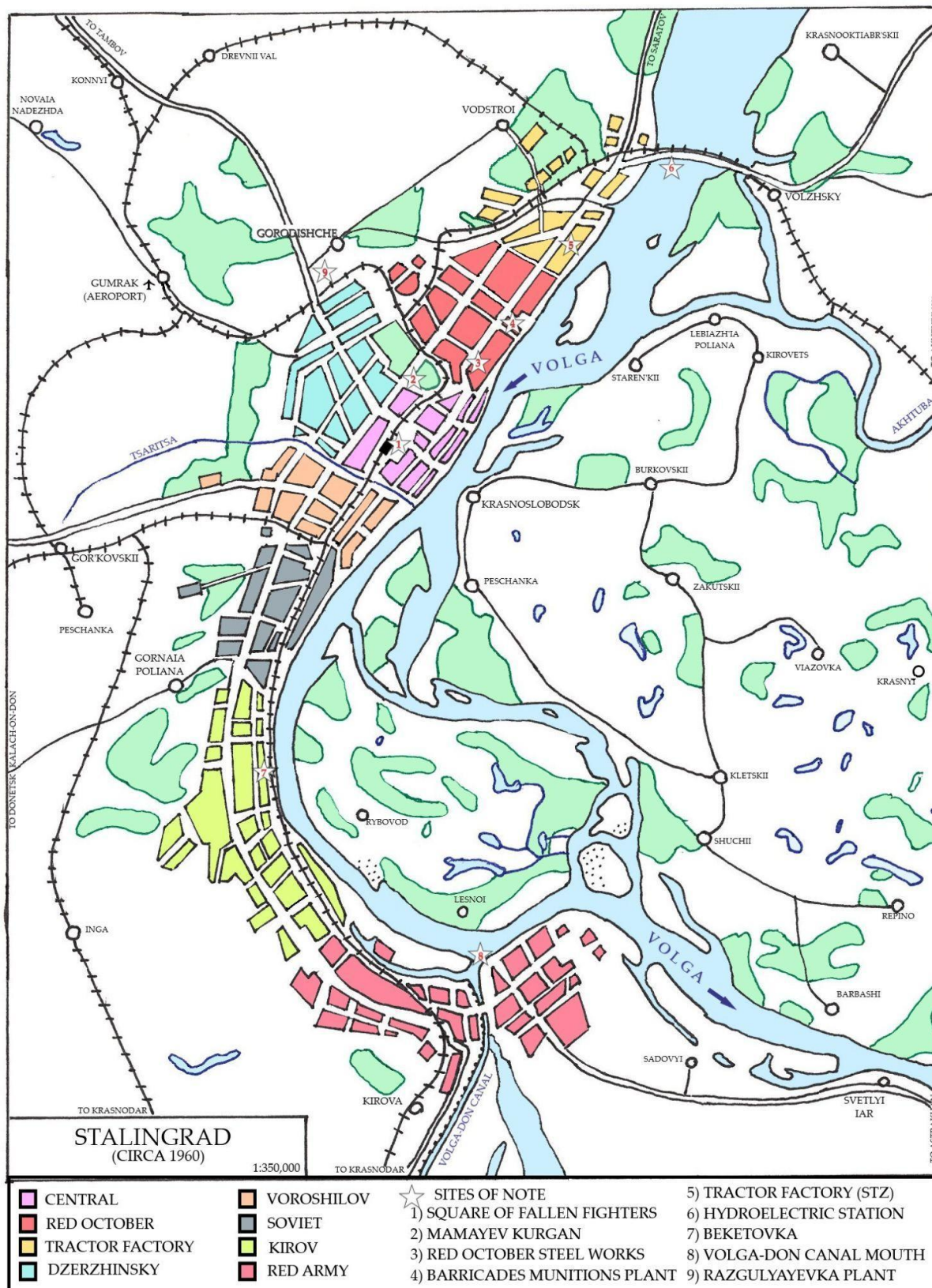
The path to my doctorate might have detoured long ago if not for the advice of countless friends and colleagues. I must thank Ken Yohn and Peter Borgen, who helped me see the way forward as I was still unsure of pursuing my ambitions as a historian. Their advice, freely given over bad gas station coffee one morning on a bike tour in the summer of 2010, proved a turning point in my academic career. I would not have survived graduate school were it not for the friendships I made in my cohorts, and in particular the countless conversations with Brad Horst, Dr. Matt Van Duyn, Katie Blank, and Emma Hinchcliffe helped nurture this project and give it shape while it was still in its infancy. I have also had the good fortune to benefit from the wisdom of my colleagues in the history faculty at McPherson College, Kerry Dobbins and (once again) Ken Yohn, who were always quick to offer much needed guidance when I found myself struggling. I also thank my longtime friend Martin Yohn for helping to turn many long car rides

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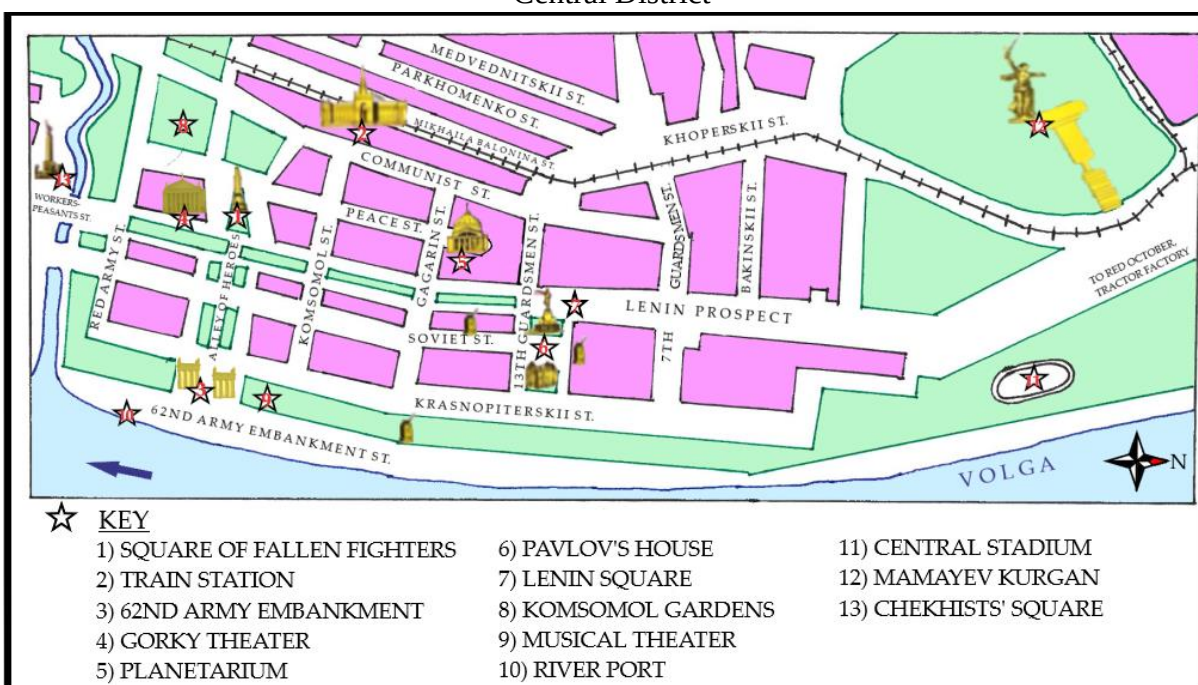
Last but not least, I could not be where I am today without the support of my family. My parents, Ken and Michelle, remained understanding and supportive every time I finished one degree and then turned around to reach for another. I cannot thank them enough for all the sacrifices they made and opportunities they provided. To my sister, who always believed I could do it, thank you for putting me up for weekend getaways in Montana when I needed to reset. To my late dog Margo, who was with me for almost the entirety of this project but sadly passed on a few months before it reached its end, thank you for all the walks and writing breaks playing in the backyard. You kept me sane, and your companionship is sorely missed. My wife Jocelyn, who has been there through every high and low, was a font of constant encouragement, and who made it possible for me to take the time I needed to make it to the finish line. For all the sacrifices you have made for me and our family while I pursued this dream you have my eternal love and gratitude. At long last, we are finally the Drs. Cotton. And finally, to my daughter Evelyn and son Henry, thank you for inspiring me every single day.

Note on Translation

The author assumes responsibility for all translations from Russian that appear in this work. Translation was sometimes aided using Google's Translate tool with corrections and interpretations offered by the author. Any fault for mistakes in translation lie solely with the author. For Russian words and names, the Library of Congress transliteration system has been used, with the exception that diacritical marks have been suppressed.



Central District



Volgograd Oblast



¹ First and second maps adapted and translated by author, based on Soviet era original maps found at <http://www.etomesto.ru/> (accessed May 1, 2024).

² "Granitsy raionov Volgograda," <https://piemuseum.ru/granitsiy-rayonov-volgograda> (accessed May 1, 2024).

Introduction

From Stalingrad to Volgograd

On November 7, 1961, the residents of Stalingrad would celebrate the anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution for the final time as “*Stalingradtsy*” (“people of Stalingrad”). It had been nearly two decades since the Battle of Stalingrad had raged through the city’s streets, leaving the once thriving metropolis of half a million Soviet citizens a smoking ruin. Yet unbeknownst to them, in a few days’ time the city’s name would be changed to Volgograd, thus making its residents “*Volgogradtsy*” (“people of Volgograd”) instead.

As celebrations of the Bolshevik Revolution’s forty-fourth anniversary got underway, the party was fresh from the events of the Twenty-Second Party Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) which had concluded at the end of October. During the weeks-long conference in Moscow, Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev had announced his aims to complete “the construction of Communism” in the Soviet Union in twenty years’ time. The assembled party representatives also marked an impressive milestone toward this task, the completion of the Volzhsky Hydroelectric Station set into the man-made dam across the Volga just north of Stalingrad, one of the largest and most powerful electric plants across Europe or Asia at the time.³ It was also the Congress at which Khrushchev’s attacks on the “cult of personality” surrounding Stalin would reach their iconoclastic culmination, with the removal of Stalin’s remains from the Red Square mausoleum where he had been interned next to Lenin.

While “de-Stalinization” was officially about the destruction of the “cult of personality,” it also provided Khrushchev a political means to attempt to redefine the promise of “the

³ Lenin had often proclaimed the formula that “Electrification + Soviet Power = Communism,” thereby marking the hydroelectric station as an important step forward to Khrushchev’s overarching goal.

Revolution” in the minds of the Soviet people. In the wake of Stalin’s death, both the party and Soviet citizens were given a chance to reimagine what life in the world’s first socialist state should look like. After years of hardship, privation, war, and state-terror under Stalin, there was a real appetite in many corners of Soviet society for real, meaningful reform. Khrushchev sensed in this political moment a chance to consolidate his power atop the Soviet presidium in 1956. Over the course of his eight years leading the Soviet state, he pursued policies aimed at rationalizing the planned economy, revitalizing labor relations, solving the housing crisis, investing heavily in agriculture, reigning in the reach of the police state, and resetting Soviet foreign policy. Though certainly emblematic of the dynamic political environment of the time, the decision to change the city’s name was merely one symbolic gesture amidst a much larger campaign.

From Stalingrad to Volgograd: De-Stalinizing Soviet Civilization, 1943-1964 explores how “Stalinist civilization” evolved beyond Stalin’s reign.⁴ By situating the work as an urban history of the city of Stalingrad in the two decades following the battle, I aim to extrapolate the diffuse ways in which “Stalinist civilization” was rebuilt in the postwar and was then reshaped by de-Stalinization—as well as the ways in which it remained the same. I argue that Khrushchev’s collective policies were an attempt to revitalize the modernizing promise of the revolution and formulate a new “post-Stalinist civilization,” a model of organizing society that could meet the material demands of the Soviet public and which might be exported globally to contend with the competing model offered by the capitalist West.

As I attempt to examine the de-Stalinization of “Stalinist civilization,” it is important to note that this is not to suggest that Khrushchev somehow ushered in an entirely separate

⁴ Term coined by Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

civilizational model, as his ambition to “build communism” might suggest. Rather, I argue that the post-Stalinist civilization that was being constructed at Stalingrad and across the Soviet Union was inherently linked to the Stalinist civilization that preceded it. Just as structures within the city built under Stalin and Khrushchev may stand together on the same street, Stalinist civilization remained a persistent aspect of the post-Stalinist construction that followed. Though the conservative wing of the party would emerge resurgent in 1964 to oust Khrushchev from office, effectively halting or reversing many of his policies, his and his supporters’ efforts nonetheless had a profound effect. I argue that life in Stalingrad at this time can illustrate how de-Stalinization would irrevocably change the makeup of Soviet civilization.

Methodology and Definition of Terms

The term at the heart of this study, that of “Stalinist civilization,” was coined by historian Stephen Kotkin to describe life in the Soviet steel town of Magnitogorsk in *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization*. Kotkin argues that the economic and political programs adopted by Stalin formed a distinct civilizational model, “the advent of a specifically socialist civilization based on the rejection of capitalism.”⁵ Kotkin uses “civilization” to define the scale of Stalin’s policy objectives as they shaped every aspect of life in Magnitogorsk as the city sprang up amidst the bare hills of the Russian steppe beyond the Urals over the course of the first two Five-Year Plans (1928-1937). He notes that when the decision was made to build the settlement that would become home to more than 200,000 people, it was not “preordained that they would build everything like the way they did,” but instead what was built reflected the core values of the Stalin and the Bolsheviks’ interpretation of “the Revolution.” “The Bolsheviks brought along

⁵ Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*, 4.

their banners and slogans, their agitprop newspapers and circles for the liquidation of illiteracy, their bread factories and mass dining rooms. They brought along the Communist party and the portraits of the Father of All Peoples, bourgeois specialists and young Red engineers, peasant prisoners and peasants turned shock workers. And they brought along foreign designs and equipment for state-of-the-art blast furnaces, open-hearth ovens, and rolling mills.”⁶ The Revolution was inherently and deliberately a modernizing project, and the experience of it would be a core aspect of lived Stalinist civilization.⁷

Kotkin’s work builds off many decades of scholarship on “Stalinism,” the term ascribed by historians to denote the authoritarian political system and rigid social and economic controls imposed on the Soviet Union during Stalin’s twenty-five-year rule.⁸ However, Kotkin argues that “the distinctiveness of Stalinism lay not in the formation of a mammoth state by means of destruction of society but in the creation, along with such a state, of a new society—manifest in property relations, social structure, the organization of the economy, political practice, and

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Kotkin’s view of socialist modernity is that while a continuation of the Enlightenment project to find a “just and correct” social order, the Soviet “variant” of modernity under Stalin joined the promise of Marxism to eliminate the worst injustices of the modern experience of early western capitalism and the (he sees) as the engrained Russian cultural idea of having a “special mission” to guide the rest of the world to salvation, which can be traced to the Moscow patriarchate’s assumption of the mantle of the “Third Rome” and the seat of “true” Orthodox Christianity. His analysis, which draws heavily on theories of modernity first put forward by Marshall Berman in *All that is Solid Melts into Air* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1981), has sparked wider debates as to how to view the Soviet experience and to what degree it was truly unique, see Michael David-Fox, “Multiple Modernities vs. Neo-Traditionalism: On Recent Debates in Russian and Soviet History,” *Jahrbücher Für Geschichte Osteuropas* 54, no. 4 (2006): 535–55,” and Anna Krylova, “Soviet Modernity: Stephen Kotkin and the Bolshevik Predicament,” *Contemporary European History* 23, no. 2 (2014): 167–92, and Anatoly Pinsky, “Soviet Modernity Post-Stalin: The State, Emotions, and Subjectivities,” in *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 16, no. 2 (2015): 395–411.

⁸ Additional scholarship pertaining to Stalinism and its definition includes Graeme J Gill, *Stalinism* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998), Martin McCauley, *Stalin and Stalinism* (London: Longman, 1996), and Harold Shukman, *Redefining Stalinism* (Portland: Frank Cass, 2003).

language.”⁹ The shape of the built environment of the city, as well as the rhythms of life and the culture therein, was an ongoing act of creation by party bosses and residents alike.

As Kotkin notes, even before the Enlightenment popularized the idea of a scientifically-ordered society, attempts to organize urban spaces were part of a long tradition of “trying to imagine the ideal city” that might produce a microcosm of “how best to organize human affairs.”¹⁰ As the advent of the industrial revolution transformed European cities to the vast detriment of the working poor, one of the key contradictions Marxist ideologists were forced to confront was how to alleviate the worst ills of modern industrialized society while preserving the material benefits of what it produced. Kotkin argues that Magnitogorsk embodied the new Soviet vision for the “socialist city,” where “Stalinism seemed to bring together the elements of what was then the prevalent conception and experience of ‘progressive modernity.’”¹¹ Understanding the city as a marker of societal values was key to Kotkin’s extrapolation of the history of Magnitogorsk as a means to examine “Stalinist civilization.”

However, Kotkin notes it is important to look beyond the official proscribed plan for constructing a distinct socialist modernity. He contends that “the results of building socialism were not entirely what the Bolsheviks intended,” and that “as important as these intentions were, they constitute only the beginning of the story.”¹² Kotkin’s exploration of “Stalinist civilization” at Magnitogorsk was dependent on the intersection of idealized Bolshevik policy and the lived

⁹ Ibid, p. 3. Kotkin goes on in his introduction to explain the use of Michel Foucault’s analytical approach in relation to language and the creation of power relations under Stalin that led to a discursive process that he called “speaking Bolshevik,” a merger of one’s constative opinion with the performative aspect of public speech, which was made in a forum where the rules and consequences for breach of acceptable speech were well understood. Krylova in her critique of Kotkin’s work in “Soviet Modernity: Stephen Kotkin and the Bolshevik Predicament” argues that this process was not static and that the postwar Soviet citizens adapted to a “post-Bolshevik” discourse that was less revolutionary and more grounded in traditional modern frameworks.

¹⁰ Ibid, 14.

¹¹ Ibid, 15.

¹² Ibid, 18.

experience of its people. He argues that “for one thing, the policies and programs enacted contained irreconcilable aspects that surfaced during the attempts to implement them; indeed, the methods of implementation themselves were often at odds with the stated goals of programs and policies. For another, these policies and programs formed part of the lives of people, ordinary and higher-ups alike, and their actions and reactions, initiatives and responses, in significant ways influenced how those programs were carried out, circumvented, and changed in unforeseen ways.”¹³

To examine the “everyday” experience and construct a social history of Stalinist civilization, Kotkin adopted a methodological approach heavily dependent on the work of Michel Foucault exploring the concept of “subjectivity” and how individuals navigate power relations within a socio-political framework.¹⁴ He argues that the “intentions, programs, and policies” of Stalin’s Bolshevik government “were responsible for the fields of action within which the behavior of individuals took place.”¹⁵ In short, he hoped to explore “what kinds of lives people were able to lead, and how they understood their lives.”¹⁶ His use of “civilization” to describe Stalinism is meant to encompass the everyday experience of not just one aspect of Soviet life, but of Soviet life in its entirety. I have adopted a similar framework here to my study of Stalingrad in the postwar period to examine the creation of a post-Stalinist civilization.

Having established our “civilizational” framework, we must now turn to another important historical term central to this dissertation that must be explained, that of course being

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid, Kotkin explains his use of Foucault in his introduction in the section titled “The Politics of Everyday Life,” 18-20.

¹⁵ Ibid, though he does not directly state as such, it seems that approach and understanding of “fields of action” was drawn from the work of sociologist Talcott Parsons, who laid out in *The Structure of Social Action* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1937) a “positivistic theory of action” to ascribe how individuals interact with social and political systems.

¹⁶ Ibid.

“de-Stalinization.” The term was never used by Khrushchev or his supporters to describe his campaign of reforms, but rather was a later invention by historians describing the period. The contours of what de-Stalinization actually means have significantly changed in recent decades. One seminal work, *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization*, a collection of essays edited by historian Polly Jones, was an attempt to connect the breadth of recent scholarship on the Khrushchev era.¹⁷ In her essay introducing the collection, Jones notes that “in its original historiographic context, “de-Stalinization” (*destalinizatsiia*) was most often used very narrowly to denote the specific political process: “the demythologization of the leader cult.”¹⁸ In this framing, de-Stalinization was a destructive force aimed at breaking one aspect of Soviet politics and culture. Gradually, though, the term became an analytical device for historians to look at how Khrushchev tried to navigate and reform the system that remained following Stalin’s death. In the aftermath of the Soviet Union’s dissolution in 1991, many historians have attempted to argue the “failure” or “success” of de-Stalinization as a policy.¹⁹

The contributors of *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization* laid out a different approach. Like Kotkin, the authors in the collection, through their various fields of specialization, lay out the case that de-Stalinization can be understood as a multifaceted attempt to completely revamp how Soviet life was structured. In her introduction to the collection, Jones defines de-Stalinization (and its opposite, “re-Stalinization”) as a “process of historical revisionism” which deconstructed the Stalin cult. However, deconstruction was not the aim, but only means to a greater end: “historical revisionism is crucial to our understanding of the period, not least because debunking

¹⁷ Polly Jones, ed., *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization: Negotiating Cultural and Social Change in the Khrushchev Era* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

¹⁸ Ibid, 2-3.

¹⁹ For instance, see Martin Malia, *The Soviet Tragedy: The History of Socialism in Russia, 1917-1991* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), or Vladislav M. Zubok, *A Failed Empire* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

of Stalin's authority was a prerequisite for rethinking a whole range of Stalinist priorities and practices in other domains."²⁰ For Khrushchev and his allies who supported a change in course, the core "dilemma of de-Stalinization" was "the prerogative to direct and control social and cultural change."²¹ Hitherto this prerogative had belonged to Stalin alone, but now was contested between progressive and conservative elements of the party and society.

It was a struggle that played out across many battlefields simultaneously. Jones prefaces their study with the assertion:

The Khrushchev era was a time of enormous changes, some contained in the reforms of the post-Stalin leadership, others spontaneously welling up "from below" after the end of Stalinism. [...] The dilemmas of de-Stalinization encompassed all realms of Soviet life, from party politics to the economy, from art and literature to the writing of history, from criminal justice to the maintenance of social order. In each of these realms, the sudden absence of Stalin, whose charismatic authority had substituted for real political legitimacy, forced his successors to sift the legacy of Stalinism to determine how much of it should be preserved, and how much discarded.²²

De-Stalinization was a process that occurred at the party, state, social, and individual level. In questioning the legacy of the Stalinist past, individuals had to constantly consider and reconsider their relationship with the Soviet state and "the Revolution." It changed the ways in which the party engaged with society and how it approached public criticism, both from within and without. The Soviet people, given the opportunity to share their complaints with the state,

²⁰ Ibid, 3.

²¹ Ibid, 5.

²² Jones, "Introduction," in *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization*, 1. Jones is referencing the work of numerous scholars producing new research on de-Stalinization and the Thaw, many of whom contribute to the volume. See Donald A. Filtzer, *Soviet Workers and De-Stalinization: The Consolidation of the Modern System of Soviet Production Relations, 1953-1964*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), Brian LaPierre, *Hooligans in Khrushchev's Russia: Defining, Policing, and Producing Deviance during the Thaw* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2012), Miriam Dobson, *Khrushchev's Cold Summer: Gulag Returnees, Crime, and the Fate of Reform after Stalin* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), Denis Kozlov, *The Readers of Novyi Mir: Coming to Terms with the Stalinist Past* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), Stephen V. Bittner, *The Many Lives of Khrushchev's Thaw: Experience and Memory in Moscow's Arbat* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008).

did so vociferously. Though the limits of critique were carefully defined and policed, the party also had to seriously consider offering solutions to some of the Soviet people's concerns. These conversations spread throughout all dimensions of Soviet life, changing the very language through which conversations around politics and society were framed. De-Stalinization was "a discursive process, a state of thinking and being that defined the Soviet Union as it sought to come to terms with the core contradiction at the crux of its current crisis."²³

The shared theme of these studies centering discourse to understand two distinct periods of Soviet civilization make the studies of Kotkin and Jones natural analytical companions. Just as "Stalinist civilization" was a construction that emerged over time, I argue that the attempts by both the party and individuals to "de-Stalinize" Soviet life gave rise to a post-Stalinist civilization by redefining the values and social contract at the heart of "the Revolution" following the Soviet dictator's death. As the contributors of *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization* attest through the sheer scope of their various studies, Khrushchev's reform efforts impacted nearly every area of Soviet life, on what I would argue to be a "civilizational" scale. By combining this understanding of de-Stalinization with Kotkin's analytical approach to the study of Soviet modernity, it is my aim to present a case study of how a post-Stalinist civilization was being built throughout the reconstruction of Stalingrad.

Khrushchev invested untold state resources and his own political capital to pursue his goals. He launched a public campaign to "rationalize" the planned economy, both to reset labor relations and loosen restrictions on social mobility.²⁴ He also sought to reshape Soviet housing

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ For more on Soviet labor policy during de-Stalinization, see Donald Filtzer, *Soviet Workers and De-Stalinization*, as well as "From Mobilized to Free Labour: De-Stalinization and the Changing Legal Status of Workers," in *Dilemmas of De-Stalinization*, ed. Jones, 154-169.

policy with the introduction of the mass-produced private single-family apartment.²⁵ His ambitions included an ambitious bid to revitalize the country's ailing and unproductive collective farms and modernizing the Soviet countryside, in order to increase access to consumer goods for Soviet workers.²⁶ Intellectual and educational reforms were necessary to create a scientific and technological labor base capable of competing in the race to space.²⁷ All the while he faced the difficult task of resetting Soviet diplomatic relations with the West in the midst of the Cold War and the emergence of the postcolonial Third World.²⁸

Khrushchev's reasons for pursuing such policies were not entirely altruistic. In the wake of Stalin's death, the Soviet elite feared that public dissent after decades of hardship was close to a tipping point.²⁹ While scholars have thoroughly researched the ways in which state terror was used by Stalin as a means to stamp out public opposition to his rule (including within his own party), the relative stability of the Khrushchev years even in the absence of terror has been less

²⁵ For housing policies see Lewis Siegelbaum, ed. *Borders of Socialism: Private Spheres of Soviet Russia* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), Steven E. Harris, "Soviet Mass Housing and the Communist Way of Life," in *Everyday Life in Russia Past and Present*, eds. Chatterjee, Ransel, Cavender, and Petrone (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2015), Mark B. Smith, *Property of Communists: The Urban Housing Program from Stalin to Khrushchev* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2010), Susan E. Reid, "Everyday Aesthetics in the Khrushchev-Era Standard Apartment," *Etnofoor* 24, no. 2 (2012): 78–105, Lynne Attwood, *Gender and Housing in Soviet Russia: Private Life in a Public Space* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), Christine Varga-Harris, *Stories of House and Home: Soviet Apartment Life during the Khrushchev Years* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015), Phillip Meuse and Dimitrij Zadorin, *Towards a Typology of Soviet Mass Housing: Prefabrication in the USSR, 1955-1991*, (Berlin: DOM Publishers, 2016).

²⁶ For more on the Soviet agriculture and the "Virgin Lands" campaign see Martin McCauley, *Khrushchev and the Development of Soviet Agriculture: The Virgin Land Programme, 1953-1964* (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1976), Aaron Hale-Dorrell, *Corn Crusade: Khrushchev's Farming Revolution in the Post-Stalin Soviet Union*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).

²⁷ Michael Froggatt, "Renouncing dogma, teaching utopia: Science in schools under Khrushchev," in *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization*, ed. Jones, 250-266.

²⁸ For more on Khrushchev's reset of Soviet diplomatic policy, Choi Chatterjee, Lisa A. Kirschenbaum, and Deborah A. Field, *Russia's Long Twentieth Century: Voices, Memories, Contested Perspectives*, (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016), and my own essay "Marshalling Tito: Soviet Foreign Policy, Yugoslavia, and the Crisis of International Stalinism in the Early Cold War, 1948-56" (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Washington, Spring 2015).

²⁹ Polly Jones, "From the Secret Speech to the Burial of Stalin: Real and Ideal Responses to de-Stalinization," in *The Dilemmas of de-Stalinization*, ed. Jones, (New York: Routledge, 2006), 41-63.

thoroughly explored.³⁰ Aside from the notable uprisings against communist party rule abroad in the People's Republics of Hungary and Poland in 1956 and the bloody repression of labor unrest in the Novocherkassk (a Soviet city only some 440 km to the west of Stalingrad near Rostov on the Don), the relative domestic stability of the Soviet Union begs further explanation.³¹ Christine Varga-Harris has argued that Khrushchev's reforms represented a concerted effort to revitalize the promises of the revolution in the minds of the public, while Soviet citizens in turn used this opportunity to negotiate the "socialist contract" of what they expected from the Communist Party.³² Much like Kotkin did in his study of Magnitogorsk, it is through this discourse that I contend the idea of a "post-Stalinist civilization" might be best explored.

I chose Stalingrad for the subject of my own "sharply focused case study" for a number of reasons, specifically because of how central these policies were to life in the city during its reconstruction phase. Following the battle, the construction of both late-Stalinist and post-Stalinist civilization that took shape there was not predetermined. This allows us to track not only what was built, but what other possibilities and ambitions for what might have been. As established above, prewar Stalingrad was an exemplary example of a Stalinist city: a rapidly modernizing space centered around the effort to create a large-scale industrial economy. However, after the Battle destroyed or damaged so much of what had stood before, the city

³⁰ This has been a primary consideration of Soviet studies since they emerged in the postwar with Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Berlin: Schocken Books, 1951) and other early Sovietologists argue that terror was integral to the Bolshevik system of governance. Since those early works the mechanisms of terror and their sociological ramifications have been much more thoroughly explored, see J. Arch Getty and Roberta Thompson Manning, *Stalinist Terror: New Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Tear off the Masks!: Identity and Imposture in Twentieth-Century Russia*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), Steven Anthony Barnes, *Death and Redemption: The Gulag and the Shaping of Soviet Society*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

³¹ See Kevin McDermott and Matthew Stibbe, *Revolution and Resistance in Eastern Europe: Challenges to Communist Rule* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2006), Samuel H. Baron, *Bloody Saturday in the Soviet Union: Novocherkassk, 1962*, (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2001).

³² Christine Varga-Harris, "Forging Citizenship on the Home Front: Reviving the Socialist Contract and Constructing Soviet Identity during the Thaw" in *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization*, ed. Jones, 101-116.

would come to resemble Magnitogorsk in that its citizens were living and working in a perpetual construction site. In addition to its massive steel mills and factories, Stalingrad was situated in an arable region where long-standing peasant landholdings had been collectivized before the war. This gives us the opportunity to explore an additional aspect largely absent from Kotkin's study, namely the phenomenon of post-Stalinist civilization simultaneously being brought to the countryside surrounding the city.

However, it is important to note that Stalingrad had a much longer historical memory than Magnitogorsk. The role of the city in the Civil War and in particular its experience of World War II (the frontlines of which never crossed the Urals) certainly made it unique. The memory of the war and in particular the war myth around the Battle of Stalingrad itself became a core aspect of the city's identity and its place in history of the Revolution.³³ This historical memory further compounded how its restoration was viewed in the eyes of party planners and its civilian populace.³⁴ An integral part of this story is how the city (home to more than half a million people before the battle began) was raised from the ashes of war to reclaim its former status of a modern Soviet metropolis. The memory of the Battle, its aftereffects, and the reconstruction efforts are as core to the identity of the city as its name was, and as we shall see, were essential questions of how Soviet civilization was not just constructed but *re-constructed* on the banks of the Volga.

³³ For more scholarship on the Soviet memory of the Second World War, see Nina Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead: The Rise & Fall of the Cult of World War II in Russia* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), Amir Weiner, *Making Sense of War: The Second World War and the Fate of the Bolshevik Revolution*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), Catherine Merridale, *Ivan's War: Life and Death in the Red Army, 1939-1945* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006), David L. Hoffmann, ed. *The Memory of the Second World War in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia* (New York: Routledge, 2022).

³⁴ This phenomenon has been documented in other war-ravaged Soviet cities, see Lisa A. Kirschenbaum, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad, 1941–1995: Myth, Memories, and Monuments* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), Karl Qualls, *From Ruins to Reconstruction: Urban Identity in Soviet Sevastopol after World War II* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), and Ivo Mijnsen, *Russia's Hero Cities: From Postwar Ruins to the Soviet Hierarchy*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2021).

As I attempt to examine the de-Stalinization of “Stalinist civilization,” it is important to note that this is not to suggest that Khrushchev somehow ushered in an entirely separate civilizational model, as his ambition to “build communism” might suggest. Rather, I argue that the post-Stalinist civilization that emerges at Stalingrad grows is inherently linked to and an evolution of what came before. Just as structures within the city built under Stalin and Khrushchev may stand together on the same street, Stalinist civilization remains a persistent part of the post-Stalinist construction that followed.

Instead of thinking of post-Stalinist civilization as a wholly new entity, I suggest the metaphor of the dendrological practice of grafting and hybridization. In botany, grafting is when part of a new plant (the “scion”) is attached to the base of an older existing plant (the “rootstock”) to form a new hybrid entity. The two plants usually must be genetically similar for the graft to take, for instance, a scion from a lemon tree might be grafted to an orange tree’s rootstock. With both scion and rootstock being from citrus trees, the new hybrid has a chance to thrive, and can even produce fruits of both trees simultaneously. Typically, each plant is chosen to enhance the properties the other tree lacks--a scion from a plant with tastier fruit can be grafted to a heartier rootstock, resulting in a chimeric entity with the properties of both. One might understand the amended revolutionary model developed through the process of de-Stalinization: “Stalinist civilization” remained the rootstock to which the scion of “post-Stalinist civilization” was attached. The resultant hybrid entity, what I have termed simply “Soviet civilization” is what remains, where aspects of the old and the new continue to exist and grow side by side. One could even argue that this grafting improved the health of the ailing Stalinist system, stabilizing the Party’s place atop the Soviet state through its new focus on better managing and meeting the expectations of the public.

Grafting, it must be noted, is not an instantaneous process, but one that, once started, takes multiple growing seasons to see results. To further compound (and hopefully not overcomplicate) this metaphor, this fits with the language of “the thaw” (*ottepel’*) used to describe the impact of de-Stalinization on Soviet culture. Scholars of de-Stalinization have already accepted that it was an ongoing project which flowed in “thaws” and “freezes,” each marked by their own duration and “temperature.”³⁵ Throughout Khrushchev’s tenure, there was a real anxiety among both the Soviet leadership and the Soviet public about how much could be changed and how much should stay the same, and for those living through his reform efforts in real time, there was no way of knowing whether or not they would be successful and just when (if ever) his vision for the Soviet future would bear fruit.

With this in mind, it has become more and more difficult to define a definitive “period” in which the process can be said to have definitely started, let alone completed.³⁶ Historically, Khrushchev’s infamous “secret speech” delivered on the final evening of the Twentieth Party Congress, February on 25, 1956, has long marked the beginning of what we now consider a concrete period of “de-Stalinization” within Soviet politics, which could be seen to culminate with the resolutions of the Twenty-Second Party Congress in October 1961. However, I contend that rather than ascribing some sort of artificial break between the period of Stalin and Khrushchev, which would be ill-defined at best, it is better to examine the period between 1943-1964 as a continuum in which both late-Stalinist and post-Stalinist civilization are being constructed, at times simultaneously. To understand how Stalinist civilization was impacted by Khrushchev’s reforms, it is necessary to see how they built on top of one another over time.³⁷ It

³⁵ Jones, *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization*, 2-3.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 11.

³⁷ Glennys Young in her article “Fetishizing the Soviet Collapse: Historical Rupture and the Historiography of (Early) Soviet Socialism,” *The Russian Review* 66, no. 1 (2007): 95–122, has argued the need to deemphasize artificial

is also important to recognize the experience of de-Stalinization was greatly varied, even amidst the Soviet populace. The immediate postwar generation of Soviet citizens would live much more of their lives without Stalin in it, while the previous generation that survived both the war and the terror would have a very different memory of Stalin and the decades of his rule.³⁸

Furthermore, it is not necessarily my goal to explore the specific policies the party was institutionalizing or how they were being debated and contested within the party leadership, I will instead see how those policies manifested themselves “on the ground” within the city. I would argue that from the moment of Stalin’s death, de-Stalinization both “from the top” and “from the bottom” can be observed occurring in fits and starts, sometimes rapidly and sometimes slowly. However, rather than simply assessing the “success” or “failure” of de-Stalinization in the party’s stated aims, it is my aim to illustrate in what ways Soviet life substantially changed due to Khrushchev’s efforts, both in objective ways but also in the subjective experience of it. Without glossing over the challenges and deficiencies the Soviet people still faced during this time, I argue that the vision of socialist modernity being offered by the party was not something the Soviet public was overtly hostile to. While there were inevitably detractors and dissidents, the majority of Soviet workers were eager for amenities and the lifestyle that had been promised them and were increasingly bold when expressing their frustration when progress was slow or unequal, or when the real product was a somewhat shoddy interpretation of the blueprint.

“breakpoints” in Soviet history, particularly the 1991 “collapse” of the Soviet Union, but also has called attention to other “artificial” chronological units of analysis, for instance de-romanticizing “the decade.” While there has been a concerted effort within the historiography to uncouple the history of de-Stalinization from major events, 1956 remains a year often pointed to as the “beginning” of de-Stalinization and the thaw and further “de-fetishizing” the Secret Speech is still necessary.

³⁸ See Juliane Fürst, *Stalin’s Last Generation: Soviet Post-War Youth and the Emergence of Mature Socialism*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

In terms of life in the city, de-Stalinization was sometimes blunt, like the changing of the city's name or removing Stalinist icons, but oftentimes the effects were much more subtle, only perceptible over time. While the statue of Stalin overlooking the mouth of the Volga-Don canal in the south of the city was indeed there one night and gone the next, the deeper changes Khrushchev's reforms brought to Soviet life came only with time. Unlike symbols, the political and economic systems left by Stalin that are the aim Khrushchev's of reform efforts are largely intransigent in their inertia, and the very shape of the civilizational model defined by Stalin limited Khrushchev's options when pursuing his objectives. Khrushchev himself certainly hoped to make the case that de-Stalinization had been completed in 1961 and that the Soviet Union was on the path to realizing a fully communist civilization in twenty years' time, but as with so many of his reforms, his hopes would not always match reality.

This study begins immediately following the German surrender and traces the city's history through the postwar "late-Stalin" period and on through Khrushchev's tenure at the head of the CPSU, ending with his ouster from high politics in October 1964. During this time, the city was in a state of constant change, as both citizens and the state poured millions of rubles and hours of labor into the city's reconstruction. The population, which had reached a scant few thousand remaining by the close of the Battle, was growing at an exponential rate. To man the city's major industries the city's planners needed to account labor demand, and massive state investments would continue to drive the city's economy and expand its labor pool. With many who lived in the city prior to the battle either killed or having fled, the population of the city came to include transplants, refugees, and returning soldiers from the front: the new "*Stalingradtsy*." However, even with an influx of bodies steadily pouring into the city, the physical space of Stalingrad as a built environment took decades to reemerge. One of the largest

challenges Stalingrad faced in the postwar decades was how to house and provide for its residents. As we will see, both Stalin and Khrushchev each had their own strategies in how to approach this challenge, and their policies had a substantial impact on how the new city was constructed.³⁹

As I attempt to recreate a picture of life in the city through this dynamic period of its history, I will explore the urban space as a multi-layered construction. Any city is comprised of many things. In the realm of the physical, the “city” usually refers to the built environment—its structures, homes, roads, and urban infrastructure. There is also the human element, the masses of people who live there and their activities therein. But a city is to many degrees an imaginary construction, an “imagined community” and sense of belonging that makes the various, disparate neighborhoods feel they are part of a larger whole.⁴⁰ The imaginary view of the city is held by residents, but also by its planners and architects, as the principles of urban planning and their goals for the built environment would have a definite impact on life in the city itself. The party

³⁹ For more on Soviet urban planning strategies, see William Taubman, *Governing Soviet Cities; Bureaucratic Politics and Urban Development in the USSR* (New York: Praeger, 1973), R. A. French, *Plans, Pragmatism and People: The Legacy of Soviet Planning for Today's Cities* (London: UCL Press, 1995), Danilo Udovički-Selb, “Between Modernism and Socialist Realism: Soviet Architectural Culture under Stalin’s Revolution from Above, 1928–1938,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 68, no. 4 (2009): 467–95, Heather D. DeHaan, *Stalinist City Planning: Professionals, Performance, and Power. Stalinist City Planning* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013). More recently urban histories of Soviet cities is an emergent genre within the historical field, see for instance Qualls, *From Ruins to Reconstruction*, Paul Stronski, *Tashkent: Forging a Soviet City, 1930–1966* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010), Jonas van der Straeten and Mariya Petrova, “The Soviet City as a Landscape in the Making: Planning, Building and Appropriating Samarkand, c.1960s–80s,” *Central Asian Survey* 41, no. 2 (2022): 297–321. Kate Brown, “Gridded Lives: Why Kazakhstan and Montana Are Nearly the Same Place,” *The American Historical Review* 106, no. 1 (2001): 17–48.

⁴⁰ I borrow this concept of course from Benedict Anderson, who used “Imagined Communities” as an analytical framework to examine the advent of nationalism as a political force. Anderson argues that a shared sense of time and contemporaneous living through publications like newspapers was one of the key technological components necessary for national identity to take shape. I would argue one can see a similar phenomenon at play through the party press at Stalingrad as an “imagined community” of *Stalingradtsy/Volgogradtsy* is being constructed over time. See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso Press, 2006).

has its own imagined, idealized view of the city as a shining beacon of socialist modernity, one it hoped to promote in the minds of residents as well as part of the city's international persona.

Finally, in Stalingrad (as in many other “hero cities” that saw heavy fighting during the war—Leningrad, Kiev, Minsk, and Sevastopol—just to name a few), the legend of the Battle of Stalingrad and the war myth that surrounded that event is a construction all its own. Ivo Mijnsen argues that during the war, these cities were cast as the “protagonists” in the struggle against the invasion, and that they were already personified as characters in the collective consciousness codified into a “heroarchy.” In the postwar period, they would still be held as exemplary, “meant to be emulated by the entire nation.”⁴¹ Defining the character of the hero city of Stalingrad (and later Volgograd) as a hero-city was at the core of the reconstruction project, and understanding its imaginary construction is an integral to its physical manifestation as an urban environment.

Under both Stalin and Khrushchev, the municipal government of the city and the highest reaches of the party hierarchy alike were regularly compelled to adjust their planning and resources to meet the demands of the Soviet people. Following decades of privation and war, the people of the Soviet Union were hungry for the stability and prosperity that socialism was purported to provide. Khrushchev's reforms were an attempt to address these growing expectations and redefine the social contract between the party and society and revitalize the promise of “the Revolution” that had become stagnant in the postwar period of Stalin's rule, even amidst the monumental reconstruction effort taking place. Through an examination of Khrushchev's policies and how they were implemented within the city, this study attempts to trace both aspects of this story with the hope that it might give greater understanding of this transformative period in Soviet life more broadly. Stalingrad is certainly in many ways unique in

⁴¹ Ivo Mijnsen, *Russia's Hero Cities*, 1-4.

its local context, but it is also exemplary of wider trends appearing throughout the Soviet Union and the socialist world during this period.

A Brief History of the City and the Revolution

In order to appreciate the impact of de-Stalinization in the city, it is important to understand the city's experience of "the Revolution" more broadly. Long before Volgograd adopted its current name, the city on the Volga already held a special place in Russian culture and its revolutionary history. The city known as Tsaritsyn—originally taking its name from the Tsaritsa River, which meets the Volga from the West—grew from a frontier stronghold established at the turn of the 17th century to a major river port and commercial center. The city grew into a hub of culture and trade, becoming connected to the empire's central rail network in 1862 and even becoming one of Russia's first provincial cities to install electric streetlamps in 1913.⁴²

However, the strain of cascading domestic crises and the chaos unleashed by World War I brought about the end of Tsarist rule in February of 1917, when Nicholas II was forced to abdicate the imperial throne.⁴³ For a few months, Russia was ruled by a Provisional Government elected by members of the Duma (Russia's equivalent of an elected legislature), until such time a new constitution could be drafted. However, they were challenged by the Soviets, elected bodies of workers in Russia's major industries, who represented the more radical wings of the Russian

⁴² G. V. Orlov, *Istoriia rodnogo kraia: Volgogradskoi raion, 1589-2007* (Volgograd, Izdatel', 2007).

⁴³ For more on the final crisis of autocracy in Russia see Robert D. Warth, *Nicholas II: The Life and Reign of Russia's Last Monarch* (Westport: Praeger, 1997), Raymond Pearson, *The Russian Moderates and the Crisis of Tsarism, 1914-1917*, (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1977), Richard Pipes, *A Concise History of the Russian Revolution*, (New York: Knopf, 1995), Robert Service, *The Last of the Tsars : Nicholas II and the Russian Revolution*, (London: Macmillan, 2017).

labor movement (which included both the “Bolshevik” and “Menshevik” wings of the Russian Communist Party, as well as other major parties like the Socialist Revolutionaries).

More than a thousand miles from Tsaritsyn, the events that would decide the fate of the revolution were playing out in the streets of St. Petersburg. It was the leader of the Bolsheviks, Vladimir Lenin, recently returned to Russia following decades of exile abroad, who eventually led his party in an armed uprising against the provisional government in October 1917. Aided by defectors and mutineers from the army and navy, the Bolsheviks and their supporters seized the rail and telegraph offices of the capital of St. Petersburg along with the Winter Palace, where the leadership of Alexander Kerensky’s provisional cabinet was arrested. As their first acts in power, Lenin declared “all power to the Soviets!” as well as the intent to sue for peace and remove Russia as a combatant in World War I.⁴⁴

As Lenin struggled to secure his party’s grip on the levers of state power, however, monarchist forces within the former Imperial army had turned away from the front in Europe and set their sights on quashing the fledgling revolution (the “Whites”). They were backed by the imperial powers who were Russia’s former allies hoping to keep Germany in a two-front war and whose own legitimacy was threatened by the Bolshevik uprising. Under the command of Lev Trotsky, Lenin founded his own Red Army to defend the revolution from the existential threat the Whites represented. The resulting struggle plunged the former Russian empire into years of civil war.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Soviet Experiment: Russia, the USSR, and the Successor States*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 63-65.

⁴⁵ For a wide range of perspectives on the Russian Civil War and its impacts, see Diane Koenker, William Rosenberg, and Ronald Suny, eds, *Party, State and Society in the Russian Civil War* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press: 1989), Geoff Swain, *The Origins of the Russian Civil War* (New York: Longman, 1996), Rex A. Wade, *The Bolshevik Revolution and Russian Civil War*, (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2001), or Jonathan Smele, *The “Russian” Civil Wars, 1916-1926: Ten Years that Shook the World*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

Tsaritsyn would become a major battleground in the Russian Civil War. The city was home to an active labor movement, with its own workers' soviet founded as part of the 1905 revolution. The Bolsheviks remained a major force in local politics, and their discipline and organization meant they were well positioned to act swiftly upon Lenin's proclamation of Soviet power in 1917.⁴⁶ The city and the surrounding area were incorporated in March of 1918 into the Bolshevik-controlled "Don Soviet Republic," but soon an uprising by the Don Cossacks and German incursions into the territory following the signing of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk saw its rapid collapse.⁴⁷ The revolutionary leaders were forced to flee their chosen capital at Rostov-on-the-Don and retreated to Tsaritsyn, which became the last bastion against the reactionary White forces advancing from the South. The city, which was home to significant armaments industries, was also strategically significant to protect the shipping lines of oil from Baku and for reinforcements from the Bolshevik's supporters in Central Asia.⁴⁸

However, as a provincial city, it remained far from the core of Soviet power, which was already spread thin trying to hold back White Army advances on multiple fronts. In June of 1918 the city was besieged by White forces, who greatly outnumbered the Red defenders. It was none other than the then commissar Joseph Stalin, serving at the head of an armed expedition to procure grain from the region in his capacity as a member of the Council of People's Commissars, whom Trotsky would appoint to take command in the region.⁴⁹ The defense of the

⁴⁶ See Donald J. Raleigh, "Revolutionary Politics in Provincial Russia: The Tsaritsyn 'Republic' in 1917." *Slavic Review* 40, no. 2 (1981): 194–209.

⁴⁷ Peter Holquist, *Making War, Forging Revolution: Russia's Continuum of Crisis, 1914-1921* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002).

⁴⁸ Peter Kenez, *Red Attack, White Resistance; Civil War in South Russia 1918* (Washington, D.C.: New Academia Publishing, 2004).

⁴⁹ See Oleg Khlevniuk, *Stalin: New Biography of a Dictator* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015). Political intrigue between Stalin and Trotsky overshadowed military matters at this time, with Stalin writing directly to Lenin to complain of what he perceived as Trotsky's mismanagement of the Red Army. Stalin, on the other hand, was regularly insubordinate to Trotsky's direct orders, leading to him being recalled from the front in November 1918.

city depended on the Red Army's artillery advantage, which allowed them to hold through the winter of 1918-1919, but was briefly taken by White Army General Pytor Wrangel in the following summer. Wrangel then attempted to march on Saratov, but was forced back, and by autumn it was the Whites who were besieged within the city. In January of 1920, the Red Army decisively retook the city for the final time.

The battle for Tsaritsyn was a protracted and bloody affair, yet it was also a crucial strategic victory, as the White army, already lacking cohesive goals or chain of command between its leaders, was struggling on multiple fronts. It was here that Stalin really made his name, and to recognize his efforts, in 1925 the party leadership decided his name would be given to the city in honor of his contributions to the defense of the Revolution.⁵⁰

Though Lenin was able to secure and entrench Bolshevik power and guide the burgeoning Soviet state through the Russian Civil War, he was in power only a scant four years before suffering a series of debilitating strokes. The Bolshevik leader was forced out of his political and public role, and in January 1924 he passed away. Lenin's political maneuverings had helped secure his party's dominance of the new Soviet state, and his successors would be left with the task of safeguarding his revolution amidst a hostile international order. In the course of a few short years, life in the former Russian empire had been completely upended. The Bolshevik government of the Soviet Union now faced the daunting task of replacing it, of bringing about a new form of living in accordance with their socialist principles.

After Lenin's death, there were many years of collective leadership and internal party struggles. Eventually, outmaneuvering Trotsky and other rivals within the party's central

⁵⁰ Stephen Kotkin, *Stalin: Paradoxes of Power: 1878-1928*, (New York: Penguin Books, 2015). Kotkin argues that "no locale better encapsulated the class warfare revolutionary dynamic" of the Civil War as the Battle of Tsaritsyn, 300.

committee, Stalin used his role as General Secretary of the party to elevate his own supporters, push out his rivals, and secure his political dominance. Stalin saw the future of the revolution as dependent on a modern military capable of facing the existential threats of capitalism, imperialism, and fascism, and was willing to sacrifice millions of lives in order to see his policies through. In order to build “Socialism in One Country,” Stalin imposed strict economic control in the hands of the state and began to pursue a policy of crash industrialization, the forced collectivization of agriculture, and political terror directed at crushing any potential internal threats defined life in the Soviet Union for the two and a half decades of his leadership.⁵¹

Under Stalin, Stalingrad would become a key site in his revolutionary transformation of the region. Thanks to its strategic location within rail and river shipping infrastructure, as well as a strong industrial labor base around local manufacturing established during the late-imperial era, Stalingrad was to become a center of heavy industry in the Stalinist vision of the Soviet state. The massive Stalingrad Tractor Factory (STZ), which broke ground in 1930, would become central to the city’s economy as well as to the collectivization and mechanization of agriculture

⁵¹ In his introduction to *Magnetic Mountain*, Stephen Kotkin argues that “Stalinism” is “among the most widely observed phenomenon in history.” The study of Stalinism has evolved from the study of “totalitarianism” pioneered by Hannah Arendt’s influential postwar retrospective on Stalinism and Nazism, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, totalitarianism is defined by the state’s subjugation of society through political violence. This approach defined a generation of scholarship on the subject, see for instance Robert Conquest, *The Great Terror: Stalin’s Purge of the Thirties* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1968), Robert V. Daniels, ed., *The Stalin Revolution: Foundations of the Totalitarian Era* (Boston, Houghton Mifflin Co, 1997), and Robert C. Tucker, *Stalin in Power: The Revolution from above, 1928-1941* (New York: Norton, 1990). Later historical schools sought to refocus Stalinism as not merely a top-down process but a participatory experience, with important contributions from the likes of Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999) Moshe Lewin, *The Making of the Soviet System* (New York: The New Press, 1994), and Donald Filtzer, *Soviet Workers and Stalinist Industrialization: The Formation of Modern Soviet Production Relations, 1928-1941*, (Armonk, N.Y., Sharpe, 1986). Kotkin contends this new school or scholarship retained a “Trotskyite” approach that “the Revolution” was “hijacked” by Stalin and his policies a perversion of Leninist principles, which he seeks escape in his own analysis focused on Stalinism as a project of constructing a distinct Soviet modernity. Kotkin’s own contributions to the field have further engaged scholarship pertaining to “Soviet subjectivity,” which has further sought to understand the culture and psychology of Stalin’s revolution, see for instance Jochen Hellbeck, *Revolution on My Mind: Writing a Diary under Stalin*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), J. Arch Getty, *Practicing Stalinism: Bolsheviks, Boyars, and the Persistence of Tradition*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013).

in the region. The Red October Steelworks was also erected in the city at this time to provide the steel for the production line, and the Barricades Munitions Factory would produce weapons and munitions, including some of the first Soviet tanks that would soon also be built at STZ.⁵² The city occupied an important position in the country's water and rail shipping networks, and it was the seat and export hub for one of the most agriculturally productive regions of Soviet Russia, which further enhanced the city's strategic importance in Stalin's goal of "building socialism." While the city was not built from the ground up like some of the other massive Soviet construction projects under Stalin, in the 1930s Stalingrad certainly contained many of the hallmarks of what Stephen Kotkin would come to describe as a "Stalinist civilization."⁵³

Stalin's revolutionary model was put to the ultimate test by the shock Nazi invasion in 1941, which saw the Soviet Union fighting for its very survival against a fascist enemy bent on the destruction of communist power and the enslavement of its people. Caught off guard, the Red Army had been forced into a harried retreat, and within a few months the city of Leningrad had been besieged and Nazi troops reached within thirty km from the gates of Moscow. By 1942 the German Sixth army led by General Paulus was marching across southern Russia toward the oil fields of Baku. In July of that year, Stalin issued his infamous Order No. 227, "Not One Step Back!," which declared "every position, every meter of Soviet territory must be defended down to the last drop of blood!"⁵⁴ With their backs to the river, the Red Army dug in the southern Russian city of Stalingrad and refused to retreat beyond the Volga River, and in September 1942 the siege of the city began. The Battle of Stalingrad, as it came to be known, became an ideological and an almost personal battle between Hitler and Stalin, each with their own

⁵² Orlov, *Istoriia rodnogo kraia*.

⁵³ Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

⁵⁴ Suny, *The Soviet Experiment*, 353.

rhetorical motivation for defending the city or seeing it fall. With the Allied powers pushed to the point of breaking—France had fallen and been occupied in 1940, the English pinned down under the London Blitz, and the United States not yet active in the European theater—the Soviet defense of the Stalingrad appeared to be the battle on which the fate of the war hinged.⁵⁵

As the battle raged through the winter, aerial and artillery bombardments pummeled the city, and Stalingrad saw some of the heaviest instances of street-to-street urban warfare of the twentieth century. Ultimately, Paulus's troops were unable to fully secure the city, leaving them overextended and ill-supplied for prolonged combat through the harsh Russian winter. While the city was raised to the ground in the process, in the end Stalingrad's battered defenders held back the Sixth Army long enough for Marshal Zhukov's forces to organize a massive counter offensive, Operation Uranus, which was the Red Army's gambit to encircle the city and finally break the siege. On February 2, 1943, Paulus and his 90,000 remaining troops surrendered in the city they had brought to ruin. Nearly half a million Soviet troops perished in the fighting, along with thousands of Stalingrad's residents who could not flee to safety.⁵⁶ Yet from that day on, the tide of the Red Army surged ever westward, until two years later it arrived at the gates of Berlin, bringing an end to the war and redefining the geopolitical order of the twentieth century.

To commemorate the city's role in the war effort, Stalingrad was named one of thirteen "hero cities" of the Soviet Union in 1945. However, Stalin's victory over the Nazi threat came at a staggering cost to the Soviet people. During four years of fighting, somewhere between an estimated twenty and thirty million Soviets were killed.⁵⁷ Yet even with the Nazis defeated and

⁵⁵ See Antony Beevor, *Stalingrad: The Fateful Siege, 1942-1943*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1999), Jochen Hellbeck, *Stalingrad: The City That Defeated the Third Reich* (New York: Public Affairs, 2015), Frank Ellis, *The Stalingrad Cauldron: Inside the Encirclement and Destruction of the 6th Army* (Lawrence: The University Press of Kansas, 2013).

⁵⁶ Suny, *The Soviet Experiment*, 353.

⁵⁷ See Amir Weiner, *Making Sense of War*.

disarmed, the Soviet leader could not feel safe. The United States of America, which emerged from the Second World War as the world's first nuclear "superpower," was now viewed as the main threat to the revolution of Lenin, and a new "Cold War" loomed on the horizon.⁵⁸

For a decade after the war, Stalin retained his authoritative control on the power of the Soviet state, which he would only relinquish in death after falling ill in the spring of 1953. After another brief inter party political struggle between the members of Stalin's former inner circle, by 1956 Khrushchev had outmaneuvered his political position by consolidating support for reform within the party. After decades of hardship and privation, Khrushchev understood it to be necessary for the party to confront Stalin's failing policies in order to revitalize the promise of the revolution to the Soviet people and provide a modern standard of living as he embarked on a new phase of "peaceful competition" with the capitalist west.⁵⁹

Still, his task to reform the flailing planned economy and ease the state's grip on society without ceding Communist power was a daunting one. To achieve his political goals, all stark departures from the previous decades of "Stalinist" rule, he would need to tackle the legacy of Stalin himself. Though the collective leadership did take measures to revise Stalinist policies in the immediate aftermath of Stalin's death, de-Stalinization is understood to have begun in earnest with Khrushchev's delivery of the "Secret Speech" to the assembled Twentieth Party Congress in February of 1956. In a late-night address to thousands of party leaders, Khrushchev boldly

⁵⁸ For more on the Soviet perspective of the Cold War see Vojtech Mastny, *The Cold War and Soviet Insecurity: The Stalin Years*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), Vladislav M. Zubok, *A Failed Empire*, Oscar Sanchez-Sibony, *Red Globalization: The Political Economy of the Soviet Cold War from Stalin to Khrushchev* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

⁵⁹ Historical study of Khrushchev's tenure as the head of the Soviet Union has produced its own subfield within the historiography, see for instance Roy Aleksandrovich Medvedev and Brian Pearce, *Khrushchev* (Garden City: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1983), Martin McCauley, ed., *Khrushchev and Khrushchevism*, (Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan, 1987), Iu. V. Aksiutin, ed. *Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev: Materialy k biografii* (Moscow: Politizdat, 1989), Melanie Ilic and Jeremy Smith, eds. *Soviet State and Society Under Nikita Khrushchev*, (London: Routledge, 2009), Geoff Swain, *Khrushchev* (London: Palgrave, 2016).

took the podium for an emotional address in which his shocked audience sat in silence as the new Premier listed his predecessor's crimes. Reverberations from this event were multifaceted, as the contents of the speech did not stay “secret” for long.⁶⁰ As the Soviet public learned of Stalin's purported crimes for the first time through carefully crafted party narratives, they were forced to come to grips with hard truths about the man who had shaped their collective destinies, as well as navigate what this new political landscape might mean in their daily lives.

While many scholars have attempted to enumerate all the immeasurable ways that de-Stalinization impacted life in the Soviet Union at this time, one could argue that nowhere else would this process have been as acutely felt as it was in Stalingrad, the literal “city of Stalin.” During his rule, the party had spent decades cultivating and elevating the image of Stalin that made his personage nearly inseparable from the global socialist movement.⁶¹ Because Stalin had become a mythic, almost deific figure, Khrushchev's attempts to undercut his policies also meant destroying his image of infallibility. The legacy of Stalin had become inseparable from the legacy of the revolution, a conundrum which his successors grappled with until the Soviet Union fell (and even beyond).

Though de-Stalinization had major political ramifications, in terms of most Soviet citizens' daily concerns, Khrushchev's other initiatives pursued beyond the attack on the “cult of personality” that had the greatest impact on their lives. His push to transform the Soviet Union into a mass housing state, to produce more consumer goods in Soviet factories and increase foodstuffs available from Soviet farms, and to reestablish pathways of upward mobility for Soviet workers all produced tangible changes to their material existence. In Stalingrad, a regional

⁶⁰ Susanne Schattenberg, in “Democracy' or 'despotism'?: how the secret speech was translated into everyday life” *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization*, ed. Jones (New York: Routledge, 2006), 64-79.

⁶¹ See Jan Plamper, *The Stalin Cult: The Alchemy of Power* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012).

hub of both industry and agriculture, these economic policies would impact millions of workers, students, and pensioners.

The cultural changes unleashed by de-Stalinization were perhaps even more significant. Khrushchev's critique of Stalin as a tyrant unbothered by public opinion meant that he could hardly afford to silence dissent. Instead, the party itself invited Soviet citizens to express their own opinions (within carefully policed boundaries), and even opened public channels of complaint (that could be closely monitored). As a result, the Soviet public had more chances than ever to express their opinions on the contours of their lived experience. This free expression was extended to the arts, where the "thaw" in state standards led to an outpouring of new original forms in art, theater, music, film, and even the new medium of television. By the middle of the 1950s, as the private apartment replaced decades of overcrowded communal apartments and the barracks-style housing, there was a massive cultural shift in how new homeowners could socialize with friends and family outside of the public eye.

Compared to the myriad ways in which de-Stalinization was transforming Soviet life during this time, altering the city's name was a relatively superficial change. While a significant moment in the city's history, for the residents going about their daily lives, it was in many respects just another day. Still, this episode provides a prime example of how measures of de-Stalinization were justified by the party and received by the public.

What's In a Name?

In *Stalingradskaya pravda*, the local newspaper arm of the party's propaganda apparatus, the celebrations commemorating the October Revolution argued that "the whole world is now riveted by the historic XXII Party Congress of the CPSU, to its decisions, to the new party

program, the program for building a communist society in the land of the Soviets. The congress opened a wonderful new page in the history of the struggle for the victory of communism. It showed the whole world that the cause of October, the cause of communist construction, is moving forward with gigantic strides, that in the future it will bring new unprecedented victories.” In the last forty-four years following the fateful events of October 1917, the “party of Lenin” had led the Soviet people to overcome “countless difficulties” and now “the advantages of socialism have become especially evident in recent years, when the party, having eliminated the negative consequences of the cult of personality, led the nation-wide struggle to fulfill the main tasks of the period of widespread communist construction.” The promise of communism as an economic system capable of providing a modern standard of living better than that of the capitalist west was core to Khrushchev’s political platform, and as we can see, de-Stalinization was portrayed as irrevocably linked to the success of that project.

The story ran beneath the proclamation “Glory to the Great October, which opened a new era in the history of Humanity—the era of the collapse of capitalism and the establishment of communism!,” as well as a recreation of Lenin’s visage as it appeared in the statue recently erected in the city’s Lenin Square, located on the city’s main thoroughfare, Lenin Prospect (formerly Stalin Prospect) in the heart of the city’s Central District (formerly Stalin District).⁶²

Though allusions were made towards attempts at overcoming the “cult of personality,” there was little to indicate to readers that this was the last time the newspaper would publish under the name *Stalingradskaia pravda*. Unbeknownst to them, just three days later on November 10 a closed session of the Soviet Presidium passed a resolution to change the city’s

⁶² “Delo Oktiabria torzhestvuet,” *Stalingradskaia pravda*, November 6, 1961, p. 1.

name. The city and the surrounding oblast would hereby be known as Volgograd.⁶³ However, to the people of the city, the decision was announced with scant fanfare. On November 11, the local party newspaper began publishing under the name *Volgogradskaia pravda* alongside a short declaration from the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR explaining the change:

Taking into account the wishes and requests of collectives of industrial enterprises, construction sites, state farms, collective farms, institutions, as well as petitions from public organizations of the Stalingrad region, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR, by degree of November 10, 1961, renamed Stalingrad oblast as Volgograd oblast, and the city of Stalingrad as the city of Volgograd.⁶⁴

The next day, under a banner displaying the city's new title, "The Hero-City Volgograd and Volgograd Oblast," the front page was accompanied by images portraying the "thriving" Soviet metropolis—the hydroelectric station, the riverport, and new homes lining Lenin Prospect—along with the testimonials from residents praising the new name.

One dock worker of the city's shipyard proclaimed that the name Volgograd "rings proudly for every Soviet person" and argued that "the Twenty-Second party congress revealed serious violations of Lenin's vision by Stalin" who in doing so had "brought a lot of grief to honest Soviet people. Therefore, we could not tolerate the glorious national city to bear the name of Stalin."⁶⁵ A local schoolteacher asserted that "Volgograd is a sonorous, bright city name! It represents a manifestation of tremendous significance, exciting meaning. The greatness of the Volga and the greatness of our glorious heroic city is a wonderful legacy!"⁶⁶ One Red Army reservist remarked that "at the walls of our city, on the banks of the great Russian river, the

⁶³ The adoption of the Volga River as the city's namesake drew upon its well-established place in the Russian national consciousness, see Dorothy Zeisler-Vralsted, "The Aesthetics of the Volga and National Narratives in Russia," in *Environment and History* 20, no. 1 (2014): 93–122.

⁶⁴ "V Prezidium Verkhovnogo Soveta RSFSR," *Volgogradskaia pravda*, November 11, 1961, p. 1.

⁶⁵ P. Paramanov, "Goriachee Odobrenie," *Volgogradskaia pravda*, November 12, 1961, p. 1.

⁶⁶ K. N. Orekhova, *Ibid.*

fascists in 1943 suffered a crushing defeat. [...] I am sure that the people of Volgograd will continue their wonderful traditions at the forefront as fighters for communism.”⁶⁷ A pair of construction workers reminded readers that “we, the builders, have had the great honor to restore and build the world-famous hero city. Now you walk along avenues, streets, squares, admire the slender quarters and rejoice. [...] Now you look at our huge handsome city and think: the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR made the right decision on assigning the name Volgograd to the hero city on the Volga.” A cashier at the regional publishing house simply remarked “We are *Volgogradtsy*! I warmly approve of the renaming of our city. Volgograd sounds very good!”⁶⁸

These rosy testimonials reveal that the party was aware of the backlash such a change could generate in a city proud of its place in the history of the Revolution. The excerpts they publish tie the new name not only to the city’s place on the Volga, but to its place within the war myth, as well as its place as a new modern Soviet metropolis. If the testimonials were to be believed, the changing of the city’s name would be an obvious choice. Despite the support Khrushchev enjoyed for these measures from the pro de-Stalinization wing of the party during the XXII Party Congress, the party’s leaders could not fully predict local inhabitant’s resistance to such a change. Even as the Party circulated anti-Stalin propaganda before the name-change occurred, even those who took in the party’s new rhetoric about Stalin were still voicing concerns over what the effects of such changes might be.⁶⁹ The dialogue playing out on shop floors and in lecture halls within the city revealed a much different story from the cherry-picked reaction that supported the party’s narrative regarding the new name.

⁶⁷ N. Vusygin, *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ M. Novikova, *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Polly Jones. *Myth, Memory, Trauma, Rethinking the Stalinist Past in the Soviet Union, 1953-70*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013).

One student living in the city argued, “the whole world knows about *Stalingrad*’s feats,” arguing that the city’s historic role during the Battle as Stalingrad added important historical significance to the city that should be preserved. A factory worker worried that the city would lose its “union-wide and worldwide fame” and that “no name could resonate like Stalingrad.” One group at the city’s pedagogical institute even engaged in “attempts to speak out against the renaming of the city, since it had worldwide fame and was famous far beyond the borders of our fatherland as Stalingrad.”⁷⁰ Many of Stalingrad’s inhabitants remained proud of their connection to the legend of the city’s defense during both the Civil War and World War II as part of their own personal identity, which they were loath to give up regardless of how they may have felt regarding Stalin’s crimes. Even amidst this tumultuous political backdrop of de-Stalinization and the cultural “thaw,” the shift in the city’s core identity might have seemed sudden to the people living within the storied city. Less than half a decade before, the thought of changing the city’s name from “Stalingrad” would have been unthinkable.

As we can see, even this symbolic effort provoked a range of support and resistance, of enthusiasm as well as trepidation. In the grand scheme of things, the city’s name change was both significant and yet relatively inconsequential for the hundreds of thousands of *Volgogradtsy* attempting to navigate their ever-changing cultural, political, and even material landscapes. In the eight years since Stalin’s death, the changes to everyday life in the city were a continuously ongoing experience for its residents. The purpose of this dissertation is to attempt to trace various aspects of the lived experience of the city’s residents throughout the two decades following the battle, so that we can attempt to see the full impact of the various aspects of de-Stalinization on Soviet civilization as a whole.

⁷⁰ Ibid. Emphasis in the original text.

A Note on Sources

The research for this project was completed over the course of the last decade, as travel due to both personal and geopolitical reasons was made exceptionally difficult. While I made use of some domestically located sources, such as holding in the Library of Congress and at the Hoover Institute housed at Stanford University, most of the materials used in this project were collected during a summer 2018 trip to the city of Volgograd, where I was able to visit the State Archives of Volgograd Oblast (GAVO). While I had access to some internal documents of the municipal and regional party organizations, my primary focus on this trip became collecting stories from as broad a range of *Stalingradskaia/Volgogradskaia pravda* as I could manage in the short window allowed by my visa. The amount of information contained during this period was far too great to fit within the confines of my travel schedule, so I was both strategic and slightly random in the dates I managed to examine. With help of the archive staff, I was granted permission to digitally photograph whole pages of the publication over the 1943-1964 period, allowing me to continue my study of them upon my return home.

My collection amounts to hundreds of pages of the newspapers' run, each containing dozens of stories on the news of the day, as well as advertisements, promotions, and announcements for life within the city. I was looking for evidence of themes that created narrative through-lines over many years, and many of the articles mentioned in my study are representative of hundreds of very similar stories. I was of course invariably drawn to some major events, like the death of Stalin and the opening of the Mamayev Kurgan memorial complex. Other times, however, major events were not always reflected in the news as might be expected. For instance, in the days following the Secret Speech in 1956, the paper barely

contained any evidence that a seismic political event had just taken place. Still, major historical events in many ways disrupt, rather than further, the exploration of the “everyday,” or the “ordinary” in Soviet life.

These sources would come to be supplemented with additional materials from GAVO, as well as the State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF) and the Russian State Archive for Contemporary History (RGANI), were provided by the research network The Bridge, whose researchers were able to help me access additional sources until winter of 2022, after the Ukraine-Russia war’s outbreak disrupted their operations. These archival sources help ground the study with the party’s own assessments in its governance of Stalingrad, rather than being purely limited to the party’s narrative presented in the newspaper. Several published archival collections from GAVO also helped to expand my source pool.⁷¹ I also make use of Soviet travel guides published in the 1970s to look at remarkable locations and institutions within the city.⁷²

Finally, I was able to take advantage of a great number of Russian historians and a vibrant culture of local historical interest surrounding Stalingrad, of both the Battle and the reconstruction of the city. Being bound to the confines of the US forced me to rely all the more heavily on the work of Russian historians who were accessing the archives to study many of the same issues I hoped to examine. The local history scene around Volgograd is unsurprisingly a lively one. Vital studies on the region and particularly the postwar period have been conducted by Soviet historian Stepan P. Liushin and post-Soviet Russian historians Evgeny V. Orlov, Emma V. Kuzmina, and Aleksandr E. Epifanov.⁷³ There are also numerous scholars still

⁷¹ M. M. Zaguorul’ko, et. al., *Gorodskaiia cherta—Tsaritsyn, Stalingrad, Volgograd* (Volgograd: Izdatel’, 2010), and GAVO, *Stalingradskii gorodskoi komitetoborony v gody Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny, dok. i materialy* (Volgograd: Izdatel’, 2007).

⁷² N. T. Morozova and N. D. Monakhova, *Putevoditel’ po Volgogradu*, (Volgograd: Knizhnoe izdatel’stvo, 1966).

⁷³ Stepan P. Liushin, *Trudovoi podvig Volgogradtsev: Istoriia ocherk vosstanovleniia i razvitiia goroda-geroiia. 1943-1962* (Volgograd, Kn. Izd-vo, 1963), Evgeny V. Orlov, *Istoriia rodnogo kraia: Volgogradskii region, 1589-2007*

conducting new research in GAVO on various dedicated topics related to the reconstruction era publishing in Russian academic journals. In 2018 the city celebrated the 75-year anniversary of the Battle, which also seems to have generated a significant uptick in scholarly interest in the city's history. The work of these scholars has provided additional insights into the archival documentation that I was not able to access firsthand during my research.

As mentioned previously, however, one source pool that I am lacking in my study would be any sources that could look at the lived memory from a subjective perspective. Memoirs, diaries, and oral histories were ultimately sources I could not collect for this study, and their absence is sorely noted. While this does not mean that the voice of the residents of the city is entirely absent from the work, as we shall see, during de-Stalinization the newspaper itself became a prominent public forum where their perspectives could be shared. This necessitates further explanation of how the use of *Stalingradskaia/Volgogradskaia pravda* as a medium has shaped my analysis.

First and foremost, as the party press organ, the content of the newspaper served to promote the political initiatives of the communist party and was ultimately a vehicle for agitational propaganda directed at the city's residents.⁷⁴ National serialized stories are published alongside local news, which itself is presented in a way to promote the party's objectives. While I recognize *Stalingradskaia/Volgogradskaia pravda* remains a biased and non-objective source, it nonetheless provides a medium for historians to explore the underlying discourse the party used to justify itself to the public. Even when we are unable to verify the veracity of the facts or

(Volgograd: Izdatel', 2007), Emma V. Kuzmina, *Vosstonavlenie Stalingrada, 1943-1950* (Volgograd: Izdatel', 2002), and Aleksandr E. Epifanov, *Stalingradskii plen 1942-1956 gody: Nemetske voennnonoplennye v SSSR* (Moscow: Memorial'nyi muzei nemetskikh antifashistov, 1999).

⁷⁴ For a more thorough analysis on the creation of the Soviet press, see Matthew Lenoe, *Closer to the Masses: Stalinist Culture, Social Revolution, and Soviet Newspapers* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004).

whether the stories contained within its pages are a true reflection of the realities of the day, we are still able to see the rhetorical framing through which the ruling party wanted to frame them and shape the ways in which Soviet citizens to understand their world. This is not to depict readers as uncritical subjects, incapable of seeing beyond the party's rhetoric.⁷⁵ Readers undoubtedly saw in their daily lives a very different picture, and in highlighting this disconnect we can recreate an important aspect of Soviet life—the difference between expectations and reality. When referencing the newspaper, I have tried to preserve as much of the party's own language as possible, in order to illustrate to readers how the editors and correspondents of the organ were framing the daily dialogue of Soviet life. Like Kotkin, I argue that the ideological narrative presented by the party through the press is an important aspect of the lived experience of Soviet civilization and how citizens informed their view of the world they inhabited.

As de-Stalinization played out in the city, many of the struggles underpinning Khrushchev's challenge to the status quo are played out and shaped by the way they are framed in the public eye. It is worth noting, as historian of Soviet communications Thomas Remington did in 1981, that Soviet citizens' participation in the public forum of the newspaper greatly increased during de-Stalinization and in fact this participation was invited by the party itself.⁷⁶ By allowing citizens to vocalize their complaints about aspects of Soviet life, the party created a way for the public to buy into its initiatives and see its project as a shared objective, all the while

⁷⁵ See again wider discussions of Soviet "subjectivity," in addition to Kotkin, Pinsky, Young, and Krylova, see Eric Naiman, "On Soviet Subjects and the Scholars Who Make Them," *The Russian Review* 60, no. 3 (2001): 307–15, Ronald Grigor Suny, "On Ideology, Subjectivity, and Modernity: Disparate thoughts about doing Soviet History," *Russian History* 35, no. ½ (2008): 251–58, and Choi Chatterjee and Karen Petrone, "Models of Selfhood and Subjectivity: The Soviet Case in Historical Perspective," *Slavic Review* 67, no. 4 (2008): 967–86.

⁷⁶ Thomas Remington, "The Mass Media and Public Communication in the USSR," *The Journal of Politics* 43, no. 3 (1981): 803–17.

also controlling how critiques could be framed.⁷⁷ As we shall see, the editors of *Stalingradskaia/Volgogradskaia pravda* were very adept at using civilian complaints to push their own objectives, while even at the same time implicitly acknowledging undeniable deficiencies in the Soviet system. These "letters to the editor," appearing alongside stories that exhibit Khrushchev's reforms and prioritization of citizen's well-being, illustrate how the social contract was being renegotiated at this time.⁷⁸

The stories that appeared in the local press form a thread that runs throughout the whole of the work, from the late Stalin period through Khrushchev's premiership. In presenting these stories in their original form, I invite readers to read them critically and with hefty skepticism, just as any resident of the city might have read them for the first time when they were originally published. In doing so, the content of the local press tells its own compelling story about how the values of Soviet society were changing over time through the years of de-Stalinization, as well as helping us better understand how residents of the city were interpreting their world.

The Stalingrad that appears in *Stalingradskaia pravda* (and the Volgograd of *Volgogradskaia pravda*) is part of the imagined construction of the city, a place where the quality of life was increasing by leaps and bounds as the reconstruction efforts picked up pace. Not only did it promote the party's idealized view of what the city was, it helped to preserve a sense of shared identity in a time where travel between various neighborhoods was difficult, and where living conditions varied greatly between one part of the city and the next. It was a

⁷⁷ The process of engaging with the press through the writing of letters to the editor mirrors what Alexei Yurchak argued about voting as a public act in the Soviet Union in *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005). He argued that voting was a public declaration that included a constative element (one's opinion) and a performative element (presenting one's opinion in a socially and politically acceptable manner). Navigating the unspoken rules of engaging in this format was a way in which public actors came to understand their political relationship with the state.

⁷⁸ See Christine Varga-Harris, "Forging Citizenship on the Home Front."

contemporaneous source of what it meant to be *Stalingradtsy/Volgogradtsy*. a core aspect of identity and pride for many residents. The fact that the newspaper is an inherently visual medium, full of pictures, cartoons, and renderings of life, allows us to take part in the same imaginary construction of the city as its residents did during this period.

A Look Ahead

In the six chapters of this dissertation, I have attempted to lay out the story of the shared project of the party and the city's residents to rebuild Stalinist civilization in Stalingrad and how de-Stalinization then reshaped that effort. The chapters fall only somewhat chronologically, with chapters 1 and 2 focusing on the late-Stalinist period, while chapters 3-5 largely explore the period after Stalin's death. Chapter 6, which focuses on Stalin's legacy regarding the war myth, spans this divide.

The first chapter, "From the Ashes," picks up the story of the city immediately following the German surrender, when the effort to reimpose any sense of civilization was akin to medical triage. With the city largely destroyed and depopulated, covered in unspent ordinance and corpses of the fallen, there was little in the way of "normalcy" that could be returned to. Instead, those who sought to rebuild the city had to overcome a shortage of labor and resources, all while trying to stave off the impending catastrophes of a potential public health crisis and famine. While the German armies surrendered at Stalingrad, at least some of them would remain in the area as prison labor for the Gulag destined to rebuild the city they had come to destroy. Though little resembling a modern city could be described at this time, definite hallmarks of Stalinist civilization returned as the party reasserted its control after the chaos of the battle. Labor

initiatives, namely the Cherkasova movement, conscripted civilian participation in the recovery efforts and bore many of the hallmarks of Stalinist policies of the 1930s.

While the destruction of the city meant years and even decades of hardship for its residents, for urban planners tasked to rebuild Stalingrad, the city presented a blank slate on which they could imagine a new ideal of Soviet urbanism. As the rubble was cleared away, plans were made to build a city that was to become a shining beacon of socialist modernity and a monument to the Soviet victory. Chapter 2, “‘Where there is Stalin, there is Victory!’” examines the “hero city” of Stalingrad as it emerged in the imagination of urban planners and explores how the state prioritization of style rather than substance further slowed already laborious reconstruction efforts. In addition, major Stalinist construction projects like the Volga-Don Canal were supposed to further add to the city’s prestige. However, with Stalin’s death in 1953, the city would for the first time be forced to forge a path without the direction of its namesake.

Chapter 3, “De-Stalinizing the Socialist City,” looks at how Khrushchev’s broader reforms, namely his dedication of state resources and political capital to improve the Soviet housing stock became one of the most defining aspects of how life would change in the city around the question of the single-family home. State investments in revamping Soviet agriculture and industry would further drive a boom in the city’s economy, while another massive state project, the Kuibyshev dam and hydroelectric station, would come to define the city’s growth in this period. Yet as the city-wide construction audit of 1959 would show, deficiencies in the Stalinist planned economy continuously hampered the new vision of the socialist city.

This trend is further explored in chapter 4, “De-Stalinizing the Soviet Economy,” which takes a deeper look at how labor relations were being negotiated under Khrushchev in both urban and rural areas. This chapter expands the scope beyond the city, as the major agricultural region

of Stalingrad/Volgograd Oblast was increasingly tied to Khrushchev's objectives of providing greater foodstuffs for Soviet citizens. The chapter also explores education reforms undertaken during this time, as Khrushchev strived to train a new generation of highly specialized Soviet workers who were crucial for the success of his modernized economic vision.

The chapter most focused on the "everyday" of life in the city is Chapter 5, "The People of Stalingrad are Singing." The name for the chapter is borrowed from a musical comedy portraying a group of young people working to rebuild the Stalingrad in the years after the battle, but the "singing" we will explore is instead the explosion of critiques and criticisms that flooded the pages of *Stalingradskaia/Volgogradskaia pravda* as local citizens weighed in on the issues their city faced. As de-Stalinization redefined the way the party interacted with society, residents were encouraged, without the fear of reprisal of state terror, to voice their grievances through carefully controlled channels. By contrasting their experiences with the often-rosy depictions of life's steady improvement in the city, we can see how, despite Khrushchev's reforms, the disconnect between the promises of the party and the lived experience of residents remained far apart through the second decade of the city's reconstruction.

Chapter 6, "De-Stalinizing the War Myth," traces the contemporaneous story of how the war myth around the Battle of Stalingrad was being shaped during this time, and how it in turn was shaping the built environment and lived experience of the city. The chapter examines various forms of memorialization efforts, such as the city's museums, statues, and memorials, as well as how the rituals developed from hosting international visitors helped codify the war myth within the city. As we have already seen in the story of changing the city's name, many parties felt invested in the war myth—the party, the military, civilians, and even opportunistic Stalinist artists all had their own objectives when considering how best to cultivate and preserve the

legend of the battle. The city's identity, so connected to the Battle and yet also Stalin, would be defined and redefined during this time.

Finally, this study will conclude with a discussion of how post-Stalinist civilization fared following the conservative backlash within the party that led to Khrushchev's ouster and the end of the de-Stalinization effort, and how this understanding may open further opportunities to explore the nearly three decades of Soviet civilization that followed. We will also reflect on some of the limits of this approach, as well as explore avenues for future research that might improve the project. I will also attempt to offer reflections on the lessons that might be drawn from the reconstruction effort for other large-scale urban reconstruction projects around the world.

CHAPTER 1

From the Ashes: Rebuilding Stalinist Civilization

Introduction

The surrender of 90,000 Axis soldiers in Stalingrad on February 2, 1943, marked a major turning point in the Second World War and, indeed, the history of the twentieth century. But for thousands around the Soviet Union the meaning of this event had much more personal significance: after nearly 200 days under siege, their home had been liberated. The challenge facing the city's returning denizens and Soviet planning alike was nothing short of rebuilding a lost civilization. For in the winter of 1942-43 on the banks of the Volga, there had been an apocalypse.

Of the city's half-million residents, only a fraction remained. The rest had either been evacuated across the river or killed during the siege.⁷⁹ For months the city had been under constant threat of artillery and aerial bombardments. For the few non-military civilians still living within city limits, the consequences of the months of bombardment and street-to-street combat made the prospect of a return to normalcy practically inconceivable. In the city's central district, not a single square meter of livable space still existed among the red-brick ruins of burned-out structures. Corpses and unexploded munitions littered the streets, and military checkpoints restricted access to many areas. In the years following the battle, the citizens of Stalingrad faced an uphill struggle to regain some semblance of what had been lost. From the rubble a new yet distinctly Stalinist city would emerge.

⁷⁹ It has long been a question of whether Stalin delayed the evacuation of the city, deliberately stranding residents in order to inspire Soviet forces to fight harder in their defense. By the time the evacuation did begin, the German advance on the city and their air and artillery superiority could threaten civilian river crossings, making even that escape treacherous. See Beevor, *Stalingrad*. One aspect of the attacks of the "cult of personality" was a rethinking of Stalin's role as "master strategist" behind the Soviet defense during the war to reflect his hand in the catastrophic Soviet response to the initial invasion, see Polly Jones, *Myth, Memory, Trauma*. This topic will be explored in greater detail in Chapter 6.

This chapter will attempt to lay out the state of the city following the battle. The destruction wrought by the German offensive was extensive, but not universal—while some districts were left uninhabitable, those enclaves that remained intact became the nuclei around which the city could rebuild. Following the German surrender, the city remained under the administration of the Stalingrad Defense Committee working closely with reserve elements of the Red Army. Their initial concern was reestablishing the city as a bridgehead and staging ground to support the Soviet drive westward as they chased the retreating Nazi Wehrmacht back across the Don, focusing on clearing and repairing key factories and shops crucial to the war effort. However, the small number of troops left in reserve could not provide the manpower for such an endeavor. Citizens who had been evacuated across the river had little reason to return. Workers and specialists were brought into the city to begin the clean-up and reconstruction process, and only after months of their extraordinary efforts would the city regain some semblance of the community that had been.

The reconstruction of Stalingrad in many ways resembled earlier Soviet rapid urbanization projects like Magnitogorsk.⁸⁰ Laborers first lived out of temporary, barrack-like housing as they started to clear and reestablish an urban grid. Gradually their efforts allowed for more and more people to return to the city and add their own labor to the reconstruction, compounding the pace of the work. By the end of the first year following the battle, nearly 20% of the city's prewar population had returned, but a long road remained before the former metropolitan hub could be returned to its former glory. This is the story of that initial struggle, of the men and women who returned to restore the city of Stalingrad. It is the story of the post-apocalyptic civilization that emerged on the banks of the Volga in 1943.

⁸⁰ See yet again Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*.

Methodology and Historiography

This chapter will explore how Stalinist civilization reemerged in the immediate months and years following the battle as Stalingrad began its long road to reconstruction. The Battle had done more than just destroy the built environment. It had also disrupted the organization of society and the power of the party state, as citizens and communities were left to navigate survival as best they could.⁸¹ As the Red Army continued its advance west, the reassertion of a Stalinist social structure in its wake was just as imperative to the restoration effort as clearing away the rubble.

The recovery of Stalingrad was a project totalizing in scope. The scale of resources devoted to the cause, as well as the urgency with which it was carried out, left little room for the concerns of individual inhabitants. And yet, thousands of people who returned to the city established new lives among the rubble, and in doing so breathed humanity back into the barren wasteland that had once been a city. The story of Stalingrad after the battle is made up of thousands of individual histories, only a fraction of which can be told. Instead, this chapter seeks to recreate a sense of “everyday” life as it slowly returned to the city; a new “normalcy” that was anything but normal.

For the first year, life in post-apocalyptic Stalingrad was dominated by need and necessity, on a variety of levels—while the state needed the city’s factories once again producing tanks and munitions for the front, residents needed the basic necessities of food and shelter. While the workers in the city were needed more than ever, they in turn also needed schools for

⁸¹ See John Barber and Mark Harrison, *The Soviet Home Front, 1941-1945 : A Social and Economic History of the USSR in World War II* (London ; Longman, 1991), and for a local perspective, Ian Garner, *Stalingrad Lives: Stories of Combat and Survival* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2022).

their children and spaces to begin to rebuild their shattered communities. Where the state could not provide, citizens were forced to look out for their own well-being. The case of one such group of hardworking schoolteachers would begin a labor movement that the party would prove quick to adopt to advance their own interests. Of course, where the voluntary labor of its own citizens would not suffice, the state still relied heavily on the conscripted labor of prisoners, including Axis prisoners of war who had surrendered at the conclusion of the Battle. The Gulag, the system of prison labor camps under the control of the NKVD that had been filled with millions of Soviet citizens during the purges of the 1930s, continued to function, and after the war its inmates were brought closer than ever to the general public.⁸²

In many ways, the story of rebuilding Stalinist civilization at Stalingrad mirrors the process observed by Kotkin of when it was first being constructed in the 1930s. While we will focus more on the shape of the built environment in the following chapter, this will instead be a study of how Stalinist social structures were reasserted and how those cultural demands shaped the greater recovery effort. Much like during Stalin's initial transformation of Soviet society during the five-year plans, the question driving the party's efforts during the immediate reconstruction period was how to maximize the labor contributed by the population and secure the undisputed political primacy of the party. This chapter will establish how Stalinist culture was reestablished in the city in the form of Stalinist labor practices, control of state police, and defining the official culture of Stalingrad.

This exploration of the reconstruction of Stalinist civilization at Stalingrad was informed by a wide variety of sources. While many Western histories of Stalingrad conclude on February 2, 1943, the rebuilding of Stalingrad has been a topic of study for generations of historians in

⁸² See Wilson T. Bell, *Stalin's Gulag at War: Forced Labour, Mass Death, and Soviet Victory in the Second World War* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018).

Russia and the former Soviet Union.⁸³ The rapid restoration of the city so completely decimated by war was a success to be touted, and while these histories provide valuable perspective on the economic recovery of the city, they are rarely concerned with the lived experience of the period and their overarching assessment tends toward triumphalist declarations of success. Archival documents offer more clarity on attempts of the party to reimpose the order of the state, particularly in terms of the meticulous bureaucratic oversight of the camps, and the city's newspaper can show us the heavily propagandized version of reality the party attempted to construct for the city's residents. The perspective of citizens is the hardest to grasp, but luckily, thanks to the recent efforts of local historians, a series of interviews with residents who had lived in the city during this time published in the local history blogosphere offers a valuable look of the lived experience of the earliest days of reconstruction.

As the population in the city grew, the war effort and the need for the city's rapid recovery helped to mobilize the civilian population to provide additional unskilled labor. When civilians cleared debris and restored trafficways in their own neighborhoods (ostensibly to improve their own living conditions), they were working alongside the state to restore the city. For the first year of the reconstruction, civilian efforts went largely unregulated, even while labor brigades were often organized and directed by the party. The individual was constantly called upon to once again sacrifice their time and energy for the collective good, but self-interest also invariably played a part in which tasks citizens chose to commit their labor. As we shall see in the case of the Cherkasova movement—a voluntary labor initiative started by a group of

⁸³ For a small sample of the English-language histories of the Battle of Stalingrad, see Anthony Beevor, *Stalingrad* and Jochen Hellbeck, *Stalingrad*, Alexandra Lohse, *Stalingrad: Prevail until the Bitter End* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2021). For key Russian-language publications on Stalingrad's reconstruction see again Stepan P. Liushin, *Trudovoi podvig Volgogradtsev*, Evgeny V. Orlov, *Istoriia rodnogo kraia*, Emma V. Kuzmina, *Vosstanovleniia Stalingrada, 1943-1950*, and Aleksandr E. Epifanov, *Stalingradskii plen 1942-1956 gody*.

Stalingrad's schoolteachers—the party relies on familiar Stalinist tropes that leverage social inspiration and coercion to elicit increased labor from its citizens. Just as Stakhanovism, the shock labor movement promoted by party propagandists named for the superhuman coal mining efforts of Alexei Stakhanov in 1935, provided the rhetorical framework to demand increased production in the 1930s, the Cherkasova movement fulfilled a similar function, and indeed similarly became a nationwide phenomenon.⁸⁴

In Russian-language scholarship, the Cherkasova movement in Stalingrad has too often been relegated as a footnote to the story of the recovery, with a nod to the importance of the volunteer laborers while ignoring its cultural significance. Soviet historian Stepan Liushin credits the party leadership for inspiring such devotion among its citizens.⁸⁵ In his 1963 state-sponsored study *Trudovi podvig volgogradtsev*, he commends the Cherkasova movement as “one of the brightest manifestations of Soviet patriotism. It expressed the will and readiness of the working people to give all their strength in order to heal the wounds of war.”⁸⁶ However, Liushin is also quick to emphasize the party's role in leading the movement, rather than critically examining the other sociological factors that created such a widespread cultural phenomenon. On the other hand, Russian economic historian Emma Kuzmina emphasizes that the recovery effort was the result of a massive state infusion of capital and resources.⁸⁷ While she credits the movement as being an important labor resource, her analysis does not extend to how that labor was organized. Still, she notes “the emergence and development of the patriotic Cherkasova movement in

⁸⁴ For more on this movement see Lewis H. Siegelbaum, *Stakhanovism and the Politics of Productivity in the USSR, 1935–1941*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988). Stakhanovism in turn took inspiration from the *subbotnik* movement of the 1920s, which was an innovation supported by Lenin himself. For more see William Chase, “Volunteerism, Mobilization, and Coercion, *Subbotniki* 1919–1921” in *Soviet Studies* XLI no. 1 (1989): 111–128.

⁸⁵ Liushin, *Trudovoi podvig volgogradtsev*.

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 20.

⁸⁷ Kuzmina, *Vosstanavlenie Stalingrada, 1943–1950*.

Stalingrad made it possible to attract the masses of the population on a large scale to repair and construction work. The Cherkasova initiative was later picked up in Leningrad, Kiev, Sevastopol, Odessa, Minsk, Kharkov, Smolensk, Rostov, Voronezh and Kursk and turned into a mass national movement for the restoration of the destroyed economy.”⁸⁸ Neither scholar accounts for how the movement transformed from a small local initiative into a city-wide and even nationwide phenomenon. The social and cultural motivators behind the movement must be taken into account to better understand how such a valuable labor source was mobilized.

Elena Trubina, a historian of the Soviet war myth, has argued that the Cherkasova movement is a prime example of “from below” participation that surprised the party, even as they struggled to shape and direct it. In her 2010 essay “The Reconstructed City as Rhetorical Space,” Trubina argues that “the planners wanted to control everything in the process of the city’s redevelopment while these initiatives from below, based on the desperate need to have habitable places, made the approaches to spatial solutions perhaps too divergent.”⁸⁹ Their vision of a deliberately ordered socialist city did not take the immediate concerns of the populace into account, yet the movement was capable of rapidly outpacing their proposals, and the city’s authorities were hard pressed to keep a handle on it. As we shall see, the city administration often found itself reacting to rather than directing the movement, trying desperately to assert some influence over the brigades through the party. By examining the party press in regard to the movement, we can see some of this tension playing out.

However, while the party leaned heavily on social pressure to influence public behavior, it also used Stalinist legal structure to impose strict discipline on its population. Stalinist

⁸⁸ Ibid, 34.

⁸⁹ Elena Trubina, “The Reconstructed City as Rhetorical Space,” in *Remembering, Forgetting, and City Builders*, ed. Tovi Fenster and Haim Yacobi (London: Routledge, 2016), 107-120, 111.

civilization had come to depend on the coercive threat of the camps, and the Soviet planned economy was reliant on the labor they provided. In Stalingrad after the battle, Soviet civilization behind barbed wire was not kept separate, but rather interwoven into the fabric of daily life in the city, and the experience of those who were free and those who were not was hard to separate. In many ways, the Gulag was a separate and yet not entirely distinct part of Soviet society, and during the war further came to look like “a microcosm of the home front.”⁹⁰ Both inside the camps and out, Soviet officials sought to increase production and instill a sense of loyalty and duty to one’s country through targeted political campaigns. The camps were not meant to serve simply as a coercive threat—the party’s leadership thought of them rather as a necessary step in social engineering to weed out and reform groups it perceived as threats within Soviet society.

Finally, despite the crushing need for labor to rebuild the shattered city, during this time we also can see the return of the distinctly Soviet culture. Defining a “civil society” separate from state control can be difficult, but we can examine how Soviet citizens navigated the social framework offered by the party and began to rebuild a sense of community and belonging amidst the ruins of Stalingrad.

Assessing the Damage

During the fighting at Stalingrad, more than 2.9 million bombs of shells and mines were dropped from the air and discharged from the guns and mortars.⁹¹ German air superiority at the outset of the fighting allowed the Luftwaffe to reign destruction over huge swaths of the city. In fact, all of the city’s 126 industrial enterprises were put out of action.⁹² In the main factories

⁹⁰ Stephen A. Barnes, *Death and Redemption: The Gulag and the Shaping of Soviet Society*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

⁹¹ Kuzmina, *Vosstanovleniia stalingrada*, 24.

⁹² Ibid.

alone approximately 850,000 square meters of industrial areas and more than 8630 elements of major machine works were destroyed. The Stalingrad Tractor Factory, recently refurbished for the production of the Soviet Army's T-34 tank, all of the shops for the production of engines and tanks were destroyed, with the total damage estimated at 400 million rubles.⁹³ At the "Red October" Steelworks of the 666 industrial buildings and structures, 546 were completely destroyed. At the "Barricades" plant, almost nothing remained of metallurgical, metalworking and power equipment. Damages between these two plants alone topped 800 million rubles.⁹⁴ Those who only saw these once great factories in the aftermath of the battle stood aghast at the task that lay before them. Upon seeing what remained of the steelworks for the first time, plant engineer S. P. Sorokin remarked "it was some kind of unimaginable metal taiga, a chaos of broken and crumpled structures, girders, roofs and brick rubble, the destroyed walls and pipes. Involuntarily the thought arose that it is easier to build a new factory in some other place."⁹⁵

The destruction of the city naturally had far-reaching repercussions not only in the municipal, but also regional and even national economy. Other major industries experienced wholesale destruction. The silicate and brick plants, which were important suppliers of building materials in the region, were gone. The oil tank farm with a tank capacity of 330 thousand tons was set alight during the battle by German bombs, and the resulting firestorm scorched a huge portion of the city all the way to the banks of the Volga.⁹⁶ The city was also home to timberworks, canning works, tire factories, chemical plants, munition works, and food distribution centers. The amount of damage at the Stalingrad railway junction was 74 million

⁹³ Ibid, 25.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ This incident is vividly dramatized by Vasily Grossman in his war epic of the Battle of Stalingrad, *Life and Fate* (New York: Random House, 1980).

rubles: the near-station facilities, wagons, communications and freight devices were completely disabled. The river port at Stalingrad was completely destroyed, the total damage for which was calculated around 100 million rubles. 700 grain silos, elevators, grain dryers were damaged in the district areas in the districts of the region, and the losses incurred in the grain processing system amounted to more than 97 million rubles. Between the disruption of industrial production and the loss of rail shipping and the Stalingrad port, the total cost to the state was estimated close to 20 billion rubles.⁹⁷

The magnitude of the destruction in Stalingrad was so great that some Soviet officials had the idea of leaving the ruins as a monument to the war, and erecting an entirely new city in a different location.⁹⁸ In the foreign press, one correspondent wrote that “the city cannot be rebuilt and it is easier to build it in a new place.”⁹⁹ Contrary to these opinions, the restoration of Stalingrad as the largest industrial center in the region, the development of the local fuel base, the creation of sustainable crops of grains and potatoes, and the strengthening of railroad and water transport became the central tasks of the resolution adopted by the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR “On the plan for the development of the national economy of the Volga region for 1943-1947.”¹⁰⁰

Yet despite the almost incomprehensible scale of the damage and the staggering prospect of revival, as it became clear in the winter of 1943 that the Germans would be forced to surrender, Soviet command already began working toward laying out the path to recovery. Restorative work began even before the last of the 6th Army surrendered. On December 17, 1942, the city executive committee adopted a resolution toward the restoration of the housing

⁹⁷ Ibid, 27

⁹⁸ Kuzmina, 31.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

and communal services in the Kirov District, a suburban collection of villages south of the city center that had seen less damage during the fighting. In addition, the order was given to halt the evacuation of equipment across the Volga. On January 20-21, 1943, the XI Party Plenum of the Stalingrad Regional Committee was held, where issues of restoring the war-torn economy of the city were considered.¹⁰¹

The battle that had raged through the city's streets left behind a desolate wasteland of tumbled brick, twisted metal, unexploded mines and munitions, and frozen corpses. Even after the Germans surrendered, the vast majority of the city remained unsafe for civilians. Checkpoints around the city restricted access to all but military personnel and specialists trained to deal with and eliminate the hazardous conditions. These were the "first responders" who came to the aid of the city, and what they saw as they sifted through the empty smoke-blackened, bullet scarred buildings would shock them. How could a thriving metropolis have possibly once stood where now there was little left but charred ruins? How could a city of this size, once home to half a million Soviet citizens, possibly recover?

Like medics responding to a patient who has gone into shock, the first step was stabilization. It was imperative to create a safe environment so that workers could return to the ruins to begin the laborious work of clearing the debris and, eventually, building new structures. Even before the final German surrender, Dmitri M. Pigaleva of the Stalingrad city Soviet requested that the Stalingrad Defense Committee provide fifty specialists trained in de-mining, in order to train and lead a city-wide de-mining division. An additional request was sent to V. I. Levkina, the secretary of the city's Komsomol, to recruit an additional 200 able bodied *komsomoltsy* to assist with the cleanup effort. The youths were to be divided into groups along

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 34.

with two to three specialists, who could then be deployed as needed across the city's various administrative districts.¹⁰² Their primary goal was to be the clearing of streets and rail lines, allowing for easier flow of people and resources through the city for future cleanup efforts.

In addition to the work being done on the ground, the battle had wrought havoc on one of the city's most important lifelines—the Volga. While crossings were still able to be made through smaller boats, the wreckage of countless scuttled wrecks along the riverbed had created hazardous conditions for larger ferries and particularly shipping barges that could deliver critical aid to the city. In addition, the city's original port in the Krasnoarmeisk ("Red Army") region had been obliterated by the fires started in August 1942 when the oil tanks near the banks had been set alight by German artillery. The Defense Committee requisitioned the facilities of the nearby Sarepta lumber mill to house the nearly 1,600 workers brought in from the Nizhne-Volzhskii shipping company to begin establishing a new port and clearing debris from the riverbed.¹⁰³

Another major hazard that threatened workers as the spring thaws rapidly approached was the number of corpses that still remained within the city. In addition, the amount of raw sewage and refuse that had spilled into the city as sewer lines were blown apart and shattered had to be addressed before areas could be deemed fit for habitation. While the harsh winter had prevented the worst of decomposition, the sheer number of bodies that needed to be removed before temperatures started to climb meant that clean-up efforts were up against a clock.¹⁰⁴ On February 15, 1943, the Stalingrad Defense Committee ordered that special divisions be formed

¹⁰² Stalingradskii gorodskoi komitet oborony v gody Velikoi Otechestvennoi voiny, dok. i materialy (tom #8), (Volgograd: *Izdatel'*, 2007). Jan. 21-May 24, 1943, GAVO F. 17, Op. 88, doc. #410.

¹⁰³ *Ibid*, doc. #410a.

¹⁰⁴ See Alexander Y. Epifanov and Elena E. Krasnozhenova, "Organizatsiia i provedenie sanitarno-epidemiologicheskikh meropriiatii v stalingrade i ot del'nykh raionakh stalingradskoi oblasti (1942-1943 gg.)", *Vestnik VolGU, Sierra 4, Istoriia. Regionovedenie. Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya* 28, no. 1 (2003): 162-174.

with the express goal of corpse removal. They warned of “the huge number of corpses of enemy soldiers and officers remaining in populated areas and on the former battlefields, as well as the large dirtiness of the whole territory, which poses a serious threat to the spread of acute infectious diseases,” and special detachments should be sent to formerly-German held territory to begin the removal of corpses.¹⁰⁵ Special protocol was laid out for those identified as officers and conscripted soldiers, and after being collected were to be moved outside the city by truck for burial. Under this decree, all corpses were to be cleared out of the city by no later than April 4, 1943.

Separate orders were given for the collection of fallen Red Army soldiers and officers who had fallen in defense of the city: “The bodies of soldiers and commanders of the Red Army, who fell at the defense of Stalingrad, were buried in communal graves, in places established for fraternal memorialization by the city’s Executive Council.”¹⁰⁶ As the Soviet soldiers were interred, the party would organize funeral proceedings that might be attended by any civilians or army personnel still in the area. Many of these mass graves would become the sites for future memorials.

As the removal of corpses progressed, other priorities emerged. Most of the city’s roads needed significant repairs, filling in craters and removing barricades that had been erected during the fighting. Buildings that were structurally unsound would have to be demolished completely. Special detachments were created to oversee the collection of materials still of use from the areas of the city that had recently comprised the battlefield. These divisions were set out to collect and record the “spoils” left behind by the Germans, and everything from armaments to automobiles. While civilians were enlisted to help gather up the trophies from the Soviet victory, the military

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, doc. #414.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, doc. #415.

was tasked with ensuring there would be no destruction or looting of what was now considered state property. Fifteen of the working automobiles recovered were allocated to the Executive Committee of the City Council of Workers' Deputies in order for its members to identify and oversee the efforts in clearing the vast area of the city.¹⁰⁷ As the rubble was cleared away, special attention was paid to collect and set aside scrap metal that might be smelted down and repurposed in future reconstruction efforts.

Finally, it was necessary to recreate some of society's most basic institutions, basically from scratch. The Defense Committee called for the recreation of a local police force, trained and overseen by the NKVD. One of its first tasks was to assist the military in securing the city, protecting it from vandals and looters, as well as tracking down any deserters who might have tried to shirk their duties amid the chaos of the ruined city. By February 18, a new fire chief was appointed and tasked with inspecting all buildings that housed military units, civilian populations, and prisoners of war, establishing protocol for the building of new furnaces, and bringing any malicious offenders of the newly established fire code to justice.¹⁰⁸

All of this activity took place within the span of a few weeks of the German surrender, and the work would continue for weeks and months to come as the most basic efforts to clear the city of hazards and re-impose order to the chaotic ruins slowly bore results. However, this was just the beginning for city planners. The truly hard work was yet to come.

Build a Movement, Build a City: The Cherkasova Movement in Postwar Stalingrad

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

On Tuesday, June 15, 1943, the front page of *Stalingradskaya pravda* ran a letter to the editor, penned by a group of nineteen women led by one A. M. Cherkasova. The letter was called “Our Contribution.” I have chosen to reproduce here in its totality, just as the editors of *Stalingradskaya pravda* did for their readers:

We ask that you publish this letter, so that it might be read by all the inhabitants of our city.

We all work in kindergartens of the Dzerzhinsky district of Stalingrad. Each of us has given much effort to restore and equip our kindergartens, realizing that this is a big and very important matter. But we wanted to do as much for our native city as possible.

Yesterday, one of the kindergarten workers, the chairman of the neighborhood committee, Alexandra Maksimovna Cherkasova, who was awarded the medal “For the Defense of Stalingrad,” submitted a wonderful idea, which we happily supported. Comrade Cherkasova decided to organize a volunteer work brigade that would meet during our free hours and days off.

This proposal was warmly welcomed. The brigade was formed quickly: nineteen veterans, teachers and technical workers of children's institutions, housewives.

And today, on Sunday, refusing to rest, early in the morning our team in full force came to the aid of the builders who are restoring the famous *Dom Pavlova*. Everybody knows this building, everyone read about it in the newspapers and heard how a handful of our glorious fighters led by Guard Sergeant Pavlov heroically defended it from the Germans.

Now this house is being restored. And we decided to help the builders in the restoration work. The builders greeted us joyfully, and we all together amicably got down to business. Today we worked with special energy. The house, its dilapidated walls, wounded by fragments of bombs, shells, mines, and shrapnel, reminded us of how our husbands, fathers, and brothers—the defenders of our city—heroically fought here.

Their bright image, their exploits, their example of bravery and courage inspired us, and we tried to work the way the immortal heroes of Pavlov fought in this house.

Today our team exceeded the daily obligation almost twice over. After work, we gathered for a conversation and, having consulted, we decided: that we would commit to working at *Dom Pavlova* until its full restoration, and that we would name the brigade after Guard Sergeant Pavlov. We will come here every day for any job. We assure that we will continue the glorious traditions of the heroes of Stalingrad.

We invite the teams working on the restoration of the legendary house of Pavlov to take part in socialist competition, and we call all the working people of the city, of all the people of Stalingrad, to follow our example.

The heroic defenders of Stalingrad, defending our city, went ahead, to the west, and proposed to fight with the enemy, not knowing rest, day or night, not sparing their strength and life.

So, we will be worthy, heroic *Stalingradtsy*. We will work toward the restoration of our native city as selflessly as our husbands, fathers and brothers fight against the enemy!

The letter was signed by “A. M. Cherkasova” and eighteen other schoolteachers still living in the city’s central district.¹⁰⁹

In many ways, this letter was not entirely uncommon to find in the pages of *Stalingradskaia pravda*. It was normal to see articles and entreaties dedicated to the workers who were rebuilding the city, urging them forward in their labor and constantly updating the public of each new victory in the realm of construction. On the very day that the schoolteachers’ brigade set out for *Dom Pavlova* in the wee hours of the morning, the paper ran the story that appealed for “More Initiative, Resourcefulness!” It read, “Builders! The whole Soviet people watches closely as you work! The Country awaits your revitalization of our hero cities. More initiative, resourcefulness, more perseverance in achieving your great goal of rebuilding Stalingrad!”¹¹⁰ But to have the initiative be taken up by a group of schoolteachers—rather than dedicated party activists or state employees—was remarkable and inspiring. It was as if the ideal New Soviet Man had sprung from the pages of a Socialist Realist novel and come to life. The actions of Alexandra M. Cherkasova and her comrades would prove to be the spark that would alight a movement in the city and around the country.

This was not the first time Cherkasova had organized her neighbors to help in the restoration of the city. Cherkasova was intimately familiar with the devastation, having served

¹⁰⁹ The letter also carried the signatures of N. M. Kremliaikova, A. F. Semiletova, S. Ia. Kipnis, V. P. Podsinnikova, N. P. Kuz'mina, M. P. Velichkina, L. I. Kozlova, P. I. Kozlova, Z. S. Borozdenko, A. V. Ivolgina, A. N. Kondratenko, M. I. Kuzubova, T. A. Nerezova, A. V. Martynova, V. S. Konobevtseva, E. I. Konobevtseva, Z. S. Kopeikina, T. F. Petrova., “Nash vklad,” *Stalingradskaia pravda*, June 15, 1943, 1.

¹¹⁰ *Stalingradskaia pravda*, June 13, 1943, 1

during the Battle as a nurse with the besieged 62nd Army. She had even helped to build barricades during the street fighting in Dzerzhinsky District (now Central District). When the battle ended and the Red Army advanced West, Cherkasova resolved to stay in Stalingrad to take part in the recovery. Already on February 4, 1943, Alexandra Cherkasova was mobilizing cleanup efforts in the ruined neighborhood, in order to look for and put in order the surviving buildings to house the elderly and children. They carried out the corpses of dead German soldiers, raked bricks and broken glass, stripped paint, made windows, and collected debris that might be used for firewood.¹¹¹ One of the primary tasks facing the people of Stalingrad was the restoration of schools, kindergartens, orphanages and medical institutions, but amidst the harsh realities of the battlefield this was easier said than done. Many of the schools in the district had been converted to hospitals or even morgues during the battle. The kindergarten where Cherkasova worked held classes in a converted dugout not far from the city center.



¹¹¹ Vitaly Korovin, "Cherkasovskoe dvizhenie," *Stalingradskaya pravda*, June 13, 1943.



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Cherkasova and her fellow teachers worked in extremely hazardous conditions, as minefields and unexploded munitions still peppered the city. The women searched among the ruins for supplies—any bowls, kettles, spoons, or even cribs that might survive through the cataclysm. They even helped collect those few traumatized, exhausted, and malnourished children who had been trapped in basements and dugouts until the city was liberated. For months these brave educators and caretakers labored in obscurity. However, when Cherkasova and her comrades decided to make their pilgrimage to the symbolic site of Dom Pavlova, it captured the imagination of the city.

The publishing of their letter would prove only the beginning. Over the next month, thousands of *Stalingradtsy* would follow the example set by the schoolteachers' brigade, devoting their free time to rebuilding their home city. Following the letter's publication, banners and graffiti could be found all across the city, inscribed on ruined structures and burned-out

¹¹² Members of the Cherkasova Brigade outside school (top) and clearing rubble at Dom Pavlova (bottom), "Istoriko-dokumental'naia vystavka "iz istorii cherkasovskogo dvizheniia," Gosudarstvennoe kazennoe uchrezhdenie Volgogradskoi oblasti "Tsentr dokumentatsii noveishei istorii volgogradskoi oblasti" (GKUVO "TsDNIVO"), Accessed May 20, 2024, <https://cdnivo.ru/>

vehicles with the promise “we will revive you, our beloved Stalingrad!”¹¹³ Voluntary labor brigades provided a valuable resource on construction sites—manhours of un-skilled laborers. They cleared away rubble and collected scrap. They unloaded trucks and transported construction materials. They set new bricks in their forms and broke them from their molds by the hundreds of thousands. Skilled laborers devoted their time pulling extra hours in machine shops, repairing equipment by candlelight. The movement sought to mobilize every able-bodied resident in the city, and with their assistance the recovery of the city was exponentially expedited.

But even beyond the physical benefits of the Cherkasova Movement, it was also a massive propaganda win for the party, which was desperate for any way to boost morale. It provided the state with a ready-made narrative of civic duty, self-sacrifice, and socialist spirit. The Cherkasova movement, as it came to be called, grew slowly but steadily. Stories of Cherkasova and other brigades inundated the pages of *Stalingradskaia pravda*. They touted the exploits of exceptionally productive brigades and individuals. Mass workdays were organized, and factories and workshops competed to see who could mobilize more laborers and how many tasks could be completed. In addition, the restoration work was continuously tied to the heroic legacy of the city and the sacrifices made by those who died defending it, as well as those who still fought Hitler’s armies further west. The recovery of Stalingrad became another chapter in the mythos of the city’s epic narrative of struggle and perseverance.

Yet even while the grassroots volunteer labor movement was a huge boon for city administrators desperate for labor, there was also a tension created by such a large civil initiative largely outside of state control. While the blasted landscape of Stalingrad created harsh living

¹¹³ “By our own strength!” *Stalingradskaia pravda*, June 26, 1943, #119.

conditions for the city's actual residents, city and state planners saw a blank canvas, an opportunity to create a truly socialist city akin to other urban projects they had developed under the first two Five-Year Plans.

In reference to the Cherkasova movement and restoration project, Elena Trubina argues that “the planners wanted to control everything in the process of the city's redevelopment while these initiatives from below, based on the desperate need to have habitable places, made the approaches to spatial solutions perhaps too divergent.”¹¹⁴ Their vision of a deliberately ordered socialist city did not take the immediate concerns of the populace into account, yet the movement was capable of rapidly outpacing their proposals, and the city's authorities were hard pressed to keep a handle on it. As we shall see, the city administration often found itself reacting to rather than directing the movement, trying desperately to assert some influence over the brigades through the party. For its part, for the party it was critical to be seen as doing everything to facilitate and lead the movement, as they were still struggling to rebuild the trust of the Soviet people.

The Cherkasova movement occupied a special place in the pages of *Stalingradskaia pravda*, one important to examine in order to study the mechanisms of a unique cultural movement as it grew amidst the rubble of a shaken Stalinist civilization. In many ways it resembled several socialist labor movements that preceded it. While the movement might have begun spontaneously with the actions of a few dedicated civilians, it quickly became a project of the state that sought to mobilize its population in a time of its most desperate need. The editors of *Stalingradskaia pravda* employed a wide variety of rhetorical techniques aimed at increasing the size and efficiency of voluntary labor brigades, which repurposed tropes already familiar to the

¹¹⁴ Elena Trubina, “The Reconstructed City as Rhetorical Space,” 111.

population from other propaganda efforts. The movement became so successful that it was eventually “exported” to other “hero cities” that struggled to rebuild after the decimation brought by the war. The movement sparked by the Cherkasova brigade would become a pan-Soviet phenomenon. By tracing the movement through the pages of the Stalingrad local party organ (which also generated the stories that would soon become nationally syndicated), it is possible to see the evolution of the movement over time, just as those living in the city would have watched it unfold around them. This allows a unique insight into the relationship between the Soviet state and its citizens, and how they both attempted to navigate its complexities. In addition, this study will also attempt to measure the impact of voluntary brigade labor in the restoration of the city.

Inspiration, Incentive, Coercion—The Cherkasova Movement in the Party Press

After the letter was first published, updates and stories centered on “the Cherkasova Brigade” became a subtle staple of *Stalingradskaiia pravda*’s news of the day. On June 16, in the issue directly following the letter’s first appearance, almost every story on the front page in some way referenced or acknowledged the Brigade. The Restoration Bureau of the City Committee issued a statement praising the “patriotic initiative” of the Cherkasova Brigade, and the Executive Committee of the City Soviet expected that “the noble initiative of the brigade of Comrade Cherkasova will receive the warm support of all the working people of Stalingrad.”¹¹⁵

Almost immediately, signs of support could be found all across the city—quite literally, in fact, as banners praising the efforts of the brigade and carrying promises to follow suit were soon hung from walls and across streets. The letter-writers’ initial idea to call themselves “the Pavlov brigade” to honor the famous guardsman gave way to popular rebranding—“The

¹¹⁵ “*Patrioticheskii pochin brigady cherkasovoi*,” in *Stalingradskaiia Pravda*, June 16, 1943, 1.

Cherkasova Brigade” became famous almost overnight. The editors at *Stalingradskaia pravda* heaped praise on Cherkasova as the original organizer of the movement, and her place was cemented among the Pantheon of Stalingrad heroes alongside her war-time counterparts.



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Beyond elevating Cherkasova’s public persona, the newspaper also took an active role in publicizing and advertising the movement’s activities. On June 20, 1943, a Sunday, the front-page headline was a call for the movement’s first “mass Sunday,” a time for all *Stalingradtsy* to turn out to help rebuild their home city. It announced that on this day “thousands of *Stalingradtsy* would head out to construction sites to help the builders in the reconstruction of our city.” It claimed that the Traktorzavod region had managed to mobilize nearly 3,000 people in voluntary labor brigades that would work toward the restoration of plumbing, schools, clubs, and other objectives. 2,100 volunteers from Voroshilov, 1,200 from Red October, 1,000 from Dzerzhinsky, 500 from the central district, and hundreds from the Barricades plant also joined in their local efforts.¹¹⁷ The work for the day was to focus “on communal living objectives”—while major construction projects aimed at the restoration of physical spaces, Cherkasova brigades would

¹¹⁶ Alexandra Cherkasova and Sergeant Yakov Pavlov greet crowds at Dom Pavlova, GKUVU “TsDNIVO” Accessed May 20, 2024, <https://cdnivo.ru/>.

¹¹⁷ *Stalingradskaia pravda*, June 20, 1943, 1.

help restore the infrastructure necessary for communities to reform around shared services, like schools and entertainment halls from which all could benefit.

The movement spread so rapidly that its initial efforts were directed locally, as labor brigades could identify local problems being faced by their own neighborhoods and work to correct them. The movement was essentially spontaneous, and while party organizers were quick to try to emulate Cherkasova's example, the enthusiasm displayed by thousands of residents to give up their time-off to rebuild the city far outpaced the government's ability to direct their efforts. A week later, on June 28th, the city Soviet called a special session with an agenda specifically to address the question of how best to work with the local neighborhood soviets to harness the voluntary brigade labor, which had created an unexpected if extremely welcome labor surplus.

Following mass work days, the pages of the local *Pravda* would be flush with stories and anecdotes designed to praise the exploits of the volunteers and drive even greater turnout in the future. These stories became topics of discussion at party meetings and on factory floors. One of the volunteers of June 20 remarked that it was in this way that they learned of the upcoming workday and decided to join in—"we knew that at the meeting there would be discussion about the letter from comrade Cherkasova. What a wonderful beginning of a patriotic movement to speed up the construction of Stalingrad!" Discussions led to action, as they revealed that many felt a similar calling to do more for their city. Addressing a crowd of volunteers, the Voroshilov region party secretary, M. Odinokov, observed "people are not satisfied with their usual labor. They want to do as much for their home city as possible. And they unite in voluntary labor groups and brigades, go out in their free time from work hours to construction sites and offer their labor for the great task of rebuilding their Hero City. And there is no doubt this patriotic

movement begins in the historic, heroic Stalingrad, as a shining example to her country.”¹¹⁸ For many, the movement was a source of pride, yet another example of Stalingrad’s sacrifice, both to the war effort and to the cause of socialism.

As these stories became a staple of *Stalingradskaia pravda*’s local coverage, several distinct tropes began to form—socialist competition between competing brigades; individuals or groups going above and beyond their production targets for the day; and even stories shaming those who either did not know about the movement or, Lenin forbid, chose not to participate. Each of these stories were a morality play in microcosm, each with a message for their readers, all ultimately focused on furthering the volunteer labor movement.

In many ways, the tropes utilized by the press in the attempt to bolster volunteer turnout mimic those established by Socialist Realist authors of the 1930s.¹¹⁹ Cherkasova, as well as others inspired by her example, became the focus of stories elevating the common Soviet citizen to the realm of heroes. On the other hand, those who intentionally or even unintentionally hindered the movement became unwitting antagonists for the press. This recognition of the individual, whether positive or negative, can be seen as part of a carefully planned campaign to guide Stalingrad’s citizens toward the labor brigades—with feats of extraordinary effort, an individual or brigade might find themselves the hero of their very own story. Conversely, if one chose not to participate, they could find themselves labeled a shirker, a lay-about, or worse—someone exhibiting un-Soviet behavior.

One of the most familiar motivators to brigade workers had been a staple of Soviet productivity initiatives dating back to the first Five-Year Plan: “socialist competition.” As

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ See Jeffrey Brooks, “Socialist Realism in Pravda: Read All about It!” in *Slavic Review* 53, no. 4 (1994): 973–91.

Cherkasova brigades began to form across the city, they were typically organized in one's workplace—workers in the same shop or industry, or even the workers of nearby collective farms, would coordinate to form a new brigade, which would typically bear the name either of their place of work or the name of the enterprising organizer who founded it. Turning out a high volume of volunteers, working extra hours, or grossly exceeding production targets on any given day could lead to a brigade being recognized in the next day's headlines. When two or more brigades showed up to work on the same project, it was expected for them to attempt to outpace one another for the accolade of “most productive,” whether there was an obvious reward for doing so or not.

It should be said too, that a competitive streak was part of the Stalingrad identity—the city shared a passion for its sports teams and athletes, and neighborhood soccer club teams were a point of pride for many. In socialist competition, Stalingradtsy were offered one more chance to win bragging rights in the game of patriotic devotion. These socialist competitions were a favorite subject for the editors of *Stalingradskaia pravda*, glorifying the *Cherkasovtsy* not only for exceeding the competition, but even by taking part in the initiative. On June 30, 1943, readers would learn how on the site of Dom Pavlova, competition had already flared up between rival volunteer brigades who, following Cherkasova, had dedicated their labor to the restoration of the mythical site.

Construction was lively around Dom Pavlova. Not only was the brigade of Cherkasova there, but so were volunteers from the hardware factory, meat plant, gas plant, and other groups behind the Dzerzhinsky region. Alongside Cherkasova's brigade worked the brigades of Moshin and Sadchikova. For several days in a row, they have competed in construction, and every day they have far exceeded the norms. Both brigades of Sadchikova and Moshin have planted banners in their respective construction sites. Near Sadichikova's site, on one wall a slogan is written in bright paint: “Remember—this house will be rebuilt ahead of schedule—by the first of August. Fight to fulfill this obligation as

we fought the enemy invaders!” Next to them, Moshin’s brigade had constructed a large plywood sign that reads “Ushnov killed nineteen Germans here, what have you done?” in bright purple ink. And finally, a banner that all workers here regard as their battle standard—“The brigade of Cherkasova fulfills its commitments 150-200%! And how goes the work of your brigade?” Competition has broken out, and brigade Cherkasova has already begun to lay their walls.¹²⁰

This same formulation will be used in countless other stories covering the movement—two or more groups pitted against one another, working toward the same noble goal. Measuring the reconstruction efforts through the lens of socialist competition was used to highlight the movement’s success stories and applaud the efforts of the most loyal and driven members of the movement.

While stories of socialist competition honored the contributions of large groups, the brigades also provided countless opportunities for human interest pieces around outstanding individuals within their respective brigades. The personal spotlight was reserved for individuals that embodied the ideal Soviet person—selfless, ingenious, and patriotic—much like the traits Cherkasova herself was seen to embody. These individuals, once identified by the press, could become the focus of entire narrative arcs as their efforts drew higher and higher praise, usually ending in the form of some sort of medal or public recognition at the city or even state level.

One of the earliest examples of this can be found in the case of a young railroad worker by the name of Alexei Surin. Though technically still in school, Surin regularly helped out at Kirov station in Bekhetovka, which had become the central hub for moving supplies into the ruined city from the south. Surin was only seventeen but had shown a knack as a mechanic. Soon after the movement began, the Bekhetovka rail workers would form a volunteer brigade to tackle the task of repairing the city’s remaining fleet of railcars, many of which had been badly

¹²⁰ “Vosstanovim rodnoi stalingrad!: konkurentsia razgorayetsya,” *Stalingradskaia pravda*, June 30, 1943, 1.

damaged during the war. Their story was initially covered in June 20's *Stalingradskaja pravda* under the heading "The Patriotic Case of the Railway Men."

Not even a week later, the Kirov railway men were back in the headlines, but with Surin in the spotlight, cast as a "young patriot." Despite his age, Surin regularly joined the other railroad workers in their after-hours work. Unlike many other Cherkasova brigades, this was specialized labor, and even for his age Surin distinguished himself in his expertise and ingenuity. The handsome youngster had caught the eye of the reporter, and before long his name would be familiar to the whole city.¹²¹

In a month, even members of the CPSU Central Committee were aware of young Surin. On July 14, Surin received praise from none other than Lazar Kaganovich, currently serving as the People's Commissar of Soviet Transport. According to *Stalingradskaja pravda*, Kaganovich wrote that "You, comrade Surin, [...] made sound and excellent repairs after hours on the armature and fittings of 5000 railcars and engines, making extensive use of impressive internal resources. Your example is worthy of wide distribution! For your initiative, I bestow you with the title of "honorary railway man" and wish you success in your work."¹²²

The personal spotlight, however, could also be turned upon individuals who failed to live up to expectations. The "morality play" formulation was common in regard to the movement as a warning to those who would shirk their responsibilities to their community or somehow might be unknowingly inhibiting the movement.

Take, for instance, the story that accompanied the issue covering the first "Mass Sunday" called "A Strange Ignorance." In it, the reporter had reached out to the secretary of the Party

¹²¹ "Aleksii Surin-yunyi patriot," *Stalingradskaja pravda*, June 26, 1943, 1.

¹²² Lazar Kaganovich, "Pochetnyi zheleznodorozhnik A. Surin," *Stalingradskaja pravda*, July 14, 1943, 2.

organization at the Bread Factory's #3 plant, one comrade Sergeev, with the question: "How did the plant's staff respond to the patriotic initiative of comrade Cherkasova?" Sergeev was reportedly surprised: "I haven't heard of such a thing!" Investigating further, the reporter found that the factory had yet to organize its own labor brigade to join in the reconstruction efforts. Additionally, not only had no brigade been formed, but not even had there been any meetings or events to discuss the subject. "Nevertheless," the author reports, "workers of the factory know that a people's movement is unfolding in the city toward the swift reconstruction of Stalingrad, and they were impatiently waiting for someone to announce the organization of their own work brigade. It seems that only one among them, comrade Sergeev alone, knew nothing. A strange ignorance!"¹²³

The message of this story is of course two-fold—first, that comrade Sergeev has done his workers a great disservice by not helping them organize a labor brigade. The second message, equally important, is that it is unacceptable to be uninformed about what was happening in the city, a problem that can of course be remedied by reading *Stalingradskaiia pravda* and discussing its contents with your peers. Really, there was no excuse to be uninformed with such a font of information so readily available! To do otherwise was to hinder the movement and, therefore, the reconstruction of the city.

Another critique that made headlines in the paper was the failure to make use of the Cherkasova labor that had become so readily available. When the plenum of the regional Council of People's deputies met on June 26, 1943, the question of organizing volunteer labor was a central topic of debate.¹²⁴ The very next day, two construction site foreman found themselves under scrutiny in a piece titled "The Strange Behavior of Zelenkov and Kulikov." The story

¹²³ "Strannaia neosvedomlennost'," *Stalingradskaiia pravda*, June 20, 1943, 3.

¹²⁴ "Zasedaniye Soveta narodnykh deputatov Stalingradskoi oblasti," *Stalingradskaiia Pravda*, June 26, 1943, 1.

recounts how the two men, after being appointed by the construction site's managers to act as liaisons with a Cherkasova brigade coming to work on their site, fail to show up at the appointed meeting time. As a result, fifty-five *Cherkasovtsy* are left without direction as to where they are needed or what work they should be doing, and so no work can be done. The author is unequivocal in their assessment of the situation: "Zelenkov and Kulikov must bear the responsibility for this lost work of the volunteer brigade."¹²⁵ The two men would undoubtedly need to engage in self-criticism during the next political meeting on their site in order to save face.

The Movement Expands—Major Works & The Cherkasova School

Once it became clear to organizers that the Cherkasova movement had brought them a guaranteed source of labor, the scope of projects utilizing volunteer labor began to expand. If the project was large enough, brigades might even come from neighboring districts to help out. This expansion of the movement was important in creating a sense of community between *Cherkasovtsy*—even more-so than seeing stories in print, seeing sometimes thousands of volunteers all working alongside one another brought the sense that all of Stalingrad was participating in the effort to rebuild the city.

Sometimes this reconnecting of the city was even the explicit goal of the movement. Take for example the restoration of the city's central tramline, which became a major Cherkasova brigade initiative that began in July of 1943. As was mentioned earlier, the destruction of the city's transit infrastructure had made it incredibly difficult to move from district to district in the elongated city. Even the Voroshilov and Dzerzhinsky regions of the city,

¹²⁵ "Strannoe povedenie Zelenkovi i Kulikovoi," *Stalingradskaya pravda*, June 27, 1943, 2.

though geographically close in proximity, are separated by the bed of the old Tsaritsyn River, its steep embankments form a gulch running between the two neighborhoods that is not easy to cross. Volunteer laborers from both regions would be called to aid in restoring a tram line that would once again connect the two neighborhoods, making the city's core much more accessible and navigable. The laying of tram lines was a fairly straightforward, if labor intensive task: the old derelict line would have to be removed, its ties dug up and debris removed, before the new ties, rail, and electrification lines could be put in. It was the perfect task for the Cherkasova brigades to tackle, freeing up specialists on the projects to focus their efforts on the complex switching yards at the far ends. The work in both districts would start simultaneously, each working towards meeting the other in the middle.

On August 6, 1943, *Stalingradskaia pravda* ran a report detailing the project only a few weeks after breaking ground. Along Barricades Street in the Voroshilov district, "every evening Cherkasova brigades arrive, 200-300 people armed with shovels, sledges, and pickaxes." They worked pulling old decaying rail-ties from the ground, laying new ones, and setting the new rails. According to the traffic logs, in the last two weeks volunteers from fifty-nine different shops and institutions had joined in the effort, and between them they had already laid more than 1000 meters of new rail.

Work in Dzerzhinsky district was also greatly enhanced by widespread participation in the movement. Shifts of volunteers came out to work along the route both morning and evening, joining workers on three primary construction sites along Ladozhskaya, Dnestrovskaya and Medveditskaya Streets. Close to 2,600 *Cherkasovtsy* were estimated to have joined the regular work crews over the last few weeks, and with their help "the work of the day is often completed one and a half times over." The largest brigades hailed from the district's executive committee,

workers from the neighborhood distillery, and workers pulling double duty from the First Construction Site USVR. Together they had moved some 4,200 cubic meters of earth and set more than 1300 meters of new track.¹²⁶

Other major public works included laying thousands of meters of new water and sewer lines, rebuilding schools, hospitals, and health clinics, and *montazhaki*—large multi-story apartment complexes that formed the base unit of Soviet state housing. It should be noted, too, that while volunteers were lending their time to these distinctly socialist projects, they were foregoing spending time attempting to improve their own individual situations. It shows a continued belief in the Stalinist mission that had begun before the war, a subjugation of the individual want for the good of the collective need.

That is not to say, however, that there was no incentive for the individual to take part in the movement. In addition to improving conditions in one's own neighborhood, the movement also began to increasingly offer social incentives that could serve as stepping-stones in building one's post-war career. While the initially Cherkasova brigades needed little training to complete the tasks they faced in the immediate aftermath of the battle, as the restoration moved from stabilization to reconstruction there was an increased need for those working on large projects to be knowledgeable of the latest construction methods. As anyone who has worked on a construction site can tell you, a worker who doesn't know what they're doing can be worse for the project than no worker at all. In order that volunteers remained an asset rather than a liability to the city's professional construction workers, in 1944 the party helped open trade schools specifically for the training of *Cherkasovtsy*. Those who completed the programs (which taught skills ranging from bricklaying to welding), were then expected to act as leaders within their

¹²⁶ "Vosstanovim rodnoi stalingrad!," *Stalingradskaiia pravda*, August 6, 1943, 1.

brigades to pass on important methods and oversee that no mistakes were made. Like volunteer labor itself, these schools operated largely outside of regular work hours. However, hundreds of *Cherkasovtsy* would complete this additional training. In 1944 alone, the Cherkasova schools graduated more than three thousand skilled bricklayers, plasterers, carpenters, painters, and workers in other specialties. By the second anniversary of the movement in June 1945, an additional 134 masons, 233 carpenters, 183 plasterers, 140 engineers, and more were trained in Cherkasov schools.¹²⁷



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The additional drive to train and expand an entirely voluntary labor pool illustrates the value with which city and party administrators regarded the movement. These newly minted specialists were meant to raise the efficiency of their brigades, working more closely alongside the hierarchy of the on-site administration of the major construction firms charged with the major rebuilding efforts. The sheer number of people mobilized by the movement posed a unique challenge as well. In order for central planners to best utilize this surplus of labor, they needed to

¹²⁷ "Neutomimyye truzheniki goroda-geroia," *Stalingradskaya pravda*, June 13, 1945.

¹²⁸ *Cherkasovtsy* at work on Mir Street in the city's central district, 1945, GKUVU "TsDNIVO" Accessed May 20, 2024, <https://cdnivo.ru/>.

collect more data. As soon as it became clear that the movement was picking up steam, the party began attempting to observe and catalog the efforts of the *Cherkasovtsy*.

Measuring the Movement—The Cherkasova Ledger

As the ranks of *Cherkasovtsy* swelled throughout June of 1943, the party was hard pressed to keep a handle on the pace and scope of the work being done by volunteers. Even in a society so heavily disrupted by war, a high priority was still placed on work quotas and production targets—a staple of Stalinist state planning and supervision of the populace. In late June, an effort was made to introduce a means to keep tabs on the efforts of individuals and brigades within the movement in the form of a personal ledger, which would ideally become a staple of the movement. The record included entries for hours worked, as well space for common tasks: tons of rubble cleared, bricks formed, and materials unloaded off the constant stream of supply trucks, along with space to record the percentage to which expectations were fulfilled. To launch this new aspect of the movement and encourage Cherkasova brigades to record their efforts, a simultaneous propaganda campaign was launched in the press.

The first appearance of the personal ledger within the pages of *Stalingradskaiia pravda* came on July 7, 1943, with the publication of a speech by local party agitator N. M. Kremlianskii, initially given before a crowd of volunteers at the site of Dom Pavlova. Starting on July 25th, Kremlianskii was embedded within Cherkasova's brigade, working alongside the now famous schoolteachers. Over the course of a ten-day period the work of the brigade was tracked and recorded. At the end of this "*dekada*," Kremlianskii addressed the gathered brigadiers to share the news of their success and call for the practice of recording work data in the specialized ledgers that would soon see widespread distribution.

Kremlianskii began by marking the supposedly historic nature of the event: “Comrades! Today is a significant day in our life – today we received personal ledgers for those who are participating in the great construction of Stalingrad. A personal ledger is a document that gives the right to say, “I am a true patriot of my hero-city—in its beautiful buildings there are bricks laid by my own hands—in its busy neighborhoods, factory buildings, institutes, schools, theaters—there is a particle of my work.” The inspiration for the personal ledger, Kremlianskii intimates, came from the walls of Dom Pavlova itself, where the defenders under Sergeant Pavlov tallied their kills of would-be invaders. The ledger, then, could be viewed as an extension of the war-effort, as part of the same struggle: “when I hold in my hands my personal account as a builder of Stalingrad, I personally feel as if I am taking the baton from a great warrior who left here draped in glory. He has gone on ahead and continues in his holy work of destroying the damned enemy of my beloved motherland.”¹²⁹

The nature of the ledger clearly went beyond the need to accumulate statistics of the movement, however—it had a propagandistic function as well, as like Stakhanovism, each individual and each brigade was expected to exceed expectations. As Kremliansky stresses, “This personal account obliges each of us unceasingly to bring into it the modest and at the same time heroic facts of our own participation and revival of our invincible, glorious city.” He then urges his audience to open their own ledgers, where the first entry had already been filled out for the ten-day period just worked:

Look in your personal accounts. Today we recorded the first entry. It speaks eloquently about how great and effective our help is to builders, how much it will speed up the restoration of Stalingrad. Working one and a half two hours a day outside regular work hours, in a ten-day period we removed 189 tons of different garbage from the walls of this house, having fulfilled the obligation by 147.7

¹²⁹ N. M. Kremlianskii, “Litsevoi schet—schet nashei chesti,” *Stalingradskaia Pravda*, July 7, 1943, #132.

percent. In addition, we unloaded fifty-five tons of building materials from wagons, fulfilling the quota 197 percent. All together, we have worked 411 hours here at Dom Pavlova during these ten days, which were highly appreciated by construction crews.¹³⁰

The ledger initiative also came at an important time, Kremlianskii notes: peak building season would only last for a few scant months in the summer, and the need to maximize production in the broken city was necessary before the next winter. “There is still a lot to do, ahead of the hottest months of the construction season - July, August, September. If we continue to work in the same way, think about how much we will do in that time! But this is the labor of only one brigade, and there are already tens of them, and there is no doubt that there will be hundreds!”¹³¹

Kremlianskii also strove to tie the movement to that of the *Subbotniks* of the 1920s, reminding listeners and readers of Lenin’s remarks on the heroic and historic nature of that socialist labor movement. The Cherkasovtsy had once again, in the time of the Soviet government’s most desperate need, risen to the occasion and continued to prove what socialist initiatives could accomplish.

Just two weeks after Kremlianskii’s speech was published, the first image appeared of Alexandra Cherkasova holding aloft her ledger in the press. The ledger, it was clear, was to become another symbol of the movement, a badge which proved one’s involvement in the heroic struggle to rebuild the city and the country. Like the medals awarded to those who fought and were still fighting on the frontlines to the West, the Cherkasova ledger would come to serve as an unquestionable signifier of one’s contribution to the war effort.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid.



Presumably, it was through the widespread use of these personal ledgers that state statisticians were able to track and compile data about the movement. Though there is little way to verify the authenticity of these numbers, they nonetheless are capable of indicating several trends of the movement through the years. According to the estimates of the city's executive committee using data compiled in 1951: by the end of 1943, nearly 15,000 registered volunteers worked in 821 officially recognized labor brigades within the city, volunteering close to 480,000 man-hours to the restoration of the city. By 1944, the number of brigades had risen; around 250 new brigades were formed, bringing the total number of registered *Cherkasovtsy* to more than 20,000. Collectively, they would add over a million man-hours to the city's labor pool.

Looking Back, Looking Forward—The Cherkasova Movement at the War's End

As time went on, the Cherkasova brigades became less a reflection of sheer need. The Party viewed them as a readily available resource that could be directed at any tasks marginally tied to the recovery effort. For example, in the winter of 1945, the Cherkasova brigade hailing

¹³² Illustration uncredited, St. Oleneinik, L. Pozhelutina, "Cherkasovskim dvizheniem nado rukovodit'!", *Stalingradskaya pravda*, July 23, 1943, 3.

from the “March 8” sewing factory were put to work winterizing the “Krasnaya Astana” plant. They helped repair the main building, the boiler room, and the hothouses where vegetables were grown for workers during the winter.¹³³ Most central region brigades, where many of the largest projects had been undertaken, had exceeded expectations and were now moving on to more diverse projects. After two years of hard work, conditions around the city had improved considerably, and the need for additional volunteer labor had become less urgent.

In June of 1945, on the heels of the joyous news that Berlin had fallen and the war in Europe had ended, the city celebrated the second anniversary of the Cherkasova movement. The marking of the movement’s inception was to become an annual fixture, at least for the readers of *Stalingradskaiia pravda*—it had become an important milestone in the ongoing saga of the city, a historical moment as noteworthy as the important dates of the battle. The paper devoted two pages to the accomplishments and ongoing initiatives of the movement, including a new letter from Cherkasova herself. This anniversary was an important inflection point in the movement’s history, as it was the first time its organizers faced a decline in public participation. The anniversary celebration provided a chance to breathe fresh life into the volunteer movement that had begun to stall.

An image of Cherkasova, by now well familiar to readers, adorned the front page of that Wednesday’s issue, her pose reminiscent of countless other women in socialist realist images, gazing into the bright future. However, it was in retelling the movement’s past that the editors hoped to inspire renewed efforts. The legend of the first Cherkasova brigade had only grown in scope. Its accomplishments in the city, as well as the movement’s spread to other Soviet cities that had been liberated in the past two years, only added to its prestige. In addition, the story of

¹³³ “V centre goroda,” *Stalingradskaiia pravda*, January 7, 1945, 1.

Cherkasova—forever linked to the days of the Battle by the symbolic restoration of *Dom Pavlova*—had taken on new dimensions as part of the grandiose achievement of the ultimate Soviet victory over the fascist invaders that had destroyed the city just two and a half years ago. Yet while the remembrances of the movement’s humble origins reverberated with pride for both home and homeland, it was made abundantly clear to readers that this was no time to rest on one’s laurels.



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By the summer of 1945, the city had undergone a remarkable transformation from the ruin and desolation found in the aftermath of the battle. While the majority of the city remained covered in rubble and dilapidated structures, pockets of civilization were returning to the wasteland. Neighborhoods and communities had begun to re-form around worksites, city squares, and new housing developments. A few young green trees once even once again dotted the city's barren landscapes along its wide boulevards and scattered parks. While there was still a definite shortage of housing, the completion of new buildings being announced in the papers every day. Brand new multi-story housing complexes lined the newly asphalted streets—a symbol of progress achieved—and above them the skyline was cluttered with cranes—a symbol of progress still to come.

¹³⁴ Photo by V. Petinova, *Stalingradskaya pravda*, June 13, 1945, 1.

The volunteer brigades, of course, deserved a fair amount of praise for the speed and success of the city's recovery, which the editors of *Stalingradskaia pravda* were quick to celebrate. A report from the Secretary of the Regional Committee of the CPSU, A. Chuikov published on the front page boasts that "over the past two years, the *Cherkasovtsy* of Stalingrad have made a huge contribution to the revival of their native city. They provided invaluable help in the restoration of many objectives of housing and communal services, schools, children's and medical institutions, as well as cultural and domestic enterprises." According to the party's calculations, the Cherkasova brigades had contributed some 334,211 man-hours since the start of 1944. Their achievements included the restoration of 25 schools, 13 kindergartens, 10 nurseries, 5 hospitals and medical institutions, 8 cultural institutions, 8 worker's clubs, and about 100 residential buildings that were dedicated to housing the families of front-line soldiers. In addition, Cherkasova brigades were highly involved in the city's beautification efforts, planting over 100,000 new trees along the city's streets, boulevards, squares, parks, and gardens.¹³⁵

In addition, as the Red Army steadily liberated other besieged and occupied Soviet cities, the movement was quickly adopted by those cities' returning residents (driven, of course, by party initiatives and similar press campaigns as well). *Stalingradtsy* should be proud of their city's inspiring example: "in Leningrad and Kiev, in Sevastopol and Odessa, Minsk and Kharkov, in Smolensk and Rostov, in Voronezh and Kursk - everywhere and everywhere the noble initiative of *Stalingradtsy* found a lively response."¹³⁶ The movement was ascribed as yet another historical example of the astonishing capacity of the Soviet people to overcome any obstacle, even when faced with total ruin. "It is difficult to overestimate the importance of the Cherkasova movement, which arose on the initiative of the masses. It is one of the bright

¹³⁵ A. Chuianov, "Cherkasovskiy god," June 13, 1945, 2.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

manifestations of patriotism, of the boundless love of our people for their Motherland. It expresses the will and readiness of the working people to give all their strength to follow Comrade Stalin's instructions to heal the wounds inflicted on our war country faster, to heighten the power of our socialist state even higher."¹³⁷

The language of this passage is striking—and marks a subtle inflection in the mythos of the movement. The Cherkasova initiative, a grassroots campaign started by average (even non-party) citizens, was gradually subsumed into the cult of Stalin. While part of this can be understood as part of the general inundation of praise for Stalin that had flooded the Soviet press on the heels of winning the war, it also laid the groundwork for the renewed calls to action. The health of the movement was now a matter of national prestige, as well as necessary for the restoration of the Soviet Union itself.

Chuikov also uses his report to make an appeal that, despite years of unrelenting labor, the *Cherkasovtsy* could not afford to succumb to exhaustion.

Today marks the second anniversary of the Cherkasova movement, and we must say: do not be complacent about what has been done, persistently and resolutely overcoming difficulties, but instead move on and on, multiply the ranks of volunteer builders, raise the banner of the Cherkasova movement higher and higher!¹³⁸

However, Chuikov does note that there are signs that the movement was losing momentum in the city, but he does not place the blame for this on the citizens of Stalingrad. Rather, the secretary reprimands his own party for failing to properly produce sufficient opportunities for the involvement of the public and poor cooperation with the city's construction industries. His report

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

identifies a lack of creativity and mismanagement of brigade resources as to blame for the current lack of enthusiasm among the city's residents and volunteer brigade workers:

In some places sometimes there are complications in the labor efficiency of *Cherkasovtsy*, due to the fact that at present the base for deploying the Cherkasova movement is allegedly insufficient. They indicate that now we have entered the stage of new capital construction, mistakenly believing that the Cherkasova movement is inherent only in the initial period of the city's restoration. Of course, such an approach to organizing the Cherkasova movement, at least, is a misunderstanding and absolutely harmful. The Cherkasova movement for the near future (one to two years) should be deployed not only on the basis of participation in the reconstruction work, but also on the basis of preparing new construction in the city, in accordance with the newly approved master plan. The Cherkasova movement should continue to develop widely in such a sector as assistance to the invalids of the Patriotic War and the families of front-line soldiers in their housing.¹³⁹

Representing the official party position, Chuikov walks a fine line with his language: the calls for continued volunteer labor efforts are tied to the city's new five-year development plan, but rather than emphasize the assistance these brigades would be lending the state to accomplish its goals, they instead try to pivot to how they might help the families of veterans and those wounded in the war. This calculation tacitly implies an understanding of their readership—helping the state achieve its goals on one's day off does not hold the same patriotic weight as volunteering one's time and labor to assist those who helped hold the city and win the war.

In the same vein, the editors call on party organizers and district committees to find projects that will engage their Cherkasova brigades: projects with set goals that might yield tangible results. For example, they point to the workers of the Dzerzhinsky district who showed remarkable initiative to restore water to their neighborhood. The volunteers undertook to restore the pipeline from Mamayev Kurgan to Sibir-gory (Siberia Mountain, referring to the rise near the

¹³⁹ Ibid.

Volgograd 1 train station), as well as to clean up and fix up 336 wells and water dispensers along its path. This project was clearly inherently valuable to the people of the neighborhood, as the city's plumbing infrastructure had been significantly disrupted by the battle and getting clean water remained a difficult task for many residents of the city. If those directing the Cherkasova brigades hoped to improve turnout, it was necessary for them to show ingenuity in recognizing the most pressing tasks that had the potential to improve the lives of those living in their district (as opposed to say, the most pressing objectives of the city's planners who were overly focused on the macro picture).

This renewed participation drive had mixed results: while rebuilding the city and maintaining the connection of the movement to the legacy of the battle remained a high priority for many, the movement would struggle to maintain momentum among an exhausted populace. While the number of brigades grew for a second year in 1945, this would prove a peak before a period of relative downturn. In 1947, even with 1435 labor brigades operating with 27,000 members, only an estimated 54,300 additional man-hours were worked. The reason for this downturn is unclear and deserves further exploration. However, in 1948 the movement would manage to post a banner year, with over 5,000 brigades formed, encompassing the efforts of more than 86,000 *Cherkasovtsy*! While it is also unclear what led to this renewed interest in the movement, the combined efforts of the 1948 movement amounted to over 3 million labor-hours worked in Stalingrad alone. 1949 and 1950 saw similar figures, and as of July 1950 it was estimated that 12,383,622 man-hours had been volunteered by labor brigadiers in just seven years.¹⁴⁰

¹⁴⁰ "Spravka Stalingradskogo gorispolkoma o cherkasovskom dvizhenie v gorod Stalingrade, 1951." GAVO: f. "Volgogradskii gorodskoi komitet KP RSFSR."

Reassertion of the Stalinist State

Coercion remained a fundamental part of life in Stalingrad and Soviet law and order returned to the city. During the battle it was almost impossible for party authorities to impose the strict ideological order the population had been conditioned to by the years of purges and terror. In *Life and Fate*, Vassily Grossman plays out this phenomenon in the story of a commissar sent into “*dom Pavlova*,” the nearly entirely encircled building where one Soviet regiment heroically refused to yield. Among the unit, the men talked freely of their political opinions of the Soviet top brass, Stalin, the state and the party, and openly scoffed at the commissar’s attempts to remind them to do otherwise.¹⁴¹ Though anecdotal, Grossman captures the anxiety of the party as it felt it was losing its place in society. As the front moved westward, the Soviet state flowed back into the vacuum to reassert its authority.

As civilization reemerged at Stalingrad, so too did the power of the local gendarmerie. In a city on the verge of starvation, most crimes in the city were in some way linked to the procurement of food. Large families, or those with many children, elderly, or infirm family members, simply could not make it through the winters on their bread card rations limited to only 250 grams per day, even if they were able to keep a garden throughout the growing season. People went to great lengths to extend their caloric intake—eating the eyes off potatoes, making their own mustard from wild mustard seeds, whatever they could get their hands on.¹⁴²

During the postwar years, Stalingrad hosted a factory workshop school (*Fabrichno-zavodskoe uchilishche*, or FZU), which brought in new laborers from around the countryside for special training so they could enter the workforce of the city’s re-emerging industry. Many of

¹⁴¹ Grossman, *Life and Fate*.

¹⁴² O. Bezrukova, E. Ivanova, E. Ledovskikh, E. Lonshakova, A. Savenkova, “Beketovka v 1943-1947 godakh: cherti zhizni i byta naselenia,” *Volgohist*, November 8, 2010, <https://volgohist.livejournal.com/28847.html>.

these new arrivals, lacking family support structures within the city, were notorious for resorting to theft. Sometimes FZU students would work together—while one distracted a vendor, the others would try to shoplift whatever they could. Some even stole bread ration cards, a particularly egregious crime since the cards could only be renewed on a monthly basis, and the card's previous owner would be forced to go without.¹⁴³

While the battle had disrupted production within the city, the German advance had also thrown the surrounding countryside into chaos as farmers were forced to evacuate. They often returned in greatly fewer numbers, as many were resettled elsewhere or were swallowed up into the city's workforce. Still, access to agricultural products, particularly livestock, meant that collective farmers in the Stalingrad region were slightly better off. Having a cow could provide an extra source of revenue, but in the wartime economy this could only go so far. According to the memoirs of A. N. Fedorushkina, on the black market, a liter of milk cost around thirty rubles, but a loaf of bread cost nearly 200. The black market was a survival strategy for many, but speculation was still a crime under Soviet law, and those who engaged in such transactions risked the ire of the powers that be.

One such case is the story of Seraphima Mikhailovna Shevchenko (born 1930), who was barely a teenager when the battle drew to a close in Stalingrad. She recalls how in the spring of 1943, her family was on the verge of starvation. At the insistence of her mother, she and a friend trekked around twenty-five kilometers to the nearby collective farm of Tsybino. Winter snows had covered overtop the stubble that remained of last year's harvest, and some of the fields remained untouched by the war, preserving scant amounts of grain shake leftover from when the wheat was cut. They filled pails with the scavenged grain and made the trip home with their

¹⁴³ Ibid.

heavy burden. The whole trip took nearly two days. By the time they returned Seraphima's body ached, her feet covered with bloody blisters. Her mother rejoiced, as even this scant supplement would go far in sustaining them through to the summer. However, not long after her return, the local police appeared on their doorstep.

She was led away to the courthouse located near the Beketovka train station without being given so much as enough time to treat her mangled feet. When the judge asked her why she had made such a difficult trip just to violate the law, she responded, "What should I do? My father is at the front, we are a big family, and there is not enough to feed them, so I had to go after the grain." Initially the judge imposed a fine, but she explained there was no way for her family to pay it, since they were destitute. Instead, they reached a settlement where Seraphima would be sentenced to three months hard labor. At first she was happy, thinking this meant she would be allowed to go home. It was only later she realized that she would be imprisoned while the sentence was carried out. She was taken to the Stalingrad city prison, situated in the city center. Her selfless trek to gather food for her family probably saved them, yet it had violated Soviet legal codes that had been put in place long before the war began, making her a criminal in the eyes of the state. By her reckoning, such cases were not unique. Serafima Mikhailovna recalls the collective farmer sitting with her, who took a kilogram of grain from the collective farm's stores for her children, only to receive eight years for it.¹⁴⁴

Over time, however, it was also clear that ideological controls were to be once again strictly enforced, and that denunciation could come from anywhere. Those who lived in Beketovka after the battle remember having to police their own speech. "Even in conversations among themselves, people avoided discussing political issues. They did not tell jokes." Galina

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

Nikolaevna Ivakina, recalls one incident of how a small company of students who knew each other closely went for a picnic on the banks of the Volga. Picking up to head back, one of the young men threw a newspaper in the Volga that had printed on it a portrait of Stalin, in which he brought salted fish. He quipped, "You've eaten salty food, now you need something to drink!" Soon he was arrested for anti-Soviet agitation. While it is possible these incidents were not directly related and his arrest was due to other matters, it is clear that these events were linked in Ivankina's memory. There was a near omnipresent anxiety about speaking openly, even around people you trust—a hallmark of Stalinist society.

Stalinist Civilization behind Barbed Wire

Even while the battle raged through the streets of Stalingrad, another hallmark of Stalinist civilization lived on in the surrounding countryside. The main labor camp administration, the Gulag, maintained six camps in the Stalingrad oblast throughout the war, three of which were situated near the city.¹⁴⁵ Their continued presence constituted a holdover of the Stalinist society that had existed before, and would persist as a fundamental aspect of the post-war order—the ever close yet separate world of the labor camp. The camps that had swelled with prisoners in the years of the terror had emptied significantly during the war, as many saw their sentences commuted in return for their service at the front. By some estimates, the 2.3 million that made up the population of the camps would be nearly halved by July 1944, through both mass release and an increased mortality rate as supplies were increasingly diverted elsewhere.¹⁴⁶ Still, as the front

¹⁴⁵ GARF, f. 247, d. 1463, l. 14.

¹⁴⁶ Stephen Barnes, "All for the Front! All for Victory," 242.

moved ever westward and the Soviet home front became more secure, these camps would once again grow as Soviet law identified a new wave of anti-Soviet agitators, speculators, and filchers.

During the war, Gulag labor became increasingly tied to the narrative of sacrifice for the state in its time of need. Though they had been labeled anti-Soviet elements, prisoners could prove their progress toward rehabilitation by fulfilling and over-fulfilling their work quotas. The slogan of “All for the Front! All for Victory!” was the call that went out to both camp supervisors and inmates alike. While many tenets of the party’s insistence on ideological conditioning were already present in most camps—“red corners” existed in most barracks or mess halls. These efforts were formalized with the issuance of NKVD order #0161 in 1940, which greatly expanded and specialized the types of “mass cultural educational work” within the camps. This order directed camp authorities to educate prisoners to the beneficial work the party was doing and the principles of “socialist competition” and Stakhanovism, and to organize schools, clubs, and even libraries dedicated to teaching prisoners communist ideology. The order even established departments within the camp administration and positions devoted to the implementation of these new standards.¹⁴⁷ The order was sweeping and ambitious with its scope—Soviet authorities sought to completely revamp (and strictly control) the camp experience.

In 1943, with the circulation of NKVD order #0177, the work of the political departments within the Gulag was greatly expanded. The order tasked camp politicians to not only expose inmates to communist ideology, but to actively increase the productivity of inmate labor. Proper mobilization would increase performance relative to production plans, raise the productivity of

¹⁴⁷ Ilya A. Kolomeyskiy, “The Cultural-Education Work in the Camps of the Gulag of the NKVD during the Great Domestic War (on the Example of the CHELYABLAG)” in *Journal of Siberian Federal University; Humanities and Social Science* 2 (2009), 200-208.

man-hours, and reduce the amount of *otkazniki* (or “refuseniks”) who shirked their duties.¹⁴⁸ Such importance was placed on carrying out this sweeping charge that delegations of camp authorities were summoned to Moscow for a conference in July of 1943. Here they attended seminars to learn how the order would affect their existing work and discussed possible strategies for its implementation. The role of the political officer was to become much more hands on. Once attached to a work brigade, political officers had a number of tools at their disposal to entice their charges—chiefly ration incentives for making work quotas or attending political events. Political workers could elevate and even form special work units of prisoners who actively supported the party line among their fellow inmates (though extra care must be taken to screen these candidates for possible wreckers or anti-Soviet agitators). Showing promise in one’s production output and political education could gain a prisoner a letter of commendation for their file, usually a sure ticket to an early release into the ranks of the Red Army.¹⁴⁹

Inmates in the camps around Stalingrad had a daunting task ahead of them. Like their civilian counterparts called up for *subbotniks*, Gulag labor would be used to start to clear away the rubble of old Stalingrad so the rebuilding process could begin. To earn their daily bread, work crews would undertake the back-breaking labor of removing the thousands of tons of rubble needed to be cleared from the streets. Still, if one could work and follow the prescribed motions, one could still earn a decent ration. Between the increase of political agitation within the camps and the extremely harsh conditions for those living outside the barbed wire, the difference between life in the two halves of Stalinist civilization were increasingly difficult to distinguish during the war years.

¹⁴⁸ Kolomeyskiy, 204.

¹⁴⁹ GARF, f. 245, d. 1447, l. 52-53

Prisoners of War

There was another substantial group that made up the population of Stalingrad in the aftermath of the battle, separate from both Soviet civilians and those interned in the Gulag. When the German 6th Army surrendered, suddenly Soviet authorities faced the question of what to do with the nearly 92,000 prisoners of war, including 2,500 officers and twenty-four generals. Though mostly German, there were also regiments of Italian, Romanian, Hungarian, Czechs, Poles, and Austrian troops deployed with the Nazi's attacking force. Already before January 26, 1943, the deputy commander of the Don front, Rear Lieutenant-General Sovetnikov, ordered the chief of the rear of the 64th Army to immediately begin organizing a front-line camp for prisoners of war near the village of Beketovka.¹⁵⁰ It was here that the captured General Paulus would be held and debriefed. While he initially refused to cooperate with his captors, he later would openly critique Hitler and the Nazi regime. Eventually he would be sent to Nuremberg to serve as a witness for the prosecution.

The majority of those who were captured were driven across the steppe to the East toward camps farther from the front in a forced march where many would die of exposure or starvation. Several thousand would remain behind, relatively lucky compared to their fellows, though not by much. Three special camps were established to house prisoners of war in Stalingrad. The most infamous of these was camp #108, situated near StalGRES, where nearly 10,000 of the *voennoplennyye* (prisoners of war) captured at Stalingrad were concentrated.

¹⁵⁰ Bezrukova et. al., "Beketovka v 1943-1947 godakh."

According to the memories of Beketovka residents, prisoners of war "were very young, almost children."¹⁵¹

Those who remained in Stalingrad, though saved from the horrors of the march east, still faced a dire situation. The Soviet encirclement in the previous November meant that the fascist troops spent the winter cut off from their supply lines. By the time the final surrender came through, most were severely malnourished and partly frostbitten. According to camp records, each POW was to receive a ration of 600 grams of bread and an additional 40 g. of meat and 120 g. of potatoes or vegetables. In reality this was impossible to comply with—even if such amounts of food in the district did exist, they were hardly being prioritized toward the city's one-time besiegers. These norms, too, were set for those who were fulfilling their production targets—like Gulag inmates, the task at hand was a heavy one, the clearing of rubble from the destroyed city, a task few of the half-starved soldiers were in any condition to attempt. As a result, mortality rates among prisoners were extremely high. The dead were piled and buried in mass graves on the hill north of the town.

Despite the poor health of the POWs at Stalingrad, the city's Defense Committee, hard pressed to find the manpower to get the city's factories up and running again, saw these inmates as a potential labor pool. A decree issued on February 18, 1943, called for the conscription of nearly half of those captured at Stalingrad to be allocated to various factories and trusts. The largest amount of prisoners were sent to the "Red October" steelworks and the Stalingrad Tractor Factory (10,000 men to apiece), followed by the Barrikady factory, machine shop 91 (which had been designated for the repair of Soviet tanks), and two special construction works overseen by the NKVD (5,000 men apiece). 2,050 men would be sent to StalGRES, an additional 1,500 to

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

build roads, and hundreds more spread out among logging firms, oil fields, the city's tram-works, and the coveted job of working in the local bread factory. All told, the request calls for the conscription of 45,300 prisoners of war, which "the heads of these enterprises will immediately arrange acceptance and provide work with the maximum use of prisoners of war for reconstruction work."¹⁵² Though it is unclear if the camp administration was able to complete these requests in full, this decree illustrates how prisoner of war labor was coveted to help in the city's recovery.

As the war continued and more and more divisions of the invading army were forced to surrender, the stock of prisoners of war at the camp would be replenished. According to estimates, between the organization of camp #108 in 1943 and the start of 1949, 135,857 prisoners of war passed through the camp, of which 96,103 were transferred to other camps, 28,855 died there, and 10,899 were eventually repatriated.¹⁵³

There remains today a discussion of whether the mass mortality of Axis POWs in the Soviet Union constituted a war crime in violation of the Geneva Convention. Indeed, most estimates of those who would survive until repatriation was completed in 1951 fell somewhere between five to ten percent --a mortality rate that, at least to the passing observer, seems unbelievably steep if not for murderous intent by Soviet authorities. However, it has to be said that the refusal of the German high command to surrender at Stalingrad until months after they had been effectively defeated by the success of Operation Uranus greatly decreased the probability of their troops' survival in detention, as well as the effects of the fascist invasion on Soviet supply and distribution networks. Operation Barbarossa effectively crippled the harvest capabilities of one of the most agriculturally productive regions of Europe, driving off or killing

¹⁵² Decrees of the Stalingrad Defense Committee (tom #8): Jan. 21-May 24, 1943, GAVO f. 17, op. 88, d. 422.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

thousands of farmers that would have been supplying the grain for the intended 600g daily allotment of bread for prisoners of war. The Nazi high command had until this point been all too effective in their total war against the Soviet Union, believing their supposed racial superiority and hitherto unbeaten military would inevitably deliver them victory. In many ways, they dug their soldier's own graves.

It should be noted too, that like the prisoners of the Gulag, the state still actively attempted to rehabilitate prisoners of war, a concern that would seem superfluous if the sole intent of their incarceration was their destruction. Political workers dispatched to prisoner of war camps were tasked with spreading anti-fascist propaganda, teaching the fundamentals of socialist labor, and incentivizing prisoners to denounce their former leaders and proselytize to their cohorts. These men were at least given the chance to recant the ideology that had delivered them into their dire predicament. In addition, 45,000 of them would be made to atone by laboring to rebuild the cities they had helped to destroy—Stalingrad, Leningrad, Sevastopol, Kursk, and other “hero cities” all employed prisoner of war labor to clear the rubble, rebuild infrastructure, and restart the country's manufacturing capacity.¹⁵⁴

Like their counterparts in the Gulag, prisoners of war interned around Stalingrad could gain additional privileges for their attendance in special anti-fascist schools, attending lectures on the achievements of Soviet society and culture, and meeting planned production quotas. Libraries were formed with collections similar to those in the Gulag, with socialist realist literature and political treatises of Lenin and Stalin, published in German and other languages. Over five million books were distributed as part of this undertaking.¹⁵⁵ Camps were also provided with

¹⁵⁴ “Dokladnaya zapiska S. N. Kruglova chlenam pravitel'stva SSSR ob ignotakh raboty MVD s voennoplennymi i internirovannymi” (Moscow, July 24, 1950) in M. M. Zaguorul'ko, *Voennoplennye v SSSR, 1939-1956*, (Moscow: Logos, 2002), 915-20.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

radios, and often newspapers that carried news of the war (chiefly Soviet victories) and of the state of the prisoners' home countries in the years that followed. Soviet films were screened to present the complex ideas of the revolution in a more relatable medium. For those housed in nearby locales, excursions were even planned to familiarize prisoners of war with Soviet collective farms, museums, and theaters to "emphasize the advantages of the Soviet state over capitalist countries, showing the political, industrial, and cultural success of the USSR and the role of the Soviet Union in the worldwide struggle in the interests of all nations." In addition, they were incentivized to voice these sympathies to loved ones back home, and even join their home countries' communist parties should they so choose (with the incentive of rations, preferential treatment, and commendation for repatriation of course).¹⁵⁶ Accompanying this push for the ideological rehabilitation of prisoners was the severe crackdown on any whiff of anti-Soviet activity among prisoners of war. Those suspected of wrecking, agitation, and attempts to escape were dealt with harshly—at least 8,000 prisoners of war would be convicted as agents of foreign powers in opposition to the Soviet Union and executed.¹⁵⁷

Still, the people of Beketovka, who lived in extremely close proximity to prisoners of war captured from the sixth army, viewed them with a mixture of contempt and pity. The prisoners performed crucial labor in the city—they worked in STALgres and built roads, returning electricity and connectivity to the isolated city. P. G. Chebotarev remembers the youth of most of the *voennoplennye*, made all the more pitiful by the sorry state of their clothes and malnourished forms. He asserts that people of the village would sometimes give crusts of bread to prisoners in transit to and from the camps, and (almost unbelievably under such conditions), that the

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, 918.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, 919.

prisoners would sometimes give something back.¹⁵⁸ With such harsh conditions imposed by the day-to-day realities both inside and outside the camps, shared commiseration formed something of an understanding between erstwhile enemies.

Not all the people of Beketovka displayed such short memories or easy forgiveness. All had lost someone or something in the war. Some had lost their entire families. Zinaida Petrovna Taranenکو, at that time a student at the medical institute, recalls that the hostel of the institute and the prisoner of war camp were located in the same barrack town, divided by barbed wire into the student and camp zones. According to her, "the prisoners of war were hated. They had better supplies, and many [villagers] had relatives in the war, some who had died, and the city was badly damaged by the Germans. It used to happen that in the evening we would go to the fence and shout: 'Hans, come here!,' He approached the wire at the gate of the camp. And then you start to scold him with all your heart. And he silently listens. He approached, because he was just pleased to look at the young girls."¹⁵⁹

Such proximity between the prisoners in the camps and the general population carried another difficulty that proved dangerous in Stalingrad. While sanitary conditions were a primary objective of the camp administration, with such poor diets, weakened constitutions, and the lack of proper medical attention, the prisoner population was prone to disease. A cholera outbreak in 1943 is believed to have spread from the city's central prison. Disease also spread through the almost constant transfer of all manner of goods between owners, such as blankets and overcoats confiscated from prisoners of war. Sexually transmitted diseases also became a real concern among the city's population following the battle. While the newly opened medical institute in

¹⁵⁸ Bezrukova et. al., "Beketovka v 1943-1947 godakh."

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

Beketovka was training much-needed new medical personnel, it would be some time before public health was fully brought under control in Stalingrad.

Even as the Stalinist state relied heavily on forced prisoner labor, the work of these conscripted brigades was notoriously poor. According to historian Zhanna Gaevskaya, “poor organization of work, harsh living conditions, a depressed psychological state of people whose freedom was limited and for whom correspondence was prohibited—all of this affected labor productivity. They were often given less supplies than had been allocated, there was not enough clothing, living quarters were never cleaned, and they were not properly insulated. The canteen and medical units were also in unsatisfactory conditions.”¹⁶⁰ The camp report for the second quarter of 1944 also noted that “since the camp was organized, the special contingent sleeps on bare planks of bunks, which leads to a deterioration in the physical condition of prisoners and an increase in cases of illness.” The poor sanitation in the camps meant that prisoners were especially at risk of gastro-intestinal conditions, such as cholera. In the second half of the year, the camp overseers began measures to try to increase productivity, though mostly in the form of political education initiatives.¹⁶¹ Even as attrition from disease and harsh conditions took their toll on the camps’ population of inmates, they were rapidly replaced with new bodies fresh from the front, though not those of the enemy.

Blurring the Lines

As the Red Army pressed deeper into Nazi-held territories, it continued to liberate its own captured soldiers. Stalin viewed these units as potential spies and traitors, turning them over

¹⁶⁰ Zhanna Gaevskaya, “‘Sotrudniki NKVD opredeliali nashi sud’by’: Uzniki nemetskikh kontslagerei, okruzhennyye i repatrianty na vosstanovlenii Stalingrada,” in *Rodina* no. 10 (1015), October 1, 2015, <https://rodina-history.ru/2015/10/12/rodina-stalingrad.html>

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

to the NKVD for filtration.¹⁶² Those who had passed political review were allowed to be transferred to the state enterprises of Stalingrad. While special camp No. 0108 was disbanded in February 1945, many of the “special battalions” composed of Gulag inmates would be repopulated with Soviet repatriates from abroad as the front moved steadily west. By August of that year, some 7000 of these had been assigned to work in the Stalingrad region under NKVD supervision, and this number continued to grow. Though nominally they were not prisoners, they had little agency in where they were resettled, or what employment they received. In her examination of the question of repatriated Soviets who were used for labor in the Stalingrad region, Zhanna Gaevskaya writes that “Formally, they were guaranteed the preservation of all the rights provided for by the Constitution of the USSR, they could independently choose their place of residence and work. However, in practice, such persons were sent for inspection to the NKVD checkpoints; officers who were in captivity and aroused suspicion were sent to special camps of the NKVD; former POWs of privates and non-commissioned officers of the ages subject to demobilization were released to their homes, and former prisoners of war and civilians of the ages who should have served in the army were enrolled in workers' battalions.”¹⁶³

This process, Gaevskaya notes, was anything but smooth, as the city was hardly prepared for a sudden influx of refugees, even if they were to help with the restoration project. Upon first arriving in the region, these workers were housed in agricultural villages in the region, due to a lack of space to house them within the city itself. According to the resolution of the Stalingrad regional party committee of May 29, 1945, all of them should be “sent to agricultural areas, explaining that this measure was due to economic expediency, as well as the lack of housing in

¹⁶² For more on the experience of Red Army POWs returning to the Soviet Union, see Seth Bernstein, *Return to the Motherland: Displaced Soviets in WWII and the Cold War*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2023).

¹⁶³ Ibid.

the city." Thus, "a large group of townspeople who lived in Stalingrad before the war, after liberation were sent to Rudnyansky, Solodchensky, Gmelinsky, Staropoltavsky and a number of other districts" of the Stalingrad region.¹⁶⁴

As more and more repatriates were assigned to the restoration, it took a separate decree of the Council of People's Commissars on August 22, 1945, ordering the construction trusts of Stalingrad to adequately prepare for their new workers. The resolution prompted a meeting of the heads of the city's construction firms and political organizations. The minutes from the meeting show that the discussion regarding "the practical measures provided for by this decree, and especially in terms of preparing housing for newly arriving workers, is the primary task of not only the trust leadership, but also the party, trade union and Komsomol organizations."¹⁶⁵ To meet the challenge of housing thousands of new workers would take a concerted effort. Komsomol groups would be conscripted to build barracks housing, using traditional incentives of socialist competition to try to fulfill the requisite quotas as quickly as possible. The party in turn would be used to mobilize support for the initiative by using its political agitators and propagandists "to organize a more detailed clarification of this resolution to the workers and employees, mobilizing their attention to over-fulfilling production targets in the socialist competition in honor of 'Victory,'"¹⁶⁶ furthering the theme of tying the restoration of the city to military success, which had already become a common trope in the city's discourse even before the war was won. There were also questions about how the trusts would claim the new workers, with priority given to workers with specialized training going to the relevant firms, as well as what to do with healthy but unspecialized laborers (the timber workers were still in need of

¹⁶⁴ Gaevskaya, "'Sotrudniki NKVD opredeliali nashi sud'by'"

¹⁶⁵ GAVO, F. R-3048 Op. 1 D. 50, l. 53-54.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

healthy bodies to fell trees to meet the massive lumber shortage the construction firms still faced). There was also the matter of setting up meeting spaces for instructional classes for trade workers, and for party propagandists to see to the repatriates' "political education."¹⁶⁷

Following the August 22, 1945, order, *Glastalingradstroi*, the main construction trust in charge of reconstruction in the city, would take on nearly 12,000 of these workers. Some 4,000 repatriates would be allotted to repopulate the *Trakotorstroi* "special construction and installation department" (*Spetsial'noye stroitel'no-montazhnoye upravleniye*, or OMSU) trusts #14 (2000) and #25 (2000).¹⁶⁸ According to the reports uncovered by Gaevskaya, these repatriated laborers were used in many different construction projects in a variety of trades: "they restored residential apartments, the central water supply system, garages, schools, kindergartens, institutes, cinemas, a children's tuberculosis sanatorium, and other facilities. They worked as carpenters, bricklayers, carpenters, plasterers, handymen, tailors, and more often than not in their specialty."¹⁶⁹

However, the low productivity among these repatriate labor crews often caused frustration for the bosses of the construction trusts. It was hardly surprising, given that the conditions these workers faced were hardly better than those faced by German prisoners of war. While they were not interned, their living quarters that had been hastily constructed in the months before their arrival were basically indistinguishable from the conditions seen inside the NKVD-controlled camps. A report by K. A. Ukhanov, the head of OSMU for the Stalingrad regional party committee, revealed the conditions these workers faced in the winter of 1944-45." He states that "in the worker's hostels there is dirt, the air is cold and stale, two- and three-tiered bunks have been made from fresh-cut timber that is still damp, there is no bedding, and

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Gaevskaya, "Sotrudniki NKVD opredeliali nashi sud'by."

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

everything is lice infested. There is no potable water outside the canteens, and the dormitories are not provided with washbasins... there is a shortage of food, and no medicine.”¹⁷⁰ Though the first winter in Stalingrad would have been dire in the uninsulated barracks, the summer would have brought little relief with sweltering temperatures and a higher propensity for disease in the squalid conditions. Morale was further lowered by the fact that their situation was involuntary. One repatriate wrote that “After what we experienced, it seemed to us that our torment was over. It turns out - no. The Motherland accepted us home like an evil stepmother. The NKVD officers determined our destinies, and several times summoned us for interrogations, some people could not stand it and fainted. There was only dirty work for us...”¹⁷¹ Another recalled the abuse suffered at the hands of the NKVD authorities nominally responsible for the repatriates' well-being, “there was great distrust, sometimes even direct accusations that we had somehow betrayed the Motherland. It was a terrible time. After such comments I felt I did not want to live. You could say nothing to protect yourself from such allegations.”¹⁷² Conditions were so bad in the barracks that some even risked their lives trying to flee, though without proper documentation their chances of escape were likely slim.¹⁷³

For those who remained and survived the grueling months of labor and constant NKVD surveillance, those who were deemed politically acceptable were released from the special work brigades and transferred to civilian life in the city. By 1946, some lucky residents could even find more comfortable living space in the newly completed apartment structures. One of the workers from one of these special battalions would recall how he realized Stalingrad was to become his home in a complaint to the Supreme Soviet of the USSR in 1946: “I lived in the

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ GAVO, F. R-3048 Op. 1 D. 50, l. 107.

¹⁷² Gaevskaya, “Sotrudniki NKVD opredeliali nashi sud’by”

¹⁷³ Ibid.

Stavropol Territory ... In 1941 I was drafted into the army, where I was taken prisoner at the front where I was working on the evacuation of factories. After working here for 3 months, the resettlement department issued us the documents and sent them to my place of residence. Then they took the documents from us, enrolled in #85 ORB (special battalion) and sent them to work in the residential building trust in Stalingrad ... After the disbanding of the ORB, the administration of the trust told us that from now on we should consider ourselves *Stalingradtsy*. We were given passports, and assigned to a new trust...” However, after their lives had been upended by the war and years of imprisonment, first at the hands of the Germans and then by their own government, the letter’s writer still clung to hope that they may someday return home. They pleaded their case before the Supreme Soviet looking for adjudication on their case, “I am asking for an explanation, if we give up the place of residence we were assigned, are we still obliged to work in the city of Stalingrad?”¹⁷⁴ As the restoration of the city continued, more and more civilians were able to return, and the number of repatriates required to fill the labor pool declined from 1947-50. Eventually they no longer consisted of the majority of the workforce in Stalingrad.¹⁷⁵

Beketovka—The Nucleus of Renewal

Luckily for those directing the city’s recovery, at least one region of the city, a suburb incorporated in the city’s fifth “Kirov” district, escaped the wholesale destruction. Beketovka served as the base of operations for the 57th and 64th Division of the Red Army in the defense of the city, and while it was bombed during the German’s summer air offensive in 1942 it was hit less severely than the center of the city that bore the brunt of that assault. As a result, when the

¹⁷⁴ GAVO. f. R-4768. op. 2. d. 1, l. 22.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

battle was over Beketovka emerged as the nearest settlement with structures still standing and housed almost all of the city's remaining civilian population. At the end of the battle, it is estimated that only 32,000 of the half-million residents that lived in the city before the fighting began remained in the city. Thirty thousand of these lived in Beketovka.¹⁷⁶ It would soon become the hub around which the rebuilding of the city would be coordinated. It would also come to house the infamous camp #108, where some of the prisoners of war captured in the encirclement would be interned while they were enlisted to clear the rubble from the city they had destroyed. Between the return of refugees to the area and the sudden population boom of fascist prisoners of war, Beketovka would for a time remain the most densely populated region of the city.¹⁷⁷

Beketovka had another inherent advantage during the rebuilding period: it was also home to an important piece of Stalingrad's infrastructure, the State Regional Power Station, known colloquially as StalGRES. Opened in 1930, the plant was designed to supply power for the city's massive tractor factory and steel works facilities, and would continue to operate through the war thanks to rapidly constructed steel shelters that hid and shielded crucial equipment from the Luftwaffe's aerial raids.¹⁷⁸ Returning the station to its maximum output capacity was a high priority for the post-war city authorities, and some of the first refugees to cross back across the river were to be personnel at StalGRES. Meanwhile, elsewhere in the city, the power grid had been virtually obliterated, and some neighborhoods would remain without electricity for years to come. Typically, public institutions were prioritized over private housing, and households were forced to adapt accordingly. The city's residents used wood burning stoves for heating and

¹⁷⁶ Kuzmina, 35.

¹⁷⁷ *Gorodskaya cherta—Tsaritsyn, Stalingrad, Volgograd*, doc. #148.

¹⁷⁸ Bezrukova et. al., "Beketovka v 1943-1947 godakh."

cooking, and firewood in the city became increasingly hard to find, particularly in the winters

In addition to the housing, power, and sewage capabilities of the city being almost entirely compromised, residents in Beketovka faced nearly constant hunger. During the battle even ration card distribution had broken down, and even when it resumed after the fighting, the amount of food the city authorities had access to was hardly enough to go around.¹⁷⁹ Unlike many of their neighbors, the workers at the power station and surrounding factories had access to centralized canteens where they could count on several hot meals a day. Students at Beketovka's newly established medical institute had access to a similar situation, though even these meals left much to be desired. Zinaida Petrovna distinctly remembers "At first there was usually only a thin soup of salted fish, the taste of which I will remember all my life." Still, their situation was objectively better than most. Others had to rely on bread cards that ranged from a mere 250-600 grams a day (depending one's work status), and whatever they could cultivate or forage on their own in the surrounding countryside.¹⁸⁰

Despite the dire circumstances on the ground, however, the local party authorities had ambitious goals to return a semblance of cultural normalcy to the city. First and foremost, amongst their concerns was the reopening of schools and party institutions, like factory clubs and the Komsomol. According to one account, these goals held such priority that they were already being discussed by the plenum of the Stalingrad Regional Committee even before the German surrender. After the encirclement was completed, there was even optimistic talk of reopening schools in the city by the beginning of February 1943.¹⁸¹ In addition, Beketovka would become

¹⁷⁹ For more on Soviet rationing policies during the war, see the collection of essays compiled by Wendy Z. Goldman and Donald Filtzer, eds., *Hunger and War: Food Provisioning in the Soviet Union during World War II*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015).

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

home to some of the first functioning cultural landmarks in the city: libraries (even a regional branch), clubs, two *doma kulturi* (Houses of Culture), museums, and even a medical institute. By November of 1943, the regional library would already be able to boast of a collection holding over 21,000 books. Despite the challenges the city faced during this time, the high priority placed on the restoration of Stalinist cultural institutions reveals the extent to which the party feared it had lost its central place in society among the disruptions of war.

One of the easiest ways to bring culture to the masses in such difficult circumstances remained the mediums of theater and film. On January 21, 1943, the Stalingrad Regional Committee of the Communist Party ordered the installation of seven stationary cinema installations and ten movie projectors in Soviet controlled areas of the city and to conduct courses for the training of projector operators. By March, in Beketovka the Voroshilov rail-workers club would open one of the first permanent cinemas in the city.¹⁸² The party strictly controlled what films would be shown—among the most screened were socialist realist classics “*Chelovek s ruzhem*” (“Man with a Gun”), “*Partinii билет*” (“Party Ticket”), and “*Sel’skaya uchitel’nitsa*” (“The Rural Teacher”). There were also of course many films following the Soviet victory which praised the leadership of Joseph Stalin and exalted the exploits of the Red Army, such as “*Padenie Berlina*” (“The Fall of Berlin”). However, many of those who lived in Beketovka after the battle recall being weary of the constant barrage of propaganda, and that it was the rare screenings of foreign films that tended to draw the biggest crowds. One of the interviewees, Pavel Grigoryevich Chebotarev, recalled that the film that made the biggest impression on him during this period was when he was lucky enough to see one of the classic Hollywood staples, *Tarzan*.¹⁸³

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

While film was a relatively easy way to bring entertainment directly to the masses with so much of the city's cultural infrastructure destroyed, as theaters were rebuilt and companies reestablished, Stalingrad audiences flocked to the theaters to see live actors on the stage. In order to reestablish what had been regarded as a well-developed theater community before the war, the Chairman for the Committee of the Arts under Sovnarkom even pushed to strengthen Stalingrad's regional Gorky Theater corps with talent from top institutions in Moscow and St. Petersburg. In addition to the classics, audiences also had the opportunity to catch the debut of new productions. One new show, a musical comedy performed by the Brigade Theater of Stalingrad, was brought directly to its audiences, performing at factories, construction sites, and military bases within the city in a performance that "breaks down the boundaries between audience and stage."¹⁸⁴ However, as one Beketovka resident recalled, "there were many plays about the war."¹⁸⁵ While this could be seen as a concerted drive by Soviet propagandists to drum up morale for the war effort among the civilian population, it must also be noted that these plays set in war would have provided a common denominator for theater goers from all walks of life. All of Soviet society had been affected by the war in some way, and the hardships endured, and the victories won provided a shared experience around which a powerful collective identity was being formed.

As the reconstruction effort revived more and more institutions across the city, among them sprung up the staples of Soviet community culture. Factory clubs would host dance for young people, where small bands or the rare gramophone would provide the music. While these remained popular, A. N. Fedorushkina recalls that with so much following the war, young people would also gather organically in small groups based around where they lived. Young people

¹⁸⁴ *Stalingradsksaia pravda*, June 23, 1943, 4.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

living on the same street or in the same neighborhood would gather together to play accordion, sing, and dance—a somewhat rebellious alternative to the stuffier and formal affairs hosted by the party-affiliated clubs. A sense of community was rebuilt slowly along as more and more rubble was cleared from the city and the population continued to grow, both in the formal cultural formations favored by the party but also organically among neighbors who shared in both joys and hardship.

In a major departure from Soviet policy from before the war, following the battle the Orthodox Church would reemerge as an organizing element of community life in Stalingrad as it rebuilt. As part of the campaign against the Church in the 1930s, church lands were seized by the state and institutions were closed, demolished, or repurposed—in Stalingrad, the city’s main Kazan Cathedral was closed in 1938 and turned into a grain storehouse.¹⁸⁶ However, in September of 1943, several heads of the Church struck a deal with Stalin himself to relax state persecution.¹⁸⁷ The Church would be allowed to operate once more, both in an effort to stir patriotic spirit around a sense of a traditional Russian institution and to help collect funds for the country’s war effort. Amidst the hardships of the war, church attendance once again swelled, seemingly little affected by the previous decade discouraging religious sentiment. Beketovka’s Church of Nikita the Confessor had made it through the war unscathed, though services were halted during the battle, when it reopened its doors in 1943 it found an eager congregation—it was common on Sundays for parishioners to overfill the small chapel and listen to the sermon

¹⁸⁶ For more on Bolshevik anti-religion campaigns and particularly their impact on Orthodox practice and belief in the Soviet Union, see Daniel Peris, *Storming the Heavens: The Soviet League of the Militant Godless* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), Glennys Young, *Power and the Sacred in Revolutionary Russia: Religious Activists in the Village*, (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1997), and Paul Froese, “Forced Secularization in Soviet Russia: Why an Atheistic Monopoly Failed,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 43 no. 1 (2004): 35-50.

¹⁸⁷ For more on this reversal of policy from Stalin during the war, see Steven Merritt Miner, *Stalin’s ‘Holy War’: Religion, Nationalism, and Alliance Politics, 1941-1945*, (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

from the street outside.¹⁸⁸ The Kazan Cathedral in the city's central district had been decimated by the battle, but would be reopened only three years after the fighting stopped in 1946. Even before the renovations were complete, its congregants had started to gather at private homes.¹⁸⁹

Religious holidays once again returned as an occasion for mass celebration around the city, the sort of social event that had been monopolized by the party in the decade prior to the war. In 1946, a representative of the Russian Orthodox Church in the Stalingrad region reported that "the feast of Easter passed with great enthusiasm. The services passed not only in the districts and villages where there are churches, but also where they do not exist. In the Nikitskaya church of the Kirov district of Stalingrad, there were over 6,000 people at the Easter service, including at least 1,500 young people and children of school age. There were three to four thousand people in the open air, who also stood with candles." Many of those who lived in Beketovka during this time remember being drawn to the camaraderie and community found in the Church. In a culture so saturated by the political motions required by the party, sincere religious feeling seemed to be a kind of outlet in an environment permeated with official tedious propaganda. O. Savchenko recalls, "many people often went to church, sometimes even standing on the street. We went every Sunday and on holidays. There were services, they baptized children. Many of the elderly were believers and went to church. Young people went less often."¹⁹⁰

For the youth of the city, there was still one diversion from everyday life that had been taken by the battle and that many still craved: sports. Before the war, the city had been home to many soccer clubs, its national team FC Rotor and local clubs like FC Dzerzhinets and FC

¹⁸⁸ Bezrukova et. al., "Beketovka v 1943-1947 godakh."

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

Traktor, as well as many gymnasiums, swimming pools, and boathouses used by various athletic clubs. Following the battle, many of their stadiums and clubhouses had been destroyed. In the case of FC Traktor, their homefield had been turned into a cemetery by Paulus's army, the corpses from which were exhumed and the stadium began reconstruction by Komsomol and Cherkasova volunteer brigades in the summer of 1943.¹⁹¹ Even with sporting facilities destroyed, there was an appetite for athletic activity as evidenced by the invitation of a brigade of "Masters of Sport" from Moscow in July 1943, who offered a month's long program that included everything from calisthenics, mass games, swimming, freestyle wrestling, and even courses in hand-to-hand combat.¹⁹² The desire to bring sport back to the city manifested in one of the most legendary events in the reconstruction saga: the Battle of the Ruins.

The Battle of the Ruins—Solidarity in Sport

Stalingrad has always been a city proud of its sportsmen—its athletic clubs participate on the national stage, and local and semi-pro and amateur organizations abound. In May of 1943, just months after the end of fighting in the city, one of the city's most iconic sporting events was held. On a muddy pitch ringed by several-foot high mounds of the rubble cleared from the field of play, the now famous "Battle of the Ruins" was waged between Traktor Stalingrad and the USSR's premier soccer club, Spartak Moscow.¹⁹³ Much of the Traktor squad had served in the defense of the city, including the club's captain, Konstantin V. Belikov. Two members of the team had died in the fighting. Those that survived had lost homes, possessions, and loved ones in the Axis onslaught.

¹⁹¹ "Vosstanovim rodnoi stalingrad!," *Stalingradskaya pravda*, July 10, 1943, 3.

¹⁹² *Stalingradskaya pravda*, June 26, 1943, 4.

¹⁹³ For more on the most-followed Soviet soccer club, see Robert Edelman, *Spartak Moscow: A History of the People's Team in the Worker's State*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009).

The idea of organizing a football match in such conditions was audacious indeed. At the beginning of April 1943, Traktor's goalkeeper Vasily Yermasov met with Lieutenant General Voronin. Responding to Voronin's question about how to celebrate International Workers' Day on May 1, Yermasov eagerly said "We must play football." It was decided to arrange a game for May 2, 1943.¹⁹⁴ The Traktor stadium that once stood near the gates of the factory was partially destroyed, and part of the pitch had been converted into a cemetery for German war dead. Those graves, upon retreat, were mined, and would have to be carefully cleared by army sappers. Instead, the game would be held in the Azot stadium in the city's south, which had avoided the worst of the fighting. Still, the pitch had to be cleared of the heavy artillery pieces that had been housed there, and the routes to the stadium had to be cleared of mines and debris as well. Preparations for the match also included clearing away rubble and filling in several massive craters that pock-marked the pitch. *Stalingradtsy* who caught wind of the rumors of the coming match came out to watch the squad practice on the uneven ground in what ragged clothes and boots they could find. Several players and their families, including Belikov's, lived in the stadium's gatehouse—a small space for fourteen people.¹⁹⁵

Initially the team assumed they would be put against the Moscow Dynamo, the capital's secondary club, but it turned out that the Dynamo no longer had enough men to field a full squad with many of their players called up to fight in the war. Instead, they would face Spartak, the nation's premier soccer club led by one of the Soviet Union's most famous footballers, the goalie Anatoly M. Akimov. Akimov, when recalling his team's arrival in the shattered city, remembered being struck by the sight of dozens of fans who had traveled to Stalingrad's distant

¹⁹⁴ Nikolai Dolgoplov, "Traktor vs. Spartak: the Football Match on "the Ruins of Stalingrad," *Russia Beyond*, May 27, 2015, https://www.rbth.com/arts/2015/05/27/traktor_vs_spartak_the_football_match_on_the_ruins_of_stalingrad_46415.html

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

airfield just to catch a glimpse of the team, several of whom had seemingly made the trip barefoot. Both clubs worried that the audience for the match would amount to little more than what could be reported in the papers: amidst the day-to-day hardships of life in the city, who could make time to watch a game? A scant few posters and banners advertised the game in the city, clinging to what remnants of walls they could. However, on the day of the match, the players emerged to find the bleachers packed with spectators—the stadium could seat only 3,000, but it was estimated four times that number had turned out to cheer for the home team. Ultimately Traktor would emerge victorious after a goal from the striker Shlyapin came in the 39th minute, sneaking the ball past Akimov in the top corner of the net. Spartak was never able to score, and so Traktor claimed a hard-fought 1-0 victory over the reigning USSR championship team.¹⁹⁶ The game became the stuff of legend within the city, a symbol of Stalingrad's pride and resilience.

Conclusions--The Return of Stalinist Normality

The years immediately following the battle were hard years. Yet little by little, a city began to reemerge from beneath the heaps of rubble and skeletons of ruined buildings. By 1945 a tram line running parallel to the path of the Volga, affectionately named the “cuckoo,” would reconnect the various districts of the city, which are situated primarily on a north-south axis along the right bank. Citizens who had been forced to flee were gradually allowed back across the river as more housing became available (though crude, as many homes remained little more than dugouts well into 1947-48) and more and more jobs became available in the city's factories as their operations continued to expand. In addition, the Soviet Resettlement Bureau worked to

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

resettle refugees from all across the Eastern Front to the *kolkhozy* in the district, which in turn increased the availability of foodstuffs in the city. Gradually the quality of life improved, and a sense of normality returned. It is worth noting, however, that this normality still closely resembled the revolutionary vision of Soviet society that had been constructed under Stalin in the before the war. There were also core assumptions of what could be achieved by the world's preeminent socialist state, in the engineering of both man and his environment.

As Emma Kuzmina argues in her study of the city's recovery, the rebuilding of Stalingrad was not simply a local effort but rather an "all-Union" project. Resources and manpower flowed into the city from other regions. Neighboring oblasts offered up raw materials and construction equipment necessary for the rebuilding effort. Manpower was diverted from other enterprises and funneled into the city to provide the specialized labor necessary to get the major industries of Stalingrad up and running again. Kuzmina states that "from the outset, construction works at the main industrial sites of Stalingrad were carried out by specialized contractors. This was associated with their particular importance and the complex nature of the work." These trusts, such as "Traktorstroï" (which oversaw the restoration of STZ) and "Mettallurgstroï" (Red October steelworks) were compiled from the administrations of similar enterprises from around the Soviet Union. Such large-scale projects demanded cadres of trained engineers, machinists, and other specialists. In addition, these trusts were overseen by administrators, bookkeepers, and party bureaucrats. Even construction crews of day laborers were brought in to assist. By the end of 1943, some 80,000 new workers and specialists would arrive in the city to aid in the reconstruction efforts at the factories and other major construction sites. Beyond labor and resources, the rebuilding of the city was an incredibly expensive

undertaking. The economic cost in total damages was estimated to be close to twenty billion rubles.¹⁹⁷

Stepan P. Liushin argues that “at the head of the struggle [to rebuild the city] stood the communists.”¹⁹⁸ While this view would have undoubtedly passed the academic rigor of the 1960s, there is also little reason to doubt this would have been true. The party provided the framework to rapidly re-impose order to the chaos, as well as provide the organizational structure necessary to coordinate such a wide scale enterprise.

Still, solely crediting the party with the rebuilding of Stalingrad would be to erase the continued sacrifice and hard work of thousands of Soviet civilians, many simply trying to rebuild their lives and a sense of community that had been deeply disrupted by the chaos unleashed by the German invasion. The story of Stalingrad is one that was repeated across the Soviet Union and all along the Eastern Front—countless cities, villages, and townships had been reduced to ruin, their peoples scattered like chaff in the wind. A desire to return to stability, even a system like that of the pre-war Soviet Union, was nearly universal. The Cherkasova Movement channeled resident’s desire to reconnect and recapture what had been lost, leading thousands within the city to volunteer their time and labor to that cause. Like other Stalinist labor movements before it, it would rely on inspiring the pride and sense of duty of the Soviet people, along with a willingness for personal sacrifice for the good of collective society. Just as new structures rising from the ruins marked the rebirth of Stalingrad, like a phoenix from the ashes, the old structure of Soviet life had begun to reemerge.

¹⁹⁷ Kuzmina, 27.

¹⁹⁸ Liushin, *Trudovoi podvig volgogradtsev*, 20.

The Cherkasova Brigades provided much needed labor to return life to the city of Stalingrad. Beyond the built environment, these brigades also formed a new basis for social cohesion through a sense of shared struggle and working toward collective goals. While this drive for volunteer labor surely benefitted from a sense of duty to one's country, one's party, or even the building of socialism more broadly, there was also the very personal drive to better the living conditions for you and your neighbors. Yet as we will see, the immediate living conditions of tens of thousands of *Stalingradtsy* in the aftermath of the war was of secondary importance to city planners who had been tasked with turning Stalingrad into a "Hero City," a model of Stalinist urban design that was supposed to enshrine the honor of the Soviet victory within the city. While thousands poured their efforts into the labor brigades, they gave these planners yet another resource to envision grand designs of what a Soviet city should look like. The following chapter will examine how the city of Stalingrad was given its present form, but it is important to remember that the efforts of the *Cherkasovtsy* remain a key part of this story, even years after the movement's humble beginnings in the summer of 1943.

As civil society began to reemerge in Stalingrad, the more visible aspects of the Gulag were once again shifted outside of the city, out of sight (if not entirely out of mind) of residents. In the immediate aftermath of the battle, these prisoners, both prisoners of war and those unfortunate Soviet citizens swept up by the NKVD, provided a valuable labor resource for the state, even if the work they did was often substandard. Even as the camps and their inmates were removed from the city center, they would remain an important labor source in the region for other major Stalinist projects that were quickly forthcoming, like that of the Volga-Don Canal, which will be explored in greater depth in the subsequent chapter. Rather than an outlier to be viewed separately, I argue the camps were an integral part of the restoration of Stalinist

civilization at Stalingrad. Even while conditions remained shockingly similar for inmates and the city's residents, the camps were instructive to those who remained outside them of the waxing power of the state and the importance of adhering to the party's authority.

As the war drew to a close and Stalin felt he could finally shift the planned economy away from wartime necessity and toward the products desperately needed to aid in the efforts happening at Stalingrad and other Soviet cities, the efforts to restore Stalinist civilization would enter its next phase: the construction of the "hero-city."

CHAPTER 2

Where there is Stalin, there is Victory!: Imagining the “Hero-City” of Stalingrad , 1944-53

Introduction

On February 23, 1944, just a few weeks past the one-year anniversary of the German surrender, the Stalingrad Executive Committee resolved to adopt a new General Plan for the city. This plan would present a comprehensive vision for the city’s development in the years to come, much more-so than the *ad-hoc* restoration efforts that were driven by pure necessity as in the year prior. The Volga, of course, remained the city’s defining characteristic, and the new city would connect neighborhoods strung some ninety-seven kilometers along the river’s right bank, from Krasnoarmeysk in the south to the Traktorzavod (“Tractor Factory”) district in the north. The city’s basic infrastructure would be designed around a main traffic thoroughfare running through the city parallel to the Volga, with each individual neighborhood situated around a main street running down to its bank, bisecting the former. The plan addressed major technical questions, like the proper spacing between existing industrial facilities and the zoning for new ones. It called for multi-story housing structures to provide the base units of living space within the city’s central residential neighborhoods and stipulated that sufficient space must be set aside for urban greenspaces, many of which would be dedicated to monuments to the city’s wartime defenders. A large plot of land outside the city was designated as a nursery to grow trees to return to the city’s new parks and boulevards. The plan was for a city that would be home to at least half a million residents.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁹ *Gorodskaya cherta*, doc. #152, (GAVO, f. 2115, op. 1, d. 451, l. 97-99). As of the most recent census in 2012, the city’s current population has grown to include more than 1 million residents.

At the time, more than 50 residents had already returned to the city, with more coming in each day. By June, their number would triple. By September of 1943, there were more than 210,000 people once again living their lives along the ninety-seven kilometer stretch of the Volga that comprised the city of Stalingrad.²⁰⁰ While much of the city still lay in ruins, neighborhoods and communities had begun to reemerge. The city's major industries had once again begun production, and the great smokestacks along the riverbank once again sent white plumes above the city skyline, where myriad cranes and scaffolding spoke to the ever ongoing bustle of new construction. It was a city that, once on the brink of death, had returned to life.

The architects who developed the general plans had high expectations for their new-and-improved Stalingrad: "According to the new adjusted general layout of the city, Stalingrad should be one of the largest industrial centers of the Union and one of the most beautiful cities in our country." Though the Nazi invaders had been driven from Soviet soil, it was clear that the pride residents of Stalingrad felt for their city where the tide was finally turned would not be easily forgotten. The city owed it to those who lost their lives here to rebuild and prosper. It was also not lost that this city still bore the name of the man at the head of the Soviet war effort. In their concluding remarks about the general nature of the new urban development plan, the architects assert that "the planned reconstructive measures [...] will turn Stalingrad into an exemplary landscaped, truly socialist city worthy of the name of the great Stalin."²⁰¹

For the city's architects, the destruction wrought on Stalingrad presented them with a rare opportunity. Before the war, Stalingrad still largely resembled the old Tsaritsyn, characterized by its red-brick buildings that dominated the Central and Voroshilov regions in the historic heart of the city. The massive factories that dominated its suburbs were all fairly new constructions. As

²⁰⁰ Kuzmina, *Vosstanovleniia Stalingrada*, 38.

²⁰¹ *Gorodskaiia Cherta*, doc. #152.1, (GAVO, f. 2115, op. 1, d. 451, l. 99).

the rubble was cleared away, a blank canvas emerged. Stalingrad would be modernized, adapted according to the latest Soviet building and urbanization techniques. It would become a socialist city, like other experimental designs such as Magnetigorsk, where workers would live not only close to their factories, but to an assortment of cultural institutions, like clubhouses, theaters, libraries, and cinemas. The city was to be accessible by public transportation rather than personal automobiles, and sufficient green spaces would make the city more hygienic and let its inhabitants retain a connection to nature. The goal of city planners was to create a proper home for the new Soviet men and women created by Stalin's revolution.

This chapter will trace the emergence of a new Stalingrad, with its own culture and traditions, that was born on the Volga over the course of a decade, beginning with the adoption of the city's general plan in 1944 through 1953, when the city as well as the country would grapple with the death of their leader of a quarter of a century. It will examine how the identity of the "hero city" was forged, both in the physical environment and in the minds of its residents. While it would be some time before the city became populated with the myriad war monuments that sprang up in the aftermath of de-Stalinization, the vision of the city planners set the stage for their arrival.²⁰² Still, visions for the city from the center did not always match with the realities faced on the ground by local administrators, and the attempt to find a balance between local concerns and the goals of the center had a profound impact on the form the city ultimately took.

The "hero-city" was a new experimental form in the legacy of Soviet cities, and in many ways Stalingrad was prototypical and instrumental in using urban space to memorialize the war. Through its streets, structures, and public spaces, it is possible to observe the ideology of the post-war Soviet state in the built environment. This essentially Stalinist project, undertaken in

²⁰² This will be fleshed out more in chapter 5, but also see Scott Palmer "How Memory was Made."

the decade leading up to the Soviet leader's death (and beyond), was literally set in stone, giving it a permanence that would prove difficult to erase, even during the height of de-Stalinization.

Methodology

In his study of the reconstruction of postwar Sevastopol, a sister hero-city of Stalingrad, Karl D. Qualls argues that “destroyed cities were [a] central concern as the regime sought to redefine its relation to society and repair its image in the eyes of the population after nearly thirty years of revolution, civil war, famines, and purges. Reconstructed buildings and reborn cities became new symbols of progress and economic strength. New structures rising from above the ruins offered more than space for housing, production, convalescence, and education. Each new building was a marker of progress, healing, and recovery.”²⁰³ Stalingrad would also prove a powerful site for the construction of this new narrative through the reconstruction of the city. While the reconstruction of the built environment was of course a direct means of increasing the physical well-being and economic productivity of the city's residents, it must also be understood as a fundamentally ideological project, a propaganda effort on a massive scale. This chapter seeks to break down aspects of that project into its constituent parts.

As Qualls also notes in regard to Sevastopol, the rebuilding of the city would become a matter of national pride and prestige, and with the massive mobilization of resources needed to complete such a task, both in Stalingrad and beyond, the recovery was truly an “all-Union affair.” He writes that “Urban recovery was a national project, and its success was essential to prestige both at home and abroad. But each of the destroyed cities had its own history and

²⁰³ Karl D. Qualls, *From Ruins to Reconstruction*, 4.

tradition, which also made the rebuilding process intensely local.”²⁰⁴ While the center could and sometimes did dictate the direction and pace of reconstruction, *Stalingradtsy* retained a say in the actual implementation of the rebuilding process. Qualls describes a process of “agitation and accommodation” on the part of the periphery’s pushback against the often-unrealistic demands of the center: “agitation (re)created myths of a glorious past and present and combined them with the future promise of the great Soviet utopia. Accommodation was an attempt to meet the immediate needs of the city and residents.” Because of this, each hero-city was a unique installation into the greater pantheon. Stalingrad was certainly no exception to this, and indeed, being one of the first cities liberated, was in many ways the progenitor of the hero-city archetype.

While there have been several Russian language studies that cover the recovery of the city, this chapter will seek to cover this period using a significantly different approach.²⁰⁵ Instead of breaking down the recovery into the economic markers that dominated Soviet and even post-Soviet histories, I rather hope to record a biography of Stalingrad in what would ultimately prove to be an extremely formative period in the city’s life. In order to do so, Stalingrad itself becomes both a character in the story and a document to be read.

The layout, organization, and built environment that constitutes the physical space of the city of Stalingrad, as well as the daily cares and concerns of its populace, can reveal much about the character of the city that remains abstract when only looking at raw data. The character of the city is much better reflected in the statues that are enshrined in its parks, the names of its streets, and in the celebration of local and national holidays. It is found in the sports and entertainment sections of its newspapers (to say nothing of the opinion page), in the films shown in its cinemas

²⁰⁴ Qualls, 4.

²⁰⁵ See Liushin, *Trudovoi podvig volgogradtsev*, Kuzmina, *Vosstanovleniia stalingrada*, and Orlov, *Istoriia rodnogo kraia*.

and the plays staged in its theaters. The experience of *Stalingradtsy* would of course resemble the experience of millions of other Soviet citizens in the postwar years, and yet those experiences would also be distinctly unique—to illustrate this uniqueness of life in Stalingrad is the aim of the subsequent essay.

That said, I still will draw from the more traditional metrics of progress in the city in order to provide a more grounded sense of context for readers. These statistics are the primary drivers of documentation within the Soviet archives and the histories generated from them. Thanks to the substantial efforts of other historians to record these statistics, I am able to imagine a study that does otherwise. In accordance with the way Soviet administrators had to constantly track outputs as they were dictated by GOSPLAN, the central Soviet economic planning authority, these studies tend to utilize the quantification metrics of the day. While production targets at factories and *kolkhozy* during a Five-Year Plan can be reflected in units of finished goods, yards of rolled steel, tons of agricultural products, the rate of restoration would be tracked in terms of square meters of usable living space, usable industrial space, and rubles and resources devoted to the cause.

The obsession with quantification in economic data collection extended beyond the official documents of planners and administrators and permeated into the language of day-to-day newspaper coverage of recovery efforts.²⁰⁶ For those who lived amidst the realities of Stalingrad that first decade following the war, these displays of pride were probably secondary concerns. In a city where many still remained without access to sufficient housing, news of the ever-increasing livable square-meters and the return of basic services across various city districts also

²⁰⁶ Warren G. Nutter, Israel Borenstein, and Adam Kaufman outlined the Soviet state's attempts to gather economic data and the deficiencies of their system in their 1962 study *Growth of Industrial Production in the Soviet Union*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962). See chapter 2, "The Data: Knowns and Unknowns," 11-51.

contained the tacit promise that someday they too might see the return of modern Soviet civilization.

The Russian language scholarship of this topic largely relies on these same official statistics to chart their history of the period.²⁰⁷ The optimism and benchmarks of success touted by the party have been carried through the archives and onto the page. However, these statistics only tell part of the story. While standards of living were on the rise throughout Stalingrad in the decade following the war, there remained pronounced discrepancies between those lucky enough to receive proper accommodations and those still struggling to survive in the pseudo-wasteland conditions left behind by the battle. There was a near permanent housing crisis within the city, so the obsession on reporting the meeting or exceeding of production targets in the realm of housing construction was a major priority within the party press.

This resurgence of a socialist realist perspective during the post-war years, the party's promise that the struggles of today would eventually give way to a brighter future, is key to understanding the mindset of Stalingrad's inhabitants. Combined with the sense of pride tied to the Battle that was continually reinforced through the official dialogues of the party and city administration, and the historic nature of the reconstruction efforts, we can begin to paint a picture of life in Stalingrad—a city constantly stretched between the horrors and heroics of the past and the promise of the future.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁷ See again Liushin, *Trudovoi podvig volgogradtsev*, Kuzmina, *Vosstonavlenie Stalingrada, 1943-1950*, Morozova, N. T. and N. D. Monakhova, *Putevoditel' po Volgogradu*.

²⁰⁸ Studies on the impact of the memory of the war on Soviet national consciousness include Amir Weiner, "The Making of a Dominant Myth: The Second World War and the Construction of Political Identities within the Soviet Polity," *The Russian Review*, 55 no. 4 (1996): 638-660, Geoffre Hosking, "The Second World War and Russian National Consciousness," *Past & Present*, No. 175 (2002): 162-187, Jonathan Brunstedt, *The Soviet Myth of World War II: Patriotic Memory and the Russian Question in the USSR*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), and Amir Weiner, *Making Sense of War*, and Hoffmann, ed. *The Memory of the Second World War in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia*.

Also largely absent from the Soviet histories of the period was the very real and very close existence of gulag style labor camps operating both in and around the city.²⁰⁹ As in other major construction projects under Stalin, such as the building of the Moscow Metro or digging the White Sea Canal, prisoner labor was seen as a necessary resource to be utilized.²¹⁰ While a small number of the prisoners housed at Stalingrad were Soviet citizens, the majority of those interred within the city were Axis prisoners of war, some of whose captivity began immediately following Paulus's surrender. A separate Stalingrad camp administrative branch was created on April 15, 1943, which was used to coordinate and direct the efforts of the estimated 10,000 soldiers of Germany, Italy, Romania, and Hungary of the 90,000 that were captured at the beginning of February. The other 80,000 were marched to camps further into the interior, and due to the winter conditions and the disastrous shape of the Axis troops at that time, many never made it to their final destinations.²¹¹ While the number of prisoners in Stalingrad's labor camps would largely hold steady over the course of the next decade (around 10,000), this was by no means representative of the number of POWs held there. Rather, there was an extremely high mortality rate among the prisoners' ranks—food was scarce even for Soviets civilians at this time, and the city's former adversaries fared poorly.²¹² However, the Red Army's continued

²⁰⁹ For instance, see Liushin, *Trudovoi podvig volgogradtsev*, N. T. Morozova and N. D. Monakhova, *Putevoditel' po Volgogradu*.

²¹⁰ For more on the use of forced inmate labor under Stalin, see Paul R. Gregory and Valery Lazarev, *The Economics of Forced Labor: The Soviet Gulag* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 2003), Steven Rosefielde, "An Assessment of the Sources and Uses of Gulag Forced Labour 1929-56," in *Soviet Studies* 33, no. 1 (1981): 51–87, and Sheila Fitzpatrick, "War and Society in Soviet Context: Soviet Labor before, during, and after World War II," in *International Labor and Working-Class History*, no. 35 (1989): 37–52. For more on its use on The "Belomor" White Sea Canal project, see Julie Draskoczy, "The 'Put' of Perekovka': Transforming Lives at Stalin's White Sea-Baltic Canal," in *Russian Review* 71, no. 1 (2012): 30–48. For more on its use in the construction of the Moscow Metro, see Tijana Vujosevic, "Soviet Modernity and the Aesthetics of Gleam: The Moscow Metro in Collective Histories of Construction," in *Journal of Design History* 26, no. 3 (2013): 270–284.

²¹¹ M. M. Zaguorul'ko, *Voennoplennye v SSSR, 1939-1956*, (Moscow: Logos, 2002).

²¹² For more on the struggles faced by enemy POWs in the Soviet Union, see S. P. MacKenzie, "The Treatment of Prisoners of War in World War II," in *The Journal of Modern History* 66, no. 3 (1994): 487–520.

success in the West meant that a steady stream of newly captured POWs would find their way into Stalingrad camps, where the demand for labor remained at an all-time high. These prisoners were often interred in hastily constructed temporary locations within city limits, near the construction sites that would make use of the extorted labor. The Beketovka power plant and the Volga-Don canal are perhaps the most infamous for their use of captured soldiers as laborers. They often worked within sight of civilian labor brigades, and they were marched under guard through the city streets.

The existence of camps and the use of forced prisoner labor within the city is only one aspect of what makes this particular instance of Soviet civilization “Stalinist.” This chapter will seek to establish how Stalingrad was rebuilt as an inherently Stalinist city. Others in the field of Soviet architecture have deemed the post-war reconstruction period as an important turning point in Soviet urban design. Galina Ptichnikova and Alexy Antyufeev argue that Stalingrad is a prime example, if not the progenitor, of the “Stalinist Empire” style of urban design. They argue that:

Post-war reconstruction of Stalingrad became an important stage in architectural life, not only for the city, but for the whole country—the USSR— as well. The architects were supposed to show the contours of a happy future life appearing through a harsh daily routine. Their renderings of buildings for new Stalingrad continued to draw on the Soviet neo-classicist style, which in the post-war period obtained peculiar characteristics which allowed them to be distinguished in a style that is now referred to as “Stalinist Empire Style.” Stalingrad was to serve as exemplary in this respect, because in addition to the innovations of the “socialist city” of the 1930s, the reborn Stalingrad would become a new kind of city—the “Hero City.”²¹³

The two primary drivers Ptichnikova and Antyufeev identify in the pursuit of inventing the Hero City were “the theme of the triumph of victory in the Great Patriotic War and the theme

²¹³ Galina Ptichnikova and Aleksey Antyufeev, “Architecture of Stalingrad: The Image of the Hero City by the Language of “Stalinist Empire Style,” E3S Web of Conferences, 33: 10.1051, 2018: 1-12, 1.

of creating objects, monuments of Soviet history events. The feeling of absolute exclusiveness and importance of its universal values explains the desire of architects to capture these values in the ensembles of the city-monument and extrapolate them into the future.”²¹⁴ The authors argue that it was “the feeling of absolute exclusiveness and importance of its universal values that explain the desire of architects to capture these values in the ensembles of the city-monument and extrapolate them into the future.” While Stalingrad surely stands apart in the pantheon of Soviet hero-cities, this style of urban construction would be applied in various degrees in the twelve other cities that were awarded this honor: Moscow, Leningrad, Brest, Odessa, Sevastopol, Kiev, Novorossiysk, Kursk, Minsk, Tula, Murmansk, and Smolensk.²¹⁵ Still, none could match the “exclusivity” of Stalingrad, both for its role as a definite turning point in the war, but also because the city bore the name of the leader of the Soviet Union. While other historic cities would implement “hero-city” elements into the existing architecture, no other Soviet city could match Stalingrad in the size and scope of the way these rhetorical structures were incorporated into the built environment. Ptichnikova and Antyufeev argue this was ultimately the aim of the city’s planners: “the search for architectural solutions in restoration and reconstruction was made to be aimed at identifying the special status of the city.”²¹⁶

In addition to showcasing the city’s special status, the architecture and aesthetics of the “hero-city” design was meant to emphasize and impart Soviet ideals of the individual, much in the same way the “socialist city” was to help engineer a new model of urban living according to socialist principles. Ptichnikova and Antyufeev argue that “architecture was perceived as a means to convey morality, heroism, and citizenship. The mission of ‘propaganda of the deed’

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ For an in-depth look at how the “hero-city” construction took place in a different locale, see Karl Qualls, *From Ruins to Reconstruction*.

²¹⁶ Ptichnikova and Antyufeev, “Architecture of Stalingrad,” 2.

was no less important than the various technical tasks of restoring environmental assets.”²¹⁷

V. N. Simbircev, who was appointed Chief Architect of Stalingrad in 1944, described the main artistic challenge for the designers of the city’s master-plan as follows: “The architecture of Stalingrad must be of high quality, embodying the heroic spirit of the city. The achievements and victories of the Soviet people under the leadership of the Lenin-Stalin party should be reflected in public buildings by means of the aesthetic arts.”²¹⁸

Other authors have tried to examine the relation between the cult of the Great Patriotic War and Soviet architectures and monuments. Nina Tumarkin, in her book *The Living and the Dead: The Rise and Fall of the Cult of World War II in Russia*, examines how the emphasis on memorializing the war shaped the Soviet architectural aesthetic palate for decades. One valuable contribution of her work is the examination of ritual and tradition that surround the memory of the Great Patriotic War, such as the “*dozor*” (patrols) groups that searched former battlefield sites for unrecovered Russian war dead, which still operate in Russia today. While not all rituals are quite as morbid as the literal exhumation of corpses, there are similar groups that have since become tied to specific urban memorial sites. For instance, students are traditionally employed as honor guards during state holidays honoring the war around key monuments, or veterans’ groups using these public spaces to assemble and pay homage to the heroes of the Great Patriotic War. The effect of these public displays at these quasi-sacred sites help pass the memory of the War on to the next generation, and this direct interface with the built environment, particularly in hero-cities like Stalingrad, reasserts the message of the monument’s creators decades later, even

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ V. N. Simbirtsev, “*On the main points of the new master plan. Stalingrad*”. April 13, 1951, GAVO, f..71,Op.1, d.1252, l.23, as cited by Ptichnikova and Antyufeyev, “Architecture of Stalingrad,” 2.

after the communist system that produced them has long since itself collapsed. Many of these rituals have their genesis here, in the first decade after the battle concluded.²¹⁹

While Stalingrad's hero-city's composition was a localized project, it was tied to architectural and artistic trends in the Soviet Union. As in the 1930s, these trends followed the whims of the political mood of the day. Determinations concerning the content of artistic pursuits and the zeitgeist across the Soviet Union were made at the highest levels of political life, and major decisions regarding them were subject to Stalin's final decision. It should be noted that the drive to memorialize the war was not an instantaneous or steady process. While memorialization began in earnest before the war was even won, by 1946 Stalin was attempting to downplay the overt celebrations of victory in the Great Patriotic War in order to refocus the population on a new struggle brewing with the West as the Cold War began to escalate.²²⁰ In the three years between 1943 and 1946, however, memorialization of the war was a central theme for Soviet architects and artist's workshops. In 1944, the trade magazine *Arkitektura SSSR* published a series of articles laying out potential memorials for the war. With the limited resources available during the time, the grandiose visions of the country's top architects and sculptors had to be relegated to realistic and cheap monuments, typically plaques or simple obelisks, which could easily be installed or erected in public spaces without investing much in way of time or resources, or in symbolic names for streets and public squares.²²¹

However, following the last public holiday celebrating Victory Day (July 9th), even these became taboo. Instead, there was a reassertion of the Stalin cult, which would lead to the city of Stalingrad becoming home to the tallest statues of the Soviet leader anywhere in the world, an

²¹⁹ See Amir Weiner, "In the Long Shadow of War," Qualls, *From Ruins to Reconstruction*, and Zubkova

²²⁰ Scott W. Palmer, "How Memory was Made."

²²¹ Ibid.

episode that will be discussed later in this chapter. It was not until Stalin's death in March of 1953 that war memorials came back into fashion—and came back in earnest. Within seven months of the Soviet leader's death, construction began in Stalingrad atop Mamayev Kurgan, laying the groundwork for a cemetery and museum complex, which would eventually serve as the foundation for the massive memorial complex that stands today. In March of 1954, the All-Union Council of Ministers would announce that designs were being accepted for a “State Museum of the Defense of Tsaritsyn-Stalingrad” dedicated to “the Soviet people's heroic deeds during the struggle with foreign interventionists and counterrevolutionaries between 1918 and 1920 and against the forces of fascism during the Great Patriotic War.”²²² This museum would serve as the impetus for the now famous Panorama Museum. Still, while planning would get underway almost immediately, construction of Stalingrad's most famous war memorials would not begin until after de-Stalinization gave an imperative to supplant the narrative of Stalin's leadership with the sacrifice and greatness of the Soviet people.

The high priority given to what might be called “cultural constructions”—buildings that serve both an aesthetic and social function—also held a very real implication for those living in the city as it was rebuilt. The grandiose nature of these structures necessitated lots of resources and the attention of many skilled and unskilled laborers, all of which could have been diverted toward more immediate concerns, such as public housing, which remained woefully inadequate well into the late 1940s-early 1950s. The dedication to the shape of the “hero city” was not without a cost to its citizens, which should be taken into account in the real lived “cost” of the endeavor undertaken by Soviet planners and the politicians who commissioned them.

²²² Ibid, RGALI f. 674, op. 3, d. 653, l. 20.

Ptichnikova and Antyufeev argue that with the political narratives so clearly occupying the attention of the city's urban planners, it is imperative to understand the city's built environment as part of the larger discourse of the Soviet experiment and particularly the experience of Stalinism. The political narrative of the post-war decade—perhaps best described as “Stalinist triumphalism”—would completely shape the character of the city of Stalingrad for more than half a century to come, despite the changing of names and statues that would occur a few short years later. Even with the conspicuous absence of the Soviet leader's name and image from the city, the people of Volgograd continue to grapple with his omnipresence of Stalin's legacy to this day.

A City Built by and for Refugees

In 1945, the people of the Soviet Union had for the first time in years a sense of relief—the Nazi invaders had been expelled, and the Red Army was marching steadily onward toward Berlin. But though the immediate threat posed by the invasion had passed, life was still a day-to-day struggle in the cities and villages that had weathered the siege. Stalingrad was slowly becoming a habitable environment. As *Stalingradtsy* who had managed to flee ahead of the German advance returned to begin the arduous process of rebuilding their shattered lives, and they were joined by thousands of displaced refugees from all across the Eastern Front who were brought into the city by the trainload to build a new labor pool. The Stalingrad Executive Committee overseeing the recovery had a staggering challenge ahead of them. Outside of isolated pockets near key strategic factories, the city remained a wasteland. While new structures were beginning to take shape thanks to the herculean efforts of workers and Cherkasova brigades, there was little place to put the city's newest inhabitants. New arrivals lived in

basements, earthen bunkers, military grade wooden barracks, and partially burned-out structures, wherever they could find a semblance of shelter from the bitter cold of Stalingrad's winters and the brutal heat of its summers.

Though Stalingrad was a storied city in Soviet mythology, it was by no means a desirable place to live in 1945. The party leaders on the Executive Committee faced steep criticism of the state of the city's public spaces. "The sidewalks of the central streets of the squares after dismantling the buildings are still not cleared of rubble and construction debris. A significant number of water and sewer wells in the city center are not closed, creating a hazard to the public. Systematic cleaning of the city of garbage and sewage has not been organized, not a single public restroom has been restored, as a result of which households and streets are in an unsanitary state. Most of the street taps do not work."²²³ Even as Moscow planners attempted to provide the city with resources, materials, and laborers, local leaders still struggled to organize a response to the myriad challenges Stalingrad faced.

It took the better part of a decade for Stalingrad to reemerge as a truly modern, socialist city. Even in its dire state, Stalingrad's managers and planners strove to meet the needs of their city's ever-growing population—since the 1930s, socialist ideology was to be expressed in the built environment in the form of services and public spaces designed to support the working masses. Soviet architects strove to create what they understood as "socialism without politics," what Karl Qualls described as "the transformative power of built space and the rationality of designing cities to meet the needs of the population."²²⁴ Meeting the needs of the urban proletariat was a key pillar of Soviet authority in the Stalinist period, and reproducing it after the war was a major priority for a party desperately trying to regain its prestige and its hold over

²²³ *Gorodskaiia cherta*, Document #162, 265-66.

²²⁴ Qualls, *From Ruins to Reconstruction*, 49.

society. This challenge, already a monumental task, was made all the more difficult in a city whose residents even basic daily necessities (like cookware, lamps, and bedding, clothes) had been either lost or destroyed in the war. Even basic foodstuffs and clean water remained in short supply for years after the battle was won. Still, reconstruction was not simply about reclaiming what had been lost, but to restart the progression toward the promised “building of socialism” that had been derailed by the war.

In 1946, the city would shift from the “restoration plan” that was mostly aimed at reopening strategic wartime enterprises to a peacetime Five-Year Plan, which was adopted on March 18. While the targets were formulated by GOSPLAN for a city of half a million (and this number would continue to increase, partly to account for continued growth, but mostly to continue to secure sufficient resources for those already there),²²⁵ it was largely left to the local administration to determine how they would approach meeting the plan’s goals and how the huge quantities of funding and building materials would be appropriated around the city. The program outlined not only industrial output, but goals for the reconstruction of the city space as well. The first peacetime Five-Year plan sought to add 1,300,000 cubic meters of living space, fifty-six schools with a capacity for 35,200 students, seven movie theaters, three theaters, fifteen new hospitals, thirty-seven nursery and day-care clinics, ninety-six kilometers of new water and sewage lines, eighty-five kilometers of new tram lines, among other objectives.²²⁶ The plan held no provisions where these key facilities and public works should go, however, which sparked intense competition between regional rebuilding committees each trying to secure a piece of reconstruction for their own desperate residents.

²²⁵ Qualls explores the phenomenon of over-reporting population metrics in greater depth in chapter 2 of *From Ruins to Reconstruction*, “Accommodation,” as another means for local city administrators to game central planners to secure scarce resources in the aftermath of the war.

²²⁶ Liushin, *Trudovoi podvig volgogradtsev*, 91.

The new plan also set ambitious targets for the newly revitalized industries—production output was set at 150% of the prewar plan goals by 1950. The plan still prioritized the restoration of the city, particularly in terms of civilian infrastructure that was still severely underdeveloped in the city, but also the city's heavy industries and transport infrastructure (railroads, ports). This peacetime plan, however, also called for an increased production and distribution of agriculture, consumer goods, and cultural works—the city saw increased funding for the arts, theaters, and cinemas.²²⁷

Reconstruction was an incredibly costly endeavor for the federal government. Steven Liushin estimates that capital investments in the period topped 587.5 million rubles in the years between 1945 and 1947 alone, with those funds contributing to the construction of 500,000 square meters of buildings, schools, hospitals, and other facilities.²²⁸ The constant construction in the city sucked in a steady stream of lumber from the surrounding region, Liushin's estimates that one million cubic meters of lumber a year were flowing into the city, producing by the end of the Five-Year Plan ninety-three million rubles worth of finished products, furnishings, and goods (to say nothing of the lumber devoted to scaffolding and framing on the major construction sites). Paned glass would have been a somewhat rare sight in Stalingrad well into the 1950s. Lacking a major glass works of their own, most of the glass that would stand in Stalingrad's windows was produced by neighboring Saratov.²²⁹

The reconstruction process was by no means instantaneous. In a city of Stalingrad's size, with different neighborhoods and factories competing to secure part of the limited resources for their own reconstruction efforts. Yet construction continued to ramp up over the course of the

²²⁷ Ibid, 89.

²²⁸ Ibid, 91.

²²⁹ Ibid.

decade—the future continued to look brighter. By 1953, 311 new apartment buildings were going up in the city, 296 of which were at multiple story constructions, creating nearly a quarter million cubic meters of new housing.²³⁰

More than just returning bodies to the labor pool, Stalingrad also faced a desperate need for skilled laborers. In the realm of construction, many would be trained in the midst of the restoration effort, creating a sudden much-needed boom in the ranks of skilled bricklayers, metal workers, riveters, and other various construction professions. Once the restoration of factories and major construction projects moved toward completion, these laborers could be redeployed elsewhere, for instance, on the “great construction projects” of the Volga-Don Canal and the Kuibyshev hydroelectric dam spanning the Volga north of the city.²³¹

If Stalingrad were to be rebuilt, it would first have to be repopulated. The state at this time was already struggling to manage millions of Soviet citizens dislocated from the fighting in Ukraine, Belarus, and south-western Russia. For those beleaguered Soviet citizens who had lost everything in the war, including a home to return to, Stalingrad offered a sense of place and purpose. Though life would be hard, with levels of privation similar to those during the war persisting for many years well beyond the expulsion of the fascist invaders, city planners and party organizers strove to create a sense of belonging among the city’s new inhabitants. No

²³⁰ Ibid, 142.

²³¹ For more on the ambitious hydro projects in the Stalingrad region and their origins in Stalinist plans for Soviet economic development, see Anna Neimark, “The Infrastructural Monument: Stalin’s Water Works under Construction and in Representation,” in *Future Anterior: Journal of Historic Preservation, History, Theory, and Criticism* 9, no. 2 (2012): 1–14, Denis J. B. Shaw, “Mastering Nature through Science: Soviet Geographers and the Great Stalin Plan for the Transformation of Nature, 1948–53,” in *The Slavonic and East European Review* 93, no. 1 (2015): 120–46, and Jonathan Oldfield, Julia Lajus, and Denis J. B. Shaw, “Conceptualizing and Utilizing the Natural Environment: Critical Reflections from Imperial and Soviet Russia,” in *The Slavonic and East European Review* 93, no. 1 (2015): 1–15, Stephen Brain, “The Great Stalin Plan for the Transformation of Nature,” in *Environmental History* 15, no. 4 (2010): 670–700.

matter where one came from before, those who took part in the labor to rebuild would be forever *Stalingradtsy*.

Many more laborers came from the surrounding countryside, where young *kolhozniks* were reassigned to help with the city's reconstruction efforts. As these young men and women were trained in industrial professions, they became more likely to stay in the city where demand for such specialists would remain high for decades to come. A fair part of a generation who came of age during or after the battle in the region would be funneled from the countryside to the city, filling the vacuum left by the siege. They would help comprise the new urban proletariat that continued to grow within Stalingrad's factories and construction enterprises.²³²

The all-union Komsomol administration also helped direct valuable young laborers to Stalingrad to learn trades and assist in the reconstruction and production efforts within the city. It is worth noting that the labor pool in postwar Stalingrad, like much of the Soviet Union following the mass casualties among fighting age men during the war, would have been overwhelmingly female. Women were learning to turn lathes, set steel, and lay brick right alongside their male counterparts, and winning recognition for their capabilities.²³³

Regardless of their background before they arrived in the city, the city's desperate need for labor meant that the vast majority of Stalingrad's population was employed in the industry of construction. Even those who were employed by other firms, like the factories or the growing

²³² See Donald Filtzer, *Soviet Workers and Late Stalinism*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), Robert Dale, "Divided we Stand: Cities, Social Unity, and Post-War Reconstruction in Soviet Russia, 1945-1953," in *Contemporary European History* 24, no. 4 (2015): 493-516.

²³³ For more on how gender roles were being challenged by the realities of the war, see Mie Nakachi, "A Postwar Sexual Liberation? The Gendered Experience of the Soviet Union's Great Patriotic War," *Cahiers du Monde russe*, 52, no. 3 (2011): 423-440. For more on their role in the Soviet workforce specifically, see Donald Filtzer, *Soviet Workers and Late Stalinism*. For more on how patriarchal structures were challenged, see Claire E. McCallum, "The Return: Postwar Masculinity and the Domestic Space in Stalinist Visual Culture, 1945-53," in *The Russian Review* 74, no. 1 (2015): 117-143.

network of schools, hospitals, and public works facilities were drawn into the reconstruction effort through the Cherkasova Brigades. The city was a hive of activity, and the twin languages of reconstruction and the war myth formed a sort of *lingua franca*, carried even to those unable to work through the pages of the local press. The shared objective and experience of rebuilding the city sought to create a sense of community and place for civilians still finding their place and identity as *Stalingradsty*.²³⁴

Their efforts, however, were being directed by city planners whose long-term vision for Stalingrad did not always coincide with its short term needs. Stalingrad was to become a beautiful city, and many of the earliest construction projects still prioritized aesthetics over immediate functionality. While civilians waited for months and years for new housing units to become available, many of the earliest neighborhood projects were ones that were to showcase the “hero-city” as the new height of socialist modernity, and valuable labor was spent on grand designs that added little for the city’s current residents. This focus on the city’s aesthetics has made Stalingrad a truly iconic Soviet urban space, but it has to be noted that the favor of prestige projects over more practical concerns prolonged the privation of many of those who would help build it in the late 1940s.

Envisioning the “Hero-City”

As Qualls notes in regards to the shape of postwar Sevastopol, “postwar urban reconstruction did not appear out of a vacuum; rather, the chief foci of postwar planning and construction—the transformative power of built space and the rationality of designing cities to

²³⁴ For a sweeping overview of the Soviet experience of the postwar years, see Serhy Yekelchuk, *Stalin’s Citizens: Everyday Politics in the Wake of Total War*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

meet the needs of the population—developed out of a complicated search for a modern Soviet style.”²³⁵ This consolidated style was by no means predetermined, but rather a continuation of the artistic exploration that had been kicked off during the frantic scramble to define the Palace of the Soviets in Moscow in the 1930s, which many architectural scholars see as the definitive beginning of the search for a “Stalinist” style.²³⁶ Through competition, critique, and revision, Soviet architects continued to navigate the political expectations of the day and also integrate the new demands presented in the developing mythos around the victory in the Great Patriotic War. The imaginations of some of the Soviet Union’s top architects were allowed to run wild with possibility, only to be tamped down by the harsh realities of pragmatism and local sensibilities. It was through this process of fits and starts that the ultimate shape of the “hero-city” first emerged.

Just as local activists advocated for their cities against the demands of Moscow and its grandiose architectural visions, neighborhoods in Stalingrad sought their own answers to the difficulties of reconstruction. Centralized plans for the city rarely took into account the conditions present on the ground, and those living among the rubble could not wait for the proper approval to build new residences, schools, clubs, and bathhouses. Each neighborhood, however, could and did add its own contributions to the uniting theme of the hero city, each with its own unique contributions to the city’s mystique. In a way, these neighborhoods were “local in form, hero-city in content.”

²³⁵ Qualls, *From Ruins to Reconstruction*, 49.

²³⁶ See Peter Lizon, “Quest for an Image to Serve a Revolution: Design Competitions for the Palace of the Soviets,” in *JAE* 35, no. 4 (1982): 10–16, and Sona Stephan Hoisington, “‘Ever Higher’: The Evolution of the Project for the Palace of Soviets,” in *Slavic Review* 62, no. 1 (2003): 41–68. Other discussions of the Palace of the Soviets can be found in Alexei Tarkhanov and Sergei Kavtaradze, *Stalinist Architecture*, (London: Laurence King Publishing, 1992), Andrew Day, “The Rise and Fall of Stalinist Architecture” in *Architectures of Russian Identity, 1500 to the Present: 1500 to the Present*, edited by James Cracraft and Daniel Rowland, 172–90, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), Danilo Udovički-Selb, “Between Modernism and Socialist Realism.”

One benefit of such similar reconstruction projects taking place simultaneously across such a spread-out city was that the steady stream of good news regarding new living spaces, schools, and factories became a universal experience. The shared experience of rebuilding the city helped build a binding sense of community even across the city's archipelago of neighborhoods. In the following chapter, I will attempt to highlight some of the core architectural compositions that helped define the city and unify its urban aesthetic, despite their geographic separation. In accordance with Soviet city planning, it was often the designated center of these new neighborhoods that drew the most attention, both in the way of resources and the input of party authority. The reader will be taken on a tour of the city as it began to emerge in the minds of its architects, from the traditional "center" of the now-destroyed Old Tsaritsyn to the great factory neighborhoods of the north and the mouth of the Volga-Don Canal to the South. This tour, much like any urban exploration, can provide only a limited survey. Still, these examples provide sufficient case studies to illustrate how the "hero city" took on its physical form in Stalingrad.

The Center: Voroshilov and the Stalin/Central District

The cultural heart of the city of Stalingrad lay in its Central District, at the Square of Fallen Fighters. The square is located a few hundred yards up the bank from the Volga, situated near the city's main rail station and one of its most historic cathedrals, and is easily accessible via the city's main north/south thoroughfare (once *Prospekt Stalina*, now *Prospekt Lenina*) and the city's tram lines. Before the battle, this pedestrian square housed a memorial to the fifty-five communist defenders who were executed and buried on this very spot when the city was taken by Wrangel's White Army forces in 1919. *Ploshad' pavshikh bortsov* had long served as the

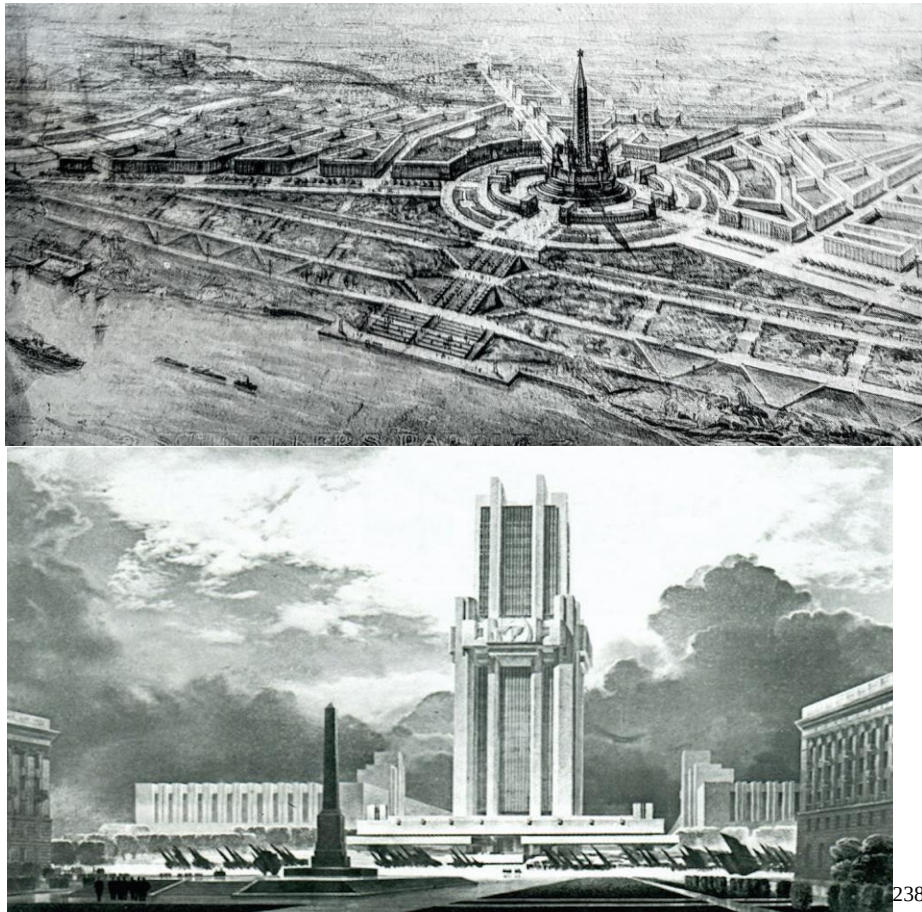
city's parade grounds, a backdrop for addresses by local officials and visiting dignitaries, and the nucleus of holiday celebrations. The square, once ringed by the red-brick buildings of old Tsaritsyn as well as modern Soviet constructions, such as the widely celebrated Univermag department store, would become the backdrop for intense fighting during the winter of 1942-43, even serving as the setting for one of the battle's most dramatic moments.

By January of 1943, the German forces trapped in Stalingrad had been systematically driven back and enclosed into two encircled pockets of resistance by Operation Ring, one of which was centered on General Paulus's command center in the basement of the department store just off the square. As supplies ran short and defeat became an inescapable reality, Paulus defied Hitler's orders to die fighting and chose instead to surrender. On January 31, a white flag was raised by the Germans, marking the capture of the highest-ranking German general in the war to date. That white flag was first waved in the Square of Fallen Fighters. The last remaining pockets of resistance would fall days later, the Battle of Stalingrad won.²³⁷

It was clear to Moscow-based architects and local officials alike that the Square would be the heart of new Stalingrad. The fundamental scope of this central ensemble, however, was one of great contention, as eager architects sought to reflect the monumental victory of the Red Army in stone. The space architectural competition for the crowning element of the Square of Fallen Fighters ensemble was opened up in 1944. Some of the Soviet Union's top architects submitted proposals, alongside suggestions sent in from soldiers who had fought at Stalingrad still actively serving at the front! The earliest drafts for the district's core ensemble were truly massive in scope. The earliest proposals included a sky-scraping Palace of Labor that would have been built atop the Square of Fallen Fighters, which would dominate the city's skyline and serve as the

²³⁷ For more memories of this day, see Jochen Hellbeck, "Facing Stalingrad: Portraits of German and Soviet Survivors," last modified 2017, <https://facingstalingrad.com/>.

center point of the city's transportation networks. Different aesthetic styles were suggested, including a circular “layer cake” design topped with a central spire, as well as the more monolithic plinth like the one that had represented the Soviet pavilion during the 1937 Paris Expo (as seen below).



However, these grandiose proposals received harsh criticism from local administrators and planners dealing with the reality on the ground—not only would such lavish constructions

²³⁸ Top: Square in Stalingrad (unexecuted proposal, 1944)—Architect David Arkin, from Alexei Tarkhanov and Sergei Kavtaradze, *Architecture of the Stalin Era*, (New York: Rizzoli International Publication, 1992). Bottom: Another proposal for the Palace of Labor on the Square of Fallen Heroes, with the obelisk monument from before the war still intact standing in the foreground, (author unknown).

take years to complete and suck up valuable resources and laborers, but they would also radically alter the historic character of the city and dramatically alter its skyline.

The upheaval caused by such construction, too, would disrupt the space which had already in the months immediately following the war a space for honoring the Soviet war dead. Take, for instance, the case of Major Vladimir G. Kamenshchikov, a pilot from Stalingrad who had fought in the skies above his native city, winning the title of Hero of the Soviet Union. When it was announced that Kamenshchikov had been killed in combat on May 22, 1943, a crude make-shift memorial was erected to the heroic pilot in the square, and Stalingrad's citizens continued to lay new flowers and wreaths at the site through the following winter in honor of their native son.²³⁹ The case of Kamenshchikov's shrine can tell us a few key things—first, that Stalingrad's civilians were already finding their own ways to memorialize the war without the party's guidance, and second, that the party had to take such organic displays and rituals into account when crafting its own vision for the space.

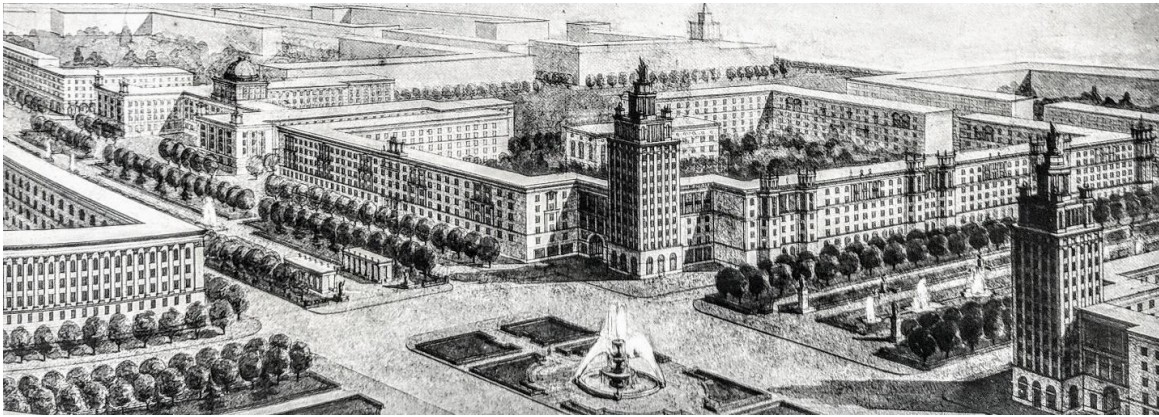
It would only later come that Kamenshchikov and many other spontaneous memorials would eventually be consolidated into a large red granite obelisk that stands at the western mouth of the Alley of Heroes, along with an eternal flame. These simple and austere monuments quickly became the preferred form of memorialization in Soviet architectural circles, not in the least due to their relatively low cost of construction in an economy where resources remained scarce. An article in *Problems of Modern City Building*, the theoretical journal of the Academy of Architecture, reminded architects that “*Memorial architecture* requires enormous significance in restored cities. Arches, obelisks, monumental memorials will have here not only agitational and memorial significance, but will also play a large role in the creation of an expressive city

²³⁹ *Sovremennyi Volgograd*, 75-76.

silhouette.”²⁴⁰ In addition, with these simple and indirect structural forms, Soviet authorities strove to direct sympathy away from specific individuals and toward a more general memory of the sacrifice of all who fell in defense of the city and the country more broadly. The obelisk, too, is officially dedicated not just to the fighters of the Second World War, but also to the defenders of Red Tsaritsyn, a memory that was in real danger of being overshadowed by the massive Soviet sacrifice in the face of the fascist invasion. This memory of course was of particular importance to Stalin himself, as his own personal mythos was tied so deeply to that conflict. We shall further examine how these spaces became central to the city’s memorialization efforts in the construction of the city’s war myth in Chapter 6.

While the earliest plans for Stalingrad’s central composition were eventually dismissed as unrealistic, much of the style and content of their proposals would be implemented in the final design, though of course much reduced in scope. The central district was envisioned to hold a uniform style throughout, and the composition was carefully laid out on a precise grid, mirrored on either side of what would become the “Alley of Heroes,” a pedestrian thoroughfare that stretched from the Square of Fallen Fighters all the way to the very banks of the Volga, which would be transformed into some sort of park. While there were many variants of the design, the core ethos that unified the proposals is very clear.

²⁴⁰ Quote originally attributed by Karl Qualls in *From Ruins to Reconstruction*, 45. Originally sourced from (V. N. Semenov, “Osnovy planirovki vosstanovlivaemykh gorodov,” *Problemy sovremennogo gradostroitel’sтва* 1 (1947): 8, emphasis in original).



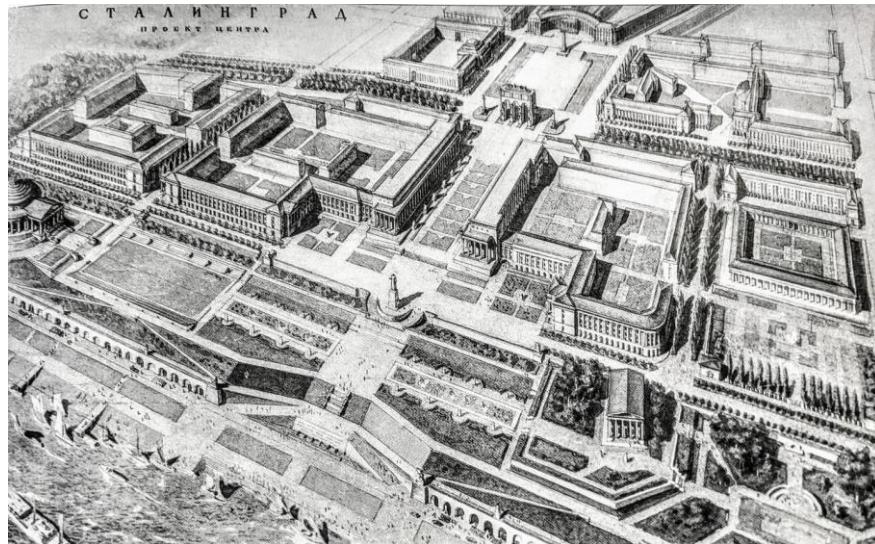
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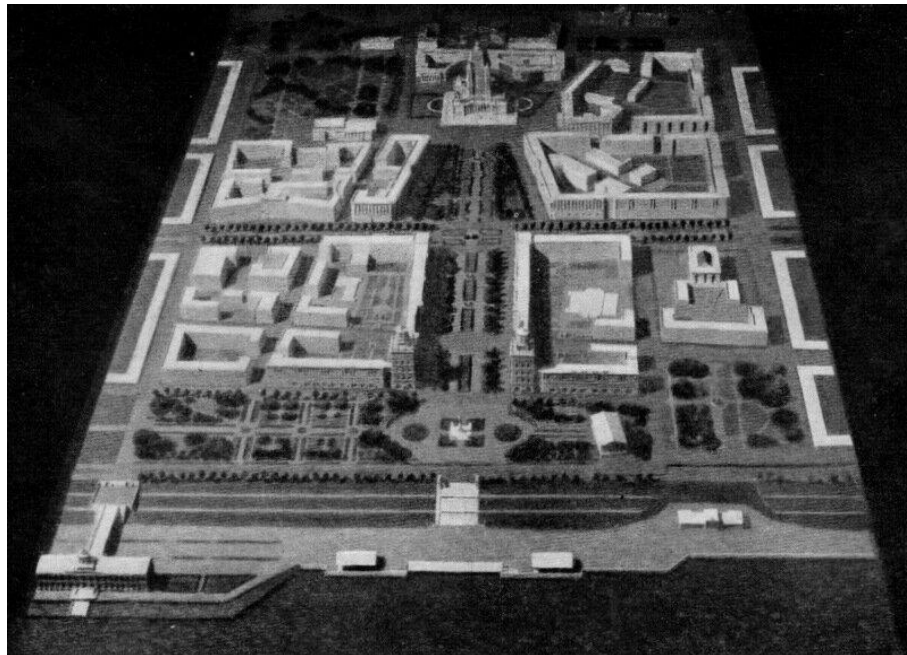
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²⁴¹ Another variant showing the intersection of Lenin Prospect and the Alley of Heroes, from Tarkhanov and Kavtaradze, *Architecture of the Stalin Era*.

²⁴² Variant proposal for the Central District, which downplays the rise of the embankment and instead makes the Alley of Heroes slowly rise toward the proposed palace of Soviets with the Square of Fallen Fighters beyond.



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Instead of being defined by massive structures towering above, the city's heart would instead be structured around open spaces—green corridors through which the city's residents and visitors could pass freely. The buildings that would line the streets and avenues around them would stick to a common aesthetic, adding to a sense of unity and grandeur. The architects faced

²⁴³ Central Ensembles for Stalingrad, Variants on the executed version (1946-1952) The proposal originated in the studio of Karo Alabyan and Vasily Simbirtsev, from Tarkhanov and Kavtaradze, *Architecture of the Stalin Era*.

²⁴⁴ This model, though still not entirely accurate to what would be built (note the large Palace of the Soviets capping the north end of the Square of Fallen Fighters. "Kak ostraivali novyi Stalingrad: Planetarii, Allei Geroev i zhiloi fond," in Stat'i (<https://dzen.ru/a/XQomdAUKMACvYUCD>, accessed 2/9/2024)

a choice, however, in what style to pursue—the Central District faced a level of destruction unlike any other neighborhood in Stalingrad. Hardly any of the structures that stood before the war, be they in the style of old Tsarytsin or the additions of socialist Stalingrad in the 1930s, could be salvaged. Ultimately, the designers decided that the newer Stalinist aesthetics—sweeping facades of marble and granite, complete with neoclassical arches and columns, as well as of course the iconic “layer cake” design—would predominate.

Moving East down the Alley of Heroes away from the Square, the composition opens up into a park along the river’s edge. The plan would be to reshape the Volga’s embankment, a narrow sliver of land which the city’s defenders had never ceded to the German offensive. This embankment would become yet another green space, with walking paths and plots dedicated to cultural institutions, with marble steps set into the bank all the way into the water. Ultimately the embankment was divided into several descending tiers, where statues, fountains, and colonnades would create the proper air of reverence in those who passed through it.

These three public spaces were deliberately functional pieces of the city—green spaces were meant to provide a space for the city’s denizens to take their recreation outdoors, the drawing together of transport lines to a centralized hub made this the logical heart of the city, and the unified aesthetic for the composition was to serve as the model for all outlying districts. However, they also served a deliberate “agitational” purpose as well. All of these sites were tied to the battle and the memory of the war was grafted onto each, both through the name and through the ample use of public space as the home to new monuments, memorials, and traditions. The district itself would be renamed the Stalin District, further tying the Soviet leader to the heart of the city up until 1961 (where it became known by its current moniker, simply the Central District). This idea of centrality in urban design was taken to its logical conclusion in the

creation of the hero-city, and it was undeniably effective—the Square of Fallen Fighters, the Alley of Heroes, and the 62nd Army Embankment, mark the cultural and spiritual heart of Volgograd today.

The center of the city was to serve as a gateway and a showcase of the city's grandest architectural accomplishments: spectacular buildings that would hold the city's post office, municipal offices, train station, theaters, and museums. Visitors to the city would be greeted by the city's most prestigious hotels and a recreation of the city's legendary department store. On the shore of the Volga, a modern commercial river port would allow travelers to access one of the Union's most important waterways. The embankment of the river would be transformed into a multi-tiered park stretching up from the water, set atop the beachhead landing zone from the time of the battle, where most of the tanks that supported the defense of the city had disembarked after the treacherous ferrying of the Volga. The park is divided into upper and lower mezzanines, centered on a cascading marble stairway that leads up to the Alley of Heroes. The planners envisioned flanking propylaea, two clusters of eight white colonnades standing on either side of the stairway as the symbolic gateway into the city from the river, which can be seen from afar before one's arrival. At the top of the incline, the park opens out into the tree-lined Park *Pobedy* ("victory"). This park would include a large fountain designed by sculptor S. S. Aleshin, now known as the "Friendship Fountain," named for its central subjects of three young girls entwined in a traditional folk dance. The park provides a home for several additional monuments to Soviet war dead, as well as for one of the Central District's main theaters. This structure, standing apart on one of the upper promenades, is a reconstruction of the theater that had stood since the days of Old Tsaritsyn, built during the time of Catherine II but largely destroyed during the battle.²⁴⁵

²⁴⁵ *Sovremennyi Volgograd*, 50.

In addition to recreational spaces like the parks and promenades of the embankment and the Alley of Heroes, the Central District was to regain its place as the city's cultural heart. Two major hotels, the Hotel Stalingrad and the *Inturist*, flank the Square of Fallen Fighters, two grand structures to receive the city's guests who would arrive at the newly renovated rail station. The city's Post Office—a cavernous building with an open composition around its central solarium, is regarded as one of the city's most significant architectural compositions. Further down the Alley, the *Univermag* department store was also restored—the store, a product of the 1930s that was renowned in the region and had become the pride of the city, had been badly damaged by fighting. No markers or plaques would tell of the slice of history that took place here—as Paulus's HQ within the city, this was where he ultimately surrendered. However, to memorialize that fact would require the admission that the Soviets had been pushed within a few hundred yards of losing the city. The site of Paulus's surrender would only become a memorial site, and a kitschy one at that, after the Soviet collapse.

The rail station, which had been little more than an open platform after the battle, was a grand undertaking. City planners, in holding with the theory of the central district serving as the “gateway” to the city, placed a high priority on creating a suitably impressive structure. While the platform was returned to service almost as soon as the rail lines were repaired in July of 1943, the necessary resources for the rail station beautification would not become available until much later. For nine years, a humble one-story temporary structure was all that welcomed new residents to the city. The architects A. V. Kurovsky and S. Z. Briskin won the bid to design the new station. In 1951, work began on the new station which would feature a grand hall three stories tall, a massive marble arch leading out into the square beyond, and a clock tower spire rising high above (its peak 67 meters above square below). The design of the station was inspired

by the “layer cake” design that was inspired by the Seven Sisters in Moscow, though certainly in microcosm. The clock tower would stand as one of the highest points in the Central District skyline, but its relatively small scale fit better the 4-5 story buildings that made up the rest of the ensemble.



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The walls and terraces created space for *bas relief* soldiers and depictions of the motherland, and the ceiling high above would come to be decorated with depictions of important scenes from the battle—the physical space of the station created a blank canvas that the politics of memorialization would soon fill. It would be a long time, too, before the iconic statue and fountain (the children holding hands in a circle around a crocodile, an allusion to a popular Pushkin story) that withstood the battle could be repaired.

The city’s main traffic thoroughfare, what is now *Prospekt Lenina* but was initially named *Prospekt Stalina*, would bisect the Alley of Heroes, which would serve as the official divide for the road’s northern and southern sections. After the path of the road had been laid out, a crudely made sign promptly appeared above the stairway to an earthen dug-out that lay at intersection, proudly declaring its address as “#1” on the street (its residents would soon be evicted to make way for the multistory apartment structures that dominate the central

²⁴⁶ The Stalingrad Train Station, circa the late-1950s, after its completion. The train station will provide the backdrop for many important state visits to the city, which will be explored more in Chapter 6.

composition).²⁴⁷ In the city's central district, this road would house some of the city's largest cultural institutions. Several theaters and museums can be found dotted throughout the central composition. To the north, the Avenue would flank the campuses of both the city's University and State Pedagogical Institute, as well as another wide square that would be dedicated to a grand statue of Lenin. The avenue to the south would require the construction of a large bridge to clear the gully created by the old path of the Tsaritsyn riverbed, connecting with the old main thoroughfare of the Voroshilov District, Worker-Peasant Street (*Ulitsa Raboche-Krestianik*). While initial designs had proposed this single trafficway would continue uninterrupted, following the Volga all the way to the Krasnoarmeisk district in the south, ultimately the idea would be amended to leave the bank to service the Soviet and Kirov neighborhoods, disrupting the contiguous line of the boulevard.

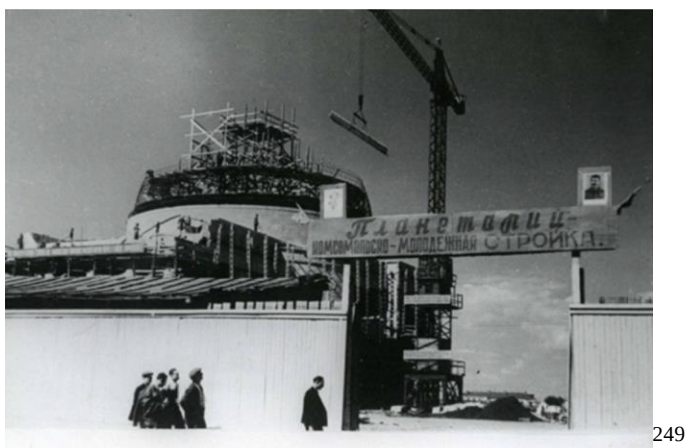
Running parallel to the river and the main avenue to the west was Peace Street (*Ulitsa Mir*), running only a few short blocks to the north from the Square of Fallen Fighters. This street was to house a showcase of the city's highest culture, cap-stoned by the city's future planetarium at its northernmost terminal. At the southern end of the Square was Stalingrad's large theater, which sustained heavy damage in the war, but would be completely remodeled as part of the city center's restoration effort. The tall white marble columns of its grand entrance are reminiscent of Greco-Roman cultural palaces of antiquity. It was announced in 1948 that it would have opened with the honor of being named Stalingrad's Gorky Theater.²⁴⁸ To the north, overlooking the square atop a plinth several meters high, was a statue depicting Stalin himself.

²⁴⁷ *Sovremennyi Volgograd*, 58.

²⁴⁸ *Stalingradskaia Pravda*, September 9, 1948.



To the west towards the river, the city's two largest hotels, including the *Inturist*, which would host the city's most distinguished visitors, look out over open space of the square below and beyond to the rail station to the east. To the north, the Planetarium itself is one of the most direct references to the neoclassical style that had become so *en vogue* for Soviet architects following the war, and many key structures there were designed to reflect the power and majesty of the party set in stone. The building, itself a monument to both progress and science, was set inside a stone colonnade and topped with an imperial dome, crested by the statue of a toga-clad woman holding a globe and dove aloft (like the Russian word *mir*—a word that can mean both “world” and “peace”), seen below.



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In addition to the new structures going up that would feature neoclassical facades and tons of white marble, the city's planners also strived to save what they could of Old Tsarytsin that managed to survive the war. Since these buildings were in highest concentration in the Central and Voroshilov districts, where some had stood for more than one hundred years, this offered the opportunity to retain some aspects of the city's former character and allow *Stalingradtsy* to feel tied to the city's historic past.

There are several examples where the preservation of Old Tsaritsyn style makes an obvious break in the new aesthetic, but the choice to maintain the old red-brick facades makes for a deliberate link to the city's past. The first example, an old manor home set on the edge of *Pavshikh bortsov* and just across from the train station, was heavily damaged during the fighting. The mansion had been built in pre-revolutionary times by the Repnikovs, a wealthy Tsaritsyn trading family with close ties to the imperial court, but during the civil war was commandeered as the headquarters of the Tsaritsyn Soviet and the military commissariat.²⁵⁰ The mansion then became a museum to the defense of the city during the Civil War, opened in 1937, just years before it would sustain heavy damage during the Battle, with its central location just off of the

²⁴⁹ Constructing the planetarium's dome, circa roughly 1953-54. Obtained from Planetarium's website, "Volgogradskii Planetarii: Glavnaia / o planetarii / Istoriiia, "Poslevoennyi Stalingrad," accessed May 1, 2024, <https://volgogradplanetarium.ru/about/history/poslevoennyy-stalingrad/>.

²⁵⁰ "Memorial-istoricheskii muzey" *O muzee-zapovednike*, at *Stalingrad-battle.ru*.

square where so much fighting had taken place. In 1955, it would officially open under the name of the I. V. Stalin Museum, and its displays of both the defense of Red Tsaritsyn and the heroic stand against the fascist invaders were very directly and spatially linked.²⁵¹ Still, instead of demolishing the structure to make way for something more in keeping with the new composition, the manor was restored in its original style, and reopened as a museum still mostly focused on the memory of the Civil War rather than the more recent conflict. Like the obelisk at the other end of the square, this choice appears to be part of a concerted effort by the party to maintain the importance of Red Tsaritsyn in the public memory, and the architectural preservation only strengthens the link to the past before the Battle.

Another old-Tsaritsyn manor home that survived the Battle and persists in Volgograd today is the Mansion of the Rysyn brothers, or what is now known as the “House of the Architects.” This three-story manor home, set in the south-east corner of the Central district near the old riverbed, became the headquarters of the very architects who were charged with the reconstruction of the city! The old mansion was one of few that required only minimal repairs following the battle, and it was used to house the head architects and engineers brought in to begin the reconstruction of the city, even though the structure itself was still surrounded by ruins. Today, *Dom arkhitektura* is somewhat of a curio, as the building was physically preserved, yet the new city was built up around it. Modern multi-story housing units that were an extension of the central ensemble were thrown up on every side of the red-brick manor home, which now exists inside the larger structure’s central courtyard. The House of the Architects is preserved as a historic site but hidden from the street for all but those who know how to find it; it serves as a physical metaphor for the city’s pre-revolutionary past amidst Soviet modernity.

²⁵¹ *Stalingradskaja Pravda*, April 6, 1955.

Finally, there is the Cossack Theater, once one of the cultural landmarks of the old imperial city. A fixture of the main drag of the Voroshilov district, the theater's beautiful façade was carefully restored, and reopened in the aftermath of the war as a place capable of providing entertainment and a welcome distraction from the harsh realities of daily life in the city. The Cossack theater was not the only red-brick structure to survive in Voroshilov, being less-thoroughly destroyed than its neighboring district to the north, and it is thanks to its preservation that many other structures also survived into the post-war period instead of giving way to new Soviet structures, which continued to rise up around them.

Even though the chaos caused by the battle had disrupted many aspects of daily life, even in the early days of reconstruction, harsh labor quotas of the planned economy were reimposed on the city's laborers. Deadlines in the midst of reconstruction efforts, with so many factors limiting work crews' ability to complete the job on time, led to poor quality of work that was a cause of constant frustration for the regional party committee. For example, at the work site designated Krasnaya Zastavka, where Stalingradstroi Trust #1 was in charge of the restoration of several two- and three-story apartment buildings heavily damaged in the fighting, work was reported completed on January 26, 1944.²⁵² When representatives of the regional committee came to inspect the work a few weeks later, their report was incredulous at the sheer scope of the problems they encountered. As of February 12, "neither the second and third floors can be considered ready for habitation or meeting the elementary installation requirements: the roof is not ready, water flows from the ceilings on the second and third floors, no plumbing is ready or even connected to the main lines, the windows are not installed, the surface of the ceilings and walls are not finished or painted, the frames of the windows and doors are not plastered, [...]"

²⁵² GAVO, F. R-3048 Op. 1 D. 46, l. 13.

there is no heating.” What’s more, while inspecting the structures, officials discovered a corpse—likely someone who had snuck inside seeking shelter from the cold—in a room on the third floor of a building that had been signed off on by the trust as “ready” for habitation!²⁵³

Despite setting high targets and reimposing stern labor discipline, projects were consistently behind and plagued by unfulfilled work orders. Another of Stalingradstroi Trust #1’s projects, the restoration of the Gorky Theater had fallen so far behind schedule that the lead engineers on the project had received a sharp rebuke from the regional party committee. A letter written back to the party *obispolkom* by several of the project heads tried to explain the lack of progress and place the blame squarely on the shoulders of subcontractors who had failed to complete their work on time.²⁵⁴ The steelworkers of Narkomchet Trust #1 responsible for the installation of the roof and supports had fallen behind, and special construction and installation (*obshchestroitel'noye montazhnoye upravleniye*, or OSMU) trusts #14 and #25 were behind on the theater’s ventilation systems, resulting in near complete work stoppage for the plaster workers responsible for the final detail work.

The trust’s director, Arutchianov, even made a personal plea to the head of the Regional Party committee, A. S. Chuianov, to overturn the committee’s decision regarding the failings of his outfit, writing “Aleksey Semenovich, I am an engineer with sixteen years of experience, a communist who was admitted to the ranks of the CPSU (b) in Stalingrad, where I was in the first months of his release at my own insistence with the Bolsheviks, since they didn’t let me go to work, I had to write a letter...” He goes on to remind Chuianov of his record before the war, where he oversaw successful projects in the Caucasus and at Magnitogorsk. As the director of this branch of Stalingradstroi, he had overseen the work “to restore thirty houses - among them

²⁵³ GAVO, F. R-3048, Op. 1 D. 50, I. 48.

²⁵⁴ GAVO, F. R-3048 Op. 1 D. 50, I.53.

are residential administrative buildings and auxiliary objects. At present, OSMU No. 1 is building theater houses, Krasnaya Zastava, the Post Office, your own housing estate, the Regional Council House on Orlovskaya Street, a trust garage and other construction sites. My responsibility as a director and chief engineer is very large, and there are very few workers, but in spite of everything, I pledge all my knowledge of an engineer to the hero city.”²⁵⁵

The groups that Arutchianov leaves holding the bag for the slow-down at Gorky Theater, Traktorstroi #14 OSMU and Krasnooktiabr'sk #25 OMSU, have their own history worth exploring. There is a reason why their work may have been poor and why they made such attractive scapegoats for the site director. The roots of these outfits go back to the earliest days of reconstruction, when one of the main labor pools in the city remained Axis POWs from the German 6th Army's surrender at Stalingrad. NKVD Special Labor Camp #108 was formed to house these prisoners, and they were deployed as manual labor brigades at some of the most important priority sites, such as STZ (then building T-34 tanks), the Red October steel works, the Barricades munitions plant, and the regional power plant outside the southern village of Bekhetovka. Of the 3000 inmates spread across multiple sites, the NKVD issued orders that they be kept guarded and separated from other work crews. They also made an effort to identify the skills or train these prisoners who would have had to be put to use in more specialized fields, which led to the creation of the OSMU units that were the progenitors of the same crews at work at the Theater years later.

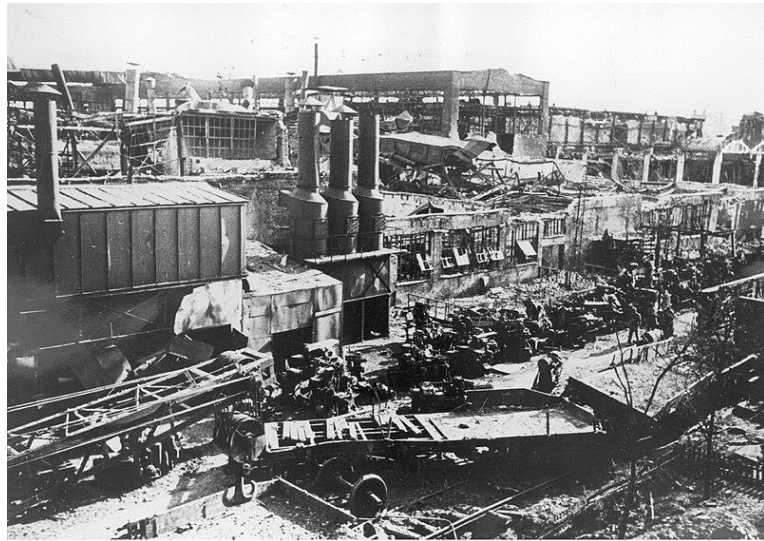
The North: Traktorzavod and Krasnooktiabr'sk

²⁵⁵ GAVO, F. R-3048, Op. 1, D. 50, l. 107.

The first neighborhoods to return to the north of the city were based around the major factory complexes—the Stalingrad Tractor Factory (STZ), the Barricades munitions plant, and Red October steel works. Because of the ongoing war effort during the initial years of recovery, these industrial sites received the most attention in terms of labor and resources. Initially, their workers were housed in dugouts, former military encampments, and hastily constructed military-style barracks. The factory was originally a product of the first Five-Year Plans, laid out in the Stalinist style of a closed industrial campus, separate from where its workers were housed. When half the factory lay in ruins, the laborers used to get the plant back up and running were housed in direct proximity to their workshops. Only over time would these temporary structures give way to multi-story apartment complexes, the *montazhakh*, that were situated across the main avenue from the factory gates, most along a radial main street running perpendicular to the river, running east to west ending at the factory gates. This composition would constitute the final major hub on the road north out of the city, and its main structures would mimic the architecture of the central district.

The tractor factory, which was a major German target and had seen some of the heaviest fighting in the days of the battle, also drew the most resources during the restoration. The assembly line had been reconfigured in the early days of the war to produce the Soviet Union's staple T-34 tank, which during the push westward became the true workhorse of the Red Army. Even beyond its crucial role in the Soviet war-effort, the factory also enjoyed a special symbolic place in the city for the administration—in the papers, the Stalingrad Tractor Factory (which also was also honorarily named for F. E. Dzerzhinsky until 1961) was often referred to as the “firstborn” of the Five-Year Plans that had sought to recalibrate and expand the city's industrial potential. The prospects and success of the “firstborn” were a source of pride for the city and the

plant's workers, who often enjoyed a sort of "first among equals" status when the party awarded accolades for outstanding individual workers, labor brigades, and workshops. However, its output capacity was severely reduced in the aftermath of the battle when so much of the complex had been destroyed in the fighting.



By April of 1943, enough of the plant had been cleared to act as a repair station for damaged tanks, but already by June of 1944 the plant was able to produce its first new STZ-NATI tractor. Over the next decade it would produce more than 70,000 new tractors, including regularly adapting to the latest schematics for new models and designs. In a little under a decade, the Stalingrad Tractor Factory would be revived as the most productive factory of its kind in the entirety of the Soviet Union.

The factory's campus runs nearly a kilometer along the right bank of the Volga, stretching up nearly two miles along the river and nearly a half mile inland before it meets the *Prospekt*. Before the massive white columns that mark the gates of the factory, a wide square serves as the centerpiece in the neighborhood, as well as the northernmost terminal stop for the

²⁵⁶ Photo by Herber, "Stalingrad: Destroyed Tractor Factory "Dzerzhinsky," November 1942, via Archiwa Panstwowe Narodowe Archiwum Cyrowe, accessed 5/30/2024:<https://audiovis.nac.gov.pl/obraz/5057/>

city's metro. On either side of the white colonnade of the gates, two massive mosaic murals present colorful depictions of heroic Soviet workers. The man who gave the factory its name, Felix Dzerzhinsky (the man Lenin appointed to oversee the operation of the Cheka, the first Soviet secret police force) had been cast in bronze to stand outside the factory gates. This statue, while suffering damage during the war, ultimately survived to reclaim his place on the north end of the square. To the south, a T-34 tank, marked with the words "*za rodinu!*" ("for the motherland!") became a fixture of the space in 1943. This monument was an easy means of concretely tying the factory to its wartime legacy—it was also almost certainly a local initiative, since simply parking a tank on the square required little cost or approval from the city's planners. With the ruins of T-34 tanks spread out still across the city, with some becoming miniature memorial sites themselves, this also helped tie the Tractor Factory in a very tangible way with the rest of the city. Only in 1949, after it had become a fixture of the space, was it set atop a proper plinth with a memorial plaque, giving it an additional status of reverence.

The "Barricades" armaments factory, a slightly smaller and more condensed plant located just south along the Volga's right bank, lacks the regal central ensemble of the city's larger industrial enterprises, but during and after the battle its production was highly relied upon throughout the city. The winter of 1943-44 made it clear that in a city where most housing was still woefully incomplete heating systems would need to be prioritized. The *Barrikady* plant would rework its production line to produce radiators rather than shells, and it is estimated that these radiators would have been responsible for providing heat to over 50,000 square kilometers of renovated living spaces in the city.²⁵⁷

²⁵⁷ Liushin, *Trudovoi podvig Volgogradtsev*, 91.

Further south still are the sprawling steelworks of Red October, which was specifically planned to supply the steel needed by the STZ. The rail lines that connected the two however, both shipping and civilian transport, would need to be rebuilt after the battle. Like the tractor factory, the factory's directors were hard pressed to find housing for the laborers brought in to clear the rubble and slowly return the facilities to operation. Earthen bunkers and hastily constructed barracks amidst the towering smokestacks were all many had for living space as the large-scale residential buildings being designed to line the *Prospekt* would not see construction even begin until the late 1940s. Unlike most districts, Krasnooktiabr'sk ("Red October") had no traditional central ensemble that would define it and its place in Stalingrad's tapestry of districts (*raion*). Instead, planners envisioned a corridor of multistory housing complexes running parallel to the *Prospekt*, with a green corridor setting the buildings back from the road and rail lines. Though it would be a long time before this space became truly "green," it did intend to provide workers of the steel plant with a pedestrian promenade that spanned several miles, reaching nearly to the base of Mamayev Kurgan in the south. These parks would also provide local officials ample space to add memorials or other agitation installments. Cultural attractions, schools, daycares, and medical facilities were to be interspersed amidst the apartment complexes. The architects who led the design of the compositions facing the avenue, Stalingrad native architects G.F. Borisenko, V.P. Statuna, and V.A. Minkin sought a relatively austere aesthetic that would create an effect that was "peaceful yet majestic" in nature.²⁵⁸

²⁵⁸ *Sovremennyi Volgograd*, 77.



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The northern neighborhoods differed from their counterparts in the Center, because they were first and foremost designed in their relation to the factories on the river-facing side of Lenin Prospect and the tram line, which formed a sort of buffer between dedicated industrial and residential zones. Their smokestacks, blast furnaces, and other trappings of heavy industry defined the area's skyline and helped citizens orient themselves on the north/south Axis. Rather than emphasizing neighborhood centers, city designers strove for uniformity in the long rows of public housing buildings, mimicking to the best of their ability the form and lines of the city's central ensemble, stretched out over the course of several kilometers. Since these multi-story housing units are high enough to block sightlines of much beyond, the impression is given that this would be the predominant form of the rest of neighborhoods as well. In reality, the first housing units on this stretch of the city would only see completion by the mid-1950s, after Stalin's death and as architectural styles would once again change to meet political demands. The buildings to the West of the city's "façade" feel very different, mostly due to the lack of

²⁵⁹ Image from *Stalingradskaja pravda*, April 30, 1952. The text at the bottom reads: "The avenue named for I. V. Stalin will be the central thoroughfare of the revived Stalingrad. This highway will pass through the whole city - from Traktorzavod to Krasnoarmeisk. Beautiful buildings like these will be built along its entire length. The contours of the avenue are increasingly wide. This image shows one of the sections of the avenue in the Krasnooktyabrsk district. It is built up with multi-story buildings with beautifully designed architectural facades. Construction is carried out by the management team of *Metallurgzstroi*. The company is making every effort to fulfill the obligations to the letter of Comrade Stalin's requests. The management plan exceeded the plan for the first quarter. It was decided to build new houses in this quarter by the flow-speed method, which should allow builders to complete the annual plan in July. Via this method, new residences will be completed according to an hourly schedule."

ornamentation on buildings not directly facing the city's most important transportation artery. Still the uniform vision of the immediate post-war style creates a remarkable effect.

At the southern end of the Red October, the hill of Mamayev Kurgan rose up above the cranes and structures. The area had seen such intense fighting during the war that for years after the battle the terrain was impassable for civilians. The hill itself could hardly be considered fit for civilian construction. It was the final resting place of literally thousands of war dead, many still unrecovered, both Soviet and German. It had seen some of the fiercest fighting in the days of the battle. At the peak of the fighting, the heights switched hands dozens of times, sometimes for weeks, sometimes only for mere hours. The hill itself was a sort of monument in its own right, a looming reminder of the cost of the war. Still, it would be some time before Mamayev Kurgan would become the pinnacle of the hero-city's memorialization efforts, topped with its massive concrete composition of "*Rodina Mat.*"²⁶⁰ For the time being, memorial sites on and around the hill sprung up organically around known grave sites and lingering artifacts of the war, such as tanks destroyed during the battle whose corpses still dotted the landscape. At the crest of the hill, a small monument was erected dedicated to the defenders of the hill, and this site became an important location for performative rituals on days of remembrance. City officials would lay wreaths and flowers at the monument on holidays dedicated to the war or the Battle, and it would become a sort of pilgrimage site for visitors to the city, particularly for foreign dignitaries and central party officials.

The South: Krasnoarmeisk

²⁶⁰ The construction and opening of this memorial complex will be discussed in-depth in Chapter 6.

Located dozens of kilometers south of the city center, the Kirov district nonetheless remained one of the busiest and densely populated regions of the city following the battle. As discussed in Chapter 1, the area had seen little combat on the ground, and other than the strategically important STALgres power-station and a few other select targets, it had even missed the brunt of bombing and shelling that was much more concentrated further north.

Its name—Krasnoarmeisk—derived, of course, from the revolutionary Red Army. It was the southernmost of all the city’s suburbs. It was little more than a collection of villages before the war began. After the battle, however, it would see its importance within the city grow, with a corresponding rise in population and infrastructure. For a time, with resources and labor personnel scarce, Stalingrad’s planners shortly debated excising the district to form its own city. This idea was resoundingly rejected by the district itself—Krasnoarmeisk would stay part of Stalingrad, with all the prestige (and access to resources) that being part of the “hero-city” entailed.²⁶¹

The destruction of the city’s old commercial riverport was so thorough and the river there so choked with debris hidden under the surface, that the city’s planners decided to relocate it to the south, where the Volga reconvenes after splitting around the Sarpinskiy island and bends back to the east. Their decision was also impacted by the call from the party center to renew the effort to connect the Volga and Don rivers with an overland canal, which would theoretically connect two of Europe’s greatest river systems and allow watercraft to travel between the Black and Caspian Seas, even all the way North to Moscow. While the shipping economy, as well as a large chemical plant, would make up the core of the district’s long-term economic livelihood, it was the Volga-Don Canal that would shape the character and composition of Krasnoarmeisk.

²⁶¹ Orlov, *Istoriia rodnogo kraia*, 171.

During the city's reconstruction, the new river port became one of the city's most bustling enterprises, coordinating the massive amount of material resources still pouring into the city while also moving finished products from the city's various assembly lines. With the city's previous oil tank farm set notoriously ablaze during the early days of the battle, a new oil storage and processing facility sprang up near the river port, where most of the raw crude was received. This region became known as "a second Baku" (the Azerbaijani city on the Caspian Sea coast that was home to the most productive oil-field in the Soviet Union) during this time, with more than 400 million rubles invested in new facilities, rail and water shipping lines that service the port and the surrounding facilities.²⁶²

The idea of connecting the Volga and Don rivers was a notion that originated with the Ottoman Turks when they controlled the region during the sixteenth century, but that had been revived under the Soviets alongside other major hydro engineering ambitions. The Volga-Don project began gathering steam in the late 1930s but was promptly tabled after the outbreak of the war with Germany. Its revival came during the turn away from victory celebrations, as Stalin and the party attempted to revive the atmosphere of the 1930s, complete with *stroiki*, or the "Great Construction Projects."²⁶³

The Canal was itself a monumental feat. Nearly 101 kilometers lay between the nearest points of the two rivers. Of this, forty-five kilometers of the waterway would be formed by reservoirs created by the building of three dams and hydroelectric stations along the route. The other fifty-six kilometers would need to be artificially dredged through the steppe. The canal's proposed nine single locks would be tasked with raising ships over eighty-eight meters in the

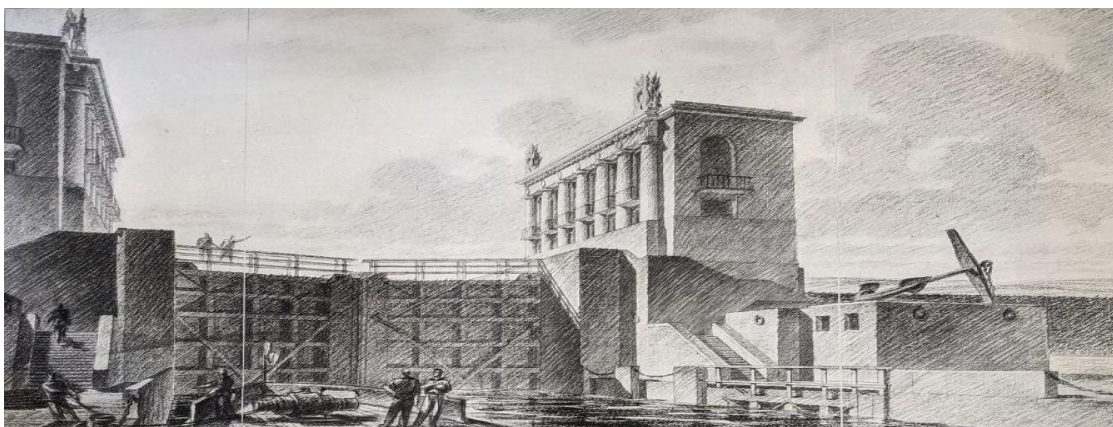
²⁶² Liushin, *Trudovoi podvig Volgogradtsev*, 90.

²⁶³ For a broad look at these "Great Construction Projects" across the Soviet Union, see Paul R. Josephson, "'Projects of the Century' in Soviet History: Large-Scale Technologies from Lenin to Gorbachev," in *Technology and Culture* 36, no. 3 (1995): 519–59.

course of their journey. Sergey Zhuk, director of the Hydroelectric Institute (which was the state's chief engineering firm for such projects) was named lead engineer of the project.

Even amidst all the other reconstruction efforts in the city, the building of the Volga-Don Canal would dominate the image and prestige of the city in the years to come. The canal had all the hallmarks of a great Stalinist construction: it was driven by a single-minded objective, was literally earth-shaking in scope, and it promised to redefine what would be possible for future generations. Because the canal would empty into the Volga in Krasnoarmeisk, the district was set to benefit greatly from the influx of resources and labor (including thousands of POWs fresh from the front). The Canal would also come to comprise the district's core composition, as bridges, parks, statues, and decorative architecture dedicated to the canal would become the defining features of the neighborhood, giving Krasnoarmeisk its own set of cultural landmarks to finally rival those of its northern counterparts.

It was still to be determined, however, what final shape this ensemble would take. The entrance to the final lock, set a few hundred meters back from the river itself, provided another opportunity for architects to craft a lasting image for the city. The architects at the firm headed by L. Polyakov returned to familiar themes echoed in the city's core ensemble: Greco-Roman columns and arches in colossal scale. The arches shown below, a variation of which would be



adapted for the official “mouth” of the Canal in Krasnoarmeisk, evoked the triumphal arches of Rome (or its modern successors in Paris and elsewhere).



Triumphal arches, sweeping facades, and columns of stone were proposed not just for the locks at the far ends of the canal, but for each of the nine locks in between. As Alexei Tarkhanov and Sergei Kavtaradze in their review of the project’s history,

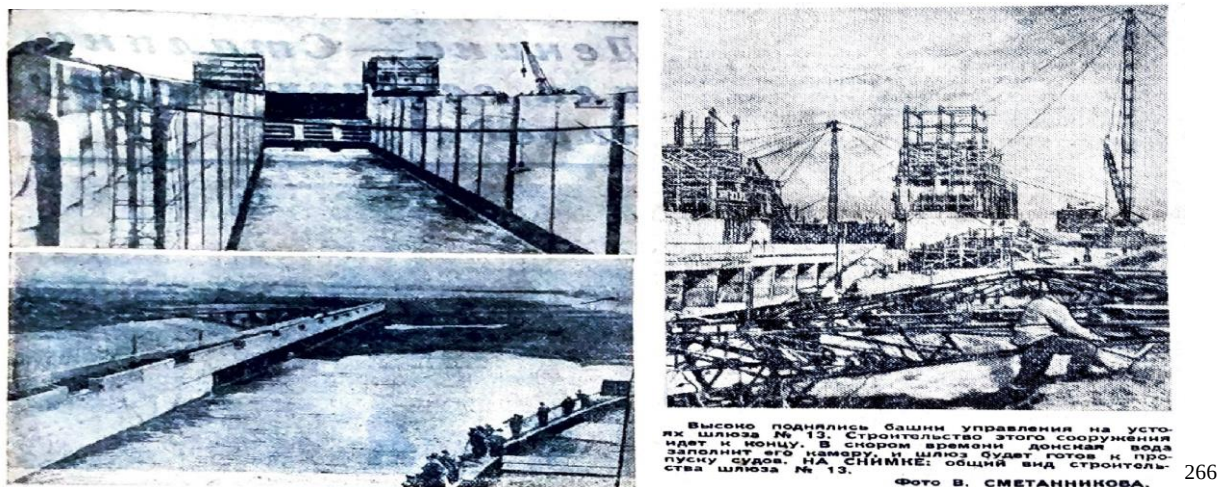
The lock-heads were decorated with triumphal arches bearing numerous bas-reliefs and sculptural groups. The designers explained that many of the greatest battles of the recent war had taken place in the steppes. Lock Number 13, for example, marked the place where the Stalingrad and Don front lines had encircled Paulus’s army on November 23, 1942, during the attempted capture of Stalingrad. The project contained many such memorial themes and hundreds of structures whose every element—ranging from light houses to power-stations—was seen as a monument.²⁶⁵

While the competition of the canal’s architectural elements was still being decided, construction began in earnest as early as 1947. The progress of the Canal was a constant topic in the city press. The party press constantly stressed the historic nature of the project and the transformative effect it would supposedly have on the regional economy upon its completion. Interviews with outstanding workers, stories by reporters who spent days embedded with labor brigades, and each celebration of construction milestones were designed to connect *Stalingradtsy*

²⁶⁴ Above: “Sluice No. 9, Volga-Don Canal Perspective,” Below: “Sluice-gate, Volga-Don Canal Sketch” (1949-1952), Architects L. Polyakov, R. Yakubov, F. Topunov, from Tarkhanov and Kavtaradze, *Architecture of the Stalin Era*.

²⁶⁵ Ibid, 144.

from all over the city to “the great construction project,” the completion of which was to be another source of pride for the city.



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Images of the construction emphasized the mastery of Soviet science over nature.²⁶⁷ It should be noted that unlike major waterway projects that were hallmarks of the early Stalinist period (such as the infamous Belomor Canal), the progress made in Soviet industrialization, not to mention the access to foreign made machinery afforded by Allied aid programs during the war and the spoils taken from Eastern Europe following the Red Army’s march on Berlin, meant that the Volga-Don project would be highly mechanized. The Belomor Canal, for instance, had been largely constructed using the labor of Gulag inmates to accomplish the difficult task of moving thousands of tons of earth in appalling conditions with primitive technology. The excavations along the Volga-Don waterway, on the other hand, would require more specialized personnel operating a wide range of heavy machinery. That said, ultimately Volgodonstroi (the overarching construction conglomerate overseeing construction) would employ thousands of Soviet citizens,

²⁶⁶ *Stalingradskaya Pravda*, April 9, 1952. Left: “Vechera na Volga-Done,” June 1, 1952. Right: “Nedelya na velikikh stroikakh.”

²⁶⁷ For more on Soviet engineering projects that embodied this mentality, see Cynthia Ruder, *Making History for Stalin: The Story of the Belomor Canal* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1998), Josephson, “‘Projects of the Century’ in Soviet History.”

as well as prisoners of war and Gulag inmates. Construction carried on round-the-clock. As of September 1949, three shifts were organized across the majority of the project. Over the course of the project, nearly 900,000 workers would lend their labor to connecting the two rivers.

In addition to organizing such a massive labor pool across one hundred kilometers worth of different projects, Volgodonstroï administrators had to coordinate with Soviet central planners to acquire the various building materials and necessary equipment required to keep construction moving according to plan. Sergei Ia. Zhuk, the head engineer on the project, was constantly having to appeal to the bureaucrats at the Ministry of Internal Affairs to get ahold of high-demand items.²⁶⁸ These included large mechanical devices such as the heavy “scrapers” (excavators) that would cut the trenches of the future canal, but also lumber and timber products used for constructing basic scaffolding.²⁶⁹ To meet the massive demands of the canal’s construction, plants all over the Soviet Union were commissioned to make various products, such as iron products from Magnitogorsk, cables from Odessa, and specialized pumps transported from the Uralmash factory in Yekaterinburg.²⁷⁰ Initially, workers were bivouacked near construction sites in pop-up metal barracks borrowed from the Soviet military.²⁷¹

One particular incident reveals the difficulty Volgodonstroï’s engineers faced when confronting the logistical challenges of their enormous project. Of the fifty-six kilometers where the waterway would have to be artificially constructed, most of the terrain was flat steppe with a deep bedrock, ideal for scrapers and draglines to complete the majority of the excavation. However, between the 21st and 25th kilometer markers, there was a drastic rise in the landscape

²⁶⁸ Zhuk also played a major role in the construction of the Belomor Canal and other major hydroelectric projects. His full resume will be worth exploring further, especially to determine what contacts he had within the party apparatus.

²⁶⁹ GARF, R. 3.6933, D. 2842 I. 1-4, 26.

²⁷⁰ Ibid, 34-37.

²⁷¹ Ibid, 16.

that would require much deeper digs to allow the canal to pass. There, engineers needed to dig anywhere from seven meters to fifteen meters below the surface. To reach such depths with the standard methods would be nearly impossible and logistically infeasible to attempt. Instead, the engineers decided they would need access to the specialized multi-bucket excavators that had been acquired from Germany.²⁷²

The excavators in question were currently in use in coal mining operations in the Ukraine SFR. The initial request submitted by Volgodonstroi to the MVD was denied. The machines were already promised to the mining operations in question and could not be spared.

Volgodonstroi was advised to take up the issue with Glavgidrostoi, the main administration for water projects across the USSR. However, this would not be the end of the matter. An appeal was made by Andrei Khrulyov, who during the Great Patriotic War had held the post of Chief of Logistics of the Armed Forces and had worked closely with the top Soviet brass during the war, to none other than Lavrenti Beria himself on behalf of the engineers.²⁷³ Khrulyov wrote that to use such excavators for mining operations was a major misstep, compared with the sheer amount of work that would have to be done for the Volga-Don project to move forward—in just those four kilometers over 3.7 million cubic meters of earth would need to be removed out of the path of the waterway. The soil conditions were also ideal for the excavators along this swath. His letter concluded, “Considering this, I ask you, Lavrenti Pavlovich, whether it would be possible for a number of multi bucket excavators to not be used by the mines, for example fifteen excavators of held by the Ministry of Internal Affairs, to instead accelerate work on the Volga-Don canal, after consulting a knowledgeable person on the proper use of these excavators?”²⁷⁴ Shortly after this,

²⁷² GARF, Reel 3.6933, Delo 2842, p. 11.

²⁷³ How he was informed of their plight is unclear but might be worth exploring in future research.

²⁷⁴ Ibid, p. 13.

Beria announced that Glavogidrostroi and the MVD were in agreement that Volgodonstroi should be allocated the excavators, citing largely the same reasons outlined by the engineers in their first appeal.

Even once the materials were allocated, there was still the matter of transport and distribution across the massive construction site. The metallurgical complex at the nearby Novo-Kramotorsk (bearing the name “Stalin”), situated just north of Donetsk, was commissioned to produce many pieces of equipment and supplies for Volgodonstroi, such as the “walking draglines” (a type of mobile crane excavator) commonly used in excavation. However, both Volgodonstroi and the plant lacked sufficient trucks capable of hauling the heavy loads to where they were actually needed, and instead had to wait for the wagons to be allocated by the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

Though the project was spread across many work sites, the city of Stalingrad also directly benefited from the Volga-Don canal project. The needs of the project led to the construction of hundreds of kilometers of new roads and railroads, power lines, and communication lines. At StalGRES, which supplied the power for the major section just south of the city where most of the canal’s locks are concentrated, was expanded to provide the massive amounts of concrete needed to build the canal’s various locks and dams, a new cement factory was established in the southwest of Stalingrad. A command post for the project was established at the site of the Tsimlyansk dam and hydroelectric station, from which a direct line was established to connect Volgodonstroi’s head administration with Moscow when questions of construction would

arise.²⁷⁵ In addition, an estimated 1.5 million cubic meters of housing and public buildings were also built to house the influx of new workers into the region.²⁷⁶

By 1951, it was estimated that ninety percent of the labor done by Volgodonstroi was mechanized, and the remaining ten percent left to manual labor still required high levels of specialization. The prestige of the project also attracted workers to the Stalingrad region—tens of thousands of applications were received from all over the USSR to be transferred to the Volga-Don Canal and its connected projects.²⁷⁷ This influx of laborers helped grow Stalingrad's own economy as more and more money flooded in from the center to see the project completed. Some hard-to-acquire goods, such as automobiles, flooded into the region to accommodate the needs of Volgodonstroi's workers, and *Stalingradtsy* reaped the benefits as well. The Volga-Don canal, less than a decade after the city had been devastated, had helped to reestablish Stalingrad as a boom town and regional hub.

The Canal was a massive accomplishment, which was to further add to the greatness of the city even beyond the monumental task of its revival. The meeting of the Canal with the Volga, which ran through the heart of Krasnoarmeisk district, would actually provide the central piece of the proposed ensemble that would establish the neighborhood within the Pantheon of the city's other great architectural landmarks. One of the most visually impressive monuments was announced as the capstone of the canal, set into the bank where it met the Volga. Until this point, the visage of the Soviet leader remained largely absent from the city. Now, as the project neared completion, it would honor Stalin with a massive bronze statue rising above the river. As

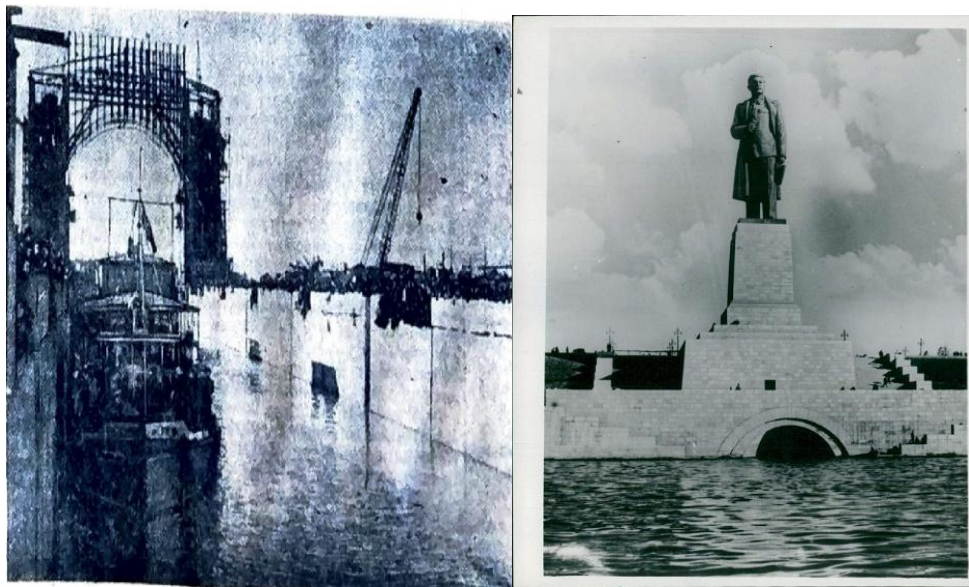
²⁷⁵ Ibid, 17-18.

²⁷⁶ "Volga Don Canal Completion Set for 1951," Central Intelligence Agency: Information from Foreign Radio Broadcasts, February 13, 1951, General CIA Records (published through Freedom of Information Act), accessed through www.cia.gov/readingroom, 1.

²⁷⁷ Ibid, p. 2.

architectural historians Alexei Tarkhanov and Sergei Kavtaradze put it, “the twenty-six -meter bronze figure of Stalin by Yevgeny Vuchetich extended its protection over the whole canal.”²⁷⁸

This final statue of Stalin, which for a time was the largest of any such statue of the Soviet leader in the entire Soviet Union, was taken down and replaced with a similarly monumental statue of Lenin in 1961 as part of de-Stalinization. In addition, the final lock before the mouth of the river was to be marked by a massive triumphal arch stretching over the canal’s path. The arch and the statue, separated by little more than a few hundred meters and connected on the upper bank by a green promenade, made up the central composition of the Krasnoarmeisk district, and remain to this day the most notable elements of its skyline.



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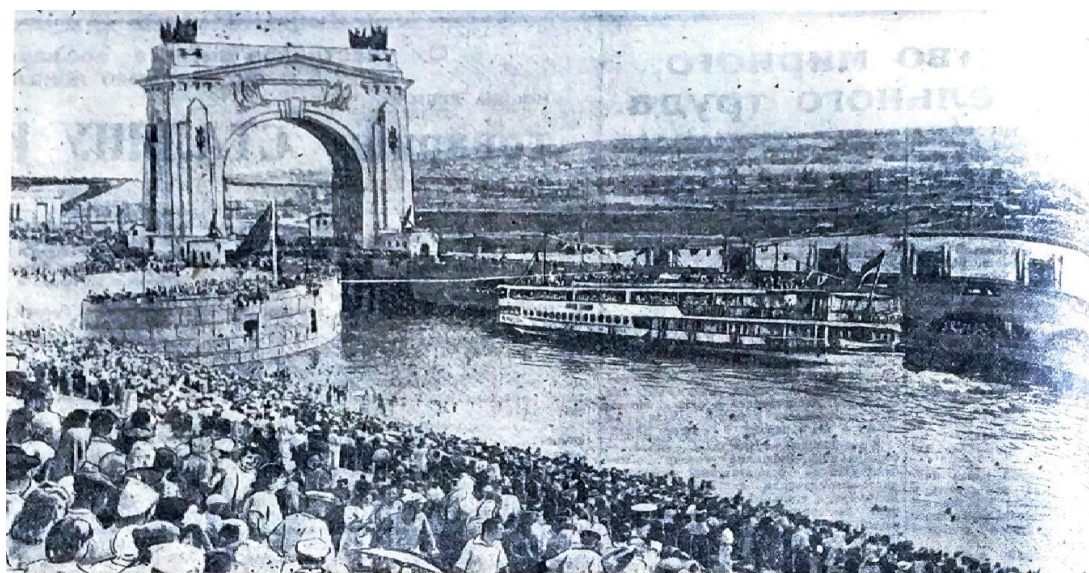
Though the ensemble of the canal was broken up by dozens of kilometers, Tarkhanov and Kavtaradze argue that the architects behind the project intended each element to be viewed as

²⁷⁸ Tarkhanov and Kavtaradze, *Architecture of the Stalin Era*, 144. Vuchetich is an interesting figure in the world of Soviet Architecture in his own right, and his connection to the city had only just begun when he was put in charge of this composition of Stalin. Vuchetich would later be named the lead architect on the Mamayev Kurgan memorial complex that would transform the city’s skyline and become its most iconic landmark. This story will be explored in Chapter 6.

²⁷⁹ Left—*Stalingradskaia Pravda*, “Na Volga-Done eti dni,” June 5, 1942. Right—Statue of Stalin atop pedestal, circa 1958 (GIS).

part of a grander vision: “The most ordinary journey by ship—even deck or third class—was intended as a memorial procession, inspired by the appearance of the ghostly white arches adorned with Motovilov’s sculptures. These arches are so fantastic that today they seem like a foretaste of eternity. Once realized, the project was a Stalinist era monument to itself.”

When construction was finally completed in 1952, the inaugural christening would come to be a memorable day in the city’s history. Thousands turned out to take part in the opening ceremonies, the events of which were broadcast throughout the Soviet Union through the party press. While Stalin had been invited to witness the opening ceremonies, the leader ultimately remained in Moscow, taking part in the festivities honoring the Soviet Air Force. In his stead, a new riverboat, *christened* with the name of Stalin, passed under the triumphal arch that spanned the Canal after its final lock. This tableau was distributed far and wide, its image recreated on postcards and even stamps at the time, as well as this poster by B. Smolyak, imagining what the effect might have been if Stalin had been aboard the ship of his namesake.



Теплоход «Иосиф Сталин» подходит к ленте, протянутой у входа в канал.

Фото В. Сметанникова 280

²⁸⁰ Photo by V. Smetannikova, appearing in “Torzhestvennoe otkrytie Volgo-Donskoi sudokhodnogo kanala imeyi V. I. Lenina,” *Stalingradskaya pravda*, July 29, 1952, 2, captioned “The motor ship “Joseph Stalin” approaches the ribbon stretched at the entrance of the canal.”



The Death of Joseph Vissarionovich

In the words of the editors of *Stalingradskia pravda*, in celebration of the Volga-Don Canal's opening, a motto was born encapsulating the pride of the city: "Where there is Stalin, there is Victory!" The implication is clear, for a city bearing Stalin's name, and the remarkable recovery of Stalingrad as a thriving metropolis from the point of near destruction in under a decade gave plenty of support to this credo. However, the inherently Stalinist nature of the city, like the rest of the Soviet Union, would soon face the inevitable question that lurked behind this statement: "What will happen when Stalin is gone?"

It was a question few dared to ask aloud before 1953, and for many the answer to such a question was truly unthinkable. As many historians have attested, the cult of Stalin was not something that could be easily undone.²⁸² The image of the Soviet leader, reinforced by state and party agitation for nearly two decades, was a deeply held belief of many Soviet citizens. In Stalingrad, Stalin remained a part of the everyday, despite the fact that he never did return to the city of his namesake before his death. Stalinism had been built into the reconstructed city's very

²⁸¹ Left: B. Smolyak's poster, *The Dream of the People Becomes a Reality!* (1952). Right: *Stalingradskaya Pravda*, Feb. 1, 1953.

²⁸² See Tucker, Robert C. "The Metamorphosis of the Stalin Myth." *World Politics* 7:1 (1954): 38–62.

foundations. Despite the campaign to rename the city from Stalingrad to Volgograd, the scrubbing of the leader's image and name from public space, the broader aspects of Stalinist culture were already permanent aspects of the city's built environment. Khrushchev and his successors would attempt to reclaim the central meta-myth of the city away from Stalin and reattribute it to the broader themes of Soviet sacrifice and victory in the Great Patriotic War. However, even this link—for better or worse—was irrevocably linked to Stalin, who had overseen the war effort and whose bloody revolution in the 1930s had ultimately given the country the tools to prevail over the fascist invasion. The “hero-city” was an important connection in that regard, and that link has proven a lasting one, even beyond the Soviet collapse itself.

Most citizens of Stalingrad learned of the death of Joseph Stalin on the morning of March 6, 1953. Alongside a massive portrait of the Soviet leader, on the front page of the morning's *Stalingradskiaia Pravda* surrounded now by black margins, the public announcement from the state and party governing bodies read “Dear comrades and friends... it is with a feeling of great sorrow, that we inform the Party and all the working people of the Soviet Union that on March 5 at 9:50 in the evening after a serious illness, the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the USSR and Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union Joseph Vissarionovich STALIN has died. The heart of a comrade-in-arms and a brilliant proponent of the cause of Lenin, a wise leader and teacher of the Communist Party and the Soviet people, ceased to beat.” The eulogy is breathless, as the authors strive to drive home the scope of this loss:

The name STALIN is infinitely dear to our party, to the Soviet people, to all working people, STALIN created a mighty party of communists, educated and tempered it; Together with Lenin, Comrade STALIN was an inspiration and

leader of the Great October Socialist Revolution, the founder of the world's first socialist state. Continuing Lenin's immortal work, Comrade STALIN led the Soviet people to the world-historic victory of socialism in our country. Comrade STALIN led our country to the victory over fascism in the Second World War, which radically changed the entire international situation. Comrade STALIN armed the Party and our entire people with a great and clear program of building communism in the USSR. The death of Comrade STALIN, who devoted his whole life to selfless service to the great cause of communism, is a grave loss for the Party, the working people of the Soviet country and the whole world.[...] The immortal name of STALIN will always live in the hearts of the Soviet people and all progressive mankind. Long live the great, all-conquering teaching of Marx-Engels-Lenin-Stalin! Long live our mighty socialist homeland! Long live the heroic Soviet people! Long live the great Communist Party of the Soviet Union!²⁸³

For the two weeks that followed, the local organ ran little else but memorials, testimonies of public grief, and tributes to the fallen Comrade Stalin as the nation reeled from his sudden passing. The city, like much of the Soviet Union, was completely caught off guard by their leader's death—his declining health had been hidden from the public eye.²⁸⁴ The funeral proceedings in Moscow were a weeks-long affair, and millions from around the Soviet Union overwhelmed the streets of the capitol to pay their respects.²⁸⁵ In the city bearing his name, huge crowds flocked to local memorials held at The Square of Fallen Fighters, the pavilion in front of the Tractor Factory, and in the park below Stalin's statue overlooking the Volga at the mouth of the Volga-Don. The mourners carried aloft portraits of Stalin and carried countless flowers and wreaths to lay at the city's many monuments and the various impromptu shrines that had cropped up throughout the city.²⁸⁶

²⁸³ "Ot Tsentral'nogo Komiteta Kommunisticheskoi partii Sovetskogo Soiuz, Soveta Ministrov Soiuz SSR i Prezidiuma Verkhovnogo Soveta SSSR: Ko vsem chlenam partii, ko vsem trudiashchimsia Sovetskogo Soiuz," *Stalingradskaia pravda*, March 6, 1953, 1.

²⁸⁴ See Roy Medvedev and Zhores Medvedev, *The Unknown Stalin: His Life, Death, and Legacy*, (New York: Abrams Press, 2005).

²⁸⁵ For a full accounting of the massive spectacle that was the state funeral for Joseph Stalin, see Georges Bortoli translated by Raymond Rosenthal, *The Death of Stalin*, (New York: Praeger, 1975).

²⁸⁶ *Stalingradskaia pravda*, March 7-8, 1953.



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After several days exhausting the seemingly endless tributes of the nation's highest-ranking politicians paying their respects, the paper began to run messages of support and grief by local *Stalingradtsy*. Correspondents at the largest memorials relayed the impassioned speeches of officials and average workers who had been moved to (or asked to) speak. The prevalent mood of the people of the city conveyed in these excerpts is one of great sorrow, alongside fear, trepidation, and even resolve. Those who spoke did so with genuine emotion, and, while attempting to reassure their comrades, often revealed their own fears of a Stalin-less future. Whatever their private thoughts on the Soviet leader, there was no denying that Stalin had stood at the helm of the Soviet ship of state for a quarter of a century, and his most ardent supporters and even his quiet critics were unsure of what was in store for the nation in his absence.²⁸⁸

Another important aspect of these testimonials to note is their language, deeply couched in Stalinist rhetoric even in grief. For instance, one comrade Ryzhov of the Red October steel works, in addressing his coworkers, channels his anxiety through a common Stalinist trope: "the people's sorrow is boundless. But brought up by Stalin, we will rally our ranks even closer. The Soviet people know that our successes infuriate the bloody rulers of the capitalist camp, they are making evil plans against us. We will continue to increase our vigilance against the intrigues of

²⁸⁷ Photo by V. Smetianikova, mourners gather in the square in front of STZ on March 6 after learning of Stalin's passing, *Stalingradskaia pravda*, March 8, 1953, 3.

²⁸⁸ See Yoram Gorlizki, "Structures of Trust after Stalin," *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 91:1 (2013), 119-146, and "Party Revivalism and the Death of Stalin," *Slavic Review* 54:1 (1995): 1-22.

the American and other imperialists, who are doing their best to send spies into our country and the countries of people's democracies.”²⁸⁹ A delegation from a nearby collective farm, which itself bore the name “Stalin” as its indicator, traveled to the city to take part in the memorial services. A farmer by the name of Zabolotenva reached a similar conclusion: “Comrades! I do not want to believe that such a heavy grief befell our country. The news of the death of Comrade Stalin echoed with deep pain in the hearts of each of us. We, Soviet people, have boundless confidence in our party, created by the great Stalin. We know that serving the people is the highest law of the Lenin-Stalin party. In these sorrowful days, I swear to our party that I will give all my strength, all my life for the Lenin-Stalin cause. We must work even better, renew our revolutionary vigilance!”²⁹⁰

At a gathering in front of STZ, poems inspired by Stalin’s death like that of one comrade Rublev—a machinist in the factory’s tool shop—implored the Soviet people to be strong: “Cold death cannot take him,/ our Stalin will live forever/ In the hearts and memory of the people. / Lead us the party, lead us/ The way Stalin led us, / Though great is the pain in our chests /We are Stalinists, we are stronger than steel!”²⁹¹ A member of the Komsomol organization in the Traktorzavod region named Ekimov reaffirmed the commitment of the communist youth to Stalin’s vision: “The most precious thing that we carried in our hearts and that we will carry forever is the great Stalin. He led us along the path of victories during the Great Patriotic War, it inspired our youth to restore the Stalingrad tractor factory. We, Komsomol members, swear to the party that we will continue to be its faithful assistants in building communism.”²⁹²

²⁸⁹ “Vse nashi sily—stroitel’stvu kommunizma,” *Stalingradskaia pravda*, March 7, 1953, 2.

²⁹⁰ “V kolkhoze imeni Stalina,” *Stalingradskaia pravda*, March 7, 1953, 3.

²⁹¹ “Vsenarodnaia skorb’” *Stalingradskaia pravda*, March 7, 1953, 3.

²⁹² Ibid.

Nekrasov, the Secretary of the Stalingrad Communist Party, in his address to the mourners gathered in the heart of the city at the Square of Fallen Fighters, is even more explicit: “The heart is pained at the thought that our dear and beloved Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin, whose great name our hometown bears with pride, is no longer among us. With boundless sorrow [...] all the working people of Stalingrad swear that they will be faithful to the great Stalinist cause to the end, and vow to rally more closely around the Leninist-Stalinist Central Committee of the Communist Party and the Soviet government.”²⁹³

While it can be assumed that those who spoke publicly on Stalin’s death were screened and perhaps even given help on what they should say beforehand, and that these quotes that *Stalingradskaia pravda*’s editors chose to include in their coverage here were supposed to convey particular themes, we can nonetheless infer much from the careful messaging they chose. The range of speakers covered in this single piece alone shows their intention to illustrate all walks of Soviet life coming together in their love for the departed and their commitment to the party’s cause. The attention to “revolutionary vigilance,” as well as affirmations about the program of Stalin and calls to draw closer with the leadership of the party, on the other hand, belie an underlying fear that somehow with the death of Stalin, the tight control he established of the state over Soviet society could begin to slip. The party leadership, themselves adrift and in the midst of clandestine political maneuverings happening behind the public displays of solidarity, were just as anxious as the rest of the populace with regards to what would come next.²⁹⁴

²⁹³ Ibid.

²⁹⁴ Yoram Gorlizki, “Structures of Trust after Stalin,” in *The Slavonic and East European Review* 91, no. 1 (2013): 119–46.

Nekrasov, in particular, had no way of knowing that this pledge to rally around the directives of the Central Committee—a very standard and even expected response for a high-ranking member of the local party—would soon come to odds with the “Stalinist cause.” Stalin’s sudden demise (as well as his own paranoid nature) meant that there was no clear successor following his death in the Spring of 1953. The political struggle between various factions of the central committee would play out over the next three years, and only then would the legacy of Stalin be truly challenged by Nikita Khrushchev, who was still only a peripheral player in the power struggle at the time of Stalin’s death.²⁹⁵

The funeral gatherings in Stalingrad continued for days. The largest crowds were drawn to the city’s center, where the high imperial columns of Stalin’s hero-city ensemble provided the backdrop for the throngs of mourners that wound through the streets, down the Alley of Heroes and up Peace Street. Large portraits of Stalin were draped down the high, sweeping facades, and at the monument to Stalin that stood on the Square of Fallen Fighters, flowers and wreaths became stacked higher than the heads of those who came to add to the ever-growing collection. Despite the late-winter cold, mourners would stay out on the streets for hours, as an unending procession of speakers rose to makeshift podiums to address those assembled on the square below.

²⁹⁵ See Robert Conquest, “Stalin’s Successors,” in *Foreign Affairs*, 48, no. 3, (1970): 509–24, Seweryn Bialer, *Stalin’s Successors: Leadership, Stability, and Change in the Soviet Union*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).



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The crowds were the largest on March 9, the day that Stalin was interred next to Lenin in the Mausoleum on Red Square in Moscow. The speakers that day ranged from party officials and city leaders, but also workers from labor brigades that were still in the midst of constructing some of the city center's future hallmark structures. Comrade Ostnov, a bricklayer of the Kulstroy trust who was working on the Stalingrad hotel, proclaimed that "our dear leader is not here with us, but the name Stalin will live for centuries, will forever remain in our hearts." The following speaker, a construction worker at the city's new Planetarium, comrade Matasov, contravened his colleague's assertion: "Stalin is eternally with us!" He went on to elaborate, "We, builders, had a great honor - to build a city bearing the bright name of our leader. Let us work so that Stalingrad becomes a wonderful monument to the great Stalin."²⁹⁷

This phrase, which the paper chose as the headline for its front page this day, would become a sort of mantra for the city. On March 13, *Stalingradskaiia Pravda* ran a "Letter to the Workers of Stalingrad and the *Oblast*" under the headline—a slight variation on the theme—with

²⁹⁶ Photo by V. Smetianikova, "Na traurnykh mitingakh trudiashchikhsia Stalingrada i oblasti," *Stalingradskaiia pravda*, March 11, 1953, 3. Captioned: "All these days, the working people of Stalingrad passed through the square of the Fallen Fighters, past the monument of I. V. Stalin, and paid their last respects to the leader, teacher, and friend who left us."

²⁹⁷ "Stalin vechno s nami: pis'ma trudiashchikhsia Stalingradskaiia oblasti," *Stalingradskaiia pravda*, March 11, 1953, 2.

the promise “Stalin will always be with us!” The “letter” was itself a series of contributions from leaders from around the city and surrounding region—factory directors, teachers, artists, poets, and foreman—all proclaiming variations on a single theme: that Stalin would forever be an immortal part of the city of Stalingrad and Stalingrad Oblast. Comrade I. Biriukov, the Head of Operations for the Volga-Don Canal, reminded readers that “At the entrance to the Volga-Don canal there is a huge monument to Comrade Stalin. Years, decades, centuries will pass ... The monument on the banks of the Volga will be an eternal memorial” that will continue to guide the heroic efforts of the city’s workers “from victory to victory,” just as Stalin had always done in the past.²⁹⁸ At the time, they could not have foreseen that this would not be the case. In less than a decade, the statue would be removed.

Conclusions

In the years following the battle and up to Stalin’s death, the Soviet state took concrete measures to put society back on Stalin’s roadmap for socialism. The construction of the “Hero-City,” a new archetype for the socialist city, was an innovation towards this goal. In observing the urban reconstruction project at Stalingrad, we watch the simultaneous construction of post-war Stalinism that staggered from among the ruins, which sought to utilize the memory of the Battle and ultimate victory to inspire Soviet citizens on to even greater heights. It marked an important turning point in the history of the seventy-five-year Soviet revolution and how the state continued down its perceived path towards socialism. When Stalin’s name and image were removed from the city in 1961, this vision long outlived him. Understanding why helps today to

²⁹⁸ “Stalin vseгда budet s nami!,” *Stalingradskaia pravda*, March 13, 1953, 1.

explain the lasting prominence of Stalingrad in the Soviet national myth and how it persists in Russian politics to this day.

The news of Stalin's passing came only a few months after the ship christened "Stalin" had passed under the final lock of the Volga-Don Canal, prompting celebrations across the city and assuring *Stalingradtsy* that their city's rebirth as a great Soviet metropolis was on the right path—after all, "Where there was Stalin, there is Victory!" The efforts of the city's denizens, the party insisted, had been in Stalin's name. For months after his passing, these tributes would still be made posthumously. It was a cornerstone of the narrative of the city's reconstruction that could not be so easily removed. The figure of Stalin had quite literally been placed on a pedestal in the city—the "cult of personality," as it would come to be known, had been thoroughly trained into the minds of Stalingrad's citizens. The death of Stalin posed something of a metaphorical quandary for the city, an identity crisis that would unfold over the course of the next eight years.

This headline stood out as an apt metaphor for the city's coming experience of de-Stalinization. The language the author uses turns out to be (most unintendedly) both ironic and prophetic in a number of ways that could not have been guessed in those emotional days following the Soviet leader's passing. While the memory of Stalin would certainly continue to live on in the hearts and minds of the Soviet people, the image of "the Great Stalin" would not go unchallenged—in just under three years, Khrushchev would attack the "cult of personality" in his Secret Speech to the Twentieth Party Congress in February 1956 and de-Stalinization would begin in earnest. In the decade of iconoclasm to follow, Stalin's name would be stripped from the city, and even the colossal monument of Stalin where mourners piled funeral wreaths, and which comrade Biriukov believed would stand for a hundred years, would be torn down in less than a decade. However, the legacies of Stalin would indeed remain forever with the city of

Stalingrad—just as the monumentalist “core” of the hero-city would remain as a physical reminder of his influence there. The memories of the great conflict that took place here, and Stalin’s purported role in it, would not be forgotten so easily. Even as the city changed and evolved under new leadership, it would always have its roots in the Stalinist past. De-Stalinization in the city of Stalin is an apt metaphor for the Georgian’s lasting impact on Soviet civilization: despite the efforts to move forward and move beyond Stalin’s vision, it was nonetheless shaped by it, and in some ways irrevocably so. Nonetheless, life in Stalingrad, and in the Soviet Union at large, was about to change dramatically.

Chapter 3

De-Stalinizing the Socialist City: Urban Planning and Mass Housing in Stalingrad under Khrushchev

Introduction

In April of 1955—ten months before the Secret Speech would formally announce the campaign of “de-Stalinization”—astute readers of *Stalingradskaia pravda* would have begun to see signs of a radical shift that would come to change the face of their city. That month, the newspaper included coverage from the ongoing All-Union Conference of Builders taking place in Moscow, where cities had sent brigades of representatives in the construction industry to learn more on “the question of the transition to new, more advanced industrial methods.” On April 9, 1955, a full-page report from the conference went into great detail, relaying the exciting techniques of the newly triumphant school of Soviet architectural thought to its Stalingrad-based readership. It included reports from several of Stalingrad’s delegation who were able to witness these new methods firsthand, touring factories where reinforced panels and concrete bricks were made and jobsites where frameless construction projects were already underway. One of the members of the Stalingrad delegation who witnessed these new techniques, O. Krasnov (Head of the Second Construction Department of the city’s main “Stalingradstroy” construction firm) remarked that, “In general, frame-panel construction is undoubtedly one of the most progressive construction methods today, and the builders of Stalingrad need it. Taking advantage of the experience of Muscovites, we should make the bold move to these new forms of work on our sites.”²⁹⁹

The piece also showcased several new buildings currently under construction in Moscow as models of these new building styles. One such building on the Frunzenskaya Embankment

²⁹⁹ O. Krasnov, “Sborochnyy tsekh zavoda,” *Stalingradskaia Pravda*, April 9, 1955. p. 3. GAVO

was an apartment building constructed from large concrete cinder blocks, faced with ceramic tiles. A second apartment built on Novopeschanaia was a large complex of frame-panel construction apartments, and a third being built on October Street was a frameless “large panel” construction.³⁰⁰ The article included photographs taken on site at these projects, so readers could visualize how these projects came together, as well as compare them to the structures currently under construction in their city. Panel housing would have been a major departure from any of the methods that had been in use in Stalingrad for the past decade. The article emphasized the speed and affordability of these new methods, without going too deep into the specifications of the living quarters themselves.

The implication and implicit promise of the article is that what was currently happening in Moscow would soon be happening here in Stalingrad. In another contribution to the piece entitled “The Grand Future,” M. Kuzyakin, a foreman with the major construction firm Glavstroy, speculated that as the city already possessed a strong industrial base, this shift would come sooner than later. He noted that “the construction of frameless, large-panel houses was being built in Magnitogorsk, and in the Donbass, and in Kiev. These industrial construction methods made it possible to build large-scale buildings in Stalingrad. I would very much like to wish the people of Stalingrad success in this large-scale and important matter!”³⁰¹

As the policy was realigned in the capital, Stalingrad’s architects and construction firms had to adapt their own thinking to match the new guidelines. This initiative to modernize the region’s construction practices led to the first regional conference of Stalingrad’s members of the Union of Soviet Architects, which took place in May of 1955. The chairman of this new body,

³⁰⁰ N. Solov’eva & A. Svetlova (photographers), “Industrialnye metody zhilashchnogo stroitel’sтва,” *Stalingradskaia pravda*, April 9, 1955. p. 3. GAVO.

³⁰¹ M. Kuzyakin, “Bol’shoe budushchee,” *Stalingradskaia pravda*, April 9, 1955. 3.

comrade Maslyayev, an architect with the city's foremost planning firm *Stalingradoproekt*, called the session to order with a general report on the ongoing development of the city, as well as a report of how his office sought to adjust to the new guidelines. The floor was then opened to questions and discussion, during which many attendees expressed their complaints about the current methods of construction and deficiencies in communication between major industries. The meeting closed with the adoption of a resolution that outlined practical measures aimed at improving the work of architects and design organizations, as well as the election of new delegates to represent Stalingrad at the All-Union Congress of Architects.³⁰²

Though it would have been impossible to know at the time, this flurry of activity in the academic realm of architecture would soon have a profound impact on life in our city on the Volga. In the next decade, hundreds of these four and five story residential apartment complexes were built all around the city, increasing the amount of available living space in the city several times over. Equally important, these apartments would not be communal dwellings with shared public spaces like the communal apartments of the 1930s, but private dwellings where families could inhabit their own secluded corner of their world. The arrival of mass housing in the city would profoundly reshape life in Stalingrad in a way that few other policies could—not only would it change the face of the city, but also the very rhythms of everyday life.³⁰³

To make the shift to these new construction efforts, however, would not be easy. Many projects that had begun under Stalin were still under construction, consuming a sizable portion of available resources, materials, and labor from the city's numerous construction trusts. In addition, despite optimistic proclamations about the capacity of the city's factories to rise to the

³⁰² "Conference of Stalingrad Architects," *Stalingradskaia Pravda*, May 27, 1955, 2.

³⁰³ See Steven Harris, *Communism of Tomorrow Street*, Smith, *Property of Communists*, and Christine Varga-Harris, *Stories of House and Home*.

demands of these new construction methods, Stalingrad in 1955 hardly had the specialized industrial base to make the prefabricated concrete products necessary for the new model of building. However, that situation was also rapidly changing. A massive state-funded public works project spanning both banks of the Volga, the Kuibyshev Hydroelectric Power Station, was set to transform and expand the city in numerous ways. The influx of labor and capital to the project turned the city into a boom town, drawing in vast numbers of workers, many of whom would mostly settle in the city and its suburbs over the decade the project took to complete. The population influx led to the creation of an entire new city, Volzhsky (also known as “The City of the Dam Builders”), which would give urban engineers a blank slate where they sought to employ these new construction techniques in every facet of their design. The hydroelectric station also drove up the demand for steel-reinforced concrete, which led to a huge investment from the state to create new concrete production facilities and expand its existing steelworks. Still, this build-up took time, and state and city planners would struggle to meet the demand for more mass housing well into the 1960s. Initially it fell to some of the city’s oldest plants and building trusts, like Stalingradstroy and Metallurgstroy, to restructure their manufacturing base to try to produce the materials needed to begin large-panel construction, with varied success.³⁰⁴

Other factors contributed to the city’s rapid growth. In addition to the dam project, there was also a significant investment in several new large-scale light-industry factories that were being favored by the Khrushchev government. The opening of the Volga-Don Canal meant that the city’s new river port was busier than ever, and rail and even air traffic to the region brought new people and raw materials to the city each day. The Stalingrad Tractor Factory (STZ), having returned to peace-time production and being supplied its steel by the revitalized Red October

³⁰⁴ Orlov, *Istoriia rodnogo kraia*, 174-175.

steelworks, began ramping up new production on models of tractors and combines that would be used in Khrushchev's push to bring agriculture to the "Virgin Lands" of the Soviet Union. Stalingrad in the Khrushchev era was a boom town, with fleets of cranes and construction vehicles a constant presence across the city. For the workers who took part in this great rebuilding effort at Stalingrad, there was still one glaring problem: there remained hardly anywhere to actually live in a city that not even two decades before had been razed to the ground.

This problem was only truly addressed in earnest in 1959, which marked a turning point in the city's construction efforts. Complaints about the speed of construction and the quality of the existing housing stock led to an audit of the city's construction industries, initiated by an Executive Committee of the Oblast Regional Party Organization's resolution criticizing the inadequate finished structures and how excessive waste had led to a flurry of reorganization. As a result, new priorities and standards for construction were established through the increasingly heavy intervention by the party and state. The city, for its part, decried the terrible delays created for construction firms by Gosplan's own outlandish targets and ineptitude at resource distribution. The supply chain of construction materials, they argued, was grievously compromised by disorganization and malpractice, from raw materials to manufactured construction products like tiles, gypsum boards (drywall), plaster, pipes, doors and windows. These products were in high demand by dozens of firms forced to compete for limited access to resources, capital, and labor. The Regional Council of Volgograd Oblast' responded by imposing even more centralized control over the city's state-backed industries, prioritizing large firms who already enjoyed the best access to the city's manufacturing base. As part of its decision to exert more control on the city's construction management, the Regional Council also obliged the

architects and urban engineers of Stalingrad to create a new plan for the development and expansion of the city, which was finalized in 1962, a year after the city itself had been renamed “Volgograd.” This directive formally put forth a de-Stalinized plan for the city, which would transform the built environment in ways that would affect the lives of its inhabitants for generations to come.

I argue that it is only with this final turn away from Stalinist construction methods and their embrace of the construction standards put forth by the Khrushchev administration that the city planners responsible for expanding Volgograd (from a city of half a million to a city of 800,000 by 1966) made real progress in providing sustainable growth in the housing market. Several other corresponding factors allowed this shift to occur. The city benefitted from the amount of capital flowing into the region tied to the Kuibyshev Hydroelectric Station, and by the time the new plan was formalized the power station was complete, freeing the city's new industrial base for steel-reinforced concrete products for new housing construction. These factories, concrete plants, steelworks, and new cadres of trained engineers were key to bringing to reality the new vision of mass housing being pushed by the state—best exemplified in the standardized designs of the *Khrushchevka* and the *mikroraion*— which would begin rising on both banks of the Volga, which was now connected for the first time by land with the road running across the top of the dam.

The completion of the hydroelectric station is important to the city's history in many ways, but one symbolic gesture in particular ties into our broader discussion of de-Stalinization, which cannot be ignored. In 1962 the dam was presented for state inspection and officially named to honor the “XXII Party Congress of the CPSU.” This choice in name brings us back to the elephant in the room—the entire time that the city was struggling to adapt to their housing

crisis, the namesake for the City of Stalin was under posthumous attack from Khrushchev. The XXII Party Congress of the CPSU was held the year prior in October of 1961, where de-Stalinization was again the driving theme. Khrushchev used the conference to launch a new round of policy reprioritization and symbolic acts of iconoclasm against the Cult of Personality, such as the changing of the city's name as well as the name of its central district, as well as the removal of the statue of Stalin from the Volga-Don Canal entrance.³⁰⁵ The process had been ongoing in various waves since Khrushchev's Secret Speech in 1956 at the XX Party Congress, when Soviet citizens and Stalingrad residents first began to grapple with the question of Stalin's legacy. But de-Stalinization went deeper than just decrying the cult of personality—it was a shift in priorities, a new distribution in resources, capital, and labor, as well as a new vision of what socialism could offer its adherents.³⁰⁶ Volgograd remains a poignant example of the results of this ideological struggle and what this effort to de-Stalinize Soviet civilization was able to achieve.

Methodology & Historiography

Taken as a whole, Khrushchev's goals for the Soviet Union offered a very different picture of Soviet modernity than the vision offered by Stalin. While many of the legacies of the Stalinist past would prove resilient, it is nonetheless important to account for the core differences of the values and worldviews of both the Soviet leadership and the civilian population at this time. There was a real effort at this time to balance the needs of the individual and the social collective, with policies directed at each, sometimes even to the point of being counterproductive

³⁰⁵ Jones, *Myth, Memory, Trauma*.

³⁰⁶ Christine Varga-Harris, "Forging citizenship on the home front."

to each other. In many ways, the uncertain direction of Khrushchev's economic policies resembled the often-contradictory conservative and liberal impulses that made up the ebb and flow of his cultural "Thaw."³⁰⁷

Though the efficacy of Khrushchev's reforms remains a question of great debate, it is important to understand this period as an attempt by the Soviet leadership to finally make good on the promises of the October Revolution. To do so it had to respond to the needs and demands of a population that increasingly believed their sacrifices under Stalin entitled them to their reward of an equitable, prosperous society—and perhaps most importantly, to achieve this aim without relying on mass terror and political violence. While certainly the party-state retained a firm hold over society in terms of economic development and the levers of social mobility, the lived experience of the Khrushchev era was certainly distinct from the Stalinist epoch that preceded it. De-Stalinization was more than just a political campaign—it was a restructuring of the cultural values that constituted what we might think of as a distinctly "Soviet civilization."³⁰⁸

This chapter will look at the many ways de-Stalinization manifested in the built environment of Stalingrad. While some of the most easily identifiable changes were superficial (such as the removal of statues of Stalin and removing his name from public spaces, even the name of the city itself), the real challenge of reforming the Stalinist system came in the form of changing the patterns of Soviet life, a shifting of value structures that was manifested in everything from the city's built environment to a revised ideal of what a socialist society owed its citizens. The most tangible change for hundreds of thousands of *Stalingradtsy* would come from the transition into the single-family apartment structures that were being built rapidly throughout the city. While the political aspects of the de-Stalinization campaign were of course

³⁰⁷ Jones, ed. *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization*, Kozlov, *The Thaw*.

³⁰⁸ See again Polly Jones, "Introduction," in *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization*, ed. Jones.

pertinent to party members and city officials, most Soviet citizens' experience of the period was shaped by this new standard of living and relative social stability.

This chapter aims to set local context for many of the phenomena described by the authors discussed here. I am also relying heavily on the two Russian authors discussed above to provide much of the hard data on the city's industrial production and the forces behind its urban plan for this decade of stabilization. By looking at how Khrushchev's policies were implemented in the Stalingrad region during this time, this chapter will attempt to highlight how the urban environment expanded and evolved during the era of de-Stalinization, which will set the backdrop and the stage on how that project played out in subsequent chapters. One of the principal elements pertaining to urban growth in the city during this time was in the realm of construction, specifically the building of new living space to house the city's growing population.³⁰⁹ As we shall see, housing policy and de-Stalinization were closely linked.

The period also led to a renegotiation of power and responsibility between the Soviet center, the regional authority, and the city, both in Stalingrad and more broadly throughout the Soviet Union and the planned economy. These state directives by Khrushchev and the CPSU were often slow to reach fruition as the bureaucracy and industries struggled to adapt, with pushback coming from local authorities when the state's political priorities didn't match reality while also using it to push their own agendas when their goals were aligned. The audit of 1959 and its repercussions highlights this trend, when we can see the state, oblast, and city as three distinct actors, each seeking credit for success and deniability for any failure to reach their ambitious targets. Their correspondence will provide insight into just how the construction

³⁰⁹ Harris, *Communism on Tomorrow Street*.

industries of Volgograd functioned during this period and how efforts at oversight and quality control led to the new city plan emerging in 1962.

The history of urban planning in Stalingrad during the 1950s-60s has not received the same attention as the Battle or the immediate reconstruction effort, both in the English and Russian language canon. In my research, I have only come across a few works that address this subject, and even then, only tangentially or in passing.

One text that has proven extremely valuable is the work of Genady V. Orlov, a native of Volgograd, who undertook writing a more than 400-year history of the city, from the founding of Imperial Tsaritsyn to Volgograd's current place in the Russian federation. His *Istoriia rodnogo krai: Volgogradskii region, 1589-2007*, is an impressive work, but because its scope is so broad, the period I set out to review here is covered only in passing. Orlov is mostly focused on the effects of Soviet power in the shaping of the city. Since Orlov is attempting to track broad trends over the course of a long timeline, his study is primarily driven by the objective gathering of facts and statistics, almost entirely avoiding the political drama of the time. However, his deep delve into the archives has proven extremely useful to help fill out my picture of the urban development of the city during this time.

Though few historians have focused on Stalingrad/Volgograd in their research, its nearby "sister city" of Volzhsky has begun to attract the attention of urban historians. Volzhskiy, now home to more than 320,000 residents, owes its existence largely to the project to build a dam and hydroelectric power station on the Volga River to the north of Volgograd. The two cities are connected by the road that runs atop the dam, making travel between the two a rather standard affair. Volzhskiy has become a focus for urban historians as a new model in the evolution of the "socialist city." and its unique urban design provides much to explore. One such scholar, Anna

Borunova, recently published her own study “*Gestures Towards a Socialist Landscape: The New City of Volzhsky*” as part of a massive project by the Rotterdam-based Crimson Historians and Urbanists called *New Towns of the Cold War Frontier*, the first part of which was published online in March 2020. Her study, which also provides an admirable if condensed history of Stalingrad and the building of the hydroelectric station, has helped me to flesh out more on this important regional development as it pertains to my own discussion of Khrushchev's policy goals in action. Understanding Stalingrad's development during this time as a part of a larger systemic process of shifting political values is key to my analysis. This will serve to better establish the physical environment of the city, the backdrop against which later discussions of daily life will take place.

In the past two decades, there have been several Soviet scholars who have sought to focus on the cultural dimensions of de-Stalinization in daily life and the built environment. As pointed out by Lynne Attwood, “Housing is clearly one of the most crucial features of daily life. As Marx famously noted, ‘life involves before everything else eating, drinking, habitation, clothing and many other things.’”³¹⁰ Such a fundamental building block of society, especially one emphasized by Marx himself, cannot be overlooked when trying to understand the ideological rationale of Soviet leaders in their attempts to create a socialist civilization. Scholars have increasingly understood that the post-Stalin changes in housing policy are instrumental to understanding the other cultural shifts that reconfigured social norms in the Soviet Union decade following his death. In addition to Attwood, who has focused much of her research on gender relations, Julianne Furst has taken on a similar approach to Soviet youth culture in the late- and

³¹⁰ Attwood, *Gender and Housing in Soviet Russia*, 1.

post-Stalin periods.³¹¹ Both pointed to the shift to the one-family apartment as the basis for Soviet housing policy as a transformative moment in daily life. In addition, historians like Stephen Harris and Christine Varga-Harris have investigated how policy makers adopted new building techniques that drew away from the monumental architecture of Stalinism, as well as the promises that were made and the expectations of the populace that went with this new approach to housing.³¹² Mark B. Smith and others have also examined how property relations had to be re-examined by this shift, as well as how the construction industry itself was transformed to accommodate the new tastes of both Soviet administrators and the public.

What Harris, Smith, and Varga-Harris have made clear is that de-Stalinization manifested in both cultural and physical forms that reflected a shifting ideological struggle within the party leadership of what Soviet modernity should look like in the aftermath of such a cataclysmic war. These decisions of how and where to commit labor and material resources had a profound effect on the built environment, of the public and private spaces, in countless cities, which were where most Soviet civilians lived. This impacted not only the way the way buildings looked, but also how they related to their world and (very literally) their place in it.

They also note that, though many of their studies are inherently local, tied to a handful or sometimes just one city, that many of these trends were universal, if with some distinct local variations. The sudden shift toward single-family apartment buildings, as cramped as they were

³¹¹ See Julianne Fürst, *Stalin's Last Generation*, or her contributions in Fürst (ed.), *Late Stalinist Russia: Between Reconstruction and Reinvention* (London: Routledge, 2006), and "The Arrival of Spring? Changes in Continuities in Soviet Youth Culture and Policy between Stalin and Khrushchev" in *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization*, ed. Polly Jones.

³¹² See Stephen Harris, *Moving to the Separate Apartment: Building: Distributing, Furnishing, and Living in Urban Housing in Soviet Russia, 1950s– 1960s* (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 2003), Harris, *Communism on Tomorrow Street*, Varga-Harris, *Stories of House and Home*.

easy to build, resulted in its own cultural shift that Soviet citizens and the party leadership struggled to navigate.

In the three years following Stalin's death, one of the most pressing internal crises facing the Soviet Union was the matter of housing its population. The war had leveled entire cities. In the West of the country, the overall destruction accounting for a loss of one third of the country's entire housing stock, leaving some twenty-five million Soviet citizens bereft of permanent housing.³¹³ Donald Fitzer estimates that over seventy million square meters of living space had been lost, down to 200 million from the 270 million estimated by Soviet central planners in 1940 before the war began.³¹⁴ The piecemeal measures to rebuild under Stalin, which had focused on the monumental form of the city's core districts and created only very limited residential spaces. Even then, these apartments were extremely difficult to acquire for the average worker and often went to party officials and families of veterans who had fallen in the war. Despite some attempts to redress the housing shortage, such as allowing individuals to construct their own dwellings to supplement the state-held supply, the crisis remained severe.³¹⁵ Mark B. Smith points to a study commissioned by the central government as proof that the Soviet leadership knew their policies were failing. He writes, "housing construction had met with variable success whose sum was a crisis. In 1950 and 1951, ministers commented with great concern on the widespread incidence of considerable failure."³¹⁶ It was the type of report, Smith argues, that clearly affected a change in policy. However, in the politically fraught climate of Stalin's final years, change would come slowly. In the meantime, pressure on the party to provide adequate housing solutions continued to build.

³¹³ Harris, *Moving to the Separate Apartment*, 159.

³¹⁴ Ibid.

³¹⁵ See Mark B. Smith, *Property of Communists*, "Chapter 1-Reconstruction and its Legacies"

³¹⁶ Ibid.

Khrushchev's Role in the Mass-Housing Campaign

During the Cold War and in the wake of the Soviet collapse, the turn to mass housing under Khrushchev was often misunderstood or mischaracterized by western historians as a failed enterprise of a purportedly inferior economic system, capable only of creating shoddy and architecturally unimpressive structures.³¹⁷ In reality, the grand scope of this initiative created a profound civilizational shift for Soviet citizens, and millions of families moved from cramped dormitories, barracks, and communal apartments (*kommunalky*) into their own single-family dwelling (that was, for most intents and purposes “privately” owned), with new rights to privacy and access to new worlds of consumer choice. Steven Harris argues that this was the single most formative experience of the post-Stalin generation, and the cultural lens through which many of the other cultural “thaws” of de-Stalinization were viewed. It presented a new set of norms for “everyday” life, a new set of expectations that were long elusive under Stalin—a sense of stability, predictability, and, perhaps most importantly, safety.³¹⁸

Mass housing was possibly the most ambitious of Soviet state projects after Stalin, and its scope and impact on Soviet life would rival many of the initiatives of the first Five Year Plans. It was Khrushchev's goal to completely “solve” the Soviet housing question in twelve

³¹⁷ See, among others, Alfred John DiMaio, Jr., *Soviet Urban Housing: Problems and Policies* (New York: Praeger Publishers, Inc., 1974), Albrecht Martiny, “Housing and Construction in the Period of ‘De-Stalinization’: The Change in Construction Policy from 1954 to 1957,” in Peter J. Potichnyj and Jane Shapiro Zacek, eds., *Politics and Participation Under Communist Rule*, (New York: Praeger, 1983), Henry W. Morton, “Housing Problems and Policies of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union,” in *Studies in Comparative Communism* 12, no. 4 (1979): 300–321, and Svetlana Boym, “The Archeology of Banality: The Soviet Home,” in *Public Culture* 2, no. 2 (1994): 263–293. Mark B. Smith also covers the critiques of many contemporary Cold War critics, including Alexander Solzhenitsyn and Margaret Thatcher in *Property of Communists*.

³¹⁸ See Steven E. Harris, ‘The Origins and Design of the Separate Apartment’, in *Moving into the Separate Apartment: Building, Distributing, Furnishing, and Living in Urban Housing in Soviet Russia, 1950s-1960s* (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 2003), 76–12.

years. Perhaps more importantly, unlike its predecessors under Stalin, Khrushchev's housing initiative was undertaken with the express understanding that it would not be achieved through the extracted labor of class enemies, nor would it be accompanied by mass terror to suppress dissent and hide its shortcomings. Khrushchev did not invent the *Khrushchevka*—his administration merely inherited the blueprints. But it was his decision (and his political capital spent) to make the push for one of the greatest mass housing initiatives of all time. The ambitiousness of the project informed its design—the cheap, cookie-cutter *Khrushchevka* that could be built in any city in the Soviet Union—and on a scale that would require mobilizing the entire national economy towards its completion.

Mark B. Smith argues that despite the urgency of the housing crisis, the program simply could not have reached the scope it did without the personal intervention of Khrushchev himself. Though changes to the housing laws and even the first designs of the single-family apartment developed in the closing years of Stalin's reign, Smith insists "there is little reason to suppose that, had Stalin lived longer, the housing program would have taken on the enormous proportions that it did in the second half of the 1950s. Even after 1951 he did not give political leadership to housing construction. The essential ideological and moral underpinning of the mass housing program, especially its escalation of individual rights, was scarcely imaginable under Stalin. Yet even after his death, a considerable increase in housing construction was not automatic. It took determined political leadership to bring together the emerging strings of policy, and to produce from them the mass housing program. Hence Khrushchev's role was, as in some other areas of Soviet life, historic."³¹⁹

³¹⁹ Smith, *Property of Communists*.

Khrushchev's personality, as well as his experiences in the highest reaches in the Soviet government, made him the right man and the right time to take the lead on such a massive undertaking. The son of Ukrainian peasants who had risen through the party as part of the new cadres elevated by Stalin, what Nikita Khrushchev lacked in formal education he made up for in enthusiasm and real interest in the technical details of new technologies and governance. Following the war (where he was for a time stationed at the Stalingrad front), Khrushchev already showed himself to be keenly aware of the acute challenge faced to house Soviet citizens in its war-ravaged cities. Upon its liberation, Khrushchev was named the Premier of the Ukrainian SSR, and as such he directly oversaw the reconstruction efforts in Ukraine, which meant he recognized the challenges and shortcomings of housing policy under Stalin intimately. During this time, as was a common theme of his very hands-on style of leadership, Khrushchev began to take on interest in the subject of construction that approached genuine expertise. He also recognized the incredible challenge at hand, advocating not just a return to prewar levels of housing, but for a new approach. In a major speech shortly after the victory of 1945, he declared that "The most important task of party and soviet organs is the reconstruction and construction of the urban economy, construction in villages and *kolhozy*." He acknowledged that in cities "many live in tremendously poor conditions," and that cities must be rebuilt so that they were better than before the war.³²⁰

Khrushchev was also a man who believed in advanced technology as the key to Soviet modernity. He had watched the Soviet Union achieve nuclear parity with the world's hitherto only nuclear superpower, the United States, and throughout his tenure pushed new technologies as the solution to the myriad problems facing his country. Khrushchev was also not above

³²⁰ Ibid, 70-71.

borrowing ideas from the West, particularly in Britain, where similar discussions regarding housing policy were gaining traction (albeit under different ideological justifications). When Khrushchev was visited by British Labor politician Harold Wilson in January of 1956, the future prime minister commented that the Soviet leader's "real interests [are] agriculture and building, especially building... [he] spent far more time on this than on the H-bomb." For Khrushchev, it seemed, these subjects were "much more rewarding."³²¹ In particular, Khrushchev understood that the new building methods of prefabricated construction presented a potentially revolutionary possibility for addressing the Soviet housing question.

Once he had secured his position atop the party in 1955-56, he wasted little time in putting the full weight of the Soviet state behind his new housing initiative. Atwood characterizes Khrushchev's campaign as "arguable the most ambitious governmental housing program in human history," pledging in 1958 to build fifteen million new city apartments to be distributed by the principle of "one family, one flat." His building program would be characterized by the slogan 'build quickly, cheaply, and well' (*stroit' bystro, deshevo, khorosho*).³²² Ultimately, however, Khrushchev was not himself an architect, but rather positioned himself as a champion of those who were already pushing a similar agenda. As Mark B. Smith notes, one of the most important roles Khrushchev played in the story of Soviet housing policy was to act as a political patron, spending his own political capital to pursue policies he believed in, even at times to the direct risk of his own political career. His choice to do so at key historical crossroads should not be underestimated.³²³

³²¹ Ibid.

³²² Attwood, Lynne. *Gender and Housing in Soviet Russia*, 154.

³²³ Smith, *Property of Communists*, 65.

The final adoption of Khrushchev's vision for a mass-housing program was the result of a year's long struggle that had been playing out within the Soviet Academy of Construction and Architecture. The debate was so fierce that it had essentially led to a schism and even the eventual dissolution of the body in 1955. As early as 1952, even before the twilight of Stalinist rule came to an end, Soviet architects had already identified "factory-based housing construction" as a means to address the housing question, and models for such dwellings began to be circulated among the body's "progressive" wing.³²⁴ Those who favored these cheap and simple structures faced the delicate task of going against the Stalinist norm, and their critiques of "monumentalism" were carefully couched in the language of their discipline. They argued that the "excessive" architecture that remained the focus in major Soviet cities was an impractical use of resources and urged a return to "rationality." The struggle between the traditional Stalinist architects and the new cadre would play out in the pages of academic journals and conferences for several years, until the political climate changed sufficiently for the scales to tip.

This revolutionary shift in Soviet architecture is illustrated vividly in Katherine Zubakovich's article "To the New Shore: Soviet Architecture's Journey from Classicism to Standardization." She notes that while the constructivists only came to prominence with Khrushchev's backing in 1955 as part of the "rehearsals" for de-Stalinization, already in the wake of the war discussions had begun among architects for the need for cheaper and more rapid methods of construction, though those voices ultimately lost out to the "monumentalists" that had defined the Stalinist "imperial" style. Zubakovitch's title for her piece is drawn from a political cartoon that appeared in the pages of *Arkhitetura SSSR* in November of 1955, which depicts "the greats of Soviet architecture as they prepared to embark on a journey (via boat)

³²⁴ Ibid.

away from the errors of their past work. ‘After a lengthy and expensive stay on the island of excesses,’ the cartoonists explained in their narrative printed alongside the image, ‘the architectural flotilla is preparing itself, at last, to depart for the long-awaited shore of standardization and industrialization in construction.’³²⁵ The cartoon was an explicit critique of some of the Academy’s leading voices under Stalin, many of whom are depicted and even labeled in the cartoon itself.

Zubakovitch then goes on to trace how such a cartoon could even be feasible in a journal that had long been a bastion of the Stalinist style and argues that it was indicative of a revolutionary transformation that had been taking place within the Academy over the past several years, a transformation that in many ways would mirror the changes the country would face in the challenges brought on by de-Stalinization. She argues that for such a drastic change to be made, “the entire architectural profession had to change over the course of just a few years. From pedagogical institutions to the tools used to design buildings, the 1950s saw a revolution in Soviet architecture. The old approach to design was not just swept aside, it was declared ideologically bankrupt.” She goes on to argue that architecture was a realm where Khrushchev could test out early aspects of de-Stalinization: “At architectural and building conferences and in state decrees of later 1954 and 1955, Khrushchev rehearsed his program of de-Stalinization with an attack on the material culture of the previous regime. These same criticisms would be directed more systematically towards the vestiges of the former state in the 1956 “Secret Speech,” but by then the language of de-Stalinization was already institutionalized in Soviet architecture.”³²⁶

³²⁵ Katherine Zubakovitch-Eady, “To the New Shore: Soviet Architecture's Journey from Classicism to Standardization” in *UC Berkeley Previously Published Works* (2013), <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/3k42j0g2>, 1.

³²⁶ *Ibid*, 3.

Khrushchev positioned himself as an outspoken ally of the constructivists in the Soviet presidium and used the clout that came with his rising political star to effect changes within the Academy. He saw the “monumentalists” and “classicists” in the academy as Stalinist holdouts who were simply extensions of the wider political culture he sought to reform. By late 1954, Khrushchev had “hinted that the Academy was on the verge of liquidation for not allowing “free exchange of opinions on creative questions, [and] the development of criticism.” In August 1955 his threat became reality. As of August 23, 1955, the institution itself was abolished. In its place was the new Academy of Construction and Architecture, entrusted with “developments in the scientific problems of construction...research on standardized buildings and facilities...and the training of highly qualified scientific specialists.” An annual “Day of the Builder” was also created in 1955, as political favor fell on engineers and builders, and architects were increasingly sidelined.”³²⁷

It must be noted, too, that Khrushchev’s political campaign sought to refute not just the policies, but the methods of Stalinist rule. Khrushchev tried to use his political clout to attempt to make bureaucrats beholden to the Soviet people for the sake of the social well-being, rather than political cronies or those only compliant for fear of political terror. While he did invest some of his patronage and political energy to push prefabrication, he did not simply dictate by fiat—he would frequently argue with recalcitrant architects, bureaucrats, and politicians alike when necessary to try to bring them around to his way of thinking. These decisions were also not made behind closed doors: Khrushchev encouraged these discussions to be made in public, which often meant that even party newspapers were giving run to these new proposals in technical detail in hopes of garnering public support.³²⁸ Suddenly, the conversations informing policy decisions

³²⁷ Ibid, 16.

³²⁸ Smith, *Property of Communists*, 72.

were being explained to a wide audience, another aspect of Khrushchev's attempts to reinvigorate the social contract between the party leadership and the Soviet people.

This idea of de-Stalinization reflected through housing policy is explored even more in-depth by Steven Harris in his own history of mass housing, *Communism on Tomorrow Street*. Here Harris argues that mass housing reflected the fundamental change in the relationship between the Soviet state and society in the wake of Stalin's bloody revolution, as both the party leadership and average citizens sought to finally realize one of the fundamental promises of the Russian Revolution. He also challenges the notion that mass-housing was a top-down phenomenon, but rather argues that "mass housing was not something that the 'state' created for 'society,' as if one was entirely separate from the other."³²⁹ He bases this assessment on the remarkable scope of mass-housing as a shared experience—state functionaries and "ordinary" citizens alike found themselves in similar spaces. As Harris observes, the campaign for mass housing required "mass participation." It directly involved "architects, construction workers, civil engineers, factory workers in the building supplies industry who designed and constructed the housing, and the local municipal officials and factory managers who were in charge of its distribution. The campaign depended on an army of bureaucrats that were in charge of mass housing's planning, financing, and statistical accounting." It required the participation of cultural producers, artists and designers, who influenced style and taste. For every new line of furniture designed specifically for new housing, "an additional contingent of designers, planners, manufacturers, furniture store personnel, and managers of furniture exhibitions" were required. Of course, what perhaps is most fascinating about this massive undertaking is that all the individuals listed above were not only the producers of the Soviet mass-housing experience, but

³²⁹Harris, *Communism on Tomorrow Street*, 4.

also its consumers: “All these workers, bureaucrats, and professionals not only worked in some fashion to make mass housing possible, but were also urban residents with their own housing question to solve.”³³⁰

The fact that the single-family apartment became the solution for so many Soviet citizens from all walks of life leads Harris to formulate the transition to mass housing as one of the most important aspects of de-Stalinization as it relates to what might be thought of as “everyday life.” As Harris puts it, “when the members of family left their communal apartment (*kommunal’naia kvartira* or *kommunalka*) for a separate apartment, they left behind the Stalinist past as embodied in their previous housing for a new and empty apartment, a clean slate mirroring the uncharted reformism and “thaw” of the Khrushchev era.” The move to the separate apartment was a mass cultural phenomenon, experienced by millions of Soviet citizens annually. According to Harris’s estimates, from 1953 to 1970, the Soviet government and its citizens in both cities and the countryside constructed 38,284,00 apartments individually built homes, which permitted 140,900,000 individuals to acquire newly built housing.³³¹

The *khrushchevka* and the apartments therein became the “central site” of the post-Stalin regime’s project to remake Soviet society. The creation of a private space for Soviet families meant a different relationship between the state and its citizens—it signified a turn away from the terror and surveillance of Stalin’s revolution. It gave people the space (both literally and figuratively) to be critical of their government and its policies without fears of reprisal. The single-family apartment was a site where de-Stalinization was experienced in privacy--while privacy itself a concept that was being reimagined in the process. What’s more, it was not just

³³⁰ Ibid, 16-17.

³³¹ Ibid, 5.

something the Soviet state had prescribed on an unwilling populace: the state's initiative to provide citizens with access to single-family apartments was a wildly popular endeavor.

Harris argues that of all the promises of the Russian Revolution, the failure of the Soviet state to provide adequate housing for its population was one of the most glaring inadequacies in the eyes of the populace, and certainly the most impactful on their lives. The experiment of the *kommunalka*, which became an instrument of state control and political terror, had come to be widely despised by both Soviet citizens and the party leadership who were trying to envision the ideal communist society of the future. While once this living situation was thought to represent the highest of bourgeois sensibilities, this consensus was eroded even before Stalin's death. Harris argues that the single-family apartment came to be understood as "the 'cultured' form of urban housing that reflected Stalinism's pro-family values and social stratification." While under Stalin these types of dwellings remained a privilege of the party elite, Khrushchev sought to make the separate apartment a mass phenomenon.³³² The decision to offer every Soviet citizen a private space was a revolutionary idea. As Harris puts it, "when the Soviet state provided an individual and his or her family with their own toilet, it was making an investment in the civil order of a new society whose members would be trained to use their new private spaces responsibly and to police one another in the public spaces of the mass housing community."³³³

In giving this ground to the individual, Harris argues, Soviet citizens gained a newfound power over their own private domain, and in doing so changed the dynamic between the individual and the state. In addition to the high-profile cultural battles that marked the period, this was a direct way that civilians experienced the "thaw," as "ordinary residents who were willing to challenge the authority of the architects, furniture designers, and local housing

³³² Ibid, 12.

³³³ Ibid, 11.

officials involved with mass housing exhibited what scholars have identified as the thaw's chief dynamics, but usually have applied only reserved for the cultural intelligentsia: iconoclasm, calls for change, attacking founding myths, scorning past accomplishments, and recalibrating existing discourses for new aims. By living in a separate apartment and critiquing mass housing, urban dwellers transformed the thaw from an elite to a popular experience."³³⁴ Because ultimately it was the state that controlled the construction and distribution of private space, the acquisition, furnishing, and even renovating one's home was itself a dialogue between the individual and the state. The state for its part still attempted to define the permissible representations of mass housing through its control of the press and media, and the propaganda heralding the campaign's goals and achievements "delimited the discourses" that people were able to use in public forums and their petitions to redress their grievances with their new conditions within the acceptable parameters of debate.³³⁵

Finally, Harris uses his study of housing policy to make a case for reexamining how Soviet scholars think of the "ordinary" and "everyday" experience of life after Stalin. Harris uses "ordinary" first and foremost to capture the common experiences of mass housing residents that cut across social lines. The experience of moving to a separate apartment and settling into everyday life in new micro-districts on the outskirts of town was becoming a rather ordinary thing for Soviet citizens from almost all walks of life. In this sense, the "ordinary residents" of mass housing were people who lived through and shaped a common experience repeated in cities throughout the Soviet Union.³³⁶ However, he also notes that "ordinary" does not necessarily be understood as a uniform experience—age, gender, profession, and personal history, and how

³³⁴ Ibid, 16.

³³⁵ Ibid, 18.

³³⁶ His study most carefully looks at Moscow and Leningrad.

their individual backgrounds and social identities intersected with their experience as “ordinary residents” of mass housing.³³⁷

However, there was one notable constant that was experienced by all walks of Soviet life that Harris believes left a deep impression on Soviet society during this period. When discussing his use of the word “ordinary” in history, he proclaims, “in the Khrushchev era, people’s lives became decidedly less turbulent and less violent, and more settled and more normal, which was in itself an extraordinary thing.” He goes on to assert “the move to the single-family apartment embodied this incredible change from the Stalin era to the Khrushchev era. The ordinariness and normality that its way of life represented were something that Soviet citizens had come to crave under Stalin and demanded once he was dead. The fact that the Soviet leaders under Khrushchev, normally accustomed to waging war on society, agreed with this craving and thus tried to make separate apartments available to everybody was an extraordinary moment in Soviet history.” From this we can see the weight Harris placed on mass-housing within the wider context of de-Stalinization. It is central, he argues, because of its “extraordinariness” when compared with Soviet civilization under Stalin.

Mass-Housing, as all the scholars above agree, did have its origins in Stalinism. However, these studies are also in firm agreement that without the political intervention of the Khrushchev administration (as part of its broader platform of reform) it would not have taken on the scope that it did. Stalingrad itself was defined by this development, as the *khrushchevka* began to spring up in every region of the city. As the city expanded, they were the building blocks around which new neighborhoods were created, like the future “Dzerzhinsky” and “Soviet” districts to the West and South of the city center. Just as Stalingrad had been a model of

³³⁷ Ibid, 18.

the “hero-city,” it was to become a showcase for the new vision of Soviet city, a truly communist urban space.

The construction of the Kuibyshev Hydroelectric Dam being built across the Volga during this period is also cannot be overlooked in this story, because without this massive public works undertaking, the city’s path to become the long-promised socialist utopia would require electrification beyond the city’s current limited means. The STALGres power plant, which had serviced the city’s grid since before the battle, was constrained now by new developments that were springing up around it. The city’s energy future lay with this hydroelectric station, at the time one of the largest in the world. This work--which took place north of the city, beyond the final reaches of the Traktorzavod district—was a massive undertaking on par with the Volga-Don Canal.³³⁸ Amidst the need to house the thousands of workers who labored daily on this project, the new city of Volzhskiy was founded as a mass-housing project with a city core that was defined by the *khrushchevka*. The need to properly house these workers was made all the more acute by the cessation of the use of prisoner labor at this time, which added several hundred more workers to the waiting list of those who would need to be given proper housing, rather than being relegated to camp conditions.

While Stalingrad began to see the first rapidly constructed housing structures in the years following the war, like the rest of the country, it would be some time before the skyline of the city would see the forest of cranes that became the symbol of mass-housing for the next several decades. It was only when the mass-housing program was launched in earnest in 1957 that Khrushchev’s signature policy proposal became an all-Union initiative no-less sweeping than

³³⁸ There was about a five-year period where both projects overlapped, bringing a huge amount of personnel and resources into the region, though the hydroelectric station was only in its infancy of its more than the project’s more-than yearlong lifespan.

Stalin's first Five Year Plan. This was a year after de-Stalinization had begun, and Khrushchev's tenure as the Soviet premier had hitherto been marked by the "secret speech" to the Twentieth Party Congress and his somewhat calamitous escapades in realigning Soviet foreign policy. Mass housing, on the other hand, would begin to have an almost immediate impact on their daily lives. The party leadership was promising to reinvigorate its promise of building socialism and preparing the Soviet Union for its eventual transition to communism. The scramble to access to this future, and how to then surpass the inherent limitations of the *khrushchevka* to match that image, would become a primary motivator for hundreds of thousands of *Stalingradtsy* who would find themselves on the waiting list for such spaces over the better part of the next decade.

Over the next twelve years (Khrushchev's own goal for reaching the country's mass-housing targets), this sweeping campaign would profoundly impact how the citizens of the world's largest socialist state lived,³³⁹ millions of Soviet citizens would see their families move into new single-family apartments as the *khrushchevka* conquered the urban landscape from Leningrad to Vladivostok—including Stalingrad.

Housing Policy in Stalingrad

As we saw in the previous chapter, the focus on creating a "hero-city" at Stalingrad was the primary concern of the city's administration and architects in charge of reconstruction. This policy represented the worst of "monumentalist excess" decried after Stalin's death. pending vast amounts of labor and resources on the city's core compositions produced an extremely limited housing supply that was often reserved for the city elite and the families of those serving at the

³³⁹ This is to say nothing of how Soviet Housing policies impacted the world's other Socialist States from Europe to Asia. For more on the Soviet contribution to the international housing question, see Smith, *Property of Communists*.

front. This extended the housing crisis in other less-serviced areas of the city. Factories tried to provide shelter for their laborers in the form of hastily constructed military-style barracks close to their worksites, but for thousands of others housing was a free-for-all, with residents forced to live out of ruined structures, crude dugouts, or ramshackle constructions of their own. As more and more workers and refugees were resettled to the city to help with reconstruction, the more acute the housing shortage became.³⁴⁰

The situation in Stalingrad mirrored many other cities in the Soviet Union, and with the state still primarily focused on bringing the war with Hitler to a close, it could hardly spare the resources or attention to offer its own housing solution. Instead, the Soviet authorities made the decision to deregulate property laws regarding individual construction in an attempt to further enlist the population into solving the problem themselves. In May of 1944, the central committee issued a decree that would authorize easy to acquire state loans for individual construction. However, in a climate where building materials remained scarce and labor resources already stretched thin, in the late years of the war there were few takers. According to Mark Smith, who looked at data regarding these loans from across the Soviet Union during, including those overseen by the Red October steelworks at Stalingrad, “by September 1944, four months after the declaration, management had distributed 17.2 percent of the loans budget [...] 115 people had been given loans, but only twenty had completed the construction of their dwellings. Three years later, the corresponding annual plan for 1947 had only been fulfilled by 34.1 percent at the end of August.” Even with demand for housing at a premium, this program simply was not a strong enough incentive to have much of an impact on the overall housing situation.³⁴¹

³⁴⁰ Orlov, *Istoriia rodnogo kraia*, 169-70.

³⁴¹ Smith, *Property of Communists*, 35.

As the war drew to a close, more practical solutions to the housing shortfall began to emerge. In 1946, the All-Union Council of Ministers adopted a proposal that would standardize design metrics for one-, two-, and three-story housing complexes specifically to address housing shortages in cities like Stalingrad that had been impacted by the war.³⁴² These standardized apartment complexes were designed with very specific square-meter requirements per unit in order to create the maximum number of dwellings that could then be allocated to new residents under existing distribution protocols. A neighborhood of these two-story, four apartment units was built to house workers of the Red October Steelworks, situated to the west of the factory behind the higher, more architecturally refined structures that faced the main *Prospekt*. These rudimentary cinder block structures comprised several city blocks, tightly packed together, and many still stand today.

While often cramped, these mass-housing solutions still represented a departure from the thinking behind the *kommunalka*, as the apartments would be counted as separate units, each dedicated to housing only one family unit. While still lacking the manufacturing capabilities to turn to full prefabrication, these standardized designs did mean that crews could become familiar with design methods and specialize in their replication. The Cherkasova volunteer movement in Stalingrad and elsewhere also added a significant boost to these standardized projects, where manual labor was easier to organize from site to site and workers could become familiar with performing similar tasks across multiple builds.³⁴³

However, with state intervention still falling well short of solving the housing shortage, wildcat solutions predominated in the city, as residents did what they had to in order to provide their families and relations with adequate housing. Individual houses constructed by residents

³⁴² Ibid, 42.

³⁴³ Ibid, 47.

were often developed outside the state loan program. Volunteer labor brigades would sometimes form not to assist on official projects, but rather to collectively improve their own and their neighbors' standard of living. Houses were built from materials purchased with state loans, or perhaps more often than not, appropriated from worksites. Residents took whatever construction supplies they could get their hands on. With so little of the land currently being developed across the vast expanse of Stalingrad's urban space, many individuals simply built their homes wherever they could find empty space, much to the chagrin of the engineers tasked with laying out the carefully rationalized socialist city of the future. According to Smith, between 1945 and 1950, officials estimated that one in six individual houses in Stalingrad was built without authorization.³⁴⁴

Still, even with all these innovations aimed at tackling the housing crisis in the city, none could meaningfully address the massive housing shortage facing Stalingrad while the state was still devoting so much of its resources to the city's core compositions. Most regions by this time possessed several newly constructed buildings devoted to housing, but these were clustered in central ensembles or facing major roadways, while the city beyond remained a tangle of rubble amidst which thousands still squatted in makeshift housing. By the time of the 1951 national report on the state of Soviet housing, inspectors estimated that the Stalingrad state-owned housing stock was still only 67 percent of the prewar levels.³⁴⁵ Due to policies that began during the war, most of those who were able to acquire residence in these newly constructed apartments were military families who had earned priority status through their service in the war. Thousands of workers still depended on shoddy military-style barracks housing that was distributed through their factory. It should also be noted, up until the clemency granted by the Soviet presidium that

³⁴⁴ Ibid, 47.

³⁴⁵ Ibid, 62.

followed close behind Stalin's death, thousands more of Stalingrad's "unofficial" population were prisoners housed in camp conditions inside the GULAG's many islands" throughout the city. All the while, the local press dutifully reported on each newly completed building, clinically quoting statistics on the quantity of square meters of new living space added to the city's housing pool. However, for most *Stalingradtsy* this remained a far-off promise of the radiant future.

What is more, the city (and the country more broadly) was facing a real crisis of morale by the time of Stalin's death. A general sense of fatigue can be seen in Stalingrad during this time. One important measure of this, voluntary participation in labor brigades, fell steadily after 1948 and continued to decline into the 1950s.³⁴⁶ Two generations now of Soviet citizens had been inundated with the language of "sacrifice" and "service" in the pursuit of a better future, from those who tirelessly worked to meet the targets of the Five-Year Plans to those who fought against the fascist invaders and struggled to rebuild from the war's devastation. This sacrifice had always been justified with the promised communist future, a society where citizens' needs were completely met under the planned socialist economy. The sense of entitlement to housing, one of the most basic building blocks of stable living conditions, was at an all-time high, and the state was failing to keep pace with demand. As Mark Smith noted, Khrushchev's housing policy was not a policy developed from the "top down" but rather from the "bottom up"—the state could either address the housing question, or the party could face a real legitimacy crisis.

The discussion that was taking place among Soviet architects would come to Stalingrad in a very tangible way not long after Stalin's death. In August 1953, a meeting of the city's members of the USSR Academy of Architecture, along with representatives of design and construction, convened in Stalingrad to discuss issues of planning, development, and the latest

³⁴⁶ See above in Chapter 2.

construction methods. Their debate saw proponents of both the current classical style and the rationalists' new school, though there was a clear desire on all sides that the structures of the city reflect its heroic history.³⁴⁷

Despite the gradual policy shifts being played out at architectural conferences and in the halls of Soviet power, the housing question in Stalingrad would not be significantly addressed until Khrushchev came to power and the Stalinist urban rationale was itself discredited as part of his larger campaign for change. The turn from Stalinist architecture and the turn to prefabricated housing options obviously had massive repercussions in Stalingrad, as well as the other "hero-cities," where this architectural style had been given priority for nearly a decade. The turn to mass housing then would see a dramatic shift in how labor and material resources were allocated within the city, causing a shake-up in administration and the city's relationship to the All-Union administration and GOSPLAN. Even once the campaign was launched in 1957, it would still be some time before new units became available to throngs of *Stalingradtsy* waiting for access to suitable housing.

However, as the debate over housing policy in the Soviet presidium began to swing in favor of the constructivists, signs of hope began to appear as talk of new construction methods became a popular topic in the pages of the local press. While housing construction took on new importance in 1955 and increased in scope and scale throughout the city, the process was not always smooth. The increase in expectations further stressed the city's struggling construction firms. Production of new living space and other important works lagged well behind yearly targets, and the quality of the work varied greatly from site to site.

³⁴⁷ Orlov does not offer many specifics of this meeting, and I was not able to look at this event in *Stalingradskaiia pravda* while I still had access to the archives. It would certainly be interesting to see how this event is covered, as well as the language of both sides of the argument.

Despite the setbacks during this period of readjustment, however, the trend over the next decade was a massive increase in housing construction in the city. Based on estimates by local historian Gennady V. Orlov, Stalingrad added 700,000 square meters of new housing in the years between 1951-1955 as several large-scale Stalinist housing projects were completed and small-scale mass housing solutions were implemented. However, as the adoption of new building methods led to a drastic shift in the Soviet manufacturing and technical base, as well as a new workforce trained and experienced in rapid construction would lead to an explosion of construction under the Seven Year Plan (1959-1965). In Stalingrad, factories capable of producing large-panel housing began construction in Traktorzavod and Krasnoarmeysk districts, as well the new Razgulyaevka plant to the north and west of the city center in what would become the Dzerzhinsky *raion*, which was to be a factory dedicated to the production of reinforced concrete and other construction materials, the largest in the region.³⁴⁸ There was also an important shift made in the realm of more basic construction materials. Stalingrad lacked the heavy deposits of stone necessary to supply enough crushed stone gravel used in setting buildings' foundations. Instead, engineers realized they could make use of the hard clay that was so abundant in the city to develop a new type of manufactured gravel, greatly reducing the building firm's reliance on imported stone from elsewhere in the Soviet Union.

In the decade following the turn to prefabricated housing beginning in 1955 through the completion of the seven-year plan in 1965, the city would see the construction of 2.2 million square meters of living space, with 30,000-40,000 new apartments being added to the housing pool every five years. According to Orlov's calculations, this amounted to four square meters per

³⁴⁸ Orlov, *Istoriia rodnogo kraia*, 176-178.

Stalingrad resident, and the new stock of apartments would provide housing to nearly 250,000 of the city's residents—nearly one-third of the total population at the time.³⁴⁹

Boom Town—The Expansion of the City's Industrial Base in the Post-Stalin Era

Mass housing was of particular concern for Stalingrad's city planners, as the city became a hub for new industries that would employ hundreds of thousands of new workers. In August 1962, the Council of Ministers of the RSFSR approved a new general plan that revised estimates of Volgograd's future population from half a million to 800,000.³⁵⁰ This revised estimate, up 300,000 from the estimates of the city's planners in the aftermath of the battle, reflected the exponential growth of Stalingrad's economy in the 1950s. As we shall soon see, by the time of Stalin's death Stalingrad was already transitioning out of its "reconstruction" phase of development and looking toward the future as a regional manufacturing hub.

Within the centrally planned Soviet economy, there were a number of reasons why Stalingrad made an attractive location for the state to locate new industrial enterprises. There was still a copious amount of undeveloped real estate in the 100 km long city, with even more potential for growth to the West. The established heavy industries located along the Volga, which had defined the city's manufacturing identity since their construction under Stalin, meant that construction materials for new plants and factories could be manufactured locally. With the completion of the Volga-Don Canal, import and export shipping could theoretically reach five separate seas. Stalingrad also sat along crucial rail lines, linking water and overland transport. In addition, the promise of cheap power to be supplied by the Kuibyshev Hydroelectric Station had

³⁴⁹ Ibid.

³⁵⁰ Ibid, 179.

made Stalingrad an extremely attractive location for the construction of new enterprises. The city's boom coincided with the economic reforms and restructuring that was beginning to take shape in the wake of Stalin's death and would be further laid out with the launch of Khrushchev's party platform in the wake of de-Stalinization. New factories, designed as part of this new manufacturing vision of the Khrushchev administration, would greatly expand the city's industrial portfolio. Many of the new industries reflected the shift towards "light" industry—factories capable of manufacturing consumer goods and foodstuffs aimed directly at the Soviet consumer, rather than state enterprises.

Even before the Khrushchev administration came to power and began its attempts to restructure the Soviet economy, Stalingrad was already a focus of GOSPLAN's larger economic vision for the region. During the time of the Fifth Five Year Plan (1950-55), Stalingrad saw 3.4 billion rubles of capital investment.

Several large-scale factories began construction during this time, and many of the city's existing enterprises saw their operational capacity expanded. The Razgulyaevka factory complex was a multifaceted production facility, capable of producing construction materials like reinforced concrete, pipes for water and gas lines, and other building essentials. The industrial park—which would come to include a motor and engine repair shop, a meat-packing plant, and a refrigerator factory—was built from scratch on the open steppe to the west of the city, employing thousands of *Stalingradtsy* even before the first production lines were operational. Another large-scale enterprise, the *Morka Mechetka* aluminum plant, began construction to the north, situated to the west of Kransnyioktiabr' and Traktorozavod. This plant was to be the largest aluminum manufacturer in all of Europe at the time of its construction and would be completed just in time to dedicate its first refined ingot to the XXI Party Congress in January of 1959. This plant would

be essential for many of the “light” industries that were also being built in the city at this time. The aluminum produced at Morka Mechetka would become appliances, sinks, and other household essentials *Stalingradtsy* would need as they moved into their new single-family apartment. In Krasnoarmeisk, a new steel cable plant would add to the district’s growing industrial portfolio, and the shipyard was outfitted to construct large ocean tankers with a carrying capacity of 5,000 tons. In addition, a major chemical plant to be named for the “50th anniversary of October” began construction at this time, and another facility capable of producing reinforced concrete products was built in the district to serve its own rapidly accelerating housing construction efforts. The Kirov region’s Erman timber works were joined with the Stroidetal construction materials plant to create a joint venture capable of meeting the city’s growing demand for lumber and other finished wood products. In October of 1953, the completion of the Archeda-Stalingrad gas pipeline led to the creation of a natural gas refinery and storage facility. Much of the machinery was provided by the Petrova factory that was growing between the Kirov and Voroshilov districts, which specialized in manufacturing parts for the oil and gas industry. This pipeline drastically improved the city’s capacity for generating heat in the wintertime, and a network of 84 km of gas pipelines were installed throughout the city, connecting more and more buildings to the heating grid.³⁵¹

While many of these new factories were being built according to the latest engineering practices, Stalingrad’s older behemoth factories like the Red October Steelworks, Barricades, and STZ were focused during this time on updating rather than expanding their facilities. At the Tractor Plant, most of the restructuring was based around preparations for building a new model—the DT-75: a lighter, faster tractor, which came equipped with heating, ventilation, and a

³⁵¹ Orlov, 172-73, 177.

more comfortable seat for its operator. Adjusting production lines for the update was no small task, but this model would become the standard during the Seven Year Plan beginning in 1957. This tractor would become one of the most widely exported products Stalingrad produced, as models were sold to all the democratic republics as well as buyers in the developing world. Tractors bearing the STZ factory mark could be found in India, Turkey, China, as well as many of the Eastern European People's Republics.³⁵² Other updates were made to the plant's hydraulics shop, where new technologies and innovations were prioritized, with an emphasis on specialist knowledge and training. At Red October, the emphasis was placed on refining the quality of the steel that was being produced, which had been sub-par and wasteful for some time. This again was a very technical process that required adjustments to both the machinery and the working methods within the plant. During this time, the plant exchanged personnel and technical expertise with their sister steelworks "Hammer and Sickle" plant to the north in Saratov. The Barricades armaments facility saw an even greater shift as it switched from a wartime to a peacetime portfolio and began producing complex parts destined for the tractor factory, shipyard, the oil industry, and even specialized medical equipment.³⁵³

However, for all the new industrial projects spreading throughout the city, nothing could compare with the massive engineering project that was taking place on the Volga at this time—a project that, when completed, would prove a massive step toward the city's revitalization as a modern Soviet metropolis.

The Kuibyshev Hydroelectric Station—Fulfilling Lenin's Promise of Electrification

³⁵² "Zavodskaiia marka," *Stalingradskaiia pravda*, June 17, 1955, 1.

³⁵³ Orlov, *Istoriia rodnogo kraia*, 182.

At the northern end of the city, beyond the Traktorzavod district, a new “Great Construction Site” was taking shape in the months before Stalin’s demise. A new hydroelectric project that would dam the mighty Volga was part of a larger “Great Volga” initiative aimed at developing one of southern Russia’s greatest waterways, which had been approved by Stalin himself on August 6, 1950. The hydroelectric station, one of the largest scale of such projects anywhere in the world at the time, would be capable of providing electricity to the city of Stalingrad and the surrounding oblast, and the resultant reservoir was to provide water for irrigation to the underdeveloped plains that had previously been unfit for sustainable agriculture. The power station would replace the increasingly strained STALGRES plant further down river, but even beyond its place in the plan for Stalingrad, a power station on the Volga was the modern realization of the vision laid out by Lenin in the earliest days of Soviet power. His formula: “Electrification + Soviet Power = Communism” had been something of a mantra before his death, but as a realizable goal had been far from attainable using the technological and industrial base of Russia in the years following the revolution. Finally, though the project started under Stalin, it would be completed under Khrushchev, who sought to reset the Soviet Union on the path toward communism that he felt had been derailed by his predecessor.

The project would require massive coordination between state enterprises, labor resources, and raw materials, and the timeline for the project expected nearly a decade needed to complete. Preparations began with the founding of a new firm, *Stalingradgidrostoi*, which was to be headed by F.G. Loginov and chief construction engineer S.R. Medvedev. The scope of the project was massive—at the point where the dam was proposed, the Volga was hundreds of meters wide. The volume of materials and labor needed to divert the river’s flow to set the dam’s footing, to say nothing of the specialized work of engineers, electricians, steelworkers, and

concrete pourers needed to install the power station's machinery, dwarfed any other project in the region, including the Volga-Don Canal. Thousands of experienced hydroelectric construction specialists were recruited into the trust from around the Soviet Union and sent to Stalingrad to begin construction. They were joined in 1952 by thousands more who had previously been working with *Volgadonstroï* in the construction of the canal. As news of the project spread, the project even drew applicants from abroad. By August 1951, Stalingradgidrostroï had received 12,500 applications from citizens of twenty-two nationalities seeking work on what would be the largest hydroelectric station and dam in all of Europe.³⁵⁴

For the first few years of the project, work was primarily relegated to preparation; gathering the necessary materials and personnel, surveying the worksite, and building the infrastructure needed to support such a massive undertaking. Unlike many earlier gargantuan public works projects under Stalin, this job would be highly mechanized—the site needed to be equipped with hundreds of excavators, dredgers, bulldozers, cranes, and pumps. While Stalingrad's major industries would take on some of the orders for supplies, the project became an All-Union affair—sixty-five dump trucks arrived from Minsk, powerful dredgers arrived fresh off the line from the machine plants of the Urals, a specialized floating crane was developed in Riga, and Yaroslavl provided thousands of kg of tires and other rubber materials—all in 1951 alone.³⁵⁵ The budget on the project was colossal, with more than 12.6 billion rubles as an operating budget to pay for not just for materials, equipment, and salaries of workers, but also the complementary factories that would supply important manufactured material components and housing construction to provide living space for its workers, which flocked to the region as the project began to get off the ground.

³⁵⁴ Ibid, 170.

³⁵⁵ Ibid, 171.

In the preliminary stages, most of the labor employed by *Gidrostoi* came from Stalingrad and the surrounding oblast—demobilized soldiers, students just out of gymnasium, and veteran earthmovers from the Volga-Don Canal all found work on the project. *Kolkhozniki* from the collective farms surrounding the city were able to acquire special passports to leave and travel to the site from the chairpersons on their collective farms.³⁵⁶ Approximately ten thousand of those employed by the trust were Komsomol members, which provided an energetic labor pool to the project, with many entering mechanical or engineering training programs as part of the vocational training initiatives of the time. *Gidrostoi* actively tried to recruit young talent in the city, launching a campaign of advertisements in the local press and over the radio to attract recruits. One optimistic applicant, for instance, had said “we, three friends, Komsomol members, decided to build the hydroelectric station with our bare hands. To be a part of construction is real happiness.”³⁵⁷

They would be joined by thousands more who were assigned to the project from all over the Soviet Union. The reporter Anatoly Arganovsky described the scene as a diverse coalition of Soviet workers, “the builders of Moscow, the metalworkers of Georgia and Uzbekistan, the miners of the Donbass, the oil workers of Baku, the Steelmakers of Magnitogorsk, the woodcutters of Karelia, the grain growers of Ukraine, Siberia, the Volga Region, the army of many thousands of Soviet scientists—our whole mighty and hardworking people consider it their patriotic duty to help with the great construction project.” The project’s authors went on to note that while the Ministry of Internal affairs had initially planned to see more than one hundred

³⁵⁶ Anna Borunova, “Gestures Towards a Socialist Landscape: The New City of Volzhsky,” in *New Towns on the Cold War Frontier, Part I*, edited by Crimson Historians and Urbanists, 70-168, (Rotterdam: Crimson Historians and Urbanists, forthcoming), <https://issuu.com/internationalnewtowninstitute/docs/newtownsonthecoldwarfrontier-part1>.

³⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 99.

thousand civilians to work on the project, in reality the number was much smaller (though still significant). In 1953, for example, Gidrostroi planned to employ 79,000 workers, but only 21,628 were actively employed by the company at the time. Still, tens of thousands of workers were drawn to the area by the project.³⁵⁸

Like the Volga-Don Canal project before it, Gidrostroi also had access to the labor of GULAG prisoners. In 1950, the new Akhtubskiyi camp, named for its placement near the Akhtuba River—a Volga tributary flowing past Volzhskiy on the right bank that empties below the dam—brought more than 26,044 prisoners to the region before the 1953 general amnesty.³⁵⁹ These prisoners lived in barracks and tent housing in a camp on the open steppe, and faced a very harsh climate, particularly in the winters. Rather than work on the dam site itself, which was a high priority state asset, they were deployed to build many of the auxiliary facilities needed for the effort, such as new factories and future housing for the project's workers, or in the gathering raw materials. Still, their civilian counterparts on the outside were faced with their own struggles. Most workers lived in rented rooms and hostels in Stalingrad or were bunked in villages in the surrounding area near the jobsite. Road construction on this side of the city remained poor and there was little to nothing in the way of public transit, so many workers faced 10-20 km treks on foot to traverse to the jobsite and back.

Due to the overall housing shortage, Gidrostroi was subject to the same housing crunch as the rest of the city as it tried to house its workers. Thousands lived in huts, dugouts, tents, and yurts for the first few seasons of the project, enduring the same hard winters as the prisoners at Akhtubskiyi. Still, with each prisoner allocated only an estimated 1.33-1.75 square meters of living space per inmate, the conditions were so bad in the camp that the prisoners sent an

³⁵⁸ Ibid.

³⁵⁹ Ibid, 100.

anonymous letter to *Pravda* protesting their treatment. The letter alleges that poor nutrition is to blame for low productivity of the camps' inmates: "Absolutely poor nutrition, only balanda from water and no fat [...] I am saying frankly this is the reason why our productivity is so low. If we had nicer living conditions, we would build not twenty houses per year but one hundred."³⁶⁰ The reliance on prisoner labor was only one factor that stymied growth at this time. Construction materials remained in continuously short supply, destined for other projects that had been attached more importance in the general plan.

The dam project meant a massive influx of capital and personnel to the region. Stalingrad and the surrounding area certainly benefited from the flurry of new industrial activity to the north of the city. During this time, dozens of new plants and manufacturing sites dedicated to the production of concrete, reinforced concrete panels, timber mills for framing materials, and chemical plants were built to meet the coming demand the project would generate. Many of these were built on the river's east bank, near the village of Volzhsky which was only just emerging from its own reconstruction efforts after being nearly destroyed during the war. Its population saw a sudden surge due to the influx of dam workers stationed there, and it would soon grow into a full-fledged metropolis of its own, a sister-city to Stalingrad.

Once work began, it was carried out at a hectic pace. The excavation phase saw work on the jobsite twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. At night bright spotlights lit up the jobsite through the night, their glare reflecting off the river visible from miles down the bank. Socialist competition between brigades was once again standard, and various brigades began to innovate new labor methods to try to boost their production targets. In 1952, the site had fourteen labor brigades, each entirely self-supported and capable of carrying out any of the tasks that the

³⁶⁰ Ibid.

job site might require, from framing new retaining walls, to the operation of bulldozers, dump trucks, and excavators. All these tasks required specialist training, and so a veritable technical school was set up on-site. A small library of technical materials was even donated from The State Scientific Library of the USSR Ministry of Higher Education, which lent hundreds of technical handbooks and engineering manuals to Stalingradgidrostoi. Following the completion of the Volga-Don Canal, many laborers on that project already familiar with the work were transferred north, bouncing from one “Great Construction Site” to the next.³⁶¹

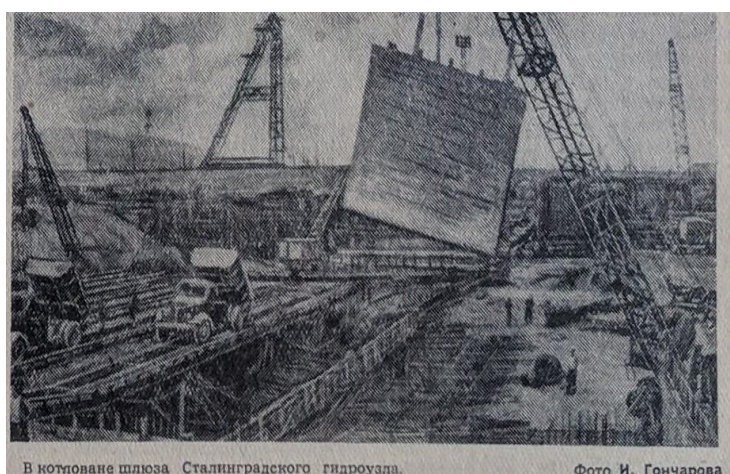
The participation of Komsomol brigades and newly trained specialists added a sense of vigor to the jobsite. These young dam builders were hungry for recognition, and apparently excelled. In 1952, 165 young machine operators and 368 drivers fulfilled their output standards by 120-200%. One outstanding youth, Yuri Pronin, a foreman of the Komsomol youth brigade, initiated the effort to increase the carrying capacity of vehicles with the aim of reducing the cost of each ton/km run by 18%.³⁶² These efforts were lauded by the city’s press, which ran near daily updates of the ongoing work at the site and ran exposes on outstanding workers who had distinguished themselves in the construction effort.

The laborers who took on the initial work of digging the footings of the dam faced a very treacherous work site and had to adapt to hazards few other jobs faced. The level of mechanization meant that it was also a highly specialized workforce. Images of the site reproduced in *Stalingradskaia Pravda* depict an extraordinarily complex operation. While the dam was nominally a matter of spanning the width of the river, work on individual sections was conducted along an axis of verticality—cranes and trusses on iron suspensions tower over deep pits where the footings were being dug and poured. Massive grids of rebar had to be laid out,

³⁶¹ Orlov, *Istoriia rodnogo kraia*, 169-70.

³⁶² Ibid.

tied, and then flown by crane into concrete molds, each one requiring towers of scaffolding and reinforcement measures.³⁶³ Falling from heights as well as plummeting objects were two of the chief hazards for workers on the site. People were not the only things on site suspended at great height. To move out the earth of the riverbed, trucks themselves were put on scaffolding above the pit that was dug out beneath them, the wet heavy earth hauled up by crane, loaded onto the precariously perched machines before it could be moved away. Still above them, huge panels of reinforced concrete hanging from cranes were swung into position to shore up the walls of the sluice.³⁶⁴ The earth that was removed is added to the growing mountain of earth upriver that was used to reroute the course of the Volga away from the workers below.



В котловане шлюза Сталинградского гидроузла.

Фото И. Гончарова

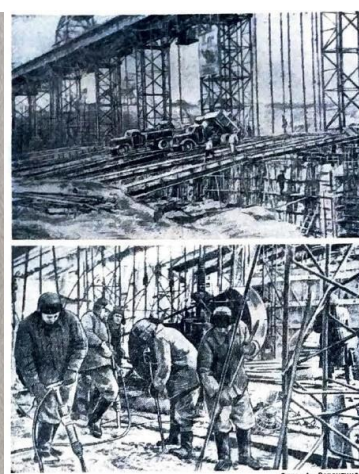


Фото А. Бетлунгина.

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For several years, most of the work was concentrated around the dam itself, which had to be expanded bit by bit across the entire width of the river, nearly a kilometer in length. The work continued both day and night, through all seasons, each of which posed its own unique challenges. The winter was particularly difficult, as the site's proximity to the river meant that an ever-present damp threatened to turn to frostbite if workers were careless. In the spring, the

³⁶³ "Vystuplenie prodolzhayetsia," *Stalingradskaya Pravda*, June 23, 1955, 2.

³⁶⁴ A. Merkulov, "Nedelia na Hidrostroye," *Stalingradskaya pravda*, July 19, 1956, 1.

³⁶⁵ Left, photo by I. Goncharova, "V kotlovane shliuza," *Stalingradskaya pravda*, July 19, 1956, 1. Right, photo by A. Betlungina, "Na stroitelstve stalingradskoi GES," April 4, 1956, 2.

snowmelt that came flooding into the Volga upstream substantially raised the river's waters, and every year proved a test on the earthen dam's integrity. If the river were to at any point breach the restraints imposed on it, the whole project could have been lost. The summer brought soaring temperatures to the exposed workers, with little shade to speak of except for those working deep down in the sluice.

A report from the winter of 1959 that ran on the front page of *Stalingradskaia pravda* stressed how far the project had come since its inception. The sluice had become so long now that moving people, equipment, and materials had become a logistical concern, and to address it, "a railway has been laid along the lower slope of this dam. Trains go along it, delivering materials, machines, parts for hydraulic units to the construction site - everything that is needed for the hard work of builders." By the time the sluice reached the far side of the river in the winter of 1958, the teams working on it had mastered the techniques of installing each new section, and work continued at a rapid pace. As the earthen dam had begun to close in on the far shore, in order to not disrupt river transit, a separate water path with its own series of locks was built on the left bank of the river. This was in and of itself a massive enterprise that required moving thousands of tons of earth, pouring tens of thousands of cubic meters of concrete, erecting metal frameworks, and installing the locks themselves. Behind them, in the sections of the dam that had already been completed, engineers and other specialized teams were busy installing more of the turbines and the complex inner workings of the power plant, and the sections already in operation had been responsible for generating millions of kilowatt-hours of electricity.³⁶⁶

³⁶⁶ "Segodnia na gidrostroe," in *Stalingradskaia Pravda*, February 15, 1959, p. 1. GAVO

While this project would become emblematic of the Khrushchev era, the work itself bore many of the hallmarks of Stalinism, including the emphasis on speed. By 1957, the amount of earth moved and reinforced concrete installed had so far outpaced the initial production targets that in their report to the XI Regional Party Conference, Stalingradgidrostoi's head engineers made the bold claim that they would be able to complete their work a full year ahead of schedule.³⁶⁷ The fevered pace of the work would soon lead to one of the most important milestones of the project. On October 31, 1958, the Volga was fully blocked by the earthen dam for the first time, and its flow rerouted through the first of the channels that would allow the hydroelectric station to produce electricity. The massive turbines, produced by the Leningrad Metalworks factory, were installed ahead of schedule later that year, and on December 22, the Stalingrad Hydroelectric Station generated its first kilowatt. In the next two years, 22 total turbines were installed, including one experimental model, reaching its peak capacity of 2,415,000 kW. The electricity generated from the plant was now capable of powering not only Stalingrad and the surrounding region. Its electricity was exported all the way to Moscow to boost the grid of the nation's capital.³⁶⁸

In its completed state, the dam is an incredible feat of human engineering. The metrics alone are staggering. The dam across the Volga is 736 meters long and 90 meters wide. The foundation of the dam is set 35 meters below the riverbed, and the built structure rises another 45 meters above the water's surface. Standing atop the dam and looking along its length, one can see the water on the reservoir side rising more than 25 meters above the level of the river below. Over the course of the project its builders moved 140 million cubic meters of earth. 5.5 million

³⁶⁷ This claim came with very little information as to the specifics of how they laid this out, and I have yet to find the report to the Congress itself.

³⁶⁸ Orlov, *Istoriia rodnogo kraia*, 173.

cubic meters of reinforced concrete were poured to stymie the river's flow and house the plant's turbines and other necessary infrastructure.³⁶⁹ On September 7, 1961, a pennant hoisted over the station's control room read "The hydroelectric complex is presented for delivery to the state commission." Two days later, by decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, the hydroelectric plant was officially named for "XXII Party Congress of the Congress" to commemorate the recent event during which Khrushchev had laid out his roadmap for the Soviet Union to reach full communism. When Khrushchev toured the plant himself, in his greeting to the station's engineers he proclaimed that "The successful completion of the construction of the new Volzhskaya Hydroelectric Power Station is a vivid testimony to the enormous achievements of our country, workers and women, engineers and technicians, designers and scientists [...] It is joyful to be among the people who have created the world's largest energy giant with their own hands, by stubborn, truly heroic work, by their own will and skill."³⁷⁰ On November 2, 1962, *Volgogradskaya pravda* reported that the last, twenty-second experimental unit of the Volzhskaya Hydroelectric Power Station began producing industrial current, and the facility first achieved its design capacity of 2,563,000 kW.³⁷¹

Those involved with the project were highly decorated with some of the highest honors the state could bestow. Hidrostoi was awarded the Order of Lenin by the Presidium, and six builders—mostly supervisors and construction heads—became Heroes of Socialist Labor. A. P. Aleksandrov, now the head of the firm, was awarded the golden Hammer and Sickle.³⁷²

The construction of the dam and the rerouting of the Volga through the hydroelectric station's turbines was a project almost a decade in the making. Like the Volga-Don before it, it

³⁶⁹ Ibid.

³⁷⁰ Ibid, 172.

³⁷¹ Ibid.

³⁷² Ibid.

became a point of pride for the city, a testament to the resolve and skill of its people. The scale of the undertaking demanded national and even international attention. Commemorative stamps were printed showing water flowing through the spillways, and it became a sort of pilgrimage site for visiting foreign dignitaries. (more on this to come in Chapter 6). In the history of the city, it was an important milestone. Not only was it important for the power it provided to the city and the region, but for the industrial facilities that were built to support the project, as well as the tens of thousands of workers who lived there for years and many of whom would come to call the region home. It also marked the first physical crossing point on the Volga, connecting the left and right bank for the transport of people and goods that had previously only been possible by watercraft. It was at the Eastern side of this crossing that a new city—a new type of socialist city—was beginning to take shape.

Volzhsky: “The City of the Dam Builders”

The village of Volzhsky, which was a small city with a population of around twenty thousand before the war came to the Volga, had been destroyed by German air raids over the course of the battle. Rebuilding efforts here had been slower than Volgograd, with few major industries that commanded the attention of Soviet authorities. However, the Kuibyshev dam project would lead to a rapid expansion of the city, as concrete and chemical industries were built on the right bank of the river near the dam’s footings. What’s more, the party used Volzhsky as a chance to showcase their modernized building methods, ensuring it would be rebuilt as a modern socialist city that would house thousands of dam builders and their families.

Much like Stalingrad in the aftermath of the battle, the urban planners for the new Volzhsky found themselves with a blank canvas on which to execute their vision. Because the

city was not a part of the same “hero city” ensemble of Stalingrad in the decade following the battle, there had been no grand reconstruction, no imperial columns or memorial parks to define its urban core. The rationale behind Volzhskiy was not to create an urban space appropriately reflecting the glory of battles past, but rather the pragmatic drive to house as many residents as possible in the shortest amount of time. The timing of Volzhskiy's construction also came after the rationalists had won their battle in the Soviet Academy of Architects, and the infrastructure needed for large-panel construction—the city was already home to facilities capable of reinforced concrete products because of the ongoing work on the dam. As such, the *khrushchevka* was to become the main building block of not just micro districts on the city's outskirts, but of the whole city.

However, the eventual shape of Volzhskiy was not clear at the outset. When the planning of a new city on the Volga's right bank was first commissioned through the Russian State Institute of Urban Planning (Giprogor) in 1950, the architect's initial vision for the city drew more still from the inspiration of Stalinist urban design. The architects Benjamin Gugel, R. Torgovnik, Nikolai Baranov, I. Ratko, and Vladimir Semyonov-Prozorovsky drew up the first masterplan for the city in 1951-52. The plan called for a city housing fifty thousand workers and their families over an area of 350 hectares, with an average living space per capita of 8 square meters.³⁷³ The initial layout the planners envisioned for the city would have been familiar to Stalingrad or other cities at the time. Unlike Stalingrad, whose shape was dictated by the river, Volzhskiy was laid out on the flat, open plain, allowing the designers to opt for a radial layout around the city's core, which was to feature administration buildings and cultural institutions like a library, a university, museums, and a Palace of Culture, all rendered in the neoclassical style

³⁷³ Anna Borunova, “Gestures Towards a Socialist Landscape,” 107-08.

that would tie it thematically with other post-war cities. One early imagining, which made it into a children's propaganda cartoon "Friends-Comrades" (1951), imagined a Stalinist "layer-cake" style skyscraper as the central point of the city's composition, rising over an imagined rendering of the completed hydroelectric station.³⁷⁴ The city would be divided into quadrants radiating out from this core, with wide green avenues creating corridors through the city, and with plenty of space dedicated to parks and public squares.

By the time of Stalin's death, the city only had a population of ten thousand, and the public works construction by this time comprised only a school, some administrative buildings, and many of the green spaces and the Palace of Culture still only just undergoing construction. In the residential neighborhoods, some apartment buildings were already finished. These were single family apartment complexes, built in the experimental new style that would come to define mass housing in the Soviet Union in the coming decade. Already these types of structures made up 85% of the available housing stock in the city.³⁷⁵ The rest was largely independently built wooden or brick homes on the nearby Zeleny island, situated between where the Akhtubia and Volga meet. These were predominantly the work of dam workers who took advantage of loans from the company to build their own housing in their free time, and the island became a popular location for these structures given its proximity to the worksite.

Though certainly not on the scale of Stalingrad across the river, some traces of the neoclassical architecture of postwar Stalinism did appear in Volzhsky's core. The most prominent example of such would be The Palace of Culture, which began construction in the early 1950s. The high columns that mark the entrance and run around the rectangular façade very deliberately invokes the aesthetics of the Greek Parthenon. Another construction that began at

³⁷⁴ Borunova, citing "Friends-Comrades," dir. Victor Gromov, written by Lev Kassil (Soyuzmultfilm, 1951).

³⁷⁵ Borunova, 111-112.

the same time would attempt to capture this look, in the form of the Loginov Central Stadium, an open-air sports complex set to the south and east, not far from the banks of the Akhtubá. At the top of the stadium stand two sets of white colonnades, and the pathway running around the stadium was lavishly ornamented with neoclassical white urn vases. One of the city's first parks, situated north of Lenin Prospect near the western entrance of the city named The Park of Culture and Leisure of *Hydrostroitel'* ("dam builders"), features a statue garden and large ornate fountain. However, these were also some of the first public works projects undertaken in Volzhsky, and while they would all see their completion in the latter half of the decade, they would become something of architectural anomalies as the vision for the city rapidly evolved.

In 1956, after Khrushchev's campaign against architectural "excesses," the plan for the city changed dramatically. While the central composition remained intact, running from the Square of the Builders to the west, down the city's thoroughfare (also named Lenin Prospect), through the main square where it is bisected by Fontannaya Street to the south and a large park to the north, capped to the east by yet another planned green space. The rest of the city was to be laid out on a careful grid that took on more of a triangular structure, in order to connect to the main traffic arteries that would move workers to the dam and its supplemental industries. A radial running off the Square of Builders, Karl Marx St., would run at a northeastern angle that dictated the orientation of the rectangular microdistricts to the north, which were carefully laid out on a grid of regular plots all the way to the railroad station situated on the northernmost edge of town. Unlike Stalingrad, the layout of Volzhsky was optimized to serve public transit.³⁷⁶ This work found no shortage of volunteers, it turns out, since these roads allowed mechanized

³⁷⁶ Ibid.

transit into neighborhoods to pick up workers headed to and from the dam—cutting out the several kilometer trek they would have otherwise faced on foot.

The new plan called for a drastic expansion of the city to house an even greater population; the party leadership decided to diversify Volzhsky's industrial portfolio. By 1956, new factories in various stages of construction were cropping up along the city's northern limit, running the length of the railroad line toward the dam. There was a new thermal power plant, a bearings factory, several food processing plants for bread, meat, and other baked goods. Volzhsky Tyre, Volzhsky Synthetic Rubber, and Volzhsky Pipe factories all began operating in the early 1960s. The single largest new enterprise was the Volga Chemical Plant, which consisted of nine separate plants all integrated into a single campus, opened in 1958.³⁷⁷ As portions of the work on the dam concluded, these workers were to be recruited into these new industries. These workers still had their current housing, and did not need to be resettled yet again).

This planned expansion required the city's chief architects to completely rethink their design. Already in 1954, they had increased their estimates to serve a population of 120,000 residents (a 220% increase), and the master plan of 1959-60 would be further revised to 300,000 (6 times what had been planned for in 1950).³⁷⁸ This sharp increase in the demand for civilian residences further pushed the planners towards the *khrushchevka* and the *mikroraion* (or “microdistrict”) as the solution to the housing question. The new technologies of prefabrication and rapid construction, however, allowed them to expand the amount of housing that would be made available to individual families. Even as the population rose, the allotment for square

³⁷⁷ Ibid, 122.

³⁷⁸ Ibid.

meterage per unit rose as well, up from 8 square meters to 15 square meters per capita.³⁷⁹ In addition, they sought to more equally distribute civic services among the new neighborhoods within the city, dramatically increasing the number of schools, kindergartens, cafeterias, hospitals, and cinemas. In addition to the Loginov Central Stadium where the Volzhskiy FC “*Energiia*” would begin hosting matches in 1956, the city would also receive a state-of-the art indoor sports facility, complete with competition swimming pool that could be used throughout the winter. Another notable aspect of the new plan, Borunova points out, was in its sharp delineations of where the city began and ended. She notes that the planners of Volzhskiy were careful that the city was to be built to be “without peripheries,” which was a term that defined the decrepit zones of rickety structures and abandoned detritus.³⁸⁰ Measures were taken by the city’s planners to consolidate urban sprawl that would allow these types of peripheral spaces to grow up between or along the outskirts. Everything was to fall into its proper place, within the clean, ordered lines of the grid.

With the plan for the city established, Volzhsky was set for a period of rapid expansion into the 1960s. In addition, a whole cadre of Soviet architects attempting a new form of urban design known as the microdistrict saw Volzhsky as a real-world testing site to implement their vision. To return to the metaphor of the blank canvas, following the approval of the city’s masterplan, the canvas had now been subdivided into dozens of sections, each waiting for a microdistrict to be mapped onto it. Once the grid of roads and infrastructure had been laid out, each rectangular or triangular plot within the city became a canvas, and the architects brought in on the project continued to try to improve on the concept and push the boundaries of what could be done with their clearly delineated space.

³⁷⁹ Ibid.

³⁸⁰ Borunova, 111.

Take, for example, the “Experimental Design for the First Microdistrict of Volzhsky” that was drawn up by Vasily Palichenikov of the state planning trust *Gosstroyizdat* in Moscow from 1961. Palichnekov lays out his neighborhood in a skinny rectangular plot, stretching north away from the city’s main avenue. He calls for twenty-six residential housing buildings, a five-story model whose plans were already designed and approved by *Stalingradstroy*. Rather than situate the southernmost buildings to run parallel with the main avenue (a hallmark of Stalinist urban design), the buildings would instead run perpendicular to the street, leaving broad corridors between them that led into the interior of the neighborhood, with pedestrian footpaths and green lawns in between. These are some of the only apartment buildings situated at a 90-degree orientation, with the rest of the units in the neighborhood slanted along 45-degree radials that allow Palichnekov to give each building its own unique place in the composition, as well as open up wider spaces in the interior for parks and public services. Kindergartens are located both at the northern and southern clusters of buildings, to give easy access to workers on both ends of the longitudinally oriented microdistrict. The school is located on the median, situated against the eastern limit of the neighborhood, complete with its own sports field, as well as basketball and tennis courts. In the green space that takes up most of the interior, several spaces are blocked off for cultural houses, cinemas, libraries, or clubhouses. The neighborhood shops are strategically located near the southern entrance to the district, where most residents would first arrive home, disembarking from the buses that carry them east and west along Lenin Prospect. The author even includes space for a local laundry service.³⁸¹ Variations of this model were replicated throughout the city, creating thousands of new apartments ready to be moved into by its steadily growing population.

³⁸¹ Vasily Palichenikov, “Experimental Design for the First Microdistrict of Volzhskiy” Moscow, *Gosstroyizdat* (1961), in Borunova, p. 134.

Taken as a whole, Volzhskiy is truly something different—it is a city of *krushchevki*, its very shape and space defined by the history of de-Stalinization. However, the impetus behind its growth went far beyond simply Khrushchev’s philosophy of “build quickly, cheaply, and well.” The aim of the design was to make the modern city accessible to its denizens, a place where their needs are met, from housing, employment, childcare, cooking and healthcare. It was a vision of a city where these amenities could be accessible to all, not just a privileged few. While Volzhskiy of course suffered many of the same infrastructure problems in terms of its reinforced concrete structures as other areas of the former Soviet republics, the decision by the city’s planners to expand its industrial profile in the 1950s proved to be a boon for the city after the Soviet Union’s dissolution. Unlike other industrial cities, where so much of the local economy was tied up in state support for large scale enterprises that did not survive the collapse, Volzhskiy has proven remarkably resilient in contemporary Russia, and remains a bustling metropolis that has now expanded north along the east bank of the Volga Reservoir.³⁸² The old downtown, however, remains a sort of time capsule of the Soviet past, as throngs of commuters queue up at countless bus stops under the low, even tops of *khrushchevki* stretching in orderly rows in every direction for as far as the eye can see.

While new technologies made the *khrushchevka* possible, urban planners still had to consider the matter of how to introduce this architectural practice to cities on such a massive scale. The standardization of the building models in reality produced something of a nightmare for urban planners, who still hoped to create beautiful urban spaces that had room for green spaces and equal access to communal services. Row upon row of identical buildings were possible, but not necessarily desirable. In Stalingrad, where much of the available real estate of

³⁸² See Borunova, “Gestures Towards a Socialist Landscape,” 130-135.

the city was already claimed, new residential living projects needed a compact footprint. It took several years after the rationalists' triumph in Soviet architecture for urban planners to develop their own solution to this problem—a compact neighborhood of buildings all of the same standardized designs—a form that would become a new building block for the architects of the socialist city.

The *Mikroraion* in New Volgograd City Planning

The lessons learned by the city and oblast's urban planners in Volzhsky would soon be applied on the opposite bank of the Volga. As the *Khrushchevka* emerged among Soviet architects as the base unit for the coming mass housing project, city planners were then faced with the consideration of how to best utilize these structures in terms of urban development. While choosing how to incorporate this new type of structure, they had to balance concerns of the rapid pace of construction demanded by the party, along with their ideals of how the socialist city of the future should look. Soviet planners continued to believe, perhaps now more than ever, that the built environment should reflect communist ideology, and in doing so it would help mold the denizens housed there into better socialist citizens. Just as Khrushchev was launching his housing initiative in 1957, the microdistrict emerged as the ideal practice for implementing mass-housing on a nationwide scale.

The *mikroraion* was not an entirely new concept. In fact, the origins of this school of urban design can be traced back to the fantastical futuristic plans of Soviet architects of the 1920s, whose revolutionary enthusiasm led to spectacular new ideas about what future cities might look like. Spurred on by the architectural impact of the Bauhaus movement in Weimar (many of whose disciples found their way to the Soviet Union to help design the first “socialist

cities” under Stalin), urban designers increasingly favored cities where housing could be clustered separate from the pollution of industry in high-rise type structures, with ample green space to allow residents ample access to light and fresh air. The communist style of life would be promoted through access to shared utilities—like laundry, childcare, and communal cafeterias—that would free workers (particularly women) from the double-burden of housekeeping on top of their full-time job. While this concept was wildly popular in theoretical circles of the 1920s, it would be dismissed under Stalin as too utopian to meet conditions in the Soviet Union at the time. Rather than devote labor and resources to building new structures in Soviet cities, existing housing was subdivided with multiple families crammed into thinly partitioned rooms as the *kommunalka* became the base unit of Stalinist housing. Aspects of this urban design style impact the new “socialist cities” of the Five-Year Plans,³⁸³ and even the new triumphal “imperial” style of post-war city centers. However, with the innovation of the *khrushchevka*, urban planners returned to earlier visions of the “future” as they sought to erect the structures that would house the world’s first truly communist society.

As early as 1958, the journal *Architecture of the USSR (Arkhitektura SSSR)* was promoting the microdistrict as the ideal, rational site of mass housing construction. In the language of the day, when the space race had just been kicked-off in earnest with the Soviet launch of the “Sputnik” satellite in October 1957, microdistricts were described as “modern satellites orbiting around older urban centers.”³⁸⁴ This analogy was fitting for several reasons. First, the microdistrict was designed to be a tight cluster of buildings that could be fitted into the city’s transportation grid without through-streets servicing individuals’ houses. During construction, this also meant a centralized location for all necessary supplies and equipment for a

³⁸³ Magnitogorsk remains a prime example of this, for more see Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*.

³⁸⁴ Harris, *Communism on Tomorrow Street*, 193.

single jobsite that could be built rapidly. The other requisite, a large, previously undeveloped parcel of real estate, meant that micro districts would necessarily be situated outside of predeveloped urban centers—the microdistrict would become the Soviet suburbs. Incidentally, this separation from the city’s industrial core would mean that microdistrict residents could service multiple factories or job sites, as opposed to the dedicated “factory neighborhoods” that had been prevalent under Stalin. Public transit was key to connecting microdistrict residents to the rest of the city. In addition, as the city expanded through microdistricts, new factories were also being built at this time to handle new demands for foodstuffs and consumer items. These light industry factories could be placed in their own “orbits” around the microdistrict, reducing the physical distance between home and work for their employees.

In addition, the microdistrict would be built with a mind to the daily services its residents would need to have access to all within the bounds of the new neighborhood. In a model presented to *Architecture of the USSR* in 1960 by Ia. Linevich, the cluster of four- and five-story apartment buildings would be complemented by multiple schools, day care centers, and sports complexes, as well as all manner of shops, grocery stores, and social services. The houses themselves are set up along atypical axes, not parallel to the surrounding city streets, with room for winding pedestrian walkways between buildings and ample green spaces for parks, trees, and even water features. The model Linevich offers would provide housing to some nine thousand Soviet residents, all within a space of just 32 hectares.³⁸⁵ This model ended up being rather conservative in terms of its use of space, as many microdistricts in practice would often be expanded to cover much more ground and include even more buildings, and often microdistricts were built next to one another, making it difficult to tell where one ended and the next began.

³⁸⁵ Ia. Linevich, “Mikroraion No. 1” in “Zhilye raiony i progressivnye priemy zastroiki mikrorainov,” *Arkhitektura SSSR*, no. 7 (1960), p. 9. Found in Harris, *Communism on Tomorrow Street*, 194.

These self-contained mini cities, each larger than most rural villages or even collective farms, would soon be popping up on the outskirts of Soviet cities like patches of mushrooms springing up in the woods after heavy rains. The clusters of cranes at their job sites—there were 154 tower cranes in operation during peak construction in Stalingrad by Orlov's count—were visible for miles around, rising over the semi-completed structures like tall, mechanical trees. This sight, common to many Soviet cities at the time, became common imagery in the daily press, and in many ways served as a promise to citizens still on the waiting list that the day when they would move into their own private apartment was indeed close at hand. For Stalingrad's rapidly growing population—just shy of 600,000 residents according to the 1959 census, nearly 100,000 more than what the city's planners had accounted for during reconstruction—this solution to the housing crisis could not come soon enough.³⁸⁶

In Stalingrad, the construction of microdistricts did not become common practice until well into the 1960s. They were typically situated to the West, away from the Volga and the city's core. Since the city's development had historically been so dependent on access to the river, the plains to the west of the city had seen little development outside a scattering of villages, most of which predated Soviet power. In addition, there was also plenty of room between existing neighborhoods along the river where the city's population remained sparse, particularly to the south of the Central District, where the dozens of kilometers between the city's core and the Kirov and Krasnoarmeisk regions remained underdeveloped. The patchwork of micro districts that cropped up during the mass housing campaign drastically increased the surface area of the city and required an increase in road and transportation infrastructure to service such a sprawling urban area. Because the micro-districts themselves were designed to be pedestrian areas (and

³⁸⁶ Orlov, *Istoriia rodnogo kraia*, 166.

because the average *Stalingradtsy* did not have access to a personal automobile), the city's main road building enterprise, *Dortrest*, could focus on building the long stretches of asphalt thoroughfares that would connect the ever-expanding city. The grid of radial lines stretching away from the riverbank would be greatly expanded during this period, reaching all the way to the new airport, which was more than 15 kilometers to the west of the city. The main road leading into the city center, Komsomolskaya, would eventually be connected to a highway that runs northwest all the way to Moscow.

As the city's infrastructure grid expanded, new public transit routes were established to allow the general public to traverse it. The city purchased sixty-two new trams and forty-eight new buses, and by 1961 the city's electric trolley system that ran north/south following the river completely connected the city's center to the north end of Red October, to the foot of Mamayev Kurgan. The city even developed a small taxi service with a fleet of sixty-six cars (mostly to be utilized by guests visiting the city).³⁸⁷ One major project, a raised steel and concrete bridge that would span the old Tsaritsa river that divided the Central district from those to the south, would finally begin construction in 1958 and be completed in 1964. The bridge would connect trolley, automotive, and pedestrian transit from the city center into the rapidly expanding Voroshilov district.

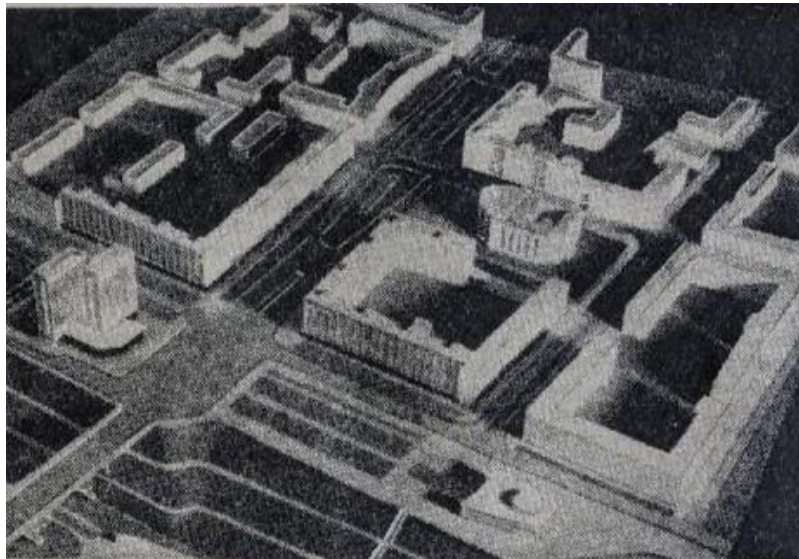
With the city's manufacturing capabilities of large-panel housing components reaching full production during the Seven Year Plan, housing construction began in earnest simultaneously across the city, with new micro districts planned in every one of the city's neighborhoods. Some even became the nucleus around which new micro districts would eventually form, such as the Dzerzhinsky and Sovetskii neighborhoods. This included the city's

³⁸⁷ Ibid, 177.

central district, where *khrushchevki* were used to fill out some of the original plans for the district that had relied on the classical Stalinist *montazhak* (though these were typically set back from the main pedestrian and traffic thoroughfares, preserving a façade of a unified style). Some microdistricts did indeed take on the shape of Ia. Linevich's model was presented in *Architecture of the USSR*, where aesthetic concerns and the need for green spaces took precedence. were typically those located in hitherto less-developed regions of the city. In other places, *Khrushchevki* were squeezed into existing neighborhoods wherever there was room, like the four rows of buildings tightly packed behind STZ that replaced the barracks housing that had been reserved for workers there in the days following the battle. Beyond the tractor factory, just south of the Kuibyshev dam, a massive collection of *khrushchevki* would become known as the Spartanovka district. On the other side of the factory, ground was being broken on several new micro districts built close together on either side of Opelchenskaia Street, which curved east away from Prospect Lenin, running several hundred meters uphill before turning back south to form a street running parallel with the main drag. In between these two streets, the Krasnioktiabr' district saw a high concentration of microdistricts develop almost all the way to the foot of Mamayev Kurgan.

On the far side of the hill, a cluster of several micro districts was being built near the new Razgulyaevka factory complex. To the south of the city's center, the Voroshilov district grew from a small collection of restored pre-Soviet structures to a new micro district metropolis, with new neighborhoods springing up on either side of Workers-Peasants Street, which flows from Prospect Lenin after it crosses the bridge over the Old Tsaritsa river. Not far to the south and west, a cluster of micro districts surround the campus of the city's State Agricultural University (GAU), which would become the Sovetskii *raion*. Continuing south through the Kirov district,

the neighborhoods of *khrushchevki* stretch in a protracted line running north and southwest of Kirov Street, which follows the river's path as it begins to bend back to the east. Finally, in Krasnoarmeisk at the south end of the city, two large neighborhoods of *khrushchevki* sit on either side of the mouth of the Volga-Don Canal's final lock, connected by the bridge over the street named for the Heroes of Stalingrad (*Ulitsa imeni Geroev Stalingrada*). All told, these developments amount to hundreds of individual structures, not only multi-story apartment housing, but also the schools, shops, cafeterias, hospitals, and cultural attractions that make each neighborhood its own self-contained part of the city.



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The “Agrogorod” and Rural Infrastructure

One final architectural innovation of this period to note is the expansion of mass-housing not just to cities, but to rural areas of the Soviet Union, such as collective farms. As early as the 1950s, Stalingrad's construction firms began taking on additional work in the surrounding

³⁸⁸ Model of two microdistricts built to form the future “bridgehead square” in the south of the city's central district. Photo by R. Lemyaschenko, “S arkhitektorom po ulitsam goroda: novaia zastroika volgograda,” November 22, 1964, 1964, 2.

region, helping collective farmers build multi-family housing structures like the ones being built in the cities. These would form the building block of the new “*agrogorod*,” or “agricultural city.” These projects usually fell short of a full microdistrict, though planners still attempted to locate both housing and social services all in the same locations. The idea of the *agrogorod* caught on as a priority for the administration before they understood the realities of what it would require to construct them, far from the manufacturing base in the city. The slow progress, particularly acute in the Stalingrad region, was the cause of much consternation for state and local officials, to say nothing of the structures’ prospective residents.

As modern prefabricated housing solutions became feasible in the region in the early-1960s it would also change the layout of Russia’s rural villages, which had already been drastically redefined by Stalin’s push for collectivization of agriculture over thirty years prior.³⁸⁹ As the population of rural collectives grew in the post-war decades, a similar housing crisis to the situation in Soviet cities loomed on the horizon in many rural areas. Mass-produced prefabricated housing offered a solution of higher-density housing that could be constructed quickly as part of preexisting agricultural centers. The *agrogorod* sought to bring the modern urban experience to the Soviet countryside, introducing the single-family apartment lifestyle to collective farms. Electrification was also an important element of bringing the modern urban experience to the countryside, and the power grid in Volgograd region was rapidly expanding, especially once the hydroelectric station came online and began generating power in 1961.

³⁸⁹ See Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Stalin’s Peasants: Resistance and Survival in the Russian Village after Collectivization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).



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However, construction in these regions suffered many of the same supply issues experienced by sites in the city, with additional challenges created by the logistical complications of transportation of materials and sufficient specialized expertise at these remote job sites. The shabby quality of new structures and rate of new construction in the countryside played a key role in the original complaint filed by the Executive Committee of the Stalingrad Regional Council in 1959, which charged that the city's industries were not just failing in their responsibility to Stalingrad's workers, but also to the farmers in the region. This prioritization came at a time when the Khrushchev government was increasing funding to collective farms as part of the "Virgin Lands" drive, which would also see a switch in the region away from wheat to corn in the 1960s. As with other local stories, the story of the *agrorod* in Stalingrad oblast is one of state priorities and resource distribution.

The Construction Audit of 1959

The inadequacies in housing construction that made life difficult for so many in the city did not go unnoticed, especially as conditions failed to improve years into the project. By 1959,

³⁹⁰ Photo uncredited, powerlines to new houses in rural Volgograd oblast, November 12, 1961, 3.

both *Stalingradtsy* and the Party administration were calling for changes to be made in the city's construction oversight and practices. Though the goal of improving the city's housing stock was shared by all, it became clear that there was a disconnect between local and central party authorities' approaches to the challenges faced at Volgograd, and official policy and practice were hardly in line.

On February 13, 1959, the executive committee of the Stalingrad Oblast's Regional Council of Working People's Deputies issued a decision on a host of ongoing complaints about the quality of work in the city and the prevalence of unsanctioned construction projects that were cropping up around the city. Their report calls out by name several construction trusts, directors, and inspectors who had produced unsatisfactory work, as well as members of the neighborhood councils who failed to control unplanned development.

The decision asserted that in Stalingrad, as well as in surrounding agricultural cities whose development was being managed by the city's construction trusts, workers were operating "according to outdated standard projects that are not included in the list of standard projects recommended by the State Construction Committee of the USSR," and that "construction of residential and civil buildings is allowed without coordination with the regional and city departments for construction and architecture and without the permission of the state architectural and construction control."³⁹¹ Executive committees of the city's districts had not been sufficient in their oversight duties, failing to "control and suppress unauthorized construction projects," causing chaos for the city planners. The committee gave several examples: a street in the Central District that had been zoned for residential housing but had instead become a plant for mortar and construction materials. In the Kirov district an area that

³⁹¹ GAVO, R-6021, op. 1, d. 340, l. 34.

had been cleared for mass-housing instead became home to a machine repair depot, and in the Soviet district a large store had been built without authorization from the city's trade department. Similar issues were reported in nearby cities of Kotelnikovo and Mikhailova.³⁹²

What is more, city trusts had been unilaterally making construction decisions on approved projects that were not part of the plans approved by the city's architectural authorities. In one case *Cemstroi*, a cement production and pouring trust, had "liquidated" basements and spaces designated for household services from the plans of several residential buildings, "which worsened the living conditions of residents in the houses that were built." Some new buildings that are being approved even with glaring flaws in their plans, such as the "large number of buildings with a large number of imperfections without a full complex of amenities and without telephones." In one drastic case, the Chief Engineer of construction trust #110 "allowed a gross violation of the decree of the CC of the CPSU ... in terms of changing the standard project, by adding an entire floor to what was supposed to be only a three-story residential building."³⁹³

Even when the state approved plans were being followed by construction crews, the results in many cases cited by the committee were beyond sub-par. Developers, the report claims, had been "presenting" projects "with a large number of imperfections and unfinished landscaping work," and the "the regional and city architectural and construction control, when accepting buildings and structures ... do not pay due attention to improvement issues, do not provide proper compliance of construction trusts for the improvement and elimination of deficiencies in a timely manner."³⁹⁴ The quality of residential apartments that were approved for

³⁹² Ibid.

³⁹³ Ibid.

³⁹⁴ Ibid, l. 35.

move-in caused a slew of complaints to regional councils and many horror stories of shoddy workmanship were proliferating in the pages of *Stalingradskaia pravda* at this time.³⁹⁵

Finally, the committee decried the fact that local district councils had not sufficiently cracked down on unauthorized individual housing. By failing to “take appropriate measures” to protect land from unauthorized individual development, the report identified 176 unauthorized individual developers in the city of Stalingrad in 1958. Unauthorized buildings in the Tractor Plant and Red October Steelworks “were built with especially unacceptable dimensions.”³⁹⁶

The decision of the Regional Executive Committee was to “oblige” the city councils under its jurisdiction (in addition to the city of Stalingrad; Kamyshinsky, Volzhsky, and Uryupinsk) to “a) prevent unauthorized construction; b) to strengthen measures to protect land from unauthorized developments from unauthorized individual construction [...]; c) stop the vicious practice of commissioning residential and civil buildings with imperfections and poor quality of work; d) to bring accountability to those who allow unauthorized construction and settlement of residential buildings with imperfections; e) to develop and implement measures to improve the quality of construction and building materials, reduce their cost and reduce construction time; and f) to build up cities and workers’ settlements only in accordance with approved plans and development projects.” In addition to these stipulations, several heads of construction firms and oversight bodies were singled out directly, and explicitly prohibited from taking part in any more unapproved unilateral decision making.³⁹⁷

Clearly, in the view of the Stalingrad Oblast party authorities, drastic intervention was needed to curb some of the practices that were endemic to construction in Stalingrad and the

³⁹⁵ These complaints will be addressed in greater detail in Chapter 5.

³⁹⁶ GAVO, R-6021, op. 1, d. 340, l. 35.

³⁹⁷ Ibid, l. 35-36.

surrounding area. Not only was the decision necessary to clamp down on unauthorized, sub-standard construction and to protect land development that had been laid out by city planners, but to end the “vicious practice” of producing buildings that failed to meet the needs of their inhabitants. The decision’s writer, Deputy Chairman of the Regional Soviet’s Executive Committee, K. Ukhanov, who had long been involved with construction in the region over the last decade, was clearly distraught at the poor quality of construction in the city and the impact it had on quality of life for the citizens of his district.³⁹⁸

However, the decision was also a reassertion of centralized authority. In an effort to control the quality of production, the state was to be granted additional oversight in the decision-making and final approval process. The emphasis on protecting real estate for city planners and only commissioning buildings that had been approved by the state regulatory commissions in turn implied the belief that these structures, when constructed properly, will in fact meet the needs of the city’s denizens. Nonetheless, in doing so Ukhanov at least alluded to the fact that in many ways local administrations were addressing their needs on the ground in very practical ways, even if they did not meet the goals and expectations of the regional party organization.³⁹⁹ Unauthorized developments, both industrial and residential, were clearly permitted to tackle some of the challenges faced by city authorities and construction firms. When there was not a repair depot close enough to service the Kirov district’s construction fleet, they built their own. With a massive housing shortage facing all regions of the city, but particularly the regions that housed some of Stalingrad’s largest factories, unauthorized housing solutions provided at least some means of putting a roof over workers’ heads, even if the regional planning administration deemed those structures as unsatisfactory when considering the city’s long-term development.

³⁹⁸ Ibid, I. 36.

³⁹⁹ Ibid.

This decision was the first sign of the increased investment that would be focused on Stalingrad's construction industries and the mass-housing project as it unfolded in the city. It led to a flurry of activity in the following months as both the city and construction firms were forced to adjust to the new protocols. Later in September of the same year, a new report on construction data in the city was produced by the city soviet. The report highlighted many of the same challenges facing the city's construction firms, and it also revealed how the city had attempted to adapt to the new construction protocols that were still new to many of the industry's workers, engineers, and department heads. It also revealed how the city was coping with the slow progress of the city's housing construction with some unique innovations.

The city's report opened by heralding the "achievements in the industrialization of construction," which included the use of new progressive designs and new materials, as well as the mechanization of labor-intensive work. The report's authors alleged that "during the years of the restoration of Stalingrad, a powerful construction base has been created. There are large construction organizations with experienced builders, a fleet of construction machines and mechanics, and enterprises for the production of construction materials and their products." The report heralds the pioneering work of Metallurgstroi, which has "mastered" the manufacture of pre-stressed steel and concrete trusses capable of spanning 26 meters, and a state-of-the-art concrete plant that had begun producing prefabricated products necessary for large panel construction according to the standard designs approved by Gosstroiproekt.

The report's authors concede, however, that "despite the unconditional achievements in the field of industrialization of construction, we are lagging behind other cities," conceding that "with large-scale and large-panel construction in our city, the situation is very bad." The use of prefabricated construction products was sparse throughout the city, and even in districts where

some of these new methods were being implemented, the results were far from satisfactory. In the Kirov district, one of the first large-panel construction projects approved in the city in 1956 had seen in three years only four such structures had been completed, and only one in 1959. In the central Stalin district, construction from large concrete blocks had just become possible with the completion of a new silicates facility, and the report was optimistic that “one can hope that now this construction method will become firmly established in the building practices in Stalingrad.”⁴⁰⁰ In order to help meet demand for these new construction products, even some other industries in the city were being repurposed. For instance, shop #85 in STZ began working with Metallurgstroi to produce the frames for large panel construction, and the firm was “confident that this relationship will also firmly enter the practice of construction in the city.”⁴⁰¹

It is worth noting that even in 1959, construction firms in Stalingrad were still incapable of producing the five-story apartment building that was so emblematic of the mass housing movement in the country at that time. According to the report, the most prolific designs primarily being built in the city were two-story houses, and only in 1959 did the construction of three- to five-story houses begin. The construction firms based out of the Red October steel works were credited as being the pioneers in this movement. While many of the city’s large industries had adapted their own production capabilities to help meet the demand for these construction materials, their contributions were being phased out prematurely, before the new plants could begin production. The report described the situation as follows: “In our city, the capacity of factories for the production of reinforced concrete products has sharply increased, but it is worth noting that as soon as the new plant for reinforced concrete products (Glukhova) was launched,

⁴⁰⁰ GAVO, f. R-6021, op. 1, d. 342, l. 1.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid.

the productivity of the production of reinforced concrete products by trusts sharply decreased, falling to 60-70%.”⁴⁰²

In the realm of quality, however, many of the reinforced concrete panels being created in Stalingrad were sub-par, with defects and deficiencies causing myriad frustrations for the construction crews who had to assemble them. Examples are given of a panel used in the construction of a kindergarten that was shipped with no overlap, and therefore could not be properly joined with the rest of the building, as well as a ceiling panel that so drastically sagged in the middle that the engineers were forced to take additional measures outside of the approved plans to support it. One plant experimenting with a new mixture of concrete found that a whole batch of panels had been exposed to unacceptable levels of oxygen and moisture, and the rusting that occurred on the inner steel frame made them completely unusable.

The deficiencies in state-funded housing solutions had led to an expansion of individual amateur construction in the city, which had been brought up in the regional committee’s complaints about the state of construction in Stalingrad. The city’s report, however, sought to push back against the idea that individual construction was a problem in Stalingrad. Rather, it presented it as a solution. The “positive experience of amateur construction” highlighted in their report has been beneficial to provide workers in need of living space in quick fashion, with their employers able to secure the funds and materials necessary for workers to construct their own homes. It was “especially noteworthy” that the neighborhoods near large factories such as Red October and the Barricades, where construction was “carried out in large areas.”⁴⁰³ The only downsides of this method that the report concedes are the “low quality of construction work,

⁴⁰² The report leaves unclear the reasons behind this drop in output. Possible explanations include a miscalculation by economic planners, but another reason could be a shift in specialized personnel from the old workshops to the new plants. Further archival research would be required to assess these theories.

⁴⁰³ GAVO, f. R-6021, op. 1, d. 342, l. 6.

diversion of construction materials, and the lack of qualified specialists in construction professions.”⁴⁰⁴ Though not explicitly stated, because these were residences built by the workers who would eventually live in them, this lower standard of construction was deemed acceptable, if only because it meant the state did not then need to provide them with a separate apartment.

The report’s praise and defense of individual construction makes sense considering what was still to come in the report—an unfaltering look at the deficiencies that existed in the city’s construction industry. The data collected from the eight months of 1959 regarding the progress made into the yearly goals for the city tells the story of state expectations versus the reality on the ground. The plan called for a new six million square meters of living space to be added to the city’s housing pool in the year of 1959, by the end of August only 17.2% had been built. Of that construction, only 190,100 square meters of new living space had been completed by the city’s construction trusts, and only 35,000 square meters of that had been built using the newest construction methods. Individual construction, on the other hand, made up for 70,000 square meters of new housing! The report singles out the construction firms that had received the sharpest reprimand for their failure to deliver: after eight months, Trust #115 had only met 33% of its annual targets for the year, Trust #22 only 37.6%, and the directorate of the right bank of the hydroelectric station, a measly 580 square meters, or 4.65%.⁴⁰⁵

The primary source of dysfunction in the construction industry boiled down to a lack of organization, both on job sites and between the different elements within the industry. The scope of new construction laid out by the plan far outstripped construction firms’ abilities to keep pace, and the result was widespread delays: “The most basic and decisive defect in the organization of construction and labor at construction sites is the absence of work organization projects. [...] The

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid, 10-11.

existing schedules for the overwhelming number of construction projects are systematically violated due to poor organization of the supply of construction materials and the substantial number of different blueprints. At construction sites, the construction process is poorly communicated.”⁴⁰⁶ In the practice of prefabricated construction, the preferred method of “mounting from the wheels” (where at the factory panels are stacked for delivery in the order they are to be assembled) is rarely if ever employed, due to the lack of communication up and down the supply chain. The quality of the panels themselves left little to celebrate even after their arrival at a build site. “Prefabricated and reinforced concrete products manufactured by subsidiary enterprises of trusts, as well as by the city’s new reinforced concrete products plant, have very low quality.”⁴⁰⁷ Sometimes the dimension of entire blueprints could be shifted if the panels were not built to specifications and did not fit properly, causing a cascading effect of problems down the line.

Yet these large panel and large block plants were only supplying the infrastructure of new housing complexes. It was the job of countless woodshops, ceramics, and pipeworks to provide finishing elements, which proved another chokehold within the construction industry’s delay in hitting its targets. Elements like doors, window and door frames, and wood floors were often put together using wet wood, which caused distensions in the dimensions and quality that made some pieces unusable entirely. In a single school building on Goncharnaya Street, thirty sets of doors that had been delivered to the project were rejected as unusable. The gypsum boards (drywall or sheetrock in modern parlance) manufactured there in the city were often “not sufficiently dried and with large irregularities” Plasterers often used far too much plaster in finishing these surfaces, leading to a shortage on sites and leaving some surfaces unfinished.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid, 8.

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid, 10.

Materials provided for the building of interior walls, such as silicate bricks (cinder blocks) were “supplied with products of poor quality, with deviations from the linear dimensions and a large amount of impregnated clay, which significantly reduces the quality of the walls. The red brick is of such low quality that it cannot be used at all on the masonry of walls.” The quality of finishing work “with very few exceptions, is at a low level, especially in Trust #115, and the reason for this is the lack of necessary control from the side of managers and inspectors.”⁴⁰⁸ The problems in the supply chain extended to the more complex finished products, such as windows, doors and their frames, and trim. These elements were supposed to meet standards set by the state construction and architectural organizations, but builders complained that they were not made according to specifications called for in the blueprints. To make things worse, the wood they were built from was often still wet, or the finished products would be exposed to the elements, resulting in warping and staining.

The problems in the supply chain did not stop there. Deliveries from manufacturers to job sites and their storage “without exception is not organized.” Bricks loaded onto dump trucks and unloaded by simply upending the bed would result in said bricks becoming little more than rubble. Precast concrete products are stored in “heaps,” and insufficient shelter meant that even gypsum boards and plaster mix would be exposed to “atmospheric moisture” and subsequently ruined. Delivery timetables were rarely adhered to, and a shortage of much needed building materials could lead to weeks of delays on any given site.⁴⁰⁹

Individual construction, on the other hand, was able to operate much more flexibly, adjusting builds on the fly according to the materials available. The main chokepoint in the realm of individual construction remained the availability of land designated for such purposes. As a

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid, 7-8.

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid, 10-11.

result, individual construction was slowing in the city. In 1956, personal property represented 40% of the available housing stock in the city, and by 1959 that number had decreased to 36%, showing that state efforts were making headway in providing additional living space. The report's authors make clear that this is not due to lack of demand, but rather that the available land for individual construction had been increasingly zoned out, leaving only four "village" sites remaining in city limits (one in Kirov, one in the Stalin district, and two in the Krasnioktiabr district) where such projects were permitted. While there were admittedly "dozens" of cases of unauthorized individual construction, the City Executive Committee had already taken measures to address this. The main problem, they contend, is that the current laws as written leave them with very few options to prosecute those involved. The report notes that "it must be said that the liquidation of unauthorized construction will be carried out when the current government decree (issued in 1940) on the fight against unauthorized development in cities is revised towards taking more decisive measures in relation to violators of the law. This is all the more necessary since at present the volume of public housing construction has increased sharply and the shortage of housing is noticeably softening."⁴¹⁰

There were other factors that were leading to a slowing of individual construction efforts. Many of the "village" sites designated for individual construction had been given over to state enterprises to develop for their workers who would be building there, which was in accordance with a Central Committee of the CPSU decision as of July 31, 1957. Unfortunately, many of these sites still lacked the basic infrastructure that would allow individual builders to integrate new structures into the city's power, water, and transportation grids. It is necessary, therefore, "to force the heads of enterprises and organizations to comply with the specified resolution,"

⁴¹⁰ Ibid, 15.

which strongly implies that efforts by the city to do so had hitherto been unsuccessful, leading them to seek help from central authorities to enforce compliance.⁴¹¹

The report's authors are overall unflinching in their assessment of the city's construction industry, but it must also be noted that throughout the document there is an effort to shift the blame for *why* these problems exist, deflecting responsibility away from the city administration and onto defects within the state's own management and its existing statutes. While the city lagged far behind its construction targets set by Gosplan, the strain that these unsustainable targets put on the city's manufacturing base and construction firms was directly leading to the delays and inadequate quality of finished structures that were entering into the housing pool. While the oblast's report had blasted the city's administrators about unchecked individual construction, the report's authors assert that in fact this method was an important supplement to Stalingrad's housing supply. Even when it comes to punishing actors building without a permit or approving structures that did not meet the state's standards, the city administrators' hands were in many ways tied by state laws that were outdated and incapable of addressing these problems.⁴¹²

In the entirety of the report no heads of government or construction firm administrators are named. They effectively remove any mention of the parties who had served as scapegoats listed in the Regional Executive Committee's complaint earlier in the year, and instead shift the responsibility for the industry's failings onto systemic issues in the state planned economy. What is more, even the report's authors declined to sign their names! It is simply delivered from "City of Stalingrad" to Moscow. The city's leaders and the heads of many of these firms (certainly some of those critiqued in February) would have had to have been aware of the report's findings,

⁴¹¹ Ibid, 16.

⁴¹² Ibid, 13-14.

and the report conveys a message of “collective leadership” protecting the interests of those responsible for the management of the city’s construction efforts. The narrative they present to the inquiring bureaucrats and heads of state is that Stalingrad’s builders were being asked to accomplish the impossible, and yet the report contends that they are doing the best they could under the circumstances they faced.

If the intention of the report was indeed for local officials to attempt to draw focus away from individuals already under pressure from the report in February, it did not have the desired effect. In the following month, on October 29, 1959, the Executive Committee of the Stalingrad Oblast Council of Working People’s Deputies passed on a new decision that would seek to shake up Stalingrad’s construction industries. The decision, which was nominally in response to the August 15 resolution issued by the Council of Ministers of the RSFSR a month prior, was forwarded to all city and party agencies, the district heads, and directors, chief engineers, and architects working on the construction of living space in the city. The decisive measure would significantly affect how funds were allocated in the city and further outline the responsibilities of both individuals and organizations.

Citing the lack of progress in the city’s construction organization’s ability to meet the targets of the plan in the present and past years, the decision notes that the “shortcomings in housing construction indicated in [decree #1366], also took place in the Stalingrad region.” Several heads of trusts do not escape the ire of the report—comrades Soldatenko of Trust #115, Vyrostkov of Trust #22, and Kotomenko of Glavelektrosetstroy all are identified in the first paragraph as producers of poor work. Not only was construction in the city erratic and poorly organized, and producing structures of unacceptably low quality, it had become unsustainably expensive. The average cost per square-meter of new living space had risen 3% in 1958 alone

and was still climbing.⁴¹³ Part of this, they contend, is due to the inability of the city's industries to properly implement new building technologies and standardized projects. This failing extended to the city's architectural and city planning commissions to reign in its building firms, stating that "bodies of architectural and construction control have little influence on the introduction of residential construction in new cost-effective designs." The city's firms, on the other hand, were responsible for not fulfilling their responsibility to learn from the practices being used in other major cities where these practices were succeeding, the examples given being Moscow, Leningrad, and Cherepovets. The Oblast council goes on to decry the failure to meet construction targets in neither the city nor the surrounding countryside. The failure of Stalingrad firms to meet the needs of collective farmers and the new vision of the agrogorod was causing cascading problems in rural areas of the region.

The multi-point decision aims to address these problems in a number of fashions. The first is to "draw the attention" of the above-mentioned department heads as well as regional architect comrade Vnokhodov to the "admitted lag in the implementation of the plan [...] and oblige (them) to take measures to ensure the unconditional development of funds allocated for housing construction and commissioning of housing." They also order the National Economic Council to "develop practical measures for the implementation of the annual plan for commissioning of residential space," which could have drastic repercussions for how funding would be distributed in future planning.⁴¹⁴

Still there were other sweeping provisions laid out in the decision that would require a complete restructuring of the city's construction and architectural industries. The Stalingrad city and district councils were called upon to a) strengthen quality control over buildings presented to

⁴¹³ Ibid, 16-17.

⁴¹⁴ Ibid, 17

the state, and to “severely punish persons who have committed poor-quality work;” b) to use designs for low-cost large-panel and large-block housing structures approved by Moscow and Leningrad design firms, and to make better use of the city's largest firms—the Stalingradstroy, Metallurgstroy, and Gidrostroy trusts—who all are “experienced” in those methods; c) reduce the targets of new construction for 1960, prioritizing all current housing projects left over from previous years. The new plan for the implementation of this decision was expected no later than November 15 of the same year.⁴¹⁵

The regional department of construction and architecture was also expected to exert more control and oversight over the design and layout of new construction projects. Their chief responsibility in the near term would be to figure out how to reduce costs and speed up construction efforts, as well as ensure the quality of the work being completed, “preventing the commissioning of buildings with imperfections, as well as control over housing, cultural, and communal construction in strict accordance with the approved planning and city development.”⁴¹⁶

The city government itself was expected to bear its fair share of the burden. One of the more surprising provisions in the decision after the regional council’s complaint in February was to direct the executive committee of the city council to “systematically check the progress of the implementation of the plan for individual housing construction and provide all possible assistance to workers, employees and pensioners in organizing housing construction teams of individual developers in their construction of residential buildings.”⁴¹⁷ This was in line with the city’s most recent report, where individual housing development had been identified not as a

⁴¹⁵ Ibid, 18.

⁴¹⁶ Ibid.

⁴¹⁷ Ibid.

burden but a key asset in increasing Stalingrad's housing stock. The city was also ordered to find ways to "eliminate shortcomings" in the construction of housing for collective farmers in rural intelligentsia, which meant tackling the long-standing organizational problem of the city's construction firms giving proper attention to the labor and physical resource needs of rural areas of the oblast.

The single most consequential element of the decision, however, was a single line at the end of the document, just above the signature of the regional Chairman of the Executive Committee, I. Pankin, that decreed that the oblast would henceforth "impose control over the implementation of this decision on the regional plan and the regional department of communal services."⁴¹⁸ The decision, which was forwarded to all relevant heads of city trusts and government and party bodies, makes abundantly clear that the regional leadership would no longer tolerate the kind of unilateral local decision making that had hitherto been a fact of life in Stalingrad's construction industries. The oblast would impose its own targets on the city, which were in turn set to meet the increasing demands of the central state apparatus.

The first step in the oblast's plan remained accountability, and for that the city Soviet and architectural oversight boards worked in conjunction with the Commission of Soviet Controllers of Council of Ministers RSFSR (Stalingrad Group) to conduct a site-by-site audit of the city's ongoing construction efforts. As early as March of 1960, several of these reports were completed and submitted to Capital Construction Management of the RSFSR. They laid out in extreme detail the widespread nature of unacceptable work being "completed" by Stalingrad's construction crews. The minutiae of these reports focused on things like spending reports and construction timelines, but they also contain some shockingly comical cases of ineptitude as the

⁴¹⁸ Ibid, 19.

firms under review struggled to at least appear to pass muster. In one case, while inspecting a multi-story apartment building adjacent to the Alley of Heroes that had been presented as “completed” on December 31, 1959, the inspectors found units where doors and even exterior windows had yet to be installed. They even came across instances where the finishing plaster on the walls was still wet, which strongly implies that it had only been applied in the hours before the inspectors’ audit!⁴¹⁹ Another glaring example from May 1960: after touring a housing complex being built near the bank of the Canal in the Krasnoarmeisk district, the auditors found that despite the ongoing efforts to connect the city’s expanding natural gas network, in these new apartments “all kitchens [...] were made with the expectation of burning solid fuel.” The auditors were baffled by the anachronistic holdout in a structure meant to embody the modern Soviet residence: “For some unknown reason, the gas utility did not include gasification of the aforementioned houses in the work plan.”⁴²⁰

In addition to reporting their findings to the relevant city, oblast, and state agencies, the controllers of the Stalingrad group were empowered to enforce building codes on site in accordance with existing protocols (the funding taken from what had been already allocated to trusts for repair and upkeep of these projects), as well as the ability to punish those found to have knowingly undermined the standard of construction. In the aforementioned case of the house on Alley of Heroes, their assessment included a sharp reprimand of several individuals who failed to conduct proper oversight of the project before it was deemed complete. They found that “the heads of a number of construction organizations presented houses for commissioning with incomplete work and low quality of construction work. Head of the Capital Construction Department of the City Executive Committee (UKS), comrade P.F. Panich, his Deputy, comrade

⁴¹⁹ GAVO, f. R-6546 op. 3 d. 56, l. 223.

⁴²⁰ Ibid, 151.

R.N. Matyash, and former Head of the Inspection of the State Architectural and Construction Control (GASK), comrade Malikov, instead of presenting demands to contractors to eliminate imperfections and low quality, in a number of cases allowed the acceptance of houses and other civil buildings without eliminating defects and imperfections that hinder normal operation."⁴²¹

Over the next two years increased scrutiny of the city's construction trusts, further development of the city's manufacturing base for mass-housing products, and stricter control in using standardized designs for new projects pushed Stalingrad's mass-housing efforts more in line with Khrushchev's new vision of the modern Soviet metropolis. The initial detailed scrutiny of the audit would give way to more generalized oversight, which increasingly focused on only the most glaring problems. The Department for Construction of Architecture of Volgograd Region, often in conjunction with one of the central state construction agencies, Gosstroï RSFSR, would routinely dispatch inspectors to investigate complaints. Frequently their attention was drawn to problematic projects by letters written to the agency or to local newspapers by civilians displeased with the pace or quality of construction efforts in their district or town.⁴²²

However, centralization had its limits. The need for state approval to modify standardized designs, regardless of local conditions that may have necessitated such amendments, began to cause problems of its own. On March 8, 1962, The Deputy Chairman of Gosstroï of the RSFSR A. Boldyrev was forced to issue a correction due to the high number of requests, stating that "in order to more promptly and correctly resolve construction issues put forward by the organizations and enterprises, the Gosstroï of the RSFSR believes that their consideration should be carried out directly by the Councils of Ministers of autonomous republics, regional executive committees, economic councils, ministries, and departments of the RSFSR, taking into account

⁴²¹ Ibid, 222.

⁴²² GAVO, f. R-6021, op. 1, d. 639, l. 105.

local conditions.”⁴²³ The officials of Volgograd oblast, who had always been quick to use directives of state agencies to impose its own will on city officials, would now be expected to shoulder their own fair share of oversight and planning responsibilities as well.

The “local conditions” in Volgograd were rapidly changing. The ability to produce mass-housing for the city’s workers had increased, but still struggled to house the population that continued to grow far beyond the rate that had been originally envisaged. Construction and zoning in the city up until this point was still being governed by the plan approved under Stalin in 1945. By 1962, it was clear that to properly meet the demand for mass housing, a new city plan would be needed, a plan that considered the new modern construction methods and the demands of their supply chains. The city’s planners in conjunction with the regional architectural board and economic council were able to finalize this new vision in the summer of 1962, which sought to radically improve the quality of life in the city by addressing some of the long-standing problems in its urban design.

The Plan for New Volgograd

On August 11, 1962, the Council of Ministers of the RSFSR officially approved the plan for new Volgograd. The plan had been undergoing a lengthy review process by the State Urban Design firm (Giprogor) as well as the technical and economic planning wings of the State Planning Committee of the RSFSR, and all parties were satisfied and in agreement about the revisions made to this final draft. The approved plan would be used “to define the main

⁴²³ Ibid.

directions of development, use of territory, planning, construction, and improvement of the city for 20-25 years.”⁴²⁴

On the macro level, it was agreed that the city must be prepared for sustained growth. Volgograd was to continue to serve as the “industrial, administrative, and cultural center of the Volgograd region,” as well as its largest metropolis, with planners expecting it to see more than a 25% rise in population over the coming period from 592,000 (as of the 1959 census) to become a city of at least 800,000. Accordingly, the city’s territory would be expanded, though due to the geographical challenges posed by the length of the city along the Volga, this would be done through the expansion of existing districts and, eventually, the creation of new ones like the Soviet and Dzerzhinsky administrative districts. The new plan called for an expansion of the “urban development area” by 3,500 hectares, a more than 20% increase. Nearly three quarters of the proposed expansion was to be dedicated solely to the construction of new residential housing, with the additional target of increasing the amount of living space per inhabitant, which they sought to increase from 12 square meters per individual to 15 square meters for each Volgograd resident.⁴²⁵

As far as new industrial growth, the plan made clear that the era of sprawling new factory complexes in the city had ended. The plan approves one major new enterprise, the chemical plant that had been in development at the southeastern end of the Krasnoarmeisk region near the commercial port. Otherwise, the priority would be “to develop existing and new enterprises for construction materials and products, light industry, and food processing plants related to serving the needs of the city and its population.”⁴²⁶ The placement of new industries should give proper

⁴²⁴ GAVO, f. R-6068, op. 2, d. 76, l. 79.

⁴²⁵ Ibid.

⁴²⁶ Ibid, 80.

consideration to location and how a plan would fit into the city's existing transportation and distribution network—the Razgulyaevka industrial park, for instance, was to be expanded, and new dedicated industrial zones would be established.

The ultimate focus of the new plan, however, was how to best meet the demand for new housing. The recent audit of the city's construction industry had revealed that to have any chance of meeting the state's targets, a substantial shift would have to occur within the “best-practices” being followed, from architects and engineers down to construction crews on the ground. Several provisions of the city's general plan are dedicated to making this happen, and they would have a significant impact on Volgograd's future housing developments.

In the plan's section dedicated to residential housing construction it is made clear that the *Khrushchevka* would be the key building block for this initiative: “new mass construction of four- and five-story residential buildings is envisaged.” These units were to be concentrated in areas that had hitherto seen little development, with “priority housing construction . . . envisaged mainly in newly developed and free territories and undeveloped areas in the existing districts of the city.” Several choice locations are listed as prime examples of where construction should begin, such as around Volgograd Agricultural Institute (situated between the populated centers of the Kirov and Voroshilov districts), west along the banks of the Volga-Don canal, and the old “training” aerodrome, which was now unnecessary with the opening of the new airport northwest of the city. One of the main reasons the city's plan highlights these “undeveloped” areas is that new housing projects would be situated into microdistricts. Provision #10 of the plan reads as follows:

New construction is envisaged to be carried out by organizing residential areas and microdistricts that create the most favorable sanitary and living conditions for the population. Simultaneously with the construction of residential buildings, it is

envisaged to build schools, hospitals, children's institutions, shops, canteens, and other enterprises and institutions of cultural and domestic purposes, based on their provision in accordance with established norms.⁴²⁷

While most of the plan focused on future housing projects, there would also be some more immediate repercussions for residents of “unauthorized” or “low value” housing in the city. The plan specifically targets several districts where clusters of one-story houses had been allowed to propagate—the plots between STZ and Red October and the river are specifically named, as well as many others that had cropped up along main transit routes in other districts. Many of these homes would have been built by individuals or the extremely cheap barracks housing constructed by the state in the immediate aftermath of the battle. While these areas were to be cleared for new four- and five- story apartment buildings, it is unclear in the plan how the residents of these houses would be compensated, or where they were supposed to live in the interterm between their housing being demolished and new structures being built.

While there were certainly some who would lose out under the new plan, overall, there was a clear effort to improve living conditions for the city's residents. In addition to the expansion of social services in new developments, the plan included many provisions tied to providing citizens with access to green spaces and even ecological preservation efforts. Green zones should be established between industrial districts and residential districts to create a buffer from air pollution and other waste. Additional green zones were to be established running along the various rail lines that cut through the city and building within these areas was to be prohibited. The new plan also sought to right some of the wrongs of early Stalinist planning. Some of the city's largest factories, like STZ and Red October Steelworks, would be expected to take “effective measures” to combat air pollution, solid waste, and wastewater disposal “to

⁴²⁷ Ibid, 81.

improve the sanitary and hygienic conditions of Volgograd.”⁴²⁸ There was also a directive to expand and improve the city’s main parks, with a particular focus on the beautification and upkeep of the city’s core composition in the Central District. The plan also called for new parks to be constructed as part of the city’s expansion, “bringing the area of public green spaces to 1600 hectares and calculating 20 square meters of greenery per inhabitant.” A fair amount of green space would be added, the plan notes, from the massive memorial complex planned atop Mamayev Kurgan, but it also calls for the creation of a new children’s park in the old Tsaritsa riverbed, new “embankment” parks along the Volga riverfront, “as well as district parks, gardens, squares, and boulevards.”⁴²⁹ Furthermore, the plan includes the first mention of creating a “green ring” around the city that would involve planting new “windbreak forests” and creating plots “designed to accommodate rest homes, pioneer camps, boarding houses, and summer cottages.” One such area, dubbed “*Bakalda*,” was “a place for Sunday rest of the working people of the city.”⁴³⁰ Situated across the river from the city’s central district, it was only reachable at this time by water taxi that docked at the city’s main passenger riverport, which would also be expanded to provide increased service.

The city’s transportation grid was also reimagined as part of the new plan, which called for major expansions of both civilian and commercial transit. The highway network connecting the city’s disparate districts would be expanded, with a second longitudinal highway set further west of the river that would link all the way to the Hydroelectric station and reservoir to Krasnoarmeisk, and a third connecting Razgulyaevka and the agricultural college. These would be intersected by transverse highways to destinations “of city-wide significance” like the airport,

⁴²⁸ Ibid, 80.

⁴²⁹ Ibid, 82.

⁴³⁰ Ibid, 83.

as well as aimed at connecting industrial districts with the new residential areas. The planners note that these highways were important to “ensure the construction of micro-districts” as supplies could be more easily delivered from the facilities where they were produced.⁴³¹ Another important addition was the construction of the roadway atop the hydroelectric station’s dam, which would create a passable land connection between the two banks of the Volga for the first time in the city’s history. As the city’s sprawl became more interconnected by roads, planners accounted for a growth not only of public transit options like bus, electric tram lines, and taxi services, but also for an increased number of cars in the city, laying out space at major transport hubs for parking lots for personal automobiles.⁴³²

The city’s rail network would also see expansion, particularly the smaller offshoots connecting the city’s industries with the wider regional network. New commercial docks were to be built in the north of the city to better facilitate loading finished goods, particularly from the tractor plant, for ships bound for other parts of the Union or to the Caspian or Black Sea to be shipped abroad. The Gumrak airport was seen as the new gateway for visitors arriving in the city, and its capacity for servicing long distance airlines was to be expanded as well. In the future regional and local flights would be redirected to the Voroponovo airfield, and ground would be broken on a second local airfield to the south of Kirov district.

To account for Volgograd’s future expansion, the city’s infrastructure and public utilities networks would need to be significantly expanded to better meet the demands of existing and newly developed areas. New water treatment facilities were envisaged on both banks of the river to increase the city’s reserves of potable water, with new wastewater treatment plants to ensure

⁴³¹ Ibid.

⁴³² For more on Soviet car culture, see Lewis H. Siegelbaum, *Cars for Comrades: The Life of the Soviet Automobile* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011).

that sewage and runoff going back into the Volga was clean. The Hydroelectric Station at the north end of the city could produce more than enough power for the city's needs, but the electrical grid itself would need to be expanded and managed. The city's natural gas refineries would be expanded, and new processing facilities were to be opened in the city's furthest districts to reduce the logistical strain of distribution over such a large area.⁴³³

On August 30, 1962, the Executive Committee of the Volgograd Regional Council of People's Deputies passed the resolution that would take the first steps to put the new plan into action. In addition to notifying the relevant industrial and engineering groups in the city and oblast how this would affect construction efforts moving forward, it also seeks to justify the urgent need for the new plan to address some of the key issues facing the city.⁴³⁴

The resolution opens by stating that thus far the construction of Volgograd has been "carried out according to the resolution [...] of April 16, 1945, which made it possible to efficiently use the existing city and the provided capital investments allocated for housing, cultural buildings, social services, and communal constructions." Praising the extensive network of social services like hospitals and kindergartens, a modern highway and public transit system, and the city's copious green spaces, the regional council asserts that over the last seventeen years the city of Volgograd has become a model of a "modern, beautiful, and comfortable city."⁴³⁵ However, they also assert that "some violations of the general plan were committed," namely that industrial enterprises in the city had grown so rapidly that they had greatly reduced the remaining real estate for housing construction. In addition, the committee notes there was a

⁴³³ GAVO, f. R-6068, op. 2, d. 76, l. 83.

⁴³⁴ GAVO, f. R-6021, op. 1. d. 639, l. 240.

⁴³⁵ Ibid.

failure to regulate the settlement of new workers to the region, which meant that by 1962 Volgograd had already exceeded the population targets that had been set for 1965.⁴³⁶

The committee resolves to adopt the new plan for execution and calls for work to begin “to develop a whole range of necessary measures for its implementation at a high urban planning level.” Deadlines for various agencies are set with both short-term and long-term goals in mind. The sharpest deadlines are set for data gathering and analytical work. A commission was to be established to analyze “the population growth and develop measures to regulate it” by September 15 (two weeks away) and to “recalculate the indicators of the provision of the population with living space and all types of cultural household and communal services” by October 1 (two weeks after that). By the start of the New Year, the region’s economic planners would need to “develop measures for the implementation by enterprises, the railway, and other departments of work on the improvement of their territories, sanitary protection zones, and “alienated lands” (areas of blighted urban space)”⁴³⁷ Some of this referred to areas of available real estate that had either fallen into disrepair or still had not been reclaimed since the battle, but it also could be taken to refer to some of the older structures that the new plan had targeted for demolition. The Volgograd Regional Executive Committee, working with the Ministry of Public Utilities of the RSFSR, were to “take an inventory of dilapidated residential buildings to be demolished before January 1, 1966.”⁴³⁸ It was still unclear in the documents at the senior level of what would happen to the residents displaced by these targeted demolitions. Constructing new residential buildings would take time, and even under perfect logistical conditions and using the latest

⁴³⁶ Ibid.

⁴³⁷ Translation “*zemla otchuzhdeniia*,”

⁴³⁸ Ibid, 242.

building methods (which the city's builders were still struggling to achieve), creating new homes atop their old plots would be a lengthy process.

Urban planners were to set to work laying out the new construction in the city, imaging new micro districts tied to the city by new roadways. Funding for the plan was to be left to the State Planning Committee of the RSFSR and the Supreme Council of the National Economy, as planners would need access to "the annual plans for the allocation of capital investments, earthmoving equipment, machinery, cranes, and materials for the construction of new structures."⁴³⁹ Work was to begin as well establishing the bounds of the "green ring" around the city, with the Regional Department of Forestry overseeing the project, and a plan for its construction no later than 1965. Local foresters would be relying on support from a state agency, *Glavleshkov* RSFSR, particularly regarding irrigation and water use from the nearby reservoir to sustain the new growth on the harsh Southern steppe.

Finally, the regional committee made clear that the city leadership would be held accountable for the implementation of the plan along the guidelines set by the Regional Council, which retained ultimate authority on all planning matters. The Executive Committee of the Volgograd City Council would be expected "to exercise strict control over the correct location and quality of construction, over the correct use of standard projects and urban areas."⁴⁴⁰ The message was a clear indication to the city's construction firms that unilateral changes to the plan by those on site would not be tolerated, with the city's chief political body on the hook should they stray from the carefully crafted dictates of the plan, modern design standards, and construction methods.

⁴³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid, 243.

Conclusions—Short-term and Long-term Legacies of Mass Housing in Volgograd

The decade following Khrushchev's rise to the head of the party was an important period in the city's development, a period arguably as formative to its urban space and civic identity as the initial reconstruction phase in the aftermath of the war. The flurry of construction activity in this decade was an unceasing fact of daily life and an ever-present symbol of the city's renewal. Construction workers were the heroes of the day. They were idealized much the same way the city's defenders were in the days of the war, and their work was no less crucial to the health and well-being of the city's residents. Construction and its rhythms had become a part of daily life in the city—the sounds of rumbling engines of heavy machinery, the hammering of wood and steel, the grating of gravel and concrete were familiar to every neighborhood, as was the sight of a half-finished new structures and a skyline filled with cranes. As the caption in *Stalingradskaia pravda* to one image of the city's central district put it: "When they talk about the Stalingrad landscape, they primarily mean numerous new buildings, dozens of tower cranes, mountains of building materials. Yes, this is the landscape of Stalingrad."⁴⁴¹

The needs of the construction industry, along with other economic initiatives under Khrushchev, also drastically changed the shape of Stalingrad's industrial base. While before life in the city had resolved around the "major" works of the Five-Year Plans like the tractor factory and steelworks, by the end of the decade tens of thousands of workers were employed in smaller plants dedicated to producing construction materials, concrete, aluminum, and other "light" goods like refrigerators and appliances. The hydroelectric station alone warranted the construction of its own support network of factories in the north of the city. And of course, as the

⁴⁴¹ E. Sivakova (photographer), in *Stalingradskaia Pravda*, February 1, 1959, p. 3. GAVO

city's industrial base grew, so did the demand for workers to staff the factories and raise new structures, drawing in tens of thousands of new residents, which only further drove the demand for new housing. In the case of Volzhskiy, this demand resulted in the construction of a whole new city.

As we have seen, the attempt to meet the demands of mass housing in Stalingrad reveals the strain between the idealized vision and reality—though the underlying value structure had elevated the construction of new housing as a priority, the logistical demands of such an undertaking would take time to catch up. New construction methods demanded new training for builders and a new industrial base to match, and the city's economy that had been inherited from Stalin lacked the flexibility to make this shift quickly. Leaders of the city's largest construction firms also proved slow to adjust, and bureaucratic inefficiencies and a culture of graft meant that in the early days of mass housing production was uneven and often sub-par. Numerous stories and anecdotes provide horror stories of the failures of mass-housing at this time—deficiencies in basic amenities, structural problems, and defects that had to be corrected after the new residents were already inside created nightmare scenarios that were read widely in the city press, as we will see in the next chapter. The dream of modern Soviet housing, a long-held wish of millions across the country, contrasted harshly with the reality of the cramped, dingy offerings that were built in the 1950s.

While methods would improve over time as construction became more streamlined into the following decade, there was a certain ceiling in the quality of the residential apartments constructed during mass-housing, which existed because of the emphasis of speed in the initiative and the need to maximize the amount of new units to their cost of construction. In order

for everyone to receive an apartment of their own, they would have to accept the physical restrictions of what that apartment could be.

Still, as hundreds of thousands of families would move into some version of the private in the decade following Stalin's death, patterns of daily life in the city changed accordingly. The social engineering present in the design of the microdistrict—which promised to provide childcare and education services, public cafeterias, laundromats and bathhouses, cultural centers, and movie theaters, all the while residents retaining the ability to retreat into the privacy of their own home—did significantly alter the daily lives of those who lived there. The stability that came from this anchor, this sense of place and belonging, cannot be understated in defining the “new normal” of the post-Stalin era.

To measure the distance life in the city had come since Stalin's revolution and the hardships of those dark days during the war, we can look to the generation who had lived through it and saw around them a remarkable new reality. For instance, one such veteran of Stalingrad, Andrei Ivanovich Zykov, who had himself been a Komsomol member who began work at STZ back in the 1930s, upon his retirement reflected that “the veterans were excited about handing over their jobs to the new generation.” He wrote this in a public letter to the factory's *Traktor* newspaper to commemorate his final shift:

Today I went to my shift for the last time, looked at the new multi-story residential buildings, schools, hospitals, shops ... I visit the apartments of our workers, my friends, - everyone has a good environment, TVs, receivers, refrigerators, cars. Our children continue the path of their fathers, work at the factory, study in the evening at technical schools and institutes. An enviable fate, their path is wonderful!⁴⁴²

⁴⁴² Orlov, *Istoriia rodnogo kraia*, 177.

The optimism of Zykov was likely shared by many of his peers from the generation that had survived a lifetime of upheaval—revolution, terror, and war. The relative stability that they saw rising around them in the form of new residential structures where every day more families found permanent residence. These new buildings were the embodiment of technological innovation and progress. It is reasonable to think that some of those collecting their pensions at this time genuinely believed that they may yet live to see a day when the Soviet Union would reach full communism as Khrushchev promised. As we shall see in later chapters, not all would agree with Zykov’s assertion that “everyone has a good environment,” but at least in the eyes of one resident, these improvements were monumental.

Few of those who experienced elation upon receiving the keys to their own apartment in the 1950s could have anticipated the legacy of mass housing decades down the road. In the Soviet period, while some exchanges of apartments were rare, single-family ownership of an apartment could be passed down between generations, meaning that for many who raised children in these apartments their children could very well someday raise a family of their own within those very same walls, even as the flaws of the rapid prefabricated constructions began to become more apparent. Reinforced concrete, which represented a seemingly permanent material when technology began to see widespread use during this time, realistically has a terminal lifespan that ranges between forty and sixty years, depending on factors of composition and climate. What that means today is that many of the apartment structures built in the 1950s, most of which are still being used as housing, are being stretched to the limits of durability and safety. Russia and other post-Soviet and Eastern European states will need to confront this problem, as it applies to millions of residential units across the former Soviet bloc. The choices available offer no clear-cut solution. Do you repair and reinforce the existing structures at a massive cost? Is it

politically viable to attempt to demolish these houses, which millions still depend on for affordable housing? Any initiative to provide an alternative would need to be as sweeping as Khrushchev's, arguably even more so. The window to address this looming crisis is beginning to run out—how long before we see news of a structural failure that results in disaster in Russia or one of the former Soviet republics?

Thus, we come to the core question of Khrushchev's housing policy for historians of Soviet and urban studies—was the mass housing initiative a success story or a failure? In the negative column we have numerous cases against, both in the project's implementation, its results, and in the long-term problems faced by urban planners who still rely heavily on the *khrushchevka* and its spiritual successors to provide housing for a modern populace. Yet to measure that against the sheer volume of Soviet citizens given shelter at a time when so many had so little, to provide stability and safety to millions of people who had faced decades of privation, war, and terror, it becomes harder to fault the attempt. Like many of Khrushchev's legacies, the picture is complicated. However, we can draw certain lessons from this period regardless. If the goal is to provide affordable shelter to all members of society (which is certainly still a matter of debate in today's world), it is imperative to muster political will behind that vision, to exercise all options using the best technologies available, and to mobilize and coordinate state and local enterprises towards achieving that common goal.

CHAPTER 4

De-Stalinizing the Soviet Economy: Rationalization, Education, and The Virgin Lands Campaign in Stalingrad Oblast

Introduction

In Stalingrad as across the Soviet Union, life revolved around labor. Where one worked could greatly influence your access to housing, define your social privileges, and in the planned Soviet economy, was one of the main points of contact between citizens and the Soviet state. The Khrushchev era was a time where Soviet workers were struggling to reclaim a sense of stability after decades of crash industrialization, collectivization, war, and laborious reconstruction. While the party still emphasized the role of the individual worker and their responsibility to production and meeting the four-year plan, in the post-Stalin era there was also more of an expectation from the party and state that their contributions to Soviet society were properly honored. More than perhaps the pre-war generation, who understood the promises of socialism could only be fulfilled after decades of work, the post-war generation of Soviet workers increasingly saw the project of Soviet modernity as something they would both contribute toward and enjoy the benefits of that lifestyle. In addition, when the state failed to meet their expectations, there was more push back from workers, who became increasingly empowered to give voice to their dissent. While nothing of the scale of the 1962 Novocherkassk strike would take place in Volgograd, we can gain a sense of this growing tension between workers and the party as it played out within the pages of the party press.⁴⁴³

⁴⁴³ For more on the use of state forces to suppress labor unrest in June 1962 in the city of Novocherkassk (a city less than 500 km southeast of Volgograd) see Baron, *Bloody Saturday in the Soviet Union*, and Vladimir A. Kozlov and Elaine McClarnand, *Mass Uprisings in the USSR: Protest and Rebellion in the Post-Stalin Years*, (New York: Routledge, 2002). This was the one exceptional instance of Khrushchev's time in power where labor relations broke down between party and state within the Soviet Union. Khrushchev had previously resorted to state coercion while dealing with threats to Communist rule abroad in both Poland and Hungary in 1956, see McDermott and Stibbe, *Revolution and Resistance in Eastern Europe*.

To get a sense of the economic priorities of Khrushchev's administration, the men and women chosen to represent Stalingrad oblast interests on the national stage serve as good an indicator as any. In the early months of 1959, the people of Stalingrad Oblast were preparing to elect their Deputies of the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR. Candidates were nominated and approved by large gatherings of workers and farmers from across the region's largest industries and collective farms, and those selected as to be placed on the ballot were individuals who were respected by the party and the people. For each district, of course, there would only be one candidate, so the "elections" would be little more than a formality, but still, the pages of the *Stalingradskiaia pravda* were loaded with candidates' profiles to familiarize the electorate with their future deputies.

The candidates that the editors of *Stalingradskiaia pravda* chose to highlight from "the people's bloc of communists and non-partisans" in the Stalingrad region were a cohort composed of leaders from important industries, party officials, and exceptional workers in a range of careers. They had all in some way distinguished themselves from their service toward the Soviet Union and Stalingrad oblast, winning recognition from both the party and their peers. While many of the nominees were communist party members, it was not required to be a member of the party in order to be nominated.

Some of the candidates would have hardly been unexpected. Among them were leaders in Stalingrad regional politics like the nominee for district #629 Leonid Sergeevich Kylichenko, a native of Old Tsaritsyn who had gone to school for construction management in Leningrad, before he returned to his home city to help in the rebuilding effort, becoming the first secretary of the Stalingrad city committee of the CPSU, where he was noted for overseeing "persistent organizational work for the further development of the industry of the hero city, for increasing

output, accelerating and improving the quality of industrial and housing construction.”⁴⁴⁴ Other notable figures included Ivan Stepanovich Pankin (the nominee for district #638), who had been climbing the hierarchy of Stalingrad oblast governance since his arrival in the region in 1950, after having gained recognition for his overseeing agricultural production from the Altai region during the War.⁴⁴⁵ In 1955, he became the first secretary of the regional party apparatus, and so his nomination by numerous collective farms would have come as no surprise. He was joined by fellow nominee Nikolai Ivanovich Chmutov (District #634), another transplant to the region from the Tul’skaya oblast (south of Moscow) who had found his way to Stalingrad following the war, who held the position of Second Secretary just below Pankin.⁴⁴⁶

Several of the other nominees came from the highest level of administration for the city’s largest industries, namely construction. Aleksandr Petrovich Aleksandrov, who had been appointed Director of *Stalingradstroi* in 1956, was an obvious candidate nominated by the workers of district #363.⁴⁴⁷ Aleksandrov’s career in the region had been particularly noteworthy, born to a family of poor peasants near the border of Estonia, he had trained as an engineer and studied at the Tashkent institute of roadbuilding, only to apply that knowledge of reinforced concrete to the construction of the Volga-Don Canal starting in 1948 and later the Kuibyshev hydroelectric dam project, which he had overseen since 1953. The nominee for district #630, which contained the Krasnoarmeisk region of Stalingrad, was Ivan Aleksandrovich Grishmanov,

⁴⁴⁴ “Nashi Kandidaty v deputy verkhovnogo coveta RSFSR: Tovarishchi izbirateli! V den’ vyborov golosuite za kandidatov narodnogo bloka kommunistov i bespartninykh!” *Stalingradskaia pravda*, February 14, 1959, 2.

⁴⁴⁵ “Nashi Kandidaty v deputy verkhovnogo coveta RSFSR: Tovarishchi izbirateli! V den’ vyborov golosuite za kandidatov narodnogo bloka kommunistov i bespartninykh!” *Stalingradskaia pravda*, February 15, 1959, 2.

⁴⁴⁶ “Nashi Kandidaty v deputy verkhovnogo coveta RSFSR,” *Stalingradskaia pravda*, February 14, 1959, 2.

⁴⁴⁷ “Nashi Kandidaty v deputy verkhovnogo coveta RSFSR,” *Stalingradskaia pravda*, February 15, 1959, 2.

who had become the Head of the Construction Department of the Central Committee of the CPSU.⁴⁴⁸

Beyond the parade of the high-ranking, well-connected party men, there were several individuals who had won their nominations through admirable work at the regional level and would represent more rural districts outside of the city itself. Valentin Mikhailovich Gavrilov (District #635) was one of the youngest of the candidates of the field, a worker on the oil and gas networks of the Don region that ran into the city's southern refineries. The crew he headed had won acclaim in 1957 when they were able to lay close to 7,000 meters of new pipeline in just 11 months, exceeding the planned work by nearly 20%, (according to his profile).⁴⁴⁹ There was also the schoolteacher Evgenia Nikolaevna Davydova (District #632), who in 1937 became part of the faculty of Stalingrad Pedagogical Institute up until its closure during the war. She then returned to her home village of Kamyshin on the right bank of the Volga north of the city, while remaining a member of the Council of Public Education at the Stalingrad Regional Department of Public Education. She was also decorated with the badge "Excellent Work in Public Education" by the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR in 1957.⁴⁵⁰

Several of the candidates came from backgrounds in agriculture. Maria Vasil'evna Kisliakova (District #631) was an agronomist who came to Stalingrad oblast before the war and made a name for herself in improving animal husbandry practices on collective farms in the region. After the war, she was elected chair of the executive committee of the Sredne-Akhtuba district (located to the southeast of where Volzhskii was being built) and was credited as being the mind behind 1958's bumper crop, when "the collective farms of the region overfulfilled the

⁴⁴⁸ "Nashi Kandidaty v deputy verkhovnogo coveta RSFSR," *Stalingradskaia pravda*, February 14, 1959, 2.

⁴⁴⁹ "Nashi Kandidaty v deputy verkhovnogo coveta RSFSR," *Stalingradskaia pravda*, February 15, 1959, 2.

⁴⁵⁰ "Nashi Kandidaty v deputy verkhovnogo coveta RSFSR," *Stalingradskaia pravda*, February 14, 1959, 2.

plan for selling grain to the state by 2.6 times, sharply increased the production of vegetables, fruits and other agricultural products.” She was awarded the medal “For the Development of the Virgin Lands” and the Red Banner of Labor for her efforts.⁴⁵¹ She was joined by Agrafena Ivanovna Khripunkova (District #633), another agronomist who oversaw the region’s single largest livestock collectives, whose work raising swine had increased pork production above Khrushchev’s new standards, earning her the medal “For the Development of the Virgin Lands” as well.⁴⁵²

While the election was technically for “Communist and Non-Party Candidates,” the only candidate of the bunch who came from a “Non-Party” background was also the youngest nominee. Nina Borisovna Vlasenko was born in 1929—she was just 12 years old when the war began. She was originally from Saratov, graduating from its agricultural institute in 1953, but was brought to Stalingrad oblast to the collective farm “Victory” (*Pobeda*) in order to help with the cultivation of new agricultural enterprises that opened under the Virgin Lands initiative. She became the resident authority on the latest scientific research in the field and pushed to establish the new best-practices standard among all work brigades, seeing yields per hectare increasing year after year. She was nominated by her fellow *kolkhozniki* to serve as the representative for District #637, despite not being a party member, and the fact that she was confirmed for the role speaks to the importance of the Virgin Lands and the fight to increase agriculture production in the zeitgeist of the day.⁴⁵³

All these candidates, as well as hundreds of others of the 12,660 deputies elected to the local soviets of the Stalingrad region, (nearly half of which were non-Party) represented the

⁴⁵¹ Ibid.

⁴⁵² Ibid.

⁴⁵³ “Nashi Kandidaty v deputy verkhovnogo coveta RSFSR,” *Stalingradskaia pravda*, February 15, 1959, 2.

values the party wished to promote and celebrate within Soviet society. Their stories were in some ways exceptional, but in many ways emblematic. Their pathways to this office were a reflection of the values of Soviet society at that time, particularly in the Stalingrad region, where construction, agriculture, education, and service dominated the discussions of the day.

The election of deputies was just one example of these types of stories that appeared in *Stalingradskaia pravda*. In the same issues where the above profiles were published, so too were stories of local victories and triumphs, such as the opening of a new school or residential building, or some plant or another meeting its production targets were the kinds of stories that made up the majority of its coverage. Stories of the achievements of the city's residents at every stage of their lives—children completing their education and choosing a vocation, young families getting married and having children of their own, people of all ages enjoying their free time, workers looking forward to retirement—helped *Stalingradskaia pravda*'s editors and writers tell the story of a city in motion, on its track from its traumatic past towards its better tomorrow.

While the nomination of deputies in early 1959 took up plenty of physical space on the pages of *Stalingradskaia pravda*, it is impossible to measure the engagement of the city's populace in yet another symbolic election. What is glaringly missing from any of the delegates' profiles is any sort of "platform." The election is not political, pitting one brand of politics against another—the politics are there, but they have already been established and these candidates are simply reflections of those values, rather than the other way around. There are no calls for changes to the existing order of things, no new policies are being proposed, and no complaints being addressed. Of course, how could there be? While new hands were at the helm

of the ship of state, the communist party still steered the direction of Soviet society as it had for the last four decades.

The input of the public, at the end of the day, was a formality. For the general populace, the narrative of the party would have been something of a formality as well—background noise, much like the constant rumble of construction trucks, drills, cranes, and swinging hammers... though those sounds of the new city being born may have been more of a real experience than the routine propaganda maneuvers in the pages of the party press. Unlike the choice to pick up a newspaper, they would have been unavoidable in what was becoming the modern Soviet metropolis of Volgograd, though at the time it might have more resembled a never-ending construction site.

Life in the city was a constant struggle between expectations and reality. Multiple perceptions of the “ideal” city life overlapped with the sometimes-shocking condition of the material conditions of life therein. The battle had left a gaping hole in the very idea of the socialist city. Families who remember the city as it stood before 1942 held the memory of *kommunalki*, but also of trams, department stores, and a bustling city of industry and trade. Then, even as the city remained largely destroyed, a new vision of modernity was being presented in Soviet newspapers, magazines, and party propaganda. The dream of the individual apartment, or the micro district where citizen’s needs might all be met within a short walk from home, was still a long way from being realized for *Stalingradtsy* in the late 1950s-early 1960s. They were stuck in a liminal space where the old modernity was gone and the new modernity had not yet been built, and yet life continued. From the patchwork of partially finished *Khrushchevki*, they navigated their existence with the same hopes of their forebears who inhabited the city in generations past: they did their best to carry on in hopes of a brighter future.

In the previous chapter, we saw how the city of Stalingrad was transformed by a decade of state investment and economic revitalization, as well as a commitment to providing its citizens with affordable private housing in a timely manner. Within the city, the day-to-day life of its citizens that had flowed around the ruins and rubble now was shaped by a geography of freshly minted structures and countless new construction sites. The experience of the “everyday” in Stalingrad was also transforming as the multi-faceted effects of de-Stalinization and the new material reality of Soviet living restructured individual and social value structures of the people who lived there. In the pages of *Stalingradskaia pravda*, we have a unique window on how to explore how the ordinary and the remarkable intersected amidst the rhythm of daily life in a new Soviet metropolis as it was still being built.

At the same time, the residents of the city were increasingly aware of life in the villages and collective farms in the region through the stories appearing in the local press. Stories about construction projects, labor triumphs, scathing complaints, and regional politics made town and country seem closer together, with both urban and rural denizens living aspects of what the party sought to promote as a shared Soviet lifestyle.

In fact, the goings-on of the countryside had become the new offensive, in the battle to build new Stalingrad, the tractors headed to the Virgin Lands rolling off the line from Traktorzavod were akin to the T-34 tanks headed straight for the front in the Great Patriotic War. Khrushchev’s new promise of modernity hinged on two main issues—the promise of housing, and the promise of abundance. The city of Stalingrad was kept constantly up to date with features on the latest in agricultural production, including schematics of the latest tractors and their upgrades. The skyrocketing bar graphs and inspiring infographics scattered throughout the pages of *Stalingradskaia pravda* conveyed to readers a steady rise in agricultural production and

all its products, particularly corn. The Volgograd Oblast had always been a wheat country, due to the climate and the hearty winter wheat that had long been cultivated by Volga Germans and Central European Mennonites who had worked the land since the days of Catherine the Great. The Virgin Lands thrust corn into the spotlight, and slowly but surely in Volgograd oblast, the rolling wheat fields were being replaced by Khrushchev's beloved foodstuff.

Methodology and Historiography

By drawing on the work of local historians, as well as the work of scholars who have shown nation-wide trends prevalent under Khrushchev's administration, I argue that the changes brought about by de-Stalinization and other policies effectively transformed Soviet civilization in Stalingrad oblast. The economic reforms pursued by Khrushchev had such widespread implications for the Soviet people, that they fundamentally altered their lived experience. By contrasting the patterns of life after Stalin with those that came before it, we can measure the extent to which Stalingrad reflected Soviet civilization de-Stalinized—as well as the ways in which Stalinism persisted.

Of course, there are many scholars in the field of de-Stalinization who have sought to study many of these same issues, albeit on a more macro level than in the city of Stalingrad itself. The works I draw from most are the various contributions to the edited collection *Dilemmas of De-Stalinization*, which remains one of the best works in the field that examines different aspects of de-Stalinization, the “thaw,” and Khrushchev's other initiatives as part of a greater whole.⁴⁵⁴ One piece notably absent from that collection, however, was that of the Virgin Lands campaign. Khrushchev's attempts to restructure Soviet agriculture from the Stalinist

⁴⁵⁴ Jones, ed. *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization*.

model is arguably as much a question of de-Stalinization as any other, and recent scholarship on this trend has made huge strides toward understanding its impact.

In *Corn Crusade: Khrushchev's Farming Revolution in the Post-Stalin Soviet Union*, Aaron T. Hale-Dorrell argues that rather than a comical historical footnote to Khrushchev's policies as it is sometimes portrayed, the Virgin Lands campaign and the Soviet leader's obsession with corn as a miracle crop were central tenets of his reform platform.⁴⁵⁵ His vision of Soviet modernity—of urban, educated workers enjoying the stability provided by private housing—also depended on providing consumer products, including basic foodstuffs, to the Soviet people. De-Stalinization, far from simply a political reform, could be seen to include this far-sweeping overhaul of the basic tenets of the Soviet economy. Even under Stalin, part of the need for crash industrialization had been the necessity to overhaul farming practices and replace existing peasant farming with modern industrial agriculture. Khrushchev did inherit a manufacturing base with many of the tools he would need, but the true success of his vision would depend on whether he could truly merge the hammer with the scythe.

As Khrushchev tried to shake the rust out of the Stalinist economy, he had to thread the needle of resetting worker protections and incentivizing production without ever relinquishing state control or risking collective action.⁴⁵⁶ As workers felt increasingly empowered following Stalin's death "to propose economic and technical innovations over the heads of factory bureaucrats" across the Soviet Union during this period in the name of "rationalization": efforts to bring logistical efficiency to the extremely inefficient Stalinist economic system.⁴⁵⁷ To

⁴⁵⁵ Aaron T. Hale-Dorrell, *Corn Crusade: Khrushchev's Farming Revolution in the Post-Stalinist Soviet Union*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018)

⁴⁵⁶ See Donald Filtzer, *Soviet Workers and De-Stalinization* and "From Mobilized to Free Labour," as well as Mark Harrison, "Trends in Soviet Labour Productivity, 1928–85: War, Postwar Recovery, and Slowdown," in *European Review of Economic History* 2, no. 2 (1998): 171–200.

⁴⁵⁷ Polly Jones, "Introduction," in *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization*, ed. Jones, 9.

modernize the Soviet economy, Khrushchev sought to improve the technical expertise of the Soviet labor pool, while also promoting buy-in from workers and shifting from the excessively coercive and exploitative labor practices of Stalin.⁴⁵⁸

To develop a more flexible and educated workforce, the party needed to instill the next generation of Soviet workers with substantially increased training in the fields of math and science. Sussane Schattenberg identifies what she calls the “second generation” of Soviet technicians who were “raised in the 1930s, mostly too young to be involved in the Great Terror, who became the incarnation of honesty and integrity. Having participated in the ‘Great Patriotic War,’ and made their careers in the frozen society of the late Stalin period, they now had the opportunity to free themselves from despotic oppression and regain the old way of revolutionary work and life.”⁴⁵⁹ This type of idealized worker can be seen embodied by characters introduced into the Soviet literary canon at this time, one prime example being the 35-year-old engineer Koroteev in Il’ia Ehrenburg’s novel *The Thaw* (1955).⁴⁶⁰

Inventors and innovators, she argues, had become the heroes for this new Soviet way of life, pushing against the old guard, the “little Stalins” of the factory bureaucracy, to reclaim the socialist vision of a technological society ruled by logic and reason. It is crucial to note too, she says, that “both the party and the intelligentsia chose the inventor to be the right person for the new beginning. But whilst the intelligentsia was drawn to the inventor because he was free from

⁴⁵⁸ Benjamin Tromly, *Making the Soviet Intelligentsia: Universities and Intellectual Life under Stalin and Khrushchev*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

⁴⁵⁹ Susanne Schattenberg, “Democracy or Despotism?”

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid. For more on literary and artistic trends that defined the cultural “thaw,” see Susan E. Reid, “Modernizing Socialist Realism: The Struggle for a ‘Contemporary Style’ in Soviet Art,” in Jones, ed., *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization*, 209-230.

the burden of history and sought the truth, the party made him the center of its economic politics solely to increase production.”⁴⁶¹

While the Secret Speech certainly remains a watershed event, it should also be noted that de-Stalinization efforts predated the Twentieth Party Congress. While these shifts are more subtle, one can already begin to see the ways in which questions around labor were being shaped through the dialogue of the party press even before 1956. As we shall see, these economic reforms will become some of the core questions of life in Stalingrad/Volgograd oblast. Now more than a decade out from the battle, the city remained an industrial center surrounded by one of the breadbaskets of Soviet industrial agriculture, magnifying the impact of Khrushchev’s economic policies and their ripple effects across all facets of Soviet life. In this chapter, I will try to widen my scope to include life in the countryside around the city and how life between the two was becoming more interconnected than ever.

De-Stalinizing Labor Relations

Despite the state’s assertions to the contrary, the Soviet economy was in dire straits by the time of Stalin’s death in 1953. His successors were left with the question of how to right the ship without fundamentally altering the party’s political grip on the levers of power. It posed a problem that would take generations to even reform, and which would never fully be resolved. Yet even in the years leading up to the Secret Speech, the groundwork was being laid for a new economic model. De-Stalinization then gave political cover to much larger structural economic reforms. As Filtzer notes, this process began almost immediately after Stalin’s death and was not unique to Khrushchev, though the process would invariably accelerate in 1956 as Khrushchev

⁴⁶¹ Schattenberg, “‘Democracy’ or ‘despotism?’,” 69.”

came to the fore and the Secret speech further shook the foundations of labor relations.

Filtzer seeks to address what he still sees as a hole in Soviet historiography, which he argues has yet to fully understand “how workers understood and articulated their own position within society at large and within the workplace as subjects of the production process.”

The labor situation by the time of Stalin’s death was close to a breaking point. Filtzer states that the Soviet economy was “largely dysfunctional, and one of the prime causes of this dysfunction was the way in which society’s toilers—its workers and peasants—related to their work. Motivation was low and the quality of the work they performed was retarding economic growth. Khrushchev understood this, but the problem was how to improve motivation and productivity without threatening the class relations of the system.”⁴⁶² He points to the strain of the postwar years, a time in which worker protections were largely non-existent, unauthorized job switching was illegal, and a substantial portion of the labor force was conscripted through the penal labor camps of the Gulag. Immediately following his death, Stalin’s successors were beginning to consider how to find a way to re-engage the Soviet population in the collective effort of building communism, while still ensuring that workers could never realize their full collective bargaining power. To this end, Khrushchev’s political and economic reforms strived to shift from “political-legal coercion” (state terror, conscripted prison labor) to “economic coercion,” (wages, improved standard of living, career paths and upward mobility). At the same time, the party would allow workers “informal avenues of bargaining,” such as complaints directed toward the management and bureaucracy of industries, rather than collective bargaining for workers’ interests. These battles often took place using the language of “rationalization” to frame the arguments of both the party and workers, but rather than discussions taking place

⁴⁶² Filtzer, “From Mobilized to Free Labour,” 155.

behind closed doors, these informal avenues of bargaining inevitably ran straight into the pages of the party press.

Prior to 1956, the tone of stories around labor in *Stalingradskaia pravda* remained very much in line with the tropes of the Stalinist era—labor competitions and dedications of “voluntary” efforts to the memory of Stalin, the defenders of the city, and the heroic efforts of the previous generations. For context, let us start by examining a facet of the *Stalingradskaia pravda*’s coverage of the 1955 “Pre-May” labor competition, a nationwide event supposedly celebrating “the successful implementation” of the historic decisions of the January Plenum of the Central Committee of the CPSU announcing the early completion of the Fifth Five-Year Plan. This same Plenum was also when Khrushchev effectively prevailed in his political rivalry with Georgi Malenkov, which helped him further consolidate his support in his bid for Premiership. While there had been signals within the committee for some time about moving the planned economy away from such an emphasis on heavy industry—a position supported by Malenkov that would be labeled “revisionist” by Khrushchev—the Plenum’s latest economic model did not greatly differentiate from its Stalin-driven predecessors.⁴⁶³

The official response of labor was similar to that seen during the pre-war or postwar production campaigns that were a staple of Stalinist rule, calling for workers across Soviet industries to demonstrate, according to the call-to-arms published in April 1955, which declared that “evidence of the profoundly patriotic attitude of the Soviet people to work, as a matter of enormous state and public importance, is the unprecedented scope of socialist competition for the early fulfillment of the Fifth Five-Year Plan.”⁴⁶⁴ Workers around the USSR would be taking part in a “Pre-May” socialist labor competition, continuing the “wonderful tradition” to celebrate

⁴⁶³ “Predmaiskoe sorevnovanie,” *Stalingradskaia pravda*, April 2, 1955, 1.

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid.

important holidays and anniversaries of the revolution with “powerful upsurge in socialist competition for production success in all branches of the national economy.”

In the Stalingrad region at this time, this meant workers at the city's major factories, construction firms, and collective farms, and among even more institutions who all entered the Pre-May Socialist Competition. The Construction Trust No. 115 undertook to “significantly expand the production of prefabricated reinforced concrete,” complete preparations for their first four-story large-panel residential buildings, and “to reduce the cost of construction and installation works.” The metallurgists at Red October Steelworks, STZ, and other enterprises all made their own contributions to the construction projects in the city and had a plan for early completion of their quarterly production targets. Collective farms in the region looked to exceed their targets for things like butter, milk, and grain. Builders of the hydroelectric plant and collective farmers at several of the region's largest agricultural institutions were also reported to have “taken up” the Pre-May labor initiative.⁴⁶⁵

The initiative to expedite massive socialist projects during this period was publicly lauded as “patriotic,” but the city’s workers had plenty of incentives to work hard for purely practical considerations. In 1955, thousands of Stalingrad workers still did not have access to a permanent home, and the goal of total electrification was dependent on the completion of the hydroelectric station that remained half a decade away. Despite the fact these labor competitions merited workers accolades in the party press (and little else), in terms of man hours worked compared with compensation, these initiatives at this point were a tool by the state for the furtherance of its collective goals. However, for the citizens of Stalingrad desperate for their

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid.

family to have the safety and security of a modern city, this would have also been a collective project that truly would impact their lives in the long term.

Like other Stalinist labor campaigns, the agit-prop campaign directed through the party press would feature rousing speeches, supposedly given on factory floors and in workshops across the city. The workers of Red October had declared that they would “follow the example of the Metalworkers of Magnitogorsk.”⁴⁶⁶ Unlike the Stakhanovite campaigns of the 1930s, which celebrated acts of superhuman strength, there was an evolution in party rhetoric emphasizing the necessity of new technologies. All cadres had something to contribute to the cause, including the efforts of engineers, technicians, and other skilled laborers.

The head of the planning department at the plant, A. Baluev, applauded the work of the plant’s engineers, which had made the steel-rolling process more efficient. In the first quarter “1955, average daily production compared with the same period in 1954 increased by 5.1 percent for steel and by 7.7 percent for rolled products [...] As a result of the mass development of high-speed steelmaking, the duration of each heat was reduced by 10-15 minutes,” while also reducing waste and downtime on the factory floor. Meanwhile, the head crane operator for the yard of Open Hearth #2, S. Kolosov, acknowledged mistakes from crane operators had been causing headaches for the steel workers on the floor. He urged his comrades to be more aware of how their work impacted the overall production of their workshop and the plant as a whole, and to adjust their habits accordingly.⁴⁶⁷

However, already in 1955, we can see the beginnings of the coming struggle of “rationalization” and reorganizational work. The competition provided a pretext to allow critique

⁴⁶⁶ “Po primeru metallurgov Magnitogorska,” *Stalingradskaia pravda*, April 3, 1955, 1.

⁴⁶⁷ S. Kosolov, “Pomozhem stalevaram,” *Stalingradskaia pravda*, April 3, 1955, 1.

and calls for operational reorganization to occur, all in the name of efficiency and increased productivity to better meet the party's own targets. Even the announcement in *Stalingradskaiia pravda* declared how building of a more "progressive" Soviet economy would be a collective effort:

Each enterprise, collective farm, [...] has unlimited production reserves. It is a question of finding and putting them into action, persistently fighting for every possible increase in quality and reduction in the cost of output, for saving raw materials, introducing new equipment and advanced technology, for raising labor productivity and production standards. In the struggle to fulfill the pre-May commitments, the working people are accumulating rich experience and making valuable suggestions. Everything new, advanced and progressive must be supported in every possible way and widely disseminated.⁴⁶⁸

While labor competitions remained a holdover of Stalinist policies, we can already see through the editorial choices of the party press to allow the conversation to begin to familiarize workers with the question of reorganization. In the new peacetime economy, the challenge of increasing productivity within Soviet industry was about making full use of new technologies and methods, particularly in mechanizing processes that had previously been dependent on unskilled manual labor. We are able to see how these organizational challenges played out in industries around the city, precisely because such topics remained the hot-button issues of the day, and many of the criticisms and criticisms of the failures to adapt to new standards were aired publicly in the city press. The following stories further reflect what other scholars of de-Stalinization have noted regarding cultural shifts and power in the workplace following Stalin's death, as educated engineers and tradesmen felt emboldened to go above or around top-level factory bureaucrats to make their enterprises more efficient.⁴⁶⁹

⁴⁶⁸ "Po primeru metallurgov Magnitogorska," *Stalingradskaiia pravda*, April 3, 1955, 1.

⁴⁶⁹ See again Schattenberg, "'Democracy' or 'despotism?,'" Filtzer, *Soviet Workers and De-Stalinization*.

Once Khrushchev had secured his position atop the party with the Secret Speech, he was able to undertake larger structural reforms. As Filtzer reminds his readers, while we often associate the Twentieth Party Congress as the start of de-Stalinization, the main theme of the conference before the delivery of Khrushchev's late-night address was how to increase economic prosperity while continuing to build communism. This led to some major changes in the way the planned economy would operate. For one, the Five-Year Plans of the Stalin era were replaced with Seven-Year plans, extending the timeline for many major economic projects and reducing the strain of crash industrialization defined by over-inflated output quotas and rushed work of poor quality. By 1957, with the launch of the Seven Year Plan, the campaign to restructure and optimize the economy even led to a de-centralization of command structures within GOSPLAN, allowing for the creation of more independent regional economic zones, of which Stalingrad would be chosen as one of 104 of these units created across the country. According to Orlov, this had a multitude of consequences for the economy of the region. Almost all enterprises and construction projects of the city and the region were transferred to the jurisdiction of the Volgograd Economic Council (more than 120 firms in total), and the centralized ministries of various aspects of the economy (such as Railways, Power Plants, Aviation, Shipbuilding, Radio Engineering, Chemical Engineering, and Communications) were given sweeping powers aimed at solving issues of technical and economic management, raw materials, and logistics. These administrative bodies were also responsible for overseeing the sales of products, and how products were priced and brought to market. The Economic Council was meant to improve planning and cooperation, drawing up long-term plans to further integrate regions and the flow of materials between connected industries. Orlov argues that "the new management structure brought management closer to production, making things more specific and efficient. It allowed

for better use of local resources, for the manifestation of local initiative. For three or four years, the Economic Council acted quite effectively. This was also facilitated by the presence of local minerals, a rather powerful energy base, transport opportunities and a number of other factors.”⁴⁷⁰

This initial restructuring was successful in tackling the bureaucratic centralism that had grown under Stalin, where false accounting, fraud, and graft that was prevalent within the system had slowed economic growth. By 1958, the gross industrial output from the city was reported at 2.7 times the level at the start of the decade. A significant part of this boost came from increased production at the city’s largest industries, with STZ reporting 1.4 times the number of tractors produced, and the rolled steel coming out of Red October was 1.5 times the same levels as in 1950.⁴⁷¹

However, the “three or four years” of success that Orlov refers to were before a new problem of these economic reforms became apparent—with all regions responsible for their own enterprises, there was a push for self-sufficiency that in the long-run led to economic isolation. In 1962, five years into the Seven Year Plan, these economic zones would be consolidated in hopes of retaining the benefits of local management, while also accounting for more trade between regional partners. Volgograd became part of the “Nizhne-Volzhsky” economic council, which merged the Volgograd region with Astrakhan and the Kalmyk ASSR. In 1965, these economic councils would dissolve entirely, as the experiment with decentralization came to an end with the ouster of Khrushchev and Leonid Brezhnev’s reassertion of state control on the economy.⁴⁷² Still, the rapid growth of industry in the city during the period of de-Stalinization meant work for

⁴⁷⁰ Orlov, *Istoriia rodnogo kraia*, 185.

⁴⁷¹ Ibid, 186.

⁴⁷² Ibid.

hundreds of thousands of *Stalingradtsy*, all of whom were trying to navigate the new economic order as it applied to their daily lives.

Even as early as 1955, as attempts to steer the Soviet economy toward meeting the promises of “everyday” socialism (housing, foodstuffs, and light industry) increased, there were already signs that the relationship between Soviet laborers and their workplaces was undergoing a transformation. The party and state had begun to increasingly place value on the specialist laborer, the cadres of highly educated workers who could make full use of technology to optimize their labor’s role in the wider Soviet economy. Meanwhile, an increasingly educated workforce was looking to the state to provide the comfort and security that a modern socialist society should enjoy, and who felt increasingly empowered to challenge the state and party bureaucracy when they felt those needs were insufficiently met. This shift in expectations coincided and was in part fueled by the political disruption of de-Stalinization and broader social trends in Soviet life during the late 1950s-early 1960s.

De-Stalinizing the Workplace

As we saw in previous chapters, it was around 1956 that economic investment in Stalingrad was picking up and the population was exponentially growing compared to immediate postwar levels. The flurry of work across the city was accompanied by a new campaign of improving the techniques and morale of “socialist labor,” including a shake-up in management and a campaign against corruption, graft, and waste that began not long after Stalin’s death. With the tacit approval of criticism of the Stalin, “the *vozhd*,” (or “boss”) in party parlance, part of De-

Stalinization also included a campaign against “mini-Stalins”—the heads of enterprises who were labeled such by subordinates that saw similar autocratic abuses of power in their own leaders.

In the summer of 1955, we can already observe “rationalization” efforts taking place in the city’s major industrial hubs. At the Stalingrad River Port in Krasnoarmeisk, N. Rubtsov, a technician at the port bemoaned the lack of progress in utilizing the new floating steam cranes and other mechanisms in the loading and unloading of freight. Instead, “in some production areas, a number of works are still carried out manually, and many workers are employed in them. The power of the mechanisms is not always used.”⁴⁷³

Nearly 90 km along the river to the north, workers at STZ were facing their own challenges to change the factory’s procedures. After having been encouraged to make “rationalization” proposals to increase efficiency, one of the chief machinists, V. Chetyrin, had proposed a new, more efficient design for the support arms of tractor seats (complete with working prototypes). This had been in 1952. According to Chetyrin, his experimental design languished in bureaucratic limbo, with no steps toward implementation having been made—no new drawings had been issued for the new parts, nor had new molds been made. By Chetyrin’s estimate, the three-year delay had cost the plant 250 tons of metal by using the existing model instead of his design. He called for a revolution in the way the plant pursued innovation and an end to the red tape that had kept his project sidelined.⁴⁷⁴

While in some instances systems were slow to move, in others blame could be laid at the feet of individual actors. Back at the steelworks, another frustrated worker complained that “at the Red October plant, rationalization work is not held in high esteem. You have to knock on the

⁴⁷³ N. Rubtsov, “Mekhaniziruem ruchnoi trud,” *Stalingradskaia pravda*, June 12, 1955, 1.

⁴⁷⁴ V. Chetyrin, “Gde proizvesti eksperiment?,” *Stalingradskaia pravda*, June 12, 1955, 2.

thresholds of the authorities a lot before they accept your proposal, you have to spend even more work and time to achieve its implementation” V. Alekseenko, a crew foreman in the blooming mill recounts his struggle to implement his innovative approach to mechanize “fire cleaning” (a finishing process used in the making of stainless steel and other specialized steel products) at the plant and the obstacles he encountered due to the workshop’s chief engineer. He writes, “I proposed to mechanize the fire cleaning of workpieces in the blooming mill. To mount and master the unit, they gave me five days. This time is not enough for such a big task, and I asked for three to four weeks. But the chief engineer, comrade Lapshov, agreed only for ten days. During this period, of course, I could not finish the installation and had to stay in the shop after my shifts. If I had been given enough time, blooming fire sweeps would have been mechanized long ago.”⁴⁷⁵

Ultimately, Alekseenko alleges, the regional party committee had to step in to ensure mechanization was properly integrated. Still, the foreman complains that the plant’s entrenched bureaucracy remained a problem to be overcome. Even after the party’s intervention, Alekseenko’s team still lacked the proper copyright certificate for the invention, because “the plant did not send the required documents,” and instead the workshop had been forced to correspond with the Technical Department of the Ministry themselves. “It seems to me that the recognition of authorship for an invention and improvement is an important stimulus for improving innovation, and the plant management should be interested in this.”⁴⁷⁶ Alekseenko’s letter to the city’s organ of the party press clearly shows that he thought his complaint would garner enough support from the editors to make publication, rather than be shelved. He was right,

⁴⁷⁵ V. Alekseenko, “Eto ne lichnoe delo,” SP, June 12, 1955, 2.

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid.

and his story sends a clear message for the city's industries to take rationalization efforts seriously.

On the other hand, rationalization efforts that saw success were just cause for celebration. Later that month, the paper lauded the efforts at STZ, where F. B. Dyakonov, one of the masters of the cold-press steelworks, had recently completed the reorganization of his shop so that he was able to oversee two parts manufacturing lines instead of just one, effectively doubling his contributions to factory operations.⁴⁷⁷ While the impact on the quality of the work was not something discussed in the piece, nor how it impacted the work of other parts of the plant, the message was clear: rationalization efforts were making STZ more efficient and more productive.

In the planned economy, innovations in one enterprise could greatly impact questions of manufacturing in others, especially those farther down the chain that started with raw materials and ended with finished products. Communication and sharing of technical knowledge were a means of implementing rationalization across industries. Conferences of workers from multiple industries were held in Stalingrad so that the city's various enterprises fit into the greater economic picture of the city.

In the summer of 1956, a major gathering of foremen, advanced workers, engineers, and technicians from the planning office were brought together at the Club of the regional industrial council "to develop and approve measures to improve the work of trade cooperation." The Chairman for the technical council S. I. Fortuna did not mince words in his opening remarks, stating that the *artels* (specialized manufacturing collectives) in the region had much to improve on throughout the stages of industrial

⁴⁷⁷ "Dve operatsii odnovremennno," *Stalingradskaiia Pravda*, June 20, 1956, 1.

production—raw materials were poorly manufactured, industrial waste was rampant, and the finished products produced were “low-quality.”⁴⁷⁸ The assembled workers were then tasked with both sharing what challenges their teams faced and to find solutions by drawing on the expertise of others. While changes would take time, the conference would help identify how the practices of the highest performing *artels* could be implemented in other aspects of the city’s economy.

Stories such as these would most likely have been commonplace across the city’s industries at this time, and across the whole of the Soviet sphere of influence, as a confluence of new technologies and cultural expectations were felt on a planned economy that was already being redefined in the political wake of the post-Stalin world.

Labor and Social Mobility

The other major policy shift that had major consequences for Stalingrad’s workers was the decriminalization of illicit job switching. As the labor market opened, workers were incentivized to pursue new careers, gain new skills, and continue their technical education. As we have noted, many amenities like housing were allocated by industry, so where one worked could have a major impact on their standard of living. This also provided the opportunity for enterprises to attempt to attract talented, educated workers to their own operation.

Starting in 1956, the back pages of *Stalingradskaia/Volgogradskaia pravda* ballooned with “help wanted” ads, illustrating how this new labor mobility impacted the city’s workers and particularly new laborers entering the workforce fresh from the city’s

⁴⁷⁸ “Konferentsiia rabotnikov promyslovoi kooperatsii,” *Stalingradskaia Pravda*, June 20, 1956, 1.

schools and universities. Applicants were given information about the specifics of the job, the qualifications needed, whether additional training would be provided, and how to contact the relevant labor office to apply or seek more information. These “*Trebuiutsia*” (“Required”) positions, also illustrate which facets of the city’s labor market were in highest demand. Unsurprisingly, the positions most often sought were not just for common day-laborers, but specialists.

Construction obviously remained one of the city’s largest industries during this time, but the positions in highest demand were for specialists: plumbers, electricians, and gas-line installers, crane operators, and mechanics for the fleets of construction vehicles and trucks that belonged to each trust. STZ and Red October steel works were also major employers, seeking engineers, welders, and chemists as they sought to modernize their operations. *Gidrostroi*, the construction firm behind the hydroelectric station, offered hostel housing for single workers and even the families of dam builders.⁴⁷⁹ The city’s transportation industries also were constantly looking for drivers, train engineers, and dock workers at the city’s industrial riverport in Krasnoarmeisk. Another burgeoning industry in high demand was the need for gas workers as the city continued to grow its refineries for oil and natural gas, while electricians and line workers helped expand the electric grid from the new power plant throughout the city and even into the countryside. There were also a fair number of desk jobs with a focus on record keeping and communications to staff the office bureaucracies at the heart of any operation. It was not uncommon for salaries to be listed alongside postings.⁴⁸⁰

⁴⁷⁹ “*Trebuiutsia*,” *Stalingradskaia pravda*, August 11, 1956, 4.

⁴⁸⁰ “*Trebuiutsia*,” *Volgogradskaia pravda*, October 26, 1961.

The city's Labor Reserves Department (*Upravlenie trudovykh rezervov*) was also an option that helped match laborers with worksites around the city, and offered training for those who would need to learn the specifics of a given trade, with some courses lasting weeks, with others lasting months. Teenagers aged 16-18 could even apply to gain experience, particularly in the construction fields as carpenters, masons, plasterers, and concrete workers.⁴⁸¹ Even temporary work, like overnight shifts in warehouses, event staff for sporting competitions, or even ticket-takers for a traveling circus passing through the city might be advertised here.

Job listings were not always just for work in the city, as other postings called for relocation within the region or constant travel. Teaching jobs in rural cities and on collective farms tried to attract teachers from the city's Pedagogical Institute to the countryside where they were desperately needed. Similarly, agronomists and veterinarians from the Agricultural college might have seen postings for a permanent position tied to a collective farm or to service farms in a broader region.⁴⁸²

Sometimes the nature of the job itself moved with the worker, as was the case with the cadre of powerline laborers who were tasked with building the infrastructure that would send power from the XXII Party Congress Hydroelectric Station all the way to Moscow. Part of this project—which was designed to use new, state-of-the-art high-power direct current transmission technology, one of the first projects to do so anywhere in the world—was undertaken by the Stalingradelektroset'stoi trust and Yuzhelektroset'stoi trust, who had been commissioned to build the lines from Stalingrad to Donbass. The task required pouring concrete footings, erecting steel supports dozens

⁴⁸¹ "Upravlenie trudovykh rezervov," *Stalingradskaia pravda*, August 11, 1956, 4.

⁴⁸² "Trebiuitsia," *Volgogradskaia pravda*, October 26, 1961.

of meters high, and running cable between them at more than 800 locations along the 473 km route. The teams out of Stalingrad lived constantly on the move from one site to the next, a collection of concrete workers, steelworkers, and “steeplejacks” (*verkholazi*) who worked the lines high above the ground. Their efforts were hailed as a major step toward completing Lenin’s goal of electrification, that crucial element of building communism. As the first installers of such a line in the Soviet Union and the world, they would also pave the way with a valuable new technology to connect more of the vast spaces of the Soviet Union to its growing electrical grid.⁴⁸³



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While there appeared to be no shortage of work to be had, what most *Stalingradtsy* craved at this time was social stability and the promise of upward mobility. As we saw in the introduction of the chapter, those who made their careers serving the needs of the Soviet state could go far, even as non-party members.

⁴⁸³ L. Bagdasarian, “Pervaia v mire,” *Volgogradskaia pravda*, September 17, 1961.

⁴⁸⁴ Left, photo by B. Basantseva of *vekhloz* Mikhail Lazarev, *Stalingradskaia pravda*, August 15, 1956, p. 2. Right, photo by V. Roldugina, from left to right: members of *Stalingradelektroset’sroi* G. Sukhov, V. Galaburda (master), N. Shipulin, appearing in L. Bagdasarian, “Pervaia v mire.”

Repairing the Social Safety Net—Pensioners in Stalingrad

In 1956, one of Khrushchev's most ambitious reforms was to overhaul the Soviet pension system. According to Soviet labor historian Mark B. Smith, the intent was to create a system more capable of alleviating "social risk" (extreme poverty, homelessness, social security, lack of healthcare, etc.) in accordance with his vision of a modern socialist society. This reform of the Soviet welfare system "touched almost all areas of life, from jobs to leisure, creating a new kind of industrial society, in which many social risks had been artificially eliminated. The effectiveness of this system was highly uneven, and many miserable examples of welfare provisions persisted, but this revised relationship between risk and welfare guided the mentalities of policy makers and ordinary people alike."⁴⁸⁵ In Stalingrad, some of these "miserable examples" spilled over into the pages of *Stalingradskaia pravda*, as pensioners and elderly workers attempted to navigate the new system.

In the Voroshilov region, the district office of the Social Security Council set up an information desk to help clarify the new Law on State Pensions. According to V. Sergeev, a retired volunteer who helped work at the resource desk, anywhere from forty-five to eighty people came each day looking for help navigating the changes to the system. Sometimes, their stories were positive: "The locomotive driver N. S. Perebinos, who had worked on the railways for half a century, was told that he would receive twice as much pension under the new Law. The same kind of information was given to F. A. Razgonin, who has forty-five years of work experience, D. S. Tynanaeva, born in 1855, and many others."⁴⁸⁶

⁴⁸⁵ Mark B. Smith, "The Withering Away of the Danger Society: The Pensions Reforms of 1956 and 1964 in the Soviet Union," *Social Science History* 39, no. 1 (2015): 129-148.

⁴⁸⁶ V. Sergeev, "Peresmotr pensii—bol'shoe delo," *Stalingradskaia pravda*, August 25, 1956, 2.

However, Sergeev also identified “abnormal phenomena” that occurred because of the new law and the documentation required to receive their allotted pensions. He alleged that the administration of many enterprises was reluctant to issue certificates of wages received by pensioners, blaming their “refusal to comply” by the lack of relevant instructions from the Social Security administration. In other cases, some administrators seem to lack the records in order to document work experience. The story of one Comrade Rodionova stuck with Sergeev, who brought in certification from the hosiery and knitwear factory where she had worked that stated she had been employed there for “a number of years before the war” (the correct answer on the form, one must imagine, would include the actual number). Petitioners in this case would need to return to the Social Security administration with a witness in tow who could verify their employment. In best-case scenarios, these unlucky pensioners could draw on support from trade unions to help them achieve verification, but doing so took time and slowed down the office’s ability to process new claims. Sergeev also warned that there appeared to be bad actors trying to game the new system: “Many of the citizens who turn to the information desk do not have relatives and often visit with “compassionate” acquaintances, who often appropriate parts of pensions for themselves. It would be necessary to examine such pensioners, and to connect them to nursing homes.”⁴⁸⁷

In conclusion, the reason he gives for feeling the need to write to the editors is an appeal for greater support for the new system. “At present, when pensions are being reviewed, it is necessary that the public should not stand aside from this matter, which is of national importance. It should provide all possible assistance to the departments of social security, since they are now doing the main work with pensioners.”⁴⁸⁸ As a pensioner himself, who had

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid.

survived years of Stalinist industrialization, collectivization, and two world wars, Sergeev's letter embodied the conviction that the time for his generation to see the promises of socialism finally realized had come.

Women in the Workforce

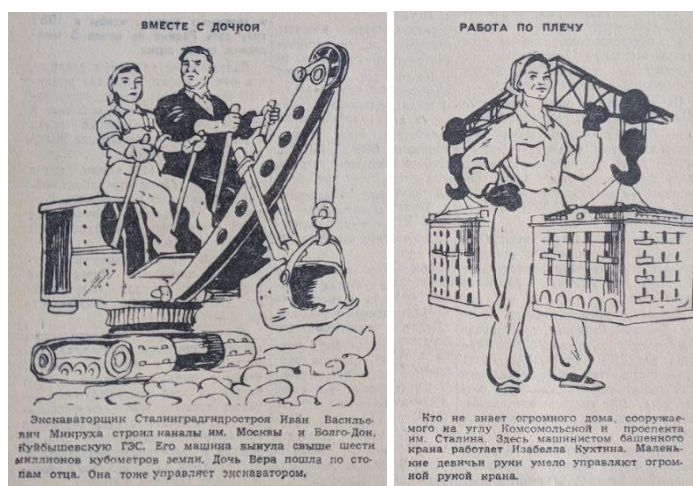
If we continue to compare the new "Soviet Dream" of the 1950s with its American counterpart—sprawling suburbs of single-family homes full of stay-at-home housewives—the contrast is stark.⁴⁸⁹ In 1955, women above the age of twenty still largely outnumbered men following the demographic shift of the war years, and they remained an integral part of the Soviet economy. What is more, women in the workforce were not constrained to white collar desk jobs as secretaries, clerks, or switchboard operators—women worked manual labor, technical fields, operated heavy machinery, and in engineering and scientific fields, with more young women finishing their education with technical and upper-level degrees entering the workforce with each passing year. The working women of Stalingrad's labor exploits were chronicled by the local press with the same enthusiasm as their male counterparts, their testament proving the progressive nature of socialist freedom of women and gender "equality."⁴⁹⁰

⁴⁸⁹ For more on the experience of women in the suburban United States, see Kim V. L. England, "Changing Suburbs, Changing Women: Geographic Perspectives on Suburban Women and Suburbanization," in *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 14, no. 1 (1993): 24–43. For how Western lifestyles impacted Soviet expectations, see György Péteri, *Imagining the West in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010).

⁴⁹⁰ For more on the post-Stalin evolution of Soviet gender roles, see Susan E. Reid, "Cold War in the Kitchen: Gender and the De-Stalinization of Consumer Taste in the Soviet Union under Khrushchev," in *Slavic Review* 61, no. 2 (2002): 211–52. Of course, gender roles in the home remained entrenched, leading many women to suffer the "double burden" of a full-time job, then coming home to a spouse who expected them to still fulfill the functions of the typical homemaker responsible for cooking, cleaning, childcare, and laundry. In addition, makeup of the top echelons of the party, industry, and professional bureaucratic leadership remained dominated by men.



Portraits of women's stories were not uncommon in the local press, as the party continued to exemplify the ideal Soviet worker with personal biographies and exemplary employees. In some cases, the subject of these profiles even had their likeness canonized in miniature cartoons (*kartinka*). In one such slate of anecdotal labor highlights, two women's stories illustrate some of the technical careers women were working in Stalingrad at this time.



The first cartoon on the left is titled “Together with Daughter,” which illustrates the family history of Vera Ivanovna Mikrukha and her father Ivan Vasilyevich, who had worked as a machine operator on major canal projects such as the Volga Don and even the Kuibyshev hydroelectric station. His daughter “followed in her father’s footsteps” and now is also an excavator operator. In the second depiction titled “Shouldering the Work,” the worker being

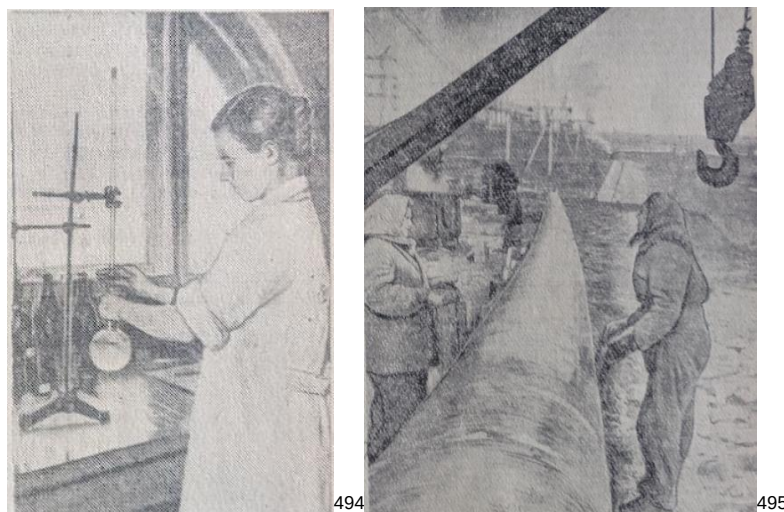
⁴⁹¹ Uncredited photograph appearing alongside announcements for Constitution Day celebrations in Volgograd, part of a 5-panel spread reading “Peace, Work, Freedom (*Svoboda*-this image), Equality, Fraternity, and Happiness.” December 5, 1961, 1.

celebrated is crane operator Isabella Kuktina, who is responsible for operating the crane at one of the city's most visible construction sites, a massive apartment complex building being erected in the heart of the city center at the intersection of Komsomolskaya Street and Prospekt Stalina. Her small stature does not represent her massive contribution to the project, as her "small girlish hands skillfully control the huge arm of the crane."⁴⁹² Beyond specialist fields, many women still worked in the construction industries as bricklayers, metalworkers, carpenters, pipefitters, plasterers, and more.

However, the majority of women in the Soviet workforce had jobs coded in the "feminine" sphere. Women remained a large percentage of cafeteria workers, laundromat workers, nurses and healthcare orderlies, office clerks, shopkeepers, and educators in the city's many primary schools and kindergartens ("*detski sad*"). Many women worked in factories, but even then, one can observe a sort of soft division between "heavy" industry (steelworks, machining, etc.) being more dominated by male workers while female laborers worked the lines at "light" industries (foodstuffs, clothing mills, appliances, chemical plants, etc.). Women in Stalingrad can and often did have careers, with opportunities for education and advancement within their fields. However, there also remained a *de facto* limit on this upper mobility, a sort of Soviet "glass ceiling," where the highest reaches of the party bureaucracy, factory management, and heads of the largest construction trusts were still dominated by men.⁴⁹³

⁴⁹² "Vmeste s dochkoi" and "Rabota po plechu," *Stalingradskaia pravda*, August 11, 1956, 2.

⁴⁹³ See Alice Shuster, "Women's Role in the Soviet Union: Ideology and Reality," in *The Russian Review* 30, no. 3 (1971): 260-277, 264.



This did not mean that female workers were less likely to succeed in their jobs or receive acclaim for their efforts in the party press alongside their male counterparts. In the summer of 1955, a milkmaid at a nearby kolkhoz named “Reconstruction” was asked to speak to an assembly of dairy workers at a regional agricultural conference being held in the city. Maria Ivanovna Fedorova had gained a name for herself by shattering previous expectations of the milk yield possible per cow, and the press had attempted to make her a minor celebrity in Stalingrad oblast’s agriculture sphere. Her story highlights not just her hard work, but also how critical technical and scientific know-how were to successful production, and how her own “rationalization” efforts made her feat possible.

In the summer of 1955, Fedorova was invited to Stalingrad to speak at a conference for young workers. Despite her young age and the fact that she was relatively new to the profession, in her first year working with her bovine charges, Federova was able to obtain (on average) 3,580 kilograms of milk from each of her twelve cows, winning first place in the regional labor

⁴⁹⁴ V. Smetanikova, photo of Lab Technician R. Chudnova analyzing water sample at Stalingrad Water Treatment Plant, “Voda poshla po magistraliam,” *Stalingradskaia pravda*, July 10, 1956, 3.

⁴⁹⁵ A. Kurov, photo of women working on the construction of a natural gas pipeline destined for Volzhsky, *Stalingradskaia pravda*, November 12, 1961, 3.

competition for milkmaids in 1954. The assembled crowd was eager to hear the secret of her success, listening intently to the “simple, unsophisticated speech of the young milkmaid.”⁴⁹⁶

While Fedorova’s methods were extremely labor intensive, keeping up strict feeding schedules and milking regimen throughout the day, what set her operation apart was her implementation and mastery of the latest technologies in dairy production. Mechanical milking apparatuses were still new to most collective farms, and optimal milking had to be carried out four times a day, each going through a multi-stage cycle across the entire herd. Not only did this result in more milk per cow, but the milk will contain a higher fat content than milking the cows by hand. Fedorova explained that she wished she could do more—the latest research suggests that the yield could be further increased by feeding the cows special vitamin-rich concentrates, but that her state farm currently did not have access to them at this time.

She concluded with the assertion that “In 1955, I’m planning on milking 4,000 liters from each cow” filled the lecture hall with raucous applause.⁴⁹⁷ Even in the niche field of dairy production, Maria Fedorova cuts the ideal figure of a Soviet working woman—she melds herculean effort with the mind of an engineer trained on optimization and efficiency, her efforts contributing to a society desperate for more access to consumer goods. Her story is also worth noting, as it also highlights the attempts to rationalize labor in the Soviet countryside, a topic which was becoming an increasingly visible topic for readers in the city.

Restructuring Industrial Agriculture: The Virgin Lands and “The Queen of the Fields”

⁴⁹⁶ “Today in our Oblast,” *Stalingradskaja pravda*, June 20, 1955, 1.

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid.

Before 1954, Stalingrad party press contained little news from the countryside. Indeed, stories trying to highlight the positives in Soviet agriculture were hard to find in the immediate post-war years. The collective farms in the Soviet breadbasket (Ukraine and Southern Russia, including the Stalingrad region) were already barely producing at pre revolutionary levels prior to the war, and mass displacement and destruction ravaged rural villages as the front moved East and then West again.⁴⁹⁸ Wartime necessity shifted production in Soviet industry from tractors to tanks, and the existing fleets of farming machinery belonging to the Machine Tractor Stations (MTS) were in dire disrepair from lack of maintenance and new parts. Morale on the collective farms was low, with workers seeing little economic incentive to work beyond the bare minimum required workdays, with most collective farmers focusing their energies on cultivating their own small private plots rather than the massive fields owned by the state.⁴⁹⁹ There was little opportunity for education or advancement in these rural areas, and the population crisis left by the war was further exacerbated as more and more working age men fled for urban centers—veterans who had served in the Red Army had more freedoms to make such moves, meaning that the women left behind, already the majority in most regions, sometimes outnumbered men by as much as three to one.⁵⁰⁰

Khrushchev was no stranger to farming when he finally consolidated his position atop the Soviet collective leadership post-Stalin. In fact, he might have been the most well-versed in agriculture of all of Stalin's inner circle. In his years heading the government in Kyiv, overseeing huge swathes of the most productive acreage in all Soviet agriculture, he had liked to get his

⁴⁹⁸ Hale-Dorrell, *Corn Crusade*, 16.

⁴⁹⁹ Katja Buisch and Timur Mukhamatulin. "Coming to Terms with the Village: Stalin's Death and the Reassessment of Rural-Urban Relations in the Soviet Union," in *Jahrbücher Für Geschichte Osteuropas* 65, no. 3 (2017): 401–22.

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid.

hands dirty down on the farm, always eager to engage with farmers to better understand the rationale behind their practices. Khrushchev came from peasant stock, and his “everyman” demeanor lent him a likability among farmers that might have dismissed his snobbish, bureaucratic counterparts in the Central Committee.⁵⁰¹

Khrushchev had also been fond of corn from an early age, when he remembered growing up on the farm in Ukraine where ears of corn made for a summertime treat. Corn had been known as the Ukrainian peasants “crop of last resort.” It was typically only planted in the event a particularly heavy frost or dry spring had killed the winter wheat that was planted the previous Autumn. Corn’s growing cycle was such that it could be planted in the spring and still harvested before the onset of winter. However, it remained far from the ideal crop for much of Russia’s climate, which did not see the same moisture over its summers as the “Corn Belt” in the Midwest of the United States.

Still, as Khrushchev surveyed the wreckage of Soviet agriculture left to him by Stalin and the looming successive crises of famine, hunger for political reform, and rising discontent among workers in the Soviet Union and the eastern bloc, he saw in corn a means to save the revolution.⁵⁰² If Khrushchev could reform the agricultural sector, offering collective farmers a seat at the table of Soviet modernity, corn would provide roadmap to a prosperous Soviet society, where even the lowliest worker and not just the bosses would eat more than just bread, but the milk, eggs, and meat that had long been scarce since the mad dash of industrialization began in the late 1920s. Khrushchev’s new vision for agriculture was informed by many

⁵⁰¹ For Khrushchev’s own autobiographical perspective, see Nikita Khrushchev, *Khrushchev Remembers*, trans. and ed. by Strobe Talbott, (Boston: Little Brown and Co., 1970). Other notable biographies include Roy Medvedev, *Khrushchev*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982) and Robert Taubman, *Khrushchev: The Man and His Era* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2003).

⁵⁰² Hale-Dorrell, *Corn Crusade*, 2-3.

concerns: fear of revolt from below certainly remained chief among them (especially following the events in Novocherkassk in 1962), but also for his desire to promote communist modernity as a viable alternative to the developing world, and indeed a sincere desire to improve the lives of the Soviet people. Though his vision would ultimately fall short of its goals, many historians have been too quick to write off corn as a quirk of Khrushchev and a harebrained scheme that went nowhere, rather than a carefully calculated part of his vision to reform Soviet society writ large.⁵⁰³

Corn was also the point of international contact across the Iron Curtain. Despite being the heart of capitalist opposition to the world socialist cause, in the postwar era the United States also had industrialized agriculture that was the envy of the world, and Khrushchev was eager to learn the secrets of their success. Hale-Dorrell traces the success of corn in the American context following the disruptions of the Great Depression and Dust Bowl, and several economic and climate factors can explain the crop's rise to prominence by the late 1940s-early 1950s. Agronomy played a huge role, with American farmers able to take advantage of ideal growing conditions to experiment with different seed strains to increase yields without necessarily needing to increase the acreage. Even as the number of farms shrank, these innovations meant that yields continued to improve at a steady pace, and the robust livestock trade in the United States meant that silage sold higher on markets than other agricultural byproducts. Khrushchev was eager to understand the technological side of US agriculture, evidenced by the frequent delegations sent to American corn country and the Soviet leader's own historic expedition to the

⁵⁰³ Outspoken critics of Khrushchev's agrarian policies range as far back as early Sovietologists, see Lazar Volin, "Soviet Agriculture under Khrushchev," in *The American Economic Review* 49, no. 2 (1959): 15–32, and Erich Straus, *Soviet Agriculture in Perspective; a Study of Its Successes and Failures*, (New York: Praeger, 1969), through more recent studies from A. I. Liushin "General 'Maize' as One of the Failed Managerial Experiments of N. S. Khrushchev," in *Upravlencheskoe Konsul'tirovanie*, no. 11 (2022): 98–110.

US in 1959. Hale-Dorrell also shows that he was ready to consider innovations from the developing world as well, as agricultural modernity was one of the key areas of Soviet outreach to decolonizing states where he hoped to raise Soviet prestige.⁵⁰⁴

But Khrushchev also genuinely thought that Soviet agronomists could overcome some of the deficiencies inherent to Soviet corn growing through their own innovations. While American farming had been driven by ultra-productive small farms with yields making up for lack of acreage sown, Khrushchev thought that large scale farming of hitherto unworked “Virgin Lands” could make up the difference. Whereas American corn was bolstered by hybrid strains and favorable climate, Soviet agriculture would instead have to rely on cunning irrigation practices and taking time to develop their own variants suited for local climates. Matching and overtaking the high yields common in US grain markets would be dependent on quantity, not just quality.

As we see the rise of corn play out in the Stalingrad press, several of these initiatives become evident as the party attempted to educate the populace on the importance of the new crop to Khrushchev’s new economic vision of abundance. Khrushchev needed to recruit and incentivize a new type of *kolkhoznik*, of rural workers who were educated and technologically savvy, as the battle for higher yields would require a new class of agricultural experts. We can watch corn ramp up in the region, from a few select test farms in 1954-55, to huge spans of Stalingrad oblast dedicated to corn production by the early 1960s. Throughout this period, the biggest question was that of yields, with every marginal tick upward in the amount of grain and biomass produced per acre a cause for celebration. All the while, we can see the vision of the new Soviet modernity creep further from the city and into the countryside, with the village being increasingly replaced by a sort of “small-town” approach that utilized new mass housing

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid, 7.

methods—after Soviet peasants long saw little fruit of their labor under Stalin, Khrushchev understood that to win the countryside rural laborers would also need to see the upsides of the new popular consumerism and the new Soviet Dream of modern, privatized housing.⁵⁰⁵

The 1950s and 1960s would prove a transformative time in the economy of the Stalingrad region as Khrushchev's agricultural initiatives swept across the lands near the Volga. As Khrushchev promised a socialist economy with better access to high quality foodstuffs, to deliver those results the state was desperately looking for ways to increase yield across the agricultural sector. As the initiative to transform Soviet agriculture gathered pace, so too did the place of corn in the everyday imaginations of *Stalingradtsy*, if only due to the fact that coverage of it became an inescapable part of the party's daily coverage.⁵⁰⁶ Corn was in the spotlight, along with all the products it would allegedly soon bring to city-dwellers.

Following the massive disruption to agriculture in the region during the war, rebuilding a modern agricultural sector dependent on state-run collective farms was no small task. Manpower shortages that had initially been tackled by the resettlement administration of refugees following the war then had to contend still with a steady pull of industrial jobs hungry for laborers in the cities, where education opportunities and career advancement were more readily available than on the *kolkhoz*. What's more, agriculture remained extremely labor intensive, and despite the peacetime shift of the Stalingrad Tractor Factory away from tanks and back to their standard line of agricultural machines, collective farms still struggled to obtain enough tractors, combines, and other critical implements (to say nothing of skilled operators and mechanics to keep the fleets

⁵⁰⁵ See Smith, *Communism on Tomorrow Street*, Timo Vihavainen and Elena Bogdanova, *Communism and Consumerism: The Soviet Alternative to the Affluent Society*. (Boston: Brill, 2015), Susan E. Reid, "Cold War Binaries and the Culture of Consumption in the Late Soviet Home," in *Journal of Historical Research in Marketing* 8, no. 1 (2016): 17–43.

⁵⁰⁶ For instance, see "V pokhod za kukuruzu!," *Volgogradskaya pravda*, May 11, 1963, 1.

running) to meet the sheer demand. Until well into the 1950s, much of the labor on collective farms was done by teams of *kolkhozniks* laboring by hand.

As a result, when Khrushchev first came to power, he was left with a multilayered problem. How to increase agricultural yield, when unlike the factories, rationalization and optimization cannot pose the easy solution—the “best methods” were already agreed upon by most agronomists but were constrained instead by the lack of skilled labor and capital assets needed to implement them. The approach he adopted, as evidenced in the Volgograd region, was multipronged: his agricultural program would increase the acreage of lands being farmed, drive output of new agricultural machines to further mechanize the sector, create a new class of agricultural specialists and upgrade rural communities with modern amenities to attract and retain workers, and adopt new crops, such as corn, peas, and melons to increase diversity of products as well as the caloric yield of every hectare farmed.

However, this plan would take time, and in the earliest days of Khrushchev’s tenure at the head of the Soviet state, labor initiatives in agriculture looked very similar to those in the Stalinist past. During the summer harvest of 1956, the pages of *Stalingradskiaia pravda* were lush with articles extolling workers to push for greater agricultural production. The “political work” done by the party among agricultural laborers at this time was seen as key to accelerate timelines, increase yield, and ensure fulfillment of the ever-important economic plan.”⁵⁰⁷ Planning and developing socialist labor competitions, volunteer days, and other agitprop work among state farms was seen as just as critical to the success of the harvest as the farm workers’ labor. Party organizations that neglected their duties in rural communities could fall behind and be lambasted as slackers, like the “underprepared” party organization at the “Bolshevik”

⁵⁰⁷ “Usilit’ politicheskuiu rabotu na uborke urozhaiia,” *Stalingradskia pravda*, July 28, 1956, 1.

collective farm (about 50 km northwest of the city) during this harvest season, where yields had supposedly suffered as a result. The party had to take a leading role even beyond the governing bodies of the kolkhoz, to ensure success:

Harvesting and grain procurement is the most important economic and political campaign. Its successful implementation depends on skillful organizational and political work among the masses, on the maximum mobilization of all forces in the heart. To a large extent, the success of harvesting also depends on the organization of labor, the highly productive use of technology, the widespread introduction of mechanization, and the development of socialist competitions.⁵⁰⁸

Ultimately, without finding success in increasing agricultural production and thereby access to foodstuffs for urban workers, Khrushchev's economic vision would fail. However, the Soviet Premier truly believed he had found just the thing to jump-start Soviet industrial agriculture: corn, "queen of the fields.". However, introducing a new crop into this labor environment (let alone the actual climate of the south Russian steppe) would inevitably prove difficult.

"On the Campaign for Corn!": The Introduction of Corn to Stalingrad Region

In the absence of the overarching structural changes to Soviet agriculture, the party was forced to make the most of the conditions on state-operated collective farms. But overarching structural reforms were indeed coming, and the harbingers of these changes were already appearing in the party press, namely the embrace of corn as a "miracle" crop that would become one of the driving forces of Volgograd's agricultural economy. In surveying the party press, one can see a sharp increase in stories on the planting of corn in the region in the 1955 growing

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid.

season. The crop was an import to the region, which traditionally had a strong agricultural base around crops like wheat, barley, and rye.



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The earliest planting efforts were closely monitored. One area that had been hand-picked for corn cultivation in the oblast was the Leninsk district, located just east of the city across the Volga, which contained large parts of the silt-rich soil of the lower floodplain where the river bends sharply east at the city's southern tip. Small plots of corn were to be planned at several collective farms, where agronomists had surveyed and set aside the land that they believed best suited for the crop and its irrigation. Preparations also included spreading tons of manure and special superphosphates to get the soil balanced to pH levels suitable for growing maize on an industrial scale. There was even special consideration given to the selection of the seed grain that

⁵⁰⁹ "V pokhod za kukuruzu!," *Volgogradskaya pravda*, May 11, 1963, 1.

would be used, requiring threshing corn by hand, a task that saw even housewives and schoolchildren on the collective farms taking part.⁵¹⁰

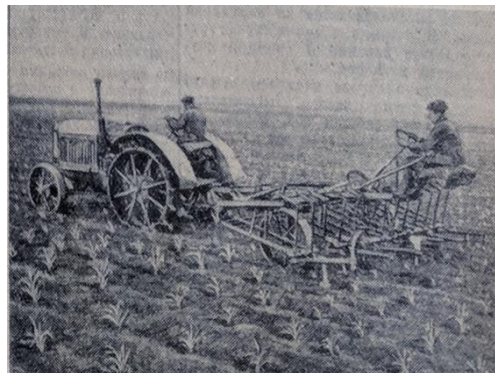
Once again, the party was heavily involved in trying to help solve the question of labor necessary to ensure the crop's success. The regional Komsomol was already organizing close to 50 new youth brigades that would help with the labor on these plots; the party was heavily involved in the planning and organizing responsibilities for other local institutions. Even agronomists on the staff for the School of Agricultural Mechanization were involved as advisors and overseers for the new plots.⁵¹¹

Interest in the growing of corn remained high (at least for the editors of the city press), who continued to educate their readers on the spread of the crop throughout the region. Later that same summer, two journalists from the local office of *Stalingradskaia pravda* spent time on two collective farms in the Dubovsky district (about 35 km north of the site of the Kuybyshev hydroelectric station), where the crop was being trialed for widespread cultivation. They highlighted the methods needed to grow corn in the region, which collective farms had recently introduced alongside their usual crops. The seeding of corn fields was a mechanized task for two-man teams, one driving the tractor, and another operating the seeder which was pulled behind. The spacing of the rows and the distance between each stalk was extremely important for the crop's viability and it took skilled crews to get it right. Tending the corn once the shoots were up remained largely dependent on manual labor of kolkhozniks, an extremely labor-intensive process. The agronomist of the collective farm "Voroshilov" Elena Timofeeva Minaeva (depicted in the center of the left photograph below) is illustrating to two farmers how seeding often results in multiple plants growing from the same "nest." In order for each plant to reach its

⁵¹⁰ "Podgotovka k posevu kukuruzy," *Stalingradskaia pravda*, April 4, 1955, 1.

⁵¹¹ Ibid.

potential, it is important to sort through each nest and to determine (by counting the leaves on each shoot) which plants to leave and which to uproot, all without damaging the root systems of the plants that remain. The whole operation requires practiced skill to assess and repeat the process thousands of times as groups of kolkhozniks would sweep through the rows of neatly planted corn, at a pace of half a hectare per day.⁵¹²



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The head of the Dobovsky district executive committee, comrade Sedov, had high hopes for his corn crops, with the goal of 15-20 centners of grain and 50 centners of silage from each hectare planted. The task was a steep one, as “a lot of work has now accumulated on the collective farms; There is haymaking, planting of vegetables, cultivation of fallows and row crops, construction of livestock buildings, silage trenches and much more.” To help cope with the sheer scale of the tasks, local party organizations in Dubovka had mobilized workdays, with workers and even schoolchildren from the city bussed to the fields to help. Still, there was only so much manual labor could accomplish, as corn in particular proved a highly mechanized process even during the cultivation stage. One of the tractor drivers interviewed laid out his work for the summer, even before harvest could begin: “it is necessary to loosen a corn field at least three times during the summer. Even if there are very few weeds on it, intermittent rains can

⁵¹² V. Ershov and M. Ivanov, “Na kukuruznykh poliakh,” *Stalingradskaia pravda*, June 4, 1955, 1.

⁵¹³ A. Yantsy (photographer), *ibid.*

form a soil crust, and then excessively rapid evaporation of moisture will begin. And the cultivated row-spacings will cover the moisture, and it, absorbed by the roots, will drive upward, fill the plants with vital juices, and promote the formation of large, thick ears.”⁵¹⁴ The strain on tractor drivers to service the crop and keep their machines running was a source of great concern.

The Mechanical Foundation of Industrial Agriculture: The Tractor

It seems counterintuitive that even collective farms within a 100km radius of one of the world’s largest tractor factories would be facing such shortages in machinery. However, it is important to note that STZ was building tractors not just for the Stalingrad region's agricultural sector, but that its products were in high demand across the Soviet Union and even abroad. In his foreign policy, Khrushchev increasingly relied on the promise of a socialist agriculture to project Soviet soft power in Eastern Europe and emergent powers in the developing world, such as India and China. While expanding agriculture was high on the party’s list of priorities, the state still needed to generate the capital to fund its large-scale projects, and the export of heavy equipment remained a necessary stream of revenue. This was to be a point of pride for *Stalingradtsy*, as the trademark stamped in the steel during production at STZ could be found around the world, even as it meant labor brigades from those same factories could find themselves working in fields just up the road by hand on their days off.⁵¹⁵

Corn in the countryside meant a constant demand on the urban laborers who stoked the forges at the Red October steelworks and manned the assembly lines at STZ. The Soviet Union’s fleet of tractors and harvesters had been seriously impacted by the war, with a lack of parts

⁵¹⁴ Ibid.

⁵¹⁵ I. Gummer, “Zavodskaya marka,” *Stalingradskaya pravda*, June 17, 1955.

leaving the already 2 decades old fleet in a decrepit state. Tractors mass produced during the first two Five-Year plans, which comprised the majority of the stock of the MTS that served the region's kolkhozes, were not suited for agricultural projects on the scale that Khrushchev had envisioned them. To farm the Virgin Lands, grow corn, and catch up to the US in terms of food production, the Soviet Union would have to redirect the behemoth of the planned economy toward the demand for important technological improvements toward these products and to produce them on a massive scale. Under the Seven-Year Plan laid out from 1958 to 1965, the Soviet Union was slated to produce more than 1 million new tractors. To cope with the new demand, STZ would have to more than double its productivity.⁵¹⁶

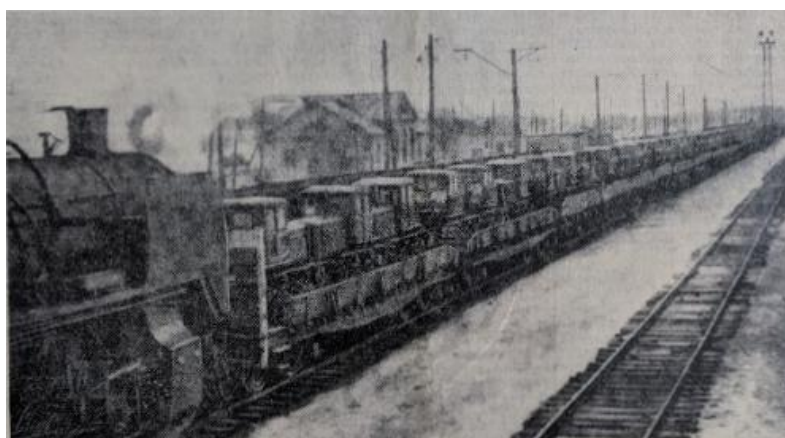


The way of the future in the late 1950s was the DT-56, a new tractor design that was much more efficient to produce. The DT-56 was nearly a ton lighter than its direct predecessor, could achieve operating speeds more than 2 kph (though this sounds small, it is a significant increase in the low-speed world of tractor work), and most importantly, had a hydraulic linkage system for various attachable accessories. The DT-56 was recently showcased at the World Exhibition in Brussels (sometimes known as “Expo ‘58”), where it was awarded the highest “Grand Prix” honor for its class, an achievement no-doubt lauded by the Khrushchev administration hungry for buyers of Soviet tractor exports to the developing world. By the end of

⁵¹⁶ Orlov, *Istoriia rodnogo kraia*, 187.

the Seven-Year Plan in 1965, “dozens of automatic lines and hundreds of special aggregate machines will be installed in the STZ workshops, which will allow increasing the output of products from the existing production areas.”⁵¹⁷

The railyard at the north end of the city situated in the Traktorozavod region known as Traktornaya-Tovarnaya was where many of the products of STZ were loaded to be shipped out into the wider world. Trains loaded with dozens of tractors destined for Soviet collective farms and even those ready to be sold abroad set out from the station multiple times a week. Even beyond creating the tractors used on Soviet farms, hundreds of plant workers had recently begun to complete their operator certifications, so that they would be able to help on regional farms during high traffic times, should the need arise to mobilize additional drivers.⁵¹⁸



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However, for the growing of corn in particular, the DT-56 was only appropriate for plowing, harrowing, and furrowing fields to prepare them for cultivation. Once the young crops were in the ground, the heavy-treaded, low-riding DT-56 could not be used for the much more delicate work of nurturing the fragile green shoots that would rapidly grow to heights of more than two meters. The tractor of choice for corn growers was the MTZ-2, MTZ-3, and later MTZ-

⁵¹⁷ “Gigantskie shagi tiazheloi industrii” in *Stalingradskaia pravda*, February 24, 1959, 2-3.

⁵¹⁸ F. Zotkin, “Na pomoshch’ truzhenikam sela,” *Stalingradskaia pravda*, February 22, 1962, 2.

⁵¹⁹ Ibid.

5 models produced by the Minsk Tractor Factory, referred to affectionately as the “Belarus.”⁵²⁰

These tractors had narrower tire treads were much more agile and had been designed to move between the carefully spaced rows required for corn and bean cultivation, and a much higher ride height that meant they could continue to move through the fields during the first crucial few months of the plant’s growing cycle, spreading fertilizer or pesticides as needed. However, not every collective farm had access to Belarus tractors when corn first started to appear in the Stalingrad region’s fields. They would only become more prevalent in the 1960s, as the push toward corn intensified, and even then, they remained a limited resource in the MTS’s fleet. These specialized machines could have a major impact on the yield of a state farm’s corn plantings.



Just as important as the tractors for plowing, seeding, and other various agricultural tasks, industrial agriculture understood in the modern context needed automated harvesters for reaping the crop quickly and efficiently. In massive fields, a harvest’s yield could depend greatly on the window in which the crop is collected—if too much time is wasted, the yield will decrease through simple attrition to the forces of nature. While Volgograd remained one of the largest manufacturers of tractors in the entirety of the Soviet Union, the majority of the region’s fleet of

⁵²⁰ Nikolai Alekseevich Lysenko, “Opyt peredovnikov vsem 61 tsentner zerna kukuruzy s hektara,” November 15, 1961

⁵²¹ Photo of a Belarus model tractor and seeder attachment by A. Kurova in V. Pukin, “Reportazh s polia: po metodu V. Pervitskogo,” *Volgogradskaya pravda*, May 11, 1963, p. 1.

combines would have been assembled in Voronezh, the capital city of the neighboring oblast to the northeast not quite 600 kilometers away. The tractor factory at Volgograd still produced the gearboxes for these harvesters, but other manufacturers provided the rest of the apparatus.

However, when Voronezh's latest batch of harvesters was facing a parts shortage in the early months of 1962, they called on their comrades at STZ for help. In a story titled "To Help Village Workers," readers hear how the new fleet is saved by the ingenuity of the tractor factory's engineers. F. Zotkin, the head of the Engineering Bureau of Training for the plant emphatically explains the character of the response as in line with the mission of the entire factory. He states that "our tractor builders have a good tradition; provide assistance to grain growers in the struggle for a high harvest and help livestock farmers increase the production of milk and meat."⁵²²

However, in the winter of 1962, the task that was being asked of the workers of STZ was not an easy one. The Voronezh workers submitted an urgent request for 6,500 signals from the STZ press shop, the lack of which was holding up construction of their combines. To manufacture the parts as designed, twelve "complex and very labor-intensive dies had to be designed and made. In addition, the stamped parts had to be subjected to metalworking and riveted." Multiple technical directors tried to game out how the factory's press shop could complete the order in a timely manner but realized it would be extremely costly and slow going. Instead, they landed on a quick and dirty solution: "they decided to make corn harvester signals from existing parts. No projects, no stamps needed! Take ready-made parts and get going." But the question remained, would these signals that had been designed for other machinery work on the new combines? To find out, the chief designer of the tractor plant M. A. Sharov flew to

⁵²² F. Zotkin, "To Help Village Workers," *Stalingradskaiia pravda*,

Voronezh with samples in tow. The Voronezh workers approved the remedy, and the assembly of the additional signals began posthaste. The effort was applauded, as “the creativity of the innovators brought great economic benefits - it increased labor productivity in signal assembly by about five times and saved about seven tons of metal due to the use of waste.”

While the overall mechanical longevity of such spontaneous hybridization of different models is certainly a question that points to all sorts of inefficiencies within the Soviet planned economy, this episode clearly shows how prioritization of the immediate needs of the agricultural sector had ripple effects on production by heavy industry.

Measuring Success (and Failure)

As corn first appeared in test fields in the Volgograd region as something of a curiosity and an experiment, as Khrushchev’s reforms gathered steam through the late 1950s and early 1960s, more and more collective farms would dedicate at least some of their planting to what was often referred to as “the queen of the fields” (*koroleva polei*), or even more affectionately, “the miracle woman” (*chudesnitsa*).⁵²³ However, Khrushchev, the party, and the state planning organization had less control over the everyday operations of state farms than many have assumed.⁵²⁴ Within the collective farms there existed a unique hierarchy and bureaucracy that would dictate what crops were planted where, and what of the farm’s limited resources of machinery, fertilizers, and labor would be allocated to which fields. In addition, with much of the mechanics of industrial corn cultivation a relative unknown to the majority of kolkhoz workers more accustomed to traditional crops of wheat and barley, institutional knowledge of how to

⁵²³ Nikolai Alekseevich Lysenko, “Opyt peredovikov vsem 61 tsentner zerna kukuruzy s hektara,” *Volgogradskaiia pravda*, November 15, 1961, 3.

⁵²⁴ See Hale-Dorrell, *Corn Crusade*.

successfully plant corn varied greatly among different collectives and would take time to accumulate the needed specialization. As a result, while corn was being planted throughout this time, the yield per acre remained staggeringly low.

Yield became the primary language of communication to the general public as the push for corn continued. In the pages of *Stalingradskaia pravda*, stories of the yearly harvest revolved around the reports of various yields: of dry kernel, of cobs, of green silage, and so on. The term “centner” — a unit of weight equal to 100 kilograms—became the primary measure of success prescribed by the party, with yield in centners per acre the primary concern of both planners and farmers. In addition, these metrics were measured against the cost per acre as both corn farmers and the state tried to convince collective farms of corn's economic viability. For many years, a yield of 50 centners per acre was the gold standard for corn production, while few farms could consistently produce such a result. With every year of trial and error, the region's farmers refined their techniques and overcame the challenges unique to each collective, and the pool of specialized corn planters and machine operators continued to grow. Combined with a continuing political will within the agricultural sphere to move toward corn, the crop's yield would continue to climb. By the 1960s, under the perfect circumstances, some farmers were reaching yields of 60+ centners per acre.



Covering the corn harvest became something of an annual tradition for the *Stalingradskaia/Volgogradskaia pravda* team. Every summer, the paper was flooded with coverage of top-performing farms, extraordinary efforts of tractor drivers, labor crews, and so on. Yield quotas were closely tracked in relation to the Seven-Year Plan, along with celebration for those who over fulfilled their targets and ridicule those who failed to do so.

Though Khrushchev abandoned state terror as a coercive force on the peasantry, he was still frustrated at the lack of progress among many farms to adapt to his agricultural initiatives. For every kolkhoz that had increased its production, there were others failing to pull their own weight. In an address to the Plenum of the Central Committee in 1959, Khrushchev complained that a lack of party oversight was partly to blame:

In fact, no one here organizes control over the production of gross output. Managers are not fighting to ensure that each farm fulfills the plan, but, as they say, are “paying off” with district, regional or republican indicators. At best, they call the advanced and the lagging behind, no one calls the middle ones, they live in peace. No one is specifically interested in what is the reason for this situation, and no one interferes in the activities of those collective and state farms that do not fulfill the plan from year to year.⁵²⁶

⁵²⁵ Anthropomorphic corn mascot I have lovingly named “Big Corn.” P. Ostrovskii, “Corn: 50 Centners per Hectare,” appeared in “The forefront of the struggle for communism,” in *Stalingradskaia pravda*, February 22, 1962, p. 3.

⁵²⁶ N. Mizin, “Fel’etoi ‘Tikhie vody,’” *Stalingradskaia pravda*, February 6, 1962, 2.

In other words, Khrushchev felt that the majority of farms were being carried by the few strong operations over-fulfilling their quotas at the top of each district. These farms were giving cover to the rest who live “in peace,” feeling no pressure to adopt new methods that might increase their own output. This frustration also illustrates a point made by Hale-Dorrell, that far from being able to dictate policy with an authoritarian hand, the Soviet state struggled to implement and oversee the party’s mandates across its vast network of rural agriculture.⁵²⁷

One satirical piece from 1962 that the editors of *Stalingradskaia pravda* used to lampoon these farms through a poem examining life on the fictional kolkhoz “Quiet waters,” where “the corn only grew in speeches.” The farmers know how to talk of the new Soviet agriculture but make no effort to deliver. Instead “the collective farm took refuge behind the broad back of neighbors who were working tirelessly, blocking bold plans, out of sight of the gaze of the controllers and auditors, the comrades from the executive and district committee.” Ultimately, the districts and regions “are held in high esteem. That’s why, in those ‘Quiet Waters,’ nobody has stopped by for many years. They live there calmly: what will be will be... no one will offend, no one will judge.” The author promises that soon a reckoning was due: “an end has come to this quiet life. From equals, it is right to demand equal. Every kolkhoz and sovkhov is obligated to give bread and meat in abundance to the Fatherland!”⁵²⁸

⁵²⁷ Hale-Dorrell, *Corn Crusade*, 9-11.

⁵²⁸ Ibid.



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However, as we shall soon see, blame could not be laid solely at the feet of collective farmers. For a harvest to be successful in any given year, the stars had to align—farmers needed access to a working fleet of tractors, combines, and accessories, access to seed and fertilizers, and the knowledge of specialists, all of which remained in short supply. Even as Khrushchev's reforms aimed to re-engage the peasantry in the Soviet collective project, even those who bought in still had to contend with the inefficacies entrenched in the Soviet economy.

In 1963, corn coverage in the local press had reached an absolute fever pitch. The people of Stalingrad could expect nearly daily coverage of some aspect of the harvest, in the months between March and September, with in-depth tracking of regional quotas for hectares planted and overall yield, as well as spotlights on farms and labor crews that were ahead of the curve.⁵³⁰ The serial column titled "On the main direction" reminded readers of the collective goal for Volgograd oblast this year: 350 million poods of grain.⁵³¹ The accompanying graphic reminds readers that this is a collective project, dependent on more than just farmers, asking readers

⁵²⁹ Ibid, illustration by P. Ostrovskii.

⁵³⁰ See for instance, "Vesti s udarnogo fronta," *Volgogradskaia pravda*, April 24, 1963, 1, V. Pulin, "Reportazh c polia: Po metodu V. Pervitskogo," *Volgogradskaia Pravda*, May 11, 1963, 1, "Bol'shaia vyrabotka," *Volgogradskaia pravda*, May 12, 1963.

⁵³¹ A "pood" is a unit of measure primarily used in Russia, equaling roughly 36.1 pounds of dry grain.

In one adventure in the spring of 1963 near the start of corn planting season, Krokodil visited the collective farm "Victory of October," where corn was to be grown in the upcoming year, but upon his arrival is confused, as the fields seem to be left unattended. Normally at this point in the season, the earth would be tilled, fertilizers and other chemical additives applied, and machinery being prepared for planting. However, here the tractors stood curiously idle.⁵³⁴ Investigating, Krokodil learns from the tractor drivers that the harrows for their tractors had yet to arrive on the farm, and their tractors had sat idle waiting for two days. The author goes to see the manager of the farm, Evseev, where he is assured that the harrows would arrive soon in a delivery from the nearby agrogorod Surovikino (about 130 km due west of Volgograd). Krokodil spends the day with the farmers waiting for the equipment they need to get started, but when the truck arrives, they find no harrows.

The next day he returned to Evseev, urging him to send his own trucks to Surovikino to secure the harrows directly. Evseev calls to confirm that he will send a truck and that the harrows will be ready for pick-up, but a few hours later, after the truck had already left the farm, he receives a call back—there are no harrows available after all! Determined to get to the bottom of the matter, Krokodil catches a ride to Surovikino to see for himself. When he gets there, he is baffled, "I see there are a whole bunch of old harrows lying near the roadway. And no one is watching them, no one is paying attention. Whose are they? No one knows. I'll tell you straight, the picture is quite sad."⁵³⁵

A few weeks later, Krokodil visited several state farms on the Pallas steppe (a region northeast of the city on the far bank of the Volga). "I walk through the fields, rejoicing at the freshness of the green shoots of barley and wheat, admiring the regular squares of the corn

⁵³⁴ Krokodil, "Krokodil proveril: razgovor o broshennykh boronakh," *Volgogradskaia pravda*, April 24, 1963, 2.

⁵³⁵ Ibid.

plantings of the “Peace,” “Progress,” and “Khar’kovskii” state farms. But suddenly... a corn field without square rows. What kind of farm is this?”⁵³⁶ Krokodil investigates, finding a corn farmer by the name of Petrunin who explains the situation on the “Pallasovski” farm. “I talked to him and learned incredible things. It turns out that the farm is not yet ready for sowing ‘the queen of the fields.’ There is no measuring wire on the seeders, some of which have not even been assembled, and not all the Belarus tractors are in working order.” Despite the urgent need to get the seed grain in the ground, Petrunin and his comrades relayed that they still had not yet seen the corn seed itself, as it had not yet been approved to be removed from the elevator where it was stored.

Krokodil sprang into action. “I raised the alarm and there was a fuss at the kolkhoz” as the whole operation was mobilized to get the seeders assembled and to send word to the *Agrocom* (agricultural committee) to get the seeds out of the elevator immediately, only to find out the variety of seed they were told they were expecting was no longer available. The commissioner they spoke to suggested they reach out to other farms, as he had heard “there was a surplus there.” Krokodil is left flabbergasted. “This is how, through their own fault, the Pallasovski state farm [...] were left without corn seeds. We will have to proceed to more efficient operations.”⁵³⁷

Krokodil’s adventures would continue throughout the season, as the corn grew from shoots in the late spring, to tall stalks late in the summer, to the eventual harvest in the fall. The serial kept the oblast’s agricultural base in the public eye, and increased pressure on collective

⁵³⁶ Krokodil, “Krokodil proveril: poka spali, cemena razobrali,” *Volgogradskaia pravda*, May 12, 1963, 2.

⁵³⁷ Ibid.

farm managers who would dread finding their own substandard operation in the pages of the paper when the Crocodile came a-calling.



Still, for every glaring failure, the newspaper was mostly focused on celebrating the successes of the region's agriculture, and what it would mean for the readers in the city in terms of luxury foodstuffs making their way to their stores and restaurants. Following the XXII Party Congress in 1961, the struggle to increase agricultural production was further established as the pillar on which communism would be built in the Soviet Union, and the workers and farmers of the Volgograd region were constantly reminded of the major role they had to play in that endeavor.⁵³⁹

The Kukuruzovody—Soviet Corn Farmers

As Krokodil's adventures suggest, many farmers remained ignorant or incapable of providing corn what it needed to thrive on their farms. Unlike the staple crops of the region, which had long institutional knowledge within the peasantry going back generations, corn was relatively unknown. To see corn growing be successful in the Stalingrad region, there would

⁵³⁸ Ibid, left from April 24, 1963, right from May 12, 1963.

⁵³⁹ "S'ezd stroitelei kommunizma," *Volgogradskaia pravda*, October 12, 1963, p. 2.

need to be a new class of specialist farmers who were dedicated to the special needs of “the Queen of the Fields.”

The tale of one of the region’s top performing “*kukuruzovodi*” (specialist corn farmers) in 1961, Nikolai Alekseevich Lysenko, illustrates how successful corn cultivation in the Volgograd region was a project years in the making. In an expose that appeared in *Stalingradskia pravda* on November 15, 1961, Lysenko lays out the path that led him to devote his career to the production of corn. His page-long story reads a bit like a socialist realist novel, complete with familiar tropes of nay-saying bureaucrats and man overcoming the forces of nature through modern technology. However, it no doubt reflects the struggle many farmers might have faced learning such a relatively new trade.

Lysenko was never predestined to be a corn farmer. In 1952, he graduated from the Uryupinsk School of Agricultural Mechanics after training to be a tractor driver, as did many of his fellows from the collective farm on which he was raised. He returned to the kolkhoz to work as an operator but found little passion for working with the farm’s ever-decaying fleet of machines that all seemed “months away from the scrap heap.”⁵⁴⁰ He left the farm for a time to serve in the Red Army, and when he returned from service was transferred away from machine operations to instead work with livestock. It was there that he had a shocking experience that would change the course of his career. One winter, while caring for the farm’s cattle, he noticed that the newborn calves, who had been hale and healthy all summer, were suddenly falling sick and dying. He rushed to the farm’s veterinarian, convinced that some plague had infected his herd, only to be informed that this was not an uncommon occurrence: “your cattle are mainly fed on last year’s straw. On such a diet, it is not surprising to lose half of the herd before spring. If

⁵⁴⁰ Nikolai Alekseevich Lysenko, “Opyt peredovikov vsem 61 tsentner zerna kukuruzy s hektara.”

there were plenty of corn silage, concentrates, and protein hay for your calves, no epidemic would befall them.” For the first time, he realized the impact corn could have on other aspects of the farm’s production.

He took the issue to the farm’s director to ask about the collective’s corn holdings. The farm grew some corn, but yields were poor, barely enough to cover the needs of the farm’s dairy cows, which were given priority over those Lysenko raised for beef. The machine operators that currently tended the corn were pessimistic about the crop, after several years of poor yields: “Our crop will grow badly, nothing can be done.”⁵⁴¹ Yet Lysenko was not convinced, having seen reports of other farms in the region producing much greater yields, even in years where there was less-than-desirable rainfall. He began to question what his farm could do differently and began to educate himself on the latest corn growing techniques.

Quickly Lysenko identified many problems with his kolkhoz’s approach to corn. The plots allocated to corn were not decided based on the needs of the crop and were typically already poor holdings, with little regard to what had been grown there the year prior. The soil was improperly prepared and plowed too shallow. The farm had scant resources by way of fertilizers and phosphates, only a little of which found their way into the fields where corn was to be planted.

Lysenko recalls that he reached a decision to change the process of planting corn on his farm: “‘What if I take up corn myself and do everything as it should be?’ [...] If I succeed, what great benefits can be brought to our collective’s livestock operations.” He brought his idea to his foreman, who derided his idealistic approach, arguing “it only comes out great in books. Everything is different in life.” Undeterred, he went to the farm’s chief agronomist, comrade

⁵⁴¹ Ibid.

Stepanov, and explained his proposals, and it was agreed that he would become a corn farmer. This occurred in the winter of 1960. However, this was only a minor triumph—the true test was still to come.

His first test was to repair the “Belarus” tractor he had been issued, which was in dire need of servicing. His original training proved useful, as he was able to repair the tractor by mid-March, before planting would need to begin. He reviewed his plans with Stepanov and his team of corn growers. This year they planned to harvest “waxy” corn,⁵⁴² which was primarily used for silage and would be simpler to raise and harvest. While he had his choice of 150 hectares of the farm’s holdings, he still had to properly prepare it to make it suitable for growing corn. The year prior, the field was used to grow rye, which did not drain as many nutrients from the soil as other crops. Once the snow thawed and the field remained damp, it needed to be deeply furrowed, to a depth of 27-30cm, creating natural channels for excess groundwater to accumulate, before again being rolled flat. Then when the ground had dried further, the topsoil was re-tilled and weeded, preparing the ground for seeding.

Planting then had to be carried out precisely—the grid of corn plants needed to be perfectly spaced to allow Belarus’s wheelbase to traverse the field in both directions without running over the delicate seedlings after they were planted, creating a perfect geometric grid of squares. To accomplish this the six-row corn seeder attachment for the tractor had to be meticulously tuned for spacing and timing. They divided the field into grids and did many practice runs with no seed to calibrate the machinery, using wire to measure the desired spread.

⁵⁴² Often referred to as “milky-waxy” (*molochno-voskovoi*) in Soviet agricultural parlance, this term refers to both a high gluten variant kernel, as well as a stage in the corn’s life cycle, which makes it ideal for livestock feed, as well as certain foodstuffs.

Lysenko notes how important the timing of the planting was dependent on the weather—he had to wait for the soil temperature to be high enough for seedlings to take root and sprout.

Then Lysenko faced a nervous wait. After his seeds were in the ground, whatever he found when it grew would be his lot, and he would have to make the most of it. Finally, the first shoots of green to rise out of the “nests” where they had been planted, he was relieved to see the precise geometric grid he had designed reflected in the field. Since his repaired Belarus would be able to navigate the field without crushing young plants, this would allow for mechanized weeding and care of the shoots until they hit the crucial one-meter mark, at which point the crop’s growth becomes much more stable.

At the end of his first year’s harvest, Lysenko matched and even exceeded some neighboring farm’s corn yields, with a total green-mass yield of 220 centners per hectare. His crop would ensure the farm’s livestock would be able to eat well in the coming winter, and Lysenko remembers how this small success boosted his own confidence in his abilities and encouraged him to further refine his techniques for the following spring. This time, they would attempt to also harvest dry-grain corn, which presented new challenges.

With the experience of furrowing last year’s fields and setting up the seeders, Lysenko only needed to make minor adjustments to his plans. He reduced the scope of his field from 150 hectares down to a little more than 100 hectares in order to achieve a tighter focus and control over the area they would cultivate. He began working with a seeder named Dmitry M. Goidin, who also had experience planting corn, and the two took pains in selecting the hybrid seed they would use, opting for the “Bukovinsky 1” variant that had been chemically pre-treated. Goidin brought his own suggestions of how to set up the seeder and the harrows they used to further optimize the process. Comrade Stepanov, the agronomist, also brought new suggestions of how

to protect the young seedlings, changing the method they used for weeding. The process was exacting, and they were delayed by steady rains that June, but Stepanov's method would allow for better water retention in the soil, which would prove crucial for the remainder of the long, dry summer. They also decided to spend on mineral fertilizers, a cost they had avoided the year prior. They bought 60 tons of superphosphates and ammonium nitrate from a neighboring farm that had improperly stored the materials and had compacted into a solid, unusable mass, but after substantial effort they transformed the fertilizers into a powder that they were able to have scattered over their corn field via airplane, marking the first use of crop-dusters on their farm.

By mid-summer, Lysenko and his crew could tell their efforts had paid off. The corn had grown to a whopping height of more than three meters. With the field bordering a local roadway, the wall of corn became the talk of the region. Lysenko remembers that during that summer, "more than once the heads of the state farm and the district came to look at the corn, and everyone was surprised that without irrigation, in a year with normal rainfall, it could grow with such force."⁵⁴³ When it came time to harvest in the early fall, they decided to harvest some of the plot for pure silage using a specialized KRX-3 corn harvester, while for the dry grain they would need to use a different combine set-up. The yield ultimately exceeded all Lysenko's expectations—the 59.4 hectares harvested for silage produced a yield of 375 centners of green mass and waxy cobs, while the 47.6 hectares harvested for grain yielded 61 centners of clean, dry grain. This achievement nearly more than doubled the yield targets for that year's growing season. Even more impressive, if one compares the yield to the cost they incurred per acre, the costs were easily covered by the grain they could sell, saving the farm money in the end. When compared to other farms in the region, who all achieved 50+ centner/acre yields, Lysenko's crop

⁵⁴³ Ibid.

still stood far and away on top, and were equal to some of the absolute best in the All-Russian competition of corn growers for 1961.

Lysenko was already planning for the next planting season. Not one to rest on his laurels, he has already identified several ways that he thinks his crew could increase their yields in the next growing season. He was confident that as innovations and techniques continue to improve, corn would become an even part of Soviet agricultural production in the future. In parting, Lysenko thanks his crew, the party leadership, and his MTZ-5 “Belarus” tractor for making it all possible. He concluded that he and his crew saw themselves as doing just one small part in the party’s grand economic vision for their country: “The 22nd Congress of the CPSU adopted a majestic program for the construction of communism in our country. Together with all the agricultural workers, let us invest our worthy resources into this honorable work.”⁵⁴⁴



⁵⁴⁴ Ibid.



This story was not simply a feel-good story of one man's successful career change. It was instructive to the residents of Volgograd in a number of ways: it emphasized that corn growing is a highly specialized trade, which required expert farmers to allow the crop to flourish; it illustrated the impact corn has on the greater rural economy, particularly in the form of feed for livestock crucial to increasing the prevalence of key foodstuffs like milk, meat, butter, and eggs in cities like Volgograd; and it proved that these projects took time, providing some cover for the administration's policies as they continue to struggle to make corn a staple of Soviet agriculture, and places the blame on a familiar foe: intransigent bureaucrats standing in the way of progress. Lysenko's concluding remarks also directly center the growing of corn within the project of building communism in the Soviet Union, and his story is a small but crucial step along that path.

The emphasis on specialization reinforces how critical education was to the new model of modern industrial agriculture being shaped under Khrushchev. While Lysenko had been trained at the Agricultural College in Uryupinsk, Volgograd housed its own institute of agricultural learning, which we will explore in depth later in the chapter. There was a push to bring in talented students from the city and surrounding region to bring in students with a mind for the

⁵⁴⁵ Top Left: Lysenko; Top Right: Goidin; Bottom: Cartoon depicting Soviet livestock feasting on, quite literally, big corn. Ibid.

agricultural sciences and prepare them for a career on the collective farm, where they could put said specialization to work increasing the yield of corn, livestock, and other crops.

The Draw of the “Virgin Lands”

There were other more direct initiatives to attract young people entering the workforce to careers in agriculture and to bring Khrushchev’s vision of Soviet modernity to rural areas. In addition to agronomists, tractor drivers, and experts in animal husbandry, the push to reform Soviet agriculture needed to revamp rural infrastructure to accommodate increased production. Construction teams building silos, storage pens, and machine stations also helped build new residential housing on collective farms, moving toward the same mass-produced, private apartment buildings seen in urban areas alongside support buildings like schools, laundromats, and healthcare facilities.

The Virgin Lands campaign continued to drive up demand in the Soviet Union for a specialized, educated workforce to provide the supporting infrastructure required for industrialized farming.⁵⁴⁶ The party youth organization, the Komsomol, was one mechanism the state utilized to put recent graduates and young urban professionals to work on this project. Being a member of the Komsomol provided more than just a pathway for social and political advancement. It was also an avenue for young people to travel. As the millions of acres of the “Virgin Lands” were prepared for cultivation, dedicated agricultural cities were continuously springing up in Stalingrad oblast and across the Soviet Union. To push valuable human capital to where it was needed most, the Komsomol helped organize “construction trains” to help with

⁵⁴⁶ See McCauley, *Khrushchev and the Development of Soviet Agriculture*, Hale-Dorell, *Corn Crusade*, Gianni Talamini, “Urbanising the Virgin Lands: At the Frontier of Soviet Socialist Planning.” In *Urban Planning During Socialism*, (United Kingdom: Routledge, 2024), 15–30.

these projects, sending cadres of young mechanists, engineers, electricians, and construction workers together by rail, along with equipment, to aid in various projects.

One story of such a journey, recounted by one A. Mateev, a paramedic at a Stalingrad hospital, made the pages of *Stalingradskaia pravda* in February of 1958. He recalls fondly the previous summer, when he joined a construction train along with 200 fellow *Stalingradtsy* bound for Blagoveshchenka, a new city rising out of the Altai steppe more than 3000 kilometers away. (The township is located about 400 kilometers southwest of Novosibirsk near Kazakhstan's northeastern border). The Stalingrad *komsomoltsy*, he recalls, were expecting to find a barren wasteland marked by tents or barracks but were surprised to find the makings of a modern city, complete with a train station, factories, parks, clubs, and movie theaters. They received a warm welcome, where they had the chance to mingle with local young people, before getting down to work. Matveev recalls that upon arrival he was struck by the buzz of activity in and around the city: "Everywhere there are highways, along which cars, motorcycles, bicycles scurry. The roar of the engines of agricultural machines is heard, continuing to expand the limitless Virgin Lands by millions of hectares."⁵⁴⁷

The Stalingrad team proved themselves more than capable at their assigned tasks, exceeding their planned targets and nearly doubling their output over the several months of their stay (May through October). The team built the grain elevators, three grain drying stations, residential buildings, a school, a kindergarten, a grocery store, and a building for a sewing workshop over that summer. The team's output won recognition from the Ministry of Grain Products and the All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions, and several individuals within the team were further commended for their contributions and innovations of new building

⁵⁴⁷ A. Matveev, "Stalingradtsy na tseline," *Stalingradskaia pravda*, February 18, 1959, 3.

techniques. When it came time to return to Stalingrad, several women from the team even received permission to stay behind, choosing to start new lives in the new agrogorod, who according to Matveev were struck by the beauty of the Altai steppe and the glittering waters of the nearby Kuchuk lake, where a sanatorium was being built due to its mineral properties.⁵⁴⁸

Matveev says that he was inspired to share his story after attending a recent reunion with fellow members of his construction train back in Volgograd, where they all fondly recalled their time together and the experience they shared. He encouraged Komsomol members and those considering joining to take full advantage of the opportunity, should the young people of the city be called on to field another construction train.

The prevalence of agricultural stories in *Stalingradskaja pravda* at this time undoubtedly reflects the narrative being pushed from the highest levels of Soviet government, but they certainly had plenty to work with in the agricultural hub of the Stalingrad region. This sampling of stories is but a small part of the coverage by the party press, which came to comprise an almost daily reminder of progress being made in the agricultural sphere. To trace the full story of the Volgograd's agricultural development could be the subject of its own full-length historical study, but the outline of the picture at least is clear. Khrushchev's investment in corn and expanding all farming operations at this time added a dynamic element to Volgograd's already booming economic footprint. However, most importantly, the shared lesson of these types of stories was that prosperity was on its way, that innovations in modern agriculture would herald Khrushchev's promise of constructing real, lived communism in the Soviet Union.

De-Stalinizing Education and Pedagogy

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid.

As we have seen, Khrushchev's vision of a communist economy required a technocratic workforce capable of understanding the basic principles of engineering and science necessary for a modern, functional economy. Unlike the labor initiatives under Stalin, where the gap in skilled labor could be overcome by superhuman acts of human labor (Stakhanovism) or outlandish expenses of human capital in the form of the mass conscription prison labor, Khrushchev needed skilled technicians in every shop in the factory, on every construction site, and on every collective farm. Rationalization was the only way for the planned economy to meet the huge demand of impatient Soviet consumers hungry for the promised benefits of a peacetime economy that felt too-long coming.

Drafting the new Soviet workforce was dependent then on overhauling the Soviet education system and drawing young people toward careers in math and science, engineering and agronomy, as well as creating a pedagogical baseline for the next generation of Soviet students. Higher education was also a tool of upward mobility and buying the investment of young people in the current economic order as they came of age, started families of their own, and began pursuing careers.⁵⁴⁹

Stalingrad was home to a host of educational institutions, and the student experience is an important aspect of understanding life in the city at this time. However, while students made up a substantial part of the city's population, their stories are less prevalent in the pages of *Stalingradskiaia/Volgogradskiaia pravda* than one would think (especially when compared to the hotbeds of counterculture that were American universities in the same period). Nonetheless, their experience of the Soviet education system was fundamentally different from earlier cohorts who received their education under Stalin. Higher education institutions were forced to stick to the

⁵⁴⁹ See Tromly, *Making the Soviet Intelligentsia*.

official party line promoted by Stalin, even when it was to the intellectual detriment of their fields.⁵⁵⁰ On top of its myriad other effects, de-Stalinization fundamentally changed the curriculum of the Soviet academy.⁵⁵¹

The whiplash felt by many students as they heard the speech was only matched by the disorientation of faculty. History courses covering the “Foundations of Marxism-Leninism” that used Stalin’s *Short Course on Party History* and other works through the 1956 school year. The faculty was given no notice of the Speech or time to prepare for the transition, and so the speech felt much like “an exploding bomb” hurled into their lecture halls.⁵⁵² What’s more, the chaotic distribution of the Secret Speech meant that in some cases students were exposed to the Speech before their professors, some of whom did not hear of its contents until after a month later. The testimony of one historian described the awkward spot the faculty found themselves in: “Our students have become acquainted with comrade Khrushchev’s speech from one or another source, but we, agitators, have been told that the speech is totally secret. And of course, we have observed party discipline and not answered questions. But now they’re saying that we must all become acquainted with the speech.”⁵⁵³ Some historians called for the Speech and its supporting documents to be made part of the current curriculum so that historians could hope to help students interpret it in real time, but this was difficult as well because the Speech had been picked up by foreign news sources who were expediting its dissemination via radio broadcasts into the Soviet Union.⁵⁵⁴ Jones argues that de-Stalinization fundamentally “disrupted

⁵⁵⁰ See Jones, *Myth, Memory Trauma*, and Valery N. Soyfer, *Lysenko and the Tragedy of Soviet Science*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1994).

⁵⁵¹ See Michael Froggatt, “Renouncing Dogma, Teaching Utopia”

⁵⁵² Polly Jones compares the *Short Course on Party History* to the “bible” of the Soviet Academy through 1956. See Jones, *Myth, Memory, Trauma*, 65.

⁵⁵³ Jones, *Myth, Memory, Trauma*, 66.

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid. Jones notes here that Yugoslavian media was particularly quick to latch onto the Speech and spread its contents through the Eastern Bloc, as it contained validation for the persecution of Yugoslav Party Head Josip Broz

conventional hierarchies of information dissemination (and concealment) and transgressed academic and even party discipline.”⁵⁵⁵

Faculty in particular were placed in an awkward position in 1956. While the party struggled to adopt a new official line, they were forced to react on the fly, and were responsible for not only interpreting the meaning of the Speech and adapting lectures accordingly, but also looking towards the long term of how this would be expected to be taught in the upcoming 1956-57 school year. They were under immense pressure and having to improvise and react to changing messages by the party in real time. The June declaration only did so much to reign in acceptable levels of discussion, and by the end of the year after a turbulent summer the Soviet leader sought to further increase control in December. This meant that lecturers who had been too thorough in their attacks on the Stalin Cult could be reprimanded and even punished. “Some of the lectures written and delivered in the spring of 1956 were deemed too critical and iconoclastic of Stalinism, leading to investigation, criticism, and even bans of the lecturers concerned. Other lectures and classes, by contrast, exhibited only minor differences from the Short Course, or were accused of avoiding “difficult questions” raised by de-Stalinization.”⁵⁵⁶

Though de-Stalinization posed the biggest problem for the teaching of history (arguably the most politically charged of all Soviet academic disciplines), it is important to remember that, under Stalin, all such fields were in one way or another subject to the bureaucratic restriction of Stalinist oversight. Michael Frougott examines how de-Stalinization impacted the Soviet curriculum on the natural sciences in the wake of the Secret Speech:

Tito and the expulsion of Yugoslavia from the Cominform of 1948. The repercussions of Stalin’s foreign policy towards Yugoslavia will come more into focus in Chapter 6, see pages 328-333.

⁵⁵⁵ Jones, *Myth, Memory, Trauma*, 66-67.

⁵⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 57.

Science and technology always played a significant role in the validating ideology of the Soviet Union. Marxism-Leninism claimed to be a scientific doctrine and asserted that it would advance all that was progressive and advantageous in the European scientific tradition, stripping it of the bourgeois ideological distortions and self-interest, laying the material and technological basis for the achievement of communism and transforming mankind in the process. This utopian vision of scientific advancement had been very pronounced in the public culture of the 1920s but receded to the immediate economic goals of a rapidly industrializing country, receiving more prominence.⁵⁵⁷

Under Stalin, the sciences had been politicized by patriotic initiatives and subject to Stalinist patronage, as in the case of “Lysenkoism and its imitators” (Lysenko was a Soviet geneticist that relied on unscientific data to justify his theories). Given the impact Lysenko's pseudo-scientific research had on the training of Soviet agronomists during collectivization, reclaiming the sciences from ideological intrusion became a big mission of de-Stalinization in the academy.⁵⁵⁸

Khrushchev also was eager to surpass the West in technological prowess, most vividly in the form of the Soviet Space project that was ramping up in the years leading up to the launch of Sputnik in 1957. While removing ideological influences from the sciences was important, if anything the propaganda surrounding Soviet advancements in the physical sciences increased. As Traugott notes, “despite dramatic changes in the rhetorical presentation of science during the process of de-Stalinization, the natural sciences remained a prominent topic in propaganda, the arts and such limited forums for public discussion as existed during the 1950s and 1960s. The renewed interest in fundamental sciences, and their broader impact on the ‘worldview’ of Soviet citizens, reached its peak in the early 1960s, when Soviet achievements in physics and the space race coincided with the peak of Khrushchev’s own personal authority.”⁵⁵⁹

⁵⁵⁷ Froggatt, “Renouncing Dogma, Teaching Utopia,” 250.

⁵⁵⁸ For more on Lysenko and this brand of pseudo-science, see Loren Graham, *Lysenko’s Ghost: Epigenetics and Russia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016).

⁵⁵⁹ Ibid.

Education reform continued as a priority for the Khrushchev administration, in no small part out of necessity based on the chaos unleashed in the field by de-Stalinization. A reform of the national curriculum that came in 1958 increased the number of hours of scientific education and “especially emphasized practicality” that would benefit students in future careers in construction, engineering, or manufacturing. The science curriculum adopted Soviet generated and foreign theories alike in a comprehensive whole. The focus on the national sciences in Soviet education shows yet another facet of the value shift of de-Stalinization and its broader impacts on Soviet life, particularly for the generation of students and young people who were coming up through the gymnasiums and universities at this time. In Stalingrad, the people also were encouraged to learn more about the order of the universe at the newly completed Planetarium at the north end of Ulitsa Mir. Another landmark event in the city’s history during this period came after cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin’s return to earth and toured the Soviet Union as a hero, a personal guest of comrade Khrushchev. Gagarin, as with everywhere he visited in those halcyon days after his historic spaceflight, received a warm reception from crowds coming to catch a glimpse of the spaceman’s famous smile when he briefly visited the city on June 5, 1961.

Higher Education Opportunities in Stalingrad

One other major venue for public interaction was within Stalingrad’s schools. As we have seen in previous chapters, from the outset neighborhoods were planned with access to their own network of kindergartens (*detskii sad*), primary and secondary schools. The lives of parents and students still largely revolved around the school calendar, from the official start of school on September 1st until the summer holidays. Michael Froggatt in 2006 explored how Soviet educational policies evolved after Stalin’s death, arguing that several trends, from Khrushchev’s

policy initiatives to the advent of the atomic bomb and the space race, helped to redefine the Soviet curriculum at this time.⁵⁶⁰

From the time of Stalin through the Khrushchev era and beyond, Froggatt argues "ideology permeated every subject in primary and secondary education." In the 1930s, this included Lysenkoist pseudo-science that had been adopted by the Stalinist state, but in the 1950s there was a realignment to bring actual scientific principles into alignment with the socialist ideological project. The summary of objectives for Soviet physics teachers in 1952-53 included the illuminating assertion that "the teaching of Soviet patriotism and Soviet pride is one of the most important tasks standing before physics teachers."⁵⁶¹ In other words, knowledge of the natural order of the world, as well as the contributions to human understanding made by Soviet scientists, were to instill in students how the laws of nature and the utopian logic of communism were irrevocably linked.

While students still received a classical liberal arts education that also prioritized art, literature, and physical culture, developing a scientifically literate student body was also crucial to Khrushchev's vision of a modern socialist workforce that increasingly relied on technology and engineering rather than raw manual labor power. Students graduating from secondary school in Stalingrad and the surrounding region faced a choice of either continuing their studies at one of the city's numerous colleges, universities, and technical institutes, or joining the workforce. Every summer, the final page of *Volgogradskaia pravda* was covered with advertisements for each school, attempting to draw students toward various career paths that would be unlocked by continuing their education in the city.

⁵⁶⁰ See Michael Froggatt, "Renouncing dogma, teaching utopia"

⁵⁶¹ Ibid, 251.

The crown jewel in the city's diverse post-secondary education repertoire was undoubtedly the State Agricultural University (*Stalingradskiaia/Volgogradskiaia GAU*), located on the northwestern edge of the Kirov district along the city's longitudinal highway. The institute, which was originally founded in nearby Uryupinsk in 1944 but moved to Stalingrad in 1949, was one of the largest of its kind anywhere in the Soviet Union at the time. Home to over eight thousand students per year, the GAU offered the equivalent of undergraduate and graduate degree programs in over forty fields of study. The university employed more than 400 full time faculty and staff and had the largest campus of any of the post-secondary schools in the city, including residential dormitories and amenities for the student body. For practical study, the university also had sprawling greenhouses and test fields less than a kilometer from its lecture halls, where students would get first-hand experience of the conditions needed to grow everything from wheat, rye, corn, mustard, and even melons. The test fields amounted to thousands of hectares, and much of what they grew was used to provide seed grain and feed for local collective farms. The University farm also had livestock pens, thousands of cattle and pigs for observation, and its own machine tractor station. The university farm itself was managed by former graduates.⁵⁶² Beyond just teaching future collective farmers, tractor operators, and agronomists for the greater Stalingrad region, the GAU would also act as a premier research institution for the development of new farming methods and hybridization of new seed strains.

With the restoration of the city so dependent on the efforts of various construction trusts, there was also a high need for workers who understood the engineering principles and various trades involved in the construction industry. Founded only in 1952 as demand for construction specialists was still steadily rising, the Construction Engineering Institute (now a satellite

⁵⁶² Morozova and Monakhova, *Pute-voditel po Volgogradu*, 159.

campus of VGU for Architecture and Engineering) was founded, its campus tucked behind some of the last remaining red-brick structures of old Tsaritsyn in the Kirov neighborhood. With no shortage of hands-on experience to be found all around the city for aspiring construction engineers, the institute also offered night classes for students who worked days in the city's construction industry to better hone their craft. Many students who studied at the institute saw their expertise rewarded with elevation to management positions within the city's construction trusts.⁵⁶³

In the winter of 1958 just before the New Year, *Stalingradskaia pravda* correspondent V. Gleser braved the winter cold to meet with a group of such students on site in the emerging Red October neighborhood, where “one after another, multi-story residential buildings rose like mushrooms from under the ground.”⁵⁶⁴ Here, buildings at all various stages of construction could be found, from structures finishing their interiors, to foundations just being poured. Gleser spoke with several young students, both women and men, who were learning on the job—one to be a master plasterer, another a carpenter, still another a crane operator, and finally Nikolai Finogenov, who was both a site manager and student. Finogenov, who planned to graduate from the institute and continue his studies with a doctoral degree in urban engineering, argued that the hands-on training was essential to a well-prepared Soviet workforce: “You think you can manage without a higher education? That you can just drop out of school? No. Every year technology becomes more complex and ‘smarter.’ Every year it becomes easier to live and work, but the main thing is that on-the-job training is becoming more and more firmly established in the life of the Soviet people.”⁵⁶⁵

⁵⁶³ Ibid, 153.

⁵⁶⁴ V. Gleser, “Dnem-stroika, vecherom-institut,” *Stalingradskaia pravda*, January 1, 1959, 3.

⁵⁶⁵ Ibid.



Another of the city's renowned engineering institutions was the Polytechnical Institute, housed in a multi-story building facing Lenin Prospect on the northern end of the Central district (near Gagarin Street). The Institute was founded in the 1930s, as the high demand for technical personnel at the city's major industries grappled with meeting the targets of the Five-Year Plans. In the postwar period, the refurbished institute once again offered programs in mechanical engineering, automotive and tractor engineering, smelting, and chemical engineering. The facilities included lecture halls, laboratories, a library, its own gymnasium with seating for spectators, and a cafeteria. The school attracted students from the Stalingrad region and international students from over ten countries. Many graduates from the institute would go on to work in Stalingrad's major industries, but also around the Union and abroad.⁵⁶⁷

While these colleges were designed to create working professionals to meet the needs of the city's industries, there were also schools in the city designed to produce professionals to serve the needs of its population. Just down the Lenin Prospect from the Polytechnical school was the city's Pedagogical Institute, where thousands of future teachers learned how to instruct the next generation of Soviet scientists, historians, and mathematicians. By the end of the 1960s,

⁵⁶⁶ Ibid, photo by V. Smetanikova. The accompanying caption reads "the work of Arkady Skvazninov has been completed. Nina Chibiryakova, Vladimir Ageev, Elvira Ponomareva, and Nikolai Finogenov (from left to right) go to class."

⁵⁶⁷ Morozova and Monakhova, *Pute-voditel po Volgogradu*, 91.

the Institute was home to roughly three thousand students a year, with live-in dormitories and recreational camps tied to the school located on the river for summer and winter holidays. The school also helped curate its own Zoological Museum, which became one of the largest of such collections in the region.⁵⁶⁸ In addition to coursework in history, geography, chemistry, biology, mathematics, literature, and physics, students could apply to become physical education instructors, working in tandem with the Institute of Physical Culture near the Central Stadium to the north.⁵⁶⁹ In addition to preparing teachers to go into area schools, the Pedagogical Institute became the educational hub specifically for Russian-language teachers in the People's Republic of Czechoslovakia. In 1948, the Czech city of Ostrava became one of Stalingrad's official sister cities, and cadres of Czechoslovak students arriving to visit or study in the city were not uncommon during this time.⁵⁷⁰

Further down Lenin Prospect in the heart of the Central district was the city's Medical Institute. Stalingrad's Medical Institute was founded in 1935, but the physical home was destroyed during the battle. Despite this, while still lacking access to a permanent campus, library, or equipment, it was still one of the first schools to resume teaching students once the battle concluded, as classes began once more in October 1943 to train the medical personnel that were so desperately needed as life began to return amongst the ruins of Stalingrad. The school's reformed campus would be housed in a building designed by award-winning architects V. N. Simbirtsev and E. O. Levitan, built in the late-Stalinist imperial style that defined the other buildings near the Square of Fallen Fighters. The school quickly gained a reputation as a prestigious medical university, with doctoral programs in medicine, pediatric care, dentistry, and

⁵⁶⁸ Ibid, 92.

⁵⁶⁹ Ibid, 97.

⁵⁷⁰ By 1962, Stalingrad already had 7 sister cities. The count now reaches 21, including Hiroshima, Japan, and Cleveland, Ohio USA, and Chennai, India. We will explore in-depth the city's international persona in Chapter 6.

later optometry. The school graduated on average somewhere between two hundred and three hundred new doctors each year, attracting students from around the region and abroad. The school's faculty was composed of many physicians at the cutting edge of their field, including A. A. Polyantsev, a heart surgeon who conducted the first successful cardiac operations in the city's history within the school's teaching hospital.⁵⁷¹ The school's ongoing focus on research and concentration of outstanding faculty made the school the most well-equipped hospital in the region, providing a place to treat patients that other facilities in the area could not.

With three colleges within a few kilometers' radius, the Central district would have been the hub of student life with a high concentration of young people engaged in their studies. Incidentally, these students would have had some of the easiest access to some of the city's best theaters, parks, and cafes. For those pursuing their education and starting their careers, the 1950s and 1960s might have seemed full of opportunity. And while higher educational opportunities in the city were designed to meet the needs both of the region's industries and its populace, training students for the roles that would be required of a modern socialist society, it created a way to further enlist the next generation in the project of building communism.

Of course, or those interested in joining the party and climbing the party ladder (or with a genuine interest in socialist theory, or a genuine interest in appearing interested in socialist theory) the Stalingrad City Committee of the CPSU offered night courses in a free, two-year "Evening University of Marxism-Leninism." Applicants did not need to be members of the party to apply, but would need to answer a "personal questionnaire" about their marital and work status.⁵⁷² The coursework for the first year included history of the party and political economy,

⁵⁷¹ Morozova and Monakhova, *Pute-voditel po Volgogradu*, 80.

⁵⁷² It seems likely this survey would have been a measure of the applicant's ideological leanings as well, but I had no chance to verify the contents of the survey beyond what was listed in the advert.

while second year students would delve into dialectical materialism and the economics of industrial enterprises. The classrooms for the institute were in a state building bordering the Square of Fallen Fighters.⁵⁷³

The generation of *Stalingradtsy* youth who were coming of age in the postwar era faced a future full of possibilities. While there was no shortage of job opportunities in the city's rapidly expanding economy, the technological innovations of the time and the demand for skilled specialists in the Soviet economy meant there were plenty of opportunities for students to gain expertise and build a career beyond manual labor. Many scholars have further examined the role of the Komsomol in organizing and promoting young careerists during the Khrushchev era.⁵⁷⁴ The organization had seen a major dip in membership in the immediate postwar years, especially as initial reconstruction enthusiasm began to fade. Praise for the city's Komsomol, which in the 1950s became one of the single most prominent organizations in the city, was ever forthcoming. Many of Stalingrad's newly graduated professional elite would have seen opportunities for social advancement in the organization. The Komsomol was an extremely important body within the city, with its own dedicated press organ and an important role in many large public works projects, including the mass-housing drive, factory boom, the Hydroelectric Station, and the Soviet countryside that was undergoing a restructuring effort of its own during the period of de-Stalinization. The Komsomol was more than just a path to party membership or career success. It was also a networking opportunity, a social club, and a place to mingle with other young people. However, not all of their peers would be so enamored with the organization or the lifestyle it

⁵⁷³ See advert, "Vechernii universitet marksizma-leninizma" *Stalingradskaia pravda*, August 11, 1956, p. 3.

⁵⁷⁴ See Julianne Fűrst, "The Arrival of Spring," Robert Hornsby, "The Post-Stalin Komsomol and the Soviet Fight for Third World Youth," in *Cold War History* 16, no. 1 (2016): 83–100, A. L. Eliseev and O. V. Leonova, "Komsomol as the Conductor of the State Youth Policy of the Soviet State," in *Journal of Public and Municipal Administration* 9, no. 3 (2020): 32–42.

represented, and found comradeship instead with like-minded rebels, frequenting the city's cinemas and bars, listening to jazz in their apartments, and doing their best to avoid the drudgery of party meetings.⁵⁷⁵

Still, the breadth of educational opportunities provided for the next generation of the city's workers provided a wide array of career opportunities in a labor market that was desperate for skilled specialists trained in math and science. In order to bring meaningful change to Soviet labor relations (without conceding party power to collective bargaining of the workers themselves), Khrushchev desperately needed workers to invest in a vision for their future, of a modern socialist city that met their demand for consumer goods, foodstuffs, and recreation. The promised lifestyle of a de-Stalinized urban utopia was meant to both reward and placate Soviet citizens after decades of terror, hardship, and war. As we shall see, however, the lingering problems with Soviet labor that affected the region's industrial and agricultural output made this promise nearly impossible to fulfill.

Conclusions

De-Stalinization of the Stalingrad/Volgograd region's economy meant a number of things. It meant a major reconstruction of labor relations, as Khrushchev's reforms offered new mobility to Soviet workers, while also the political environment of de-Stalinization allowed them to take the fight to the "bosses," inviting workers to become invested in their own solutions to the deficiencies in their worksites. Rationalization became a major on-going struggle, as sluggish, ill-managed mega industries struggled to adapt, and piecemeal reforms from below concealed a lack of meaningful action by the party to address the underlying problems inherited

⁵⁷⁵ See Fűrst, "The Arrival of Spring." More on alternative cultures is discussed in Chapter 5, see pages 271-275.

from Stalin. Workers were also encouraged to specialize and continue their education, setting them up for careers in the Soviet economy with the underlying hope of conscripting their continued support for the collective project of “building communism.” This effort extended beyond the city, aimed too at revitalizing the party’s strained relationship with Soviet farmers.

Concurrent with this shift in labor relations was the massive state investment toward restructuring Soviet industrialized agriculture, with the attempt to expand the arable holdings of the state and shift the long-established crop cycle of rye, wheat, and barley to include corn and other consumer fruits and vegetables aimed at Soviet consumers. Additionally, corn meant expanding Soviet livestock to increase the production of things like milk, eggs, butter, and meat. However, despite renewed effort and financial investment, including in the enterprises that supported industrial agriculture like STZ, introducing meaningful change on the regions collective farms was a slow process, as institutional knowledge on corn and modern agricultural techniques had to be built across a broad range of collective farms facing their own logistical challenges. This created an uneven patchwork of reform, where farms with access to the resources they needed well outperformed the farms without access to the same resources could never hope to match. Still, the reforms had a major impact on how the region’s economy developed in the 1950s-1960s, and created a new class of agricultural specialists who were instrumental in ensuring the new system worked.

All of Khrushchev’s reforms were based on the gambit that he could reform the faltering Soviet economy and start delivering on the party’s promise of communist modernity. He could not do this, however, without the support of the Soviet labor base. Recognizing that the naked political coercion of his predecessor had been instrumental in creating the inefficient, stagnant economy he inherited, Khrushchev would instead bet on economic coercion instead. If Soviet

citizens thought they had a secure place in the new Soviet economy, where beyond just their basic needs were met, their quality of work would increase. Offering higher education opportunities to the next generation of Soviet youth played a major role in that promise, while also addressing the Soviet labor pool's lack of specialized technical knowledge. Specialized training was a key step into establishing one's economic niche and career, even as movement between industries and travel for work was becoming more common. Khrushchev's attempt to enlist the new generation was crucial for his vision for the long-term health of the Soviet economy.

However, as many have noted before, as monumental as these reforms were for the lived experience of the Soviet people, they would ultimately fall short of their goals, as entrenched deficiencies from the Stalinist economic model continued to persist throughout Khrushchev's tenure and beyond. As we shall see, Khrushchev's inability or unwillingness to tackle the underlying principles that defined the Soviet economy under Stalin continued to shape the everyday realities of life in the city and made it nearly impossible for the party to meet its own stated expectations.

CHAPTER 5

“The People of Stalingrad are Singing!”: Expectations and Realities of Life in the De-Stalinizing Socialist City

Introduction

Shortly after Stalin’s death, the playwright and songwriter Konstantin Ia. Litsov, who had studied theater in Tsarytsin before the revolution, paired with the newly reformed Stalingrad Musical Theater troupe to put on his brand-new musical comedy, “The People of Stalingrad are Singing.” The cast were all young and unknown actors, leading the reviewer to joke that Stalingrad Musical Theater could be called a “youth” theater, since it had only existed for the last three years. The play debuted in Moscow in 1955 before it began a multi-city tour across the Union, before eventually coming back to Stalingrad for a run of performances at its home theater located on the 62nd Second Army Embankment overlooking the Volga.⁵⁷⁶

The action of the play begins in 1943, not long after the Soviet victory at Stalingrad, as three soldiers—Andrei, Mitya, and Sergei—vow to return to the city to help in the reconstruction. The play then traces the lives of these friends as they reconnect in Stalingrad years later in their new peacetime careers: Andrei becomes the head of a construction site, Mitya the foreman of a team of plasterers, while Sergei becomes the secretary of the District Party Committee. They are joined by a cast of young and enthusiastic group of *Komsomoltsy* who have also arrived in the city to join in the rebuilding effort, including the beautiful and ever-optimistic Tanya, whose brother died in the defense of the city, and her friend, the good-humored Zorka, who provides much of the show’s comic relief. The songs and narrative often mix the comedic with the profound, as the cast try to remain upbeat amid the hardships of life among the ruins, and the scenery for the finale reflects how much life in Stalingrad has improved since the darkest

⁵⁷⁶ K. Petrova, “Poyut stalingradtsy,” *Vypusk*, no. 9 (1955), 94-98

days of the war, recreating the iconic colonnade along the steps of the city's 62nd Army Embankment.

The musical's tour was a way to share with the rest of the country the work of *Stalingradtsy* over the past decade to restore their home, a narrative one reviewer believes audiences will find inspiring.⁵⁷⁷ While as we shall see, in some ways the play was unique for its time, it very much fit the bill of a socialist realist portrayal of life in Stalingrad—its heroes and heroines are a part of the grand reconstruction project to revive Stalingrad, exemplifying determination and resolve in the face of hardship, which was gradually being eased by their efforts. The play was a product of the strange time in Soviet history between Stalin's death and the public critique of his policies made by Khrushchev in 1956. Many artists, citizens, and even the party elite, were anxious about testing the boundaries of acceptable public speech that had been well-established under Stalin following the war. However, Khrushchev's eventual denunciation of Stalin did much more than allow him the political lever necessary to push his own reforms on the party platform. It gave a new voice to the people of the Soviet Union to engage with the party, as they were encouraged (within limits) to advocate for their own interests. In 1956, the people of Stalingrad would truly begin to “sing,” as their voices swirled together into a chorus within the public forum of the pages of *Stalingradskaia pravda*. The editors welcomed and published innumerable submissions from the public, giving *Stalingradtsy* a space where they could share their praise, their complaints, and their ideas with the party and the public.

What their submissions reveal is that from being a populace docile in their acceptance of the party and the state, the Soviet people at this time were engaged, forceful, and clever in the

⁵⁷⁷ Ibid, 98.

way they chose to advocate their interests. Their submissions also help reveal how the party initiatives were received by the public. While certainly few complained of the construction of new housing, there were plenty who were unhappy with the state of their new apartment when they moved in. Though no one could decry the goal of giving every family access to childcare, they were very much invested in the kind of care their children would receive in state-run facilities. No one could complain about the initiatives to boost the number of foodstuffs generated by the collective farms surrounding the city, but whether they felt they had access to what was available was another matter entirely. The paper's editors could direct focus as they saw fit, using public critique to pressure party officials, industry heads, and others to try to effect change.

By surveying the pages of *Stalingradskaia/Volgogradskaia pravda* at this time, we can see that a significant portion of the population was engaged with the vision of the modern Soviet city, and while many might have agreed in principle, most were at least somewhat unhappy with some aspect of its execution. This chapter will explore the discrepancies between the ideal vision shared by Soviet planners and the people of the city, and the lofty expectations and harsh realities that defined life in Stalingrad during the Khrushchev era.

Methodology & Historiography

This chapter will contain my attempt to recreate and define the “everyday” aspect of the de-Stalinized city by attempting to examine various aspects of its cultural life. One of the reasons I have found Polly Jones and her contributors’ arguments so compelling in *Dilemmas of De-Stalinization* is that they demonstrate just how many aspects of Soviet life were drastically changed in regard to the widespread social phenomenon that was de-Stalinization. From

workplace cultures, artistic interpretations, and education, each realm was shaped by this tectonic political shift. One of the main goals of this project has been to recreate this widespread treatment in regard to a singular subject, in this case the city of Stalingrad. While we have now examined how Khrushchev's economic policies transformed the modern Soviet metropolis, we will now turn to explore what the lived experience of residents in this city might have been like.

To address such a broad question, I have sought to identify some of the key elements that would have been relatively common to all strata of *Stalingradtsy*. The public record of the local newspaper is the medium I've chosen to attempt to recreate such an amorphous historical concept of "everyday life."

Stalingradskaia/Volgogradskaia pravda provides one avenue into the thoughts of the city's residents through the editorials and letters that it published, a form which becomes a prominent outlet for citizens to take part in the public discourse. In the time of de-Stalinization, the city's residents were emboldened to speak out against what they see as failings of the local administration and the annoying quirks of modern Soviet living, though as we shall see, these complaints fall into a carefully bounded framework that never fully reaches the level of questioning Soviet power or the party. Still, these stories, complaints, and even editorial cartoons reveal much about day-to-day existence in Stalingrad during this time and provide valuable insight into how *Stalingradskaia pravda*'s editors and readers tried to make sense of the new post-Stalin reality.

The idea for this chapter and its place in my wider study was strongly influenced by the approach adopted by Stephen Kotkin's *Magnetic Mountain*, particularly in the second half of the work titled "Living Socialism: Little Tactics of the Habitat." After establishing the scope of the built environment and the contours of daily life in Magnitogorsk in the 1930s during the first half

of his work, Kotkin uses the second half to examine the patterns of daily life that emerged there.⁵⁷⁸ I intend to examine how the initiatives of de-Stalinization changed those patterns of life and behavior in the immediate post-Stalin era.

In Chapter 3, it was established how utopian ideals of the modern communist city shaped the principles of architecture and urban design in the Soviet Union in the postwar era. Much as the “engineers of human souls” saw technology and social planning as integral to building communism in the 1920s, in the 1950s and 1960s—the age of space travel, atomic energy, and man seemingly bending the laws of nature to its will—Soviet architects and planners were consciously reimagining what the built environment of Soviet civilization might look like.⁵⁷⁹ In the meantime, for those living in Stalingrad at this time, the discrepancy between the promised socialist utopia and the realities of life in the city was not lost on its inhabitants. As we can see through the pages of *Stalingradskaia/Volgogradskia pravda*, complaining about the state of things was an accepted part of life. Deficiencies were not hidden but instead routinely broadcast in the public forum of the newspaper, often with specific targets of blame and with anecdotal evidence that would no doubt have many readers nodding along in recognition of their own situation.

However, criticism had to stay within the banks of the socially acceptable channels. While individual members of the party or government or organizational management could be criticized by name, the leadership of the communist party as an institution was above reproach, nor could the principles of Marxism-Leninism be to blame. By couching complaints in the

⁵⁷⁸ Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*, chapters 4-7.

⁵⁷⁹ See Harris, *Communism on Tomorrow Street*, Christine Varga-Harris, “Moving Toward Utopia: Soviet Housing in the Atomic Age,” in *Divided Dreamworlds?: The Cultural Cold War in East and West*, ed. Peter Romijn, Giles Scott-Smith, and Joes Segal, 133–54, (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012), Tijana Vujosevic, “The Flying Proletarian: Soviet Citizens at the Thresholds of Utopia,” in *Grey Room*, no. 59 (2015): 78–101.

party's own language of the promises of communism, residents could seek to exercise some influence on the shape of the world they lived in. The reality of the day was that despite the party's lofty aspirations, the state would continue to struggle to meet them. The same limitations of the Soviet planned economy Stalin had left for Khrushchev produced unending logistical challenges and systemically shoddy craftsmanship.⁵⁸⁰

To residents living in Stalingrad, the idealistic vision of life in a modern socialist city would hardly match the imperfect and often frustrating world around them. Even as quality of life in the city continued to improve through the sheer forces of time—Stalingrad, much like Rome, was not rebuilt in a day—it was a long and messy journey. After so much of reconstruction under Stalin had been dedicated to rebuilding an imperial memorial city, Khrushchev's social policies led to a massive increase in the resources, capital, and manpower that the municipal government needed to pursue this new vision. However, this momentum would take time to build, and often it would take years before residents saw the results of these policy shifts come to bear on their daily lives. While the plan for the city evolved greatly in the 1950s, it was well into the 1960s before the city's economic base was even starting to show the strength needed to meet the demands of furnishing a modern city.⁵⁸¹

It has been understood by some that the forces of de-Stalinization also fundamentally changed the way the party interacted with society through various forms of mass media.⁵⁸² In 1981, Thomas Remington argued that de-Stalinization resulted in “a greater role for the mass media in articulating and aggregating public opinion,” allowing for the creation of “publics” where only “masses” once existed. This created an “exchange of ideas” between individuals and

⁵⁸⁰ See Orlov, *Istoriia rodnogo krai*.

⁵⁸¹ Ibid.

⁵⁸² For more on the state of Soviet Journalism prior to de-Stalinization, see Simon Huxtable, *News from Moscow: Soviet Journalism and the Limits of Postwar Reform*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022).

the state, wherein individuals were not only encouraged to form their own opinions on policy matters and even voice them.⁵⁸³ This is very clearly illustrated in Stalingrad in 1956 and beyond, as its residents had no shortage of things to say about the city in which they lived.

Their complaints then reveal how Soviet planning and economic deficiencies were a shared experience, and one the party projected through its own print organ as a problem needing to be overcome by collective action (rather than a faulty model needing replaced). Even though it was never openly stated, it signaled an agreement between party and society that things could be done better than they had been up until this point. Even without saying his name, this implicitly acknowledged the failures of reconstruction under Stalin and sought to reframe the new administration as one in tune with the needs of its people. What's more, it acknowledged that the citizens of the Hero City deserved better than the conditions they currently faced, in honor of the debt the defenders paid and their role in winning victory over the fascist invaders.

However, I contend that these complaints served another purpose: they helped the party invest the public in its vision for the future, and affirmed that to reach its goals, the party and society had to work in tandem. The party still used its editorial control of the press to select which complaints to elevate and how the dialogue was framed, but instead of using the coercive threat of state violence as in the dark days of the Terror, the party invited citizens to take part in the process and add their own personal voice and vision to the public discourse without fear of reprisal. Society was instead given a means to exert leverage on the party, however superficial that pressure may have been. In effect this created a more open channel of communication between the city's residents and the party bureaucrats overseeing the municipal government,

⁵⁸³ Thomas Remington, "The Mass Media and Public Communication in the USSR."

providing a means to gauge the public's priorities and at least attempt to adapt policies to the needs of the people. Meanwhile, the continued narrative of heroic sacrifice owed to the defenders of the city galvanized civic pride in resilience and commitment to the rebuilding project. We shall see more of how the war myth was ingrained in the identity of the city in a later chapter.

Another thing to consider from what we can find in the pages of the newspaper is the existence of society outside the party's scope. Coverage of local events also included slices of life just as it was. As *Stalingradtsy's* lived experience became more stable and increasingly private with the advent of the single family home, Soviet citizens could create their own communities and habits for navigating their shared urban spaces.⁵⁸⁴ Often their innovations were quite inventive, and far from a society where every aspect of life was controlled by the party, Soviet citizens were increasingly active in shaping the world around them.

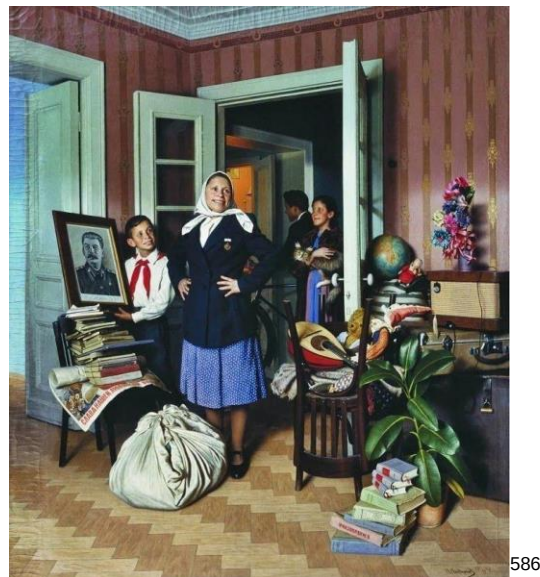
The average quality of life continued to rise exponentially as construction efforts accelerated and the postwar Soviet economy exceeded prewar levels and trade with the Third World increased. Episodes like the Kitchen Debates show how Khrushchev would continue to double down on these policies to improve the lived experience of Soviet modernity throughout his tenure as Premier.⁵⁸⁵ These initiatives did have a very real impact in connecting an increasing number of the city's residents with necessary goods and services that were key measures of quality and life. While criticism of shortcomings would never fully abate—the idealized Soviet metropolis would never fully match the lived reality—public criticisms played an important social function of shaping a shared aspirational vision of what the city could be.

⁵⁸⁴ See Varga-Harris, *Stories of House and Home*, Susanne E. Reid, "Cold War in the Kitchen."

⁵⁸⁵ See Shane Hamilton and Sarah T Phillips, *The Kitchen Debate and Cold War Consumer Politics: A Brief History with Documents*, (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2014), John W. Lahrner, "Judging the Kitchen Debate," in *OAH Magazine of History* 2, no. 1 (1986): 25–27.

Mass Housing and the Vision of Soviet Modernity

The artist A. Laktinov's painting "The New Apartment" (1952) depicts a family's glowing reaction to moving into their own apartment. Led by their beaming mother (who proudly wears a medal on her coat), the family can be seen peering into their new private rooms, their possessions in neat piles ready to be unpacked sitting on the warm caramel-colored tile. The son, wearing the white shirt and red kerchief of the young pioneers, holds a portrait of Stalin that will no doubt find a place of prominence on the richly colored wallpaper that adorns the walls.



"The New Apartment" resonated, as it captured the spirit of what might be described as the "Soviet dream"—akin to the post-war suburbanized single family "American Dream" of roughly the same period—the hope to one day have a private space to call one's own. It was a dream that had long been held by many but realized by very few.

The promise of mass-housing as an attainable future for *Stalingradsty* was propagated by the party press. Even before Khrushchev launched his mass housing initiative, *Stalingradskaia*

⁵⁸⁶ A. Laktinov, "The New Apartment" (1952), accessed via "Seventeen Moments in Soviet History: an On-line Archive of Primary Sources, soviethistory.msu.edu/ (accessed on 6/7/2024)

pravda regularly ran images of newly completed structures or sites of buildings under construction. However, whereas these images used to feature bricklayers and masons, typically working on in the cities central districts where construction was most focused, starting in the mid-fifties these were replaced by images of cranes and prefabricated concrete panels, emphasizing the speed of modern techniques and the spread of such structures throughout the city's geographically separate neighborhoods.

For example, in June of 1955—not long after the representatives of Stalingrad's construction firms would have returned from the all-Union conference in Moscow to discuss these building techniques—the paper ran a feature a cluster of five-story large panel residential buildings going up near the mouth of the Volga-Don canal in Krasnoarmeisk. The title, “Where there was once a wasteland,” emphasizes the speed at which these homes were being constructed. The story tells readers that “more recently, there was a steppe, scorched by the scorching rays of the sun. Now you cannot recognize these places! Having passed the bridge over the canal, you find yourself in a beautiful village. This is a town of builders; it grew up on the very spot where a wasteland once was.”⁵⁸⁷

This new “village” (which would form the new nucleus for the future neighborhood) was built with a goal in mind—housing the families of the workers in the construction firm, Tiazhstroy trust (a firm specializing in pouring foundations for commercial and residential buildings). This same firm had been shouldering the heavy burden of getting these same projects quite literally “off the ground.” According to the report, “Thousands of workers of the Tiazhstroy trust have been settled in comfortable and cozy apartments. At their service are shops, household workshops, and cultural institutions. Nowadays new residential quarters are being built up here.

⁵⁸⁷ “Tam, gde byl pustyr’,” *Stalingradskaia pravda*, June 1, 1955, 3.

This year it is planned to put into operation more than 20,000 square meters of housing, build a cinema theater, a hospital town, a bakery, buildings for a library and a bookstore.”

The neighborhood had come together so quickly, the article goes on to explain, due to its proximity to the district’s newly expanded industrial base. The factories that provided the reinforced concrete panels and bricks for these buildings made up part of the same skyline as the new buildings themselves. A nearby machine repair shop kept the region’s fleet of construction vehicles in operation, and a landfill just up the road allows for the easy removal of waste. In addition, the new ceramics factory still under construction would one day provide crucial materials like pipes, tiles, and facing bricks to all of Stalingrad. Of course, like any construction site, the crew has seen its fair share of problems. “Not everything goes smoothly for the builders, there are difficulties, but they persistently overcome them.”



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The newest structures, once completed, were intended for use by the workers of the new ceramics factory, and the promise of housing would serve as an additional incentive to recruit workers to a high-priority piece of the city’s construction infrastructure. The article serves as a message of hope for the future for all Soviet workers, declaring that “the first multi-story buildings have been built so far, but their number will continue to increase. Another new village

⁵⁸⁸ Photo by L. Moskvitina, *ibid.*

is growing on the wasteland!”⁵⁸⁹ While the story is distinctly regional, the message is intended not just for the people of Krasnoarmeisk, but for all of Stalingrad, as similar projects continued to propagate around the city.

What’s more, the question of one’s employment took on new dimensions, as enterprises that could offer their workers housing became in higher demand by virtue of access and distribution of new apartments. The promise of mass housing was not meant to be some distant tomorrow, but as attainable for all. The message offered was one of hope to tens of thousands still living out of dugouts, makeshift houses, and worker hostel dormitories. The dream of the single-family apartment became a reality for more and more Soviet citizens. However, like many dreams, reality could provide a rather harsh awakening.

Expectations vs. Realities of the New Soviet Dream

As we have seen, in the early days of mass housing, the final product of completed constructions could range greatly across different building trusts and neighborhoods of the city. While the physical space of a building might be complete, these apartments were scant up to the vision laid out in Laktinov’s painting. There was little in the way of finishing. Often by the time a family was handed over the keys to their new apartment, the newly minted *Khrushchevki* were the same drab gray concrete that they had been built from. Due to a shortage of hardware, often these apartments lacked many of the promised amenities. Bathtubs, shower heads, sinks, and even toilets were all in desperately short supply during construction, and so it was left to the new owners of the flat to procure these elements on their own. Sometimes floors were tiled or finished, sometimes this task would be left to the new homeowners. Kitchens (or at least, the

⁵⁸⁹ Ibid.

rooms where gas and water hook-ups were located) may or may not come equipped with countertops or cupboards, to say nothing of appliances like a stovetop, oven, or refrigerator that occupied the image of the ideal home.⁵⁹⁰ The joy of receiving new housing could quickly turn to frustration, as suddenly new residents faced an uphill battle to make these empty concrete rooms a space of comfort and belonging. To do so, they often had to navigate the same systems of shortage, corruption, and neglect that were so prevalent in daily life under Stalin.⁵⁹¹

Take for instance the case of the residents of house #10, a modest two-story apartment complex built along Angarsk Street, a new radial street leading north and west away from the central district on the far side of the rail line from the river. On June 14, 1955, their letter to the editors of *Stalingradskia Pravda* was published under the headline “Amenities are created... by Choice.” The letter writers first tell of their initial joy upon moving into their new apartments, but it doesn’t take long for them to realize that things are not as they should be. They write “Imagine our surprise when in the new apartments we did not find even signs of basic amenities—there was no water supply or sewage system. However, we found we were not the only ones upset. Along with us, the residents of neighboring houses belonging to the management of Zhilstroy and Spetsstroy (two construction firms involved in the new housing development) were also upset.”⁵⁹² However, in the house that had been designated for the workers of the sanitation firm involved in the project, there was a different story: “in the houses

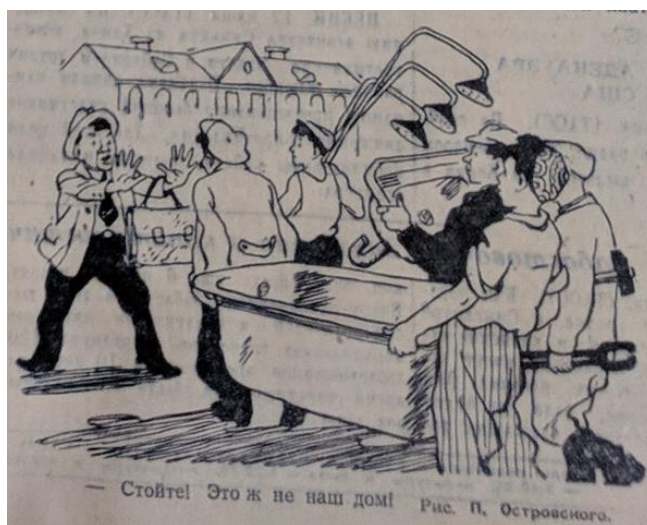
⁵⁹⁰ See Smith, *Property of Communists*, and Reid, “Cold War in the Kitchen”

⁵⁹¹ See A. Katsenelinboigen, “Coloured Markets in the Soviet Union,” in *Soviet Studies* 29, no. 1 (1977): 62–85, Alena V. Ledeneva, *How Russia Really Works: The Informal Practices That Shaped Post-Soviet Politics and Business* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006).

⁵⁹² Paramonov, Shcherbinin, Tregubenko, Erokhin, and others, “Udobstva sozdaiutsia... po vyboru,” *Stalingradskia pravda*, June 14, 1955, p. 2.

of Santekhstroi (sanitation trust) everything was as expected—water, sewage, central heating and gas.”⁵⁹³

According to the letter writers, their complaints to Santekhstroi eventually led to an effort to install new sanitation lines, which was less than ideal, considering the construction of the interiors had already been completed. Installation became its own nightmare, as the yard surrounding the building became a minefield of “mountains of dug earth and construction waste, and open trenches, into which children have fallen more than once.” However, while the others waited, the head of the Zhilstroi, who lived on the second floor, mysteriously already had plumbing while his neighbors did not.⁵⁹⁴



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The problem became bad enough that in August of 1956 a special session of the Stalingrad City Council was called to address the issue, which was covered extensively by the city press. The proceedings reveal a culture of sluggish bureaucracy, poor leadership, and

⁵⁹³ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁵ Ibid, Illustration by P. Ostrovskii, caption reads “Stop! This is not *our* house!”

incompetence that was openly decried by many of the industries' own workers, who felt the inability to meet their production targets was letting down their fellow citizens.⁵⁹⁶

The session began with a report on the current state of the yearly development plan, now already seven months in. At the time, 301 residential buildings in total were currently under construction in Stalingrad. While the construction of new gas and water lines remained on schedule, the report revealed staggering deficiencies in other areas. Of the target 142,000 square meters of living space that were called for by the end of the year, this metric had only been fulfilled 46.9%, and for cultural/commercial construction only 37%.⁵⁹⁷ When the floor was opened to debate, the session was flooded with speakers who wished to share their take on what was responsible for the delays. Individual construction trusts were put under great scrutiny, and the leaders of these trusts were subjected to harsh criticism.

The report in *Stalingradskaia pravda* asked “What's the matter? Why is home construction, which is the most important task in improving the living standards of the working people of Stalingrad, being conducted so unsatisfactorily? It was noted at the session that, until recently, the leaders of individual construction organizations have shown a careless attitude to the implementation of the housing construction plan, and do not carry out concrete and daily management of it.” Four organizations and their chief officers were called out as emblematic of the biggest problems facing the construction industry in the city: Construction Trust #115 (managed by comrade Kopanev) Stalingradmetallurgstroy (managed by comrade Kogotkov), Stalingradstroy (managed by comrade Andreev) and the municipal housing administration

⁵⁹⁶ “Sdat’ 120 tysiach kvadratnykh metrov zhil’ia: s sessii Stalingradskogo gorsoвета,” *Stalingradskaia pravda*, August 11, 1956, 2.

⁵⁹⁷ Ibid.

(headed by comrade Stepchikov). These trusts were accused of the poor use of funds, no oversight in the distribution of materials, slow and sloppy work, and general mismanagement.⁵⁹⁸

The article gives several examples of how the workmanship, even in what little there was of the construction completed that year, was exceedingly shoddy. Most of the blame was passed to management, rather than the efforts of the workers themselves. One example given during the session recalled how due to a miscommunication between Stalingradmetallurgstroi's chief engineer and head of the construction department the use of materials had been recalled, causing a housing structure in the Krasnooktiabr'sk district to be pulled down just as it was being completed.⁵⁹⁹ In another case, construction of a house in the central district had to be halted because the building's engineers had tried to use an unapproved heating system in a building at the corner of Soviet and Peace Streets, which would have sent black plumes of smoke into the heart of downtown. The plans had to be redrawn, even as the foundations of the site were already in the process of being prepared.⁶⁰⁰ Finally, one example that gathered particular complaint, Trust #115 had improperly installed the radiator heating system in a hospital administration building, and in the winter the heating could barely keep the thermostat higher than six degrees Celsius (roughly 42 degrees Fahrenheit). These examples reflected the broader scope of the problem in the city—many construction sites stood half-completed, bogged down by one delay or another, and many completed projects fell well short of basic expectations. An accompanying cartoon shows a building inspector walking beneath a wall of an apartment complex that is about to collapse onto him, including the caption “The question of the quality of construction has reached a tipping point.”

⁵⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁰ Ibid.

However, the critiques did not stop with upper management. Even the city council was not able to escape reproach, as complaints were lodged about the governing body's failures to enforce oversight. It was reported that "during the session, many examples were given when the executive committees of the city and district Soviets did not fulfill their own decisions, did not specifically direct and did not control the implementation of the plan for housing and cultural and social construction." One of the examples given is attributed to a comrade Zharov, "who reproached the executive committee of the City Council for the fact that it often does not respond to criticism, and does not take due measures."⁶⁰¹ At the last session, he says, "I asked to help one citizen in obtaining housing. Comrade Dynkin promised to act, and then instructed Comrade Zhdanyuk to do this. The latter simply passed the case on; he referred the cases to the Voroshilov regional executive committee. So, this question remained unresolved." To drive home this point, the article here includes a cartoon depicting the bureaucratic chain of command as administrators sitting at a long row of desks, handing orders backwards to the next in line, stretching on to infinity with a caption that reads "and so on..."



Though the session is ostensibly about construction standards and production targets, it also reveals a snapshot of how the broader atmosphere of de-Stalinization impacted housing

⁶⁰¹ Ibid.

⁶⁰² P. Ostrovskii, left: "Vopros o kachestvo stroitel'stva "stavitsia pebrom," right: "I tak dalee...," ibid.

construction. The criticism directed at not only the heads of major firms, but of the city soviet as well, illustrates how Khrushchev's campaign against bureaucracy and the "mini Stalins" entrenched in positions of power had been taken up by citizens no longer willing to tolerate the status quo. The expectations of the citizenry, particularly around the question of housing, were brought to the fore—a failure on this front was to fail the people of Stalingrad. The final resolution of the session included the warning that "the leaders of the above construction sites were reminded about their personal responsibility for the completion of the construction and putting into operation of these buildings." The council also declared that, despite the delays, the city's building firms were still expected to fulfill the plan of 142,000 square meters of new residential space, as well as fifty buildings for cultural and domestic purposes, before the end of the year.⁶⁰³

The "Letters to the Editor" section of *Stalingradskaia pravda* were filled with similar stories of complainants hoping that publicizing their plight might lead to some recourse within official channels. Of course, this was not often the case. In the case of one persistent house, we have the chance to follow up on one of these stories. In May of 1956, a letter was published among the editorials on behalf of the residents of House #7 on Kiev Street. The letter had been written to proclaim that its residents were "happy with our home building for just a day. And then the sorrows began." Soon after moving into the building in January, a massive plumbing issue caused flooding throughout the building, with water pooling between floors, and leaking through brand new roofs into residents' apartments. The flooding was so bad that the doors warped, and many residents' furniture and possessions were ruined. The residents in May were

⁶⁰³ "Gorsovet reshil," *Stalingradskaia pravda*, August 11, 1956, 2.

delighted to read their letter in the newspaper, as they believed that perhaps now measures would be taken to redress the situation on their behalf.⁶⁰⁴

A second letter, published four months later on August 15, reveals that this was not the case. Resident of the house V. Mitrofanov wrote that “soon after the article was published, plumbers came to inspect our apartments. However, as soon as they appeared, they left without doing anything. The plumbers blamed all the troubles on the builders, and the builders blamed it on the plumbers. And while they were arguing, new problems were added to the old ones.”⁶⁰⁵ With the plumbing issue still unresolved, the building was to receive new gas lines since the neighborhood had now been connected to the city grid. As Mitrofanov tells it, “for a whole month they tortured us while they connected the stoves to the line.” Because the building was not built with gas infrastructure in mind, the lines were not able to be run through the walls without first demolishing sections. Sometimes lines were run through doorways, through awkward cutouts hastily slashed through the top or bottom of the wooden frame. The work was done sloppily, so that in some cases once a wall was patched up after a new line was run, they would have to break it out again to fix some problem that was not caught the first time. “There is dirt and debris everywhere,” Mitrofanov complains.⁶⁰⁶ By the end of his letter, any sense of optimism that the situation might be resolved favorably any time soon had been dashed. And while this is just one example, surely many residents in similar situations across the city were able to relate to Mitrofanov’s frustration.

⁶⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁵ V. Mitrofanov, “Pis’ma v redaktsiiu: V tom zhe dome na Kievskoi,” *Stalingradskaia pravda*, August 15, 1956, 3.

⁶⁰⁶ Ibid.



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For all the faults of the newly expanding public housing in the city, the goal of attaining an apartment was still a deeply held dream for tens of thousands of the city's residents. The housing question even remained one of the top issues in municipal elections, as can be seen in February 1959 by the number of questions asked to candidates seeking election to the city soviet. The coverage of these meetings taking place around the city reveals how involved the general public was with questions regarding mass housing, from construction rates, the floor plans available for new apartments, and even amenities that would be included. "At numerous pre-election meetings, at meetings with candidates, voters often asked questions about the further construction of Stalingrad. How many houses will be built, what will they be like? Literally all *Stalingradtsy* are interested in this." At this time, the city's construction firms were still making the switch to full prefabricated building techniques, as many of the projects started before the 1955 switch had finally reached completion. Stalingrad's architects had also approved new

⁶⁰⁷ P. Ostrovskii, "Po i posle remonta" (Before and after repairs), appearing in "Gorchichnik," *Stalingradskaia pravda*, January 23, 1959, 2.

building plans from the two-story to five-story range, complete with a new layout that included greater storage for clothes and linens, the lack of which had been a complaint of earlier designs.

I. Fialko, the director of the *Stalingradproekt* institute, wrote to *Stalingradskaia pravda* to weigh in on the new design choice:

Considering that each family will live in a separate apartment, it is possible, without sacrificing convenience, to reduce and minimize the area of the transition corridors and the front hall, to somewhat reduce the size of the kitchen and sanitary unit. To create great household amenities and comfort, each apartment has a built-in wardrobe, according to its equipment and dimensions, designed for storing summer and winter clothes, suitcases, bedding, linen and other household items. Sometimes you can hear the opinion that they say, ‘wouldn’t it be better to increase the living area by two and a half square meters? This is not true, since in the absence of well-equipped and spacious built-in closets in the living rooms, one has to buy expensive and bulky wardrobes that occupy the same living space and are less convenient.

There was also concern among residents about the low ceilings of the new units, but Fialko defends this decision on a matter of economy and speed.

If we compare five-story and four-story residential buildings with the same number of apartments according to the old and new layouts, it turns out that for the same funds and the same materials that were previously spent on the construction of five houses, now six are being built. It is not difficult to construct six. It is not difficult to imagine how important the transition to small-sized construction of residential buildings is and how much it brings us closer to solving the housing problem.

Though the city’s housing pool remained inadequate, Fialko admits, he stressed that the pace of construction was accelerating, and the quality of work improving as more and more of the city’s industry was rising to meet the new needs of the construction industry. He promised that “with the foundations and underground utilities completed in advance, the four- and five-story residential building will be assembled within one to one and a half months.” In addition, the new plans all accounted for water, heating, and electrification installation *during* construction—a

welcome sign to those still awaiting housing and had seen the horror stories of some of the earliest recipients (and surely frustrating to those whose apartments lacked this foresight, knowing the odds of them moving to an updated model were exceedingly slim). To end his report, Fialko stressed the need to elect candidates who understand the complexity of the housing question, and who would make it a priority in the future. “Housing construction is one of the conditions for the further well-being of the working people. It will be carried out at an ever-quickenning pace in the interests of the people.”

At the tenth session of the Stalingrad City Council of Working People’s Deputies, which took place in January 1959, council chairman comrade Dynkin took a similar view. Though he admits the city’s construction firms were still falling short of the high demands placed on them, improvements being made to the city’s industrial base and better coordination between factories and work crews would allow Stalingrad to rise to the challenge laid out by the Seven-Year Plan approved at the Twenty First Party Congress. “The most important task of the deputies, of all the working people of the city, is the implementation of the tasks of the Seven-Year Plan. It is necessary to build 1,900,000 square meters of living space in the city in seven years, including at least 330,000 in 1959, to expand housing construction using the methods of rapid construction. Its also necessary to build forty school buildings, and in 1959, start the construction of ten schools and eight hostels for boarding schools.”⁸¹ These ambitious targets would provide housing, as well as education, to tens of thousands of Stalingrad’s families, and put the city on pace to achieve the promise of socialism as it had been defined by the Khrushchev administration.

Other deficiencies remained at this time, which were supposed to come part and parcel with these new apartment buildings. With the city’s water and gas facilities both near the

geographical center of the city, infrastructure for those utilities in its northern- and southern-most reaches lagged behind other districts, inconveniencing residents of those areas disproportionately. This problem was even more pronounced in the countryside in the housing built in the new agrogorods and large state farms. Even if an apartment building came equipped with the proper gas and water hookups at the time residents moved in (which was not by any means a guarantee), new homeowners still faced the challenge of furnishing them. Large amenities, like bathtubs, stoves, and refrigerators, needed to be installed with the proper hookups to the city's sewer and power lines. Specialized installation *artels* (specialized worker collectives) became a new economic niche for a much-needed trade within Soviet life. However, even in this field, good service was hard to come by.⁶⁰⁸

In addition, the greening of the city, which had long been an objective even since the days of the hero city, was being constantly stymied by new construction, and many complained of the bleak, treeless landscape created by the constant construction, as residents walked out their front doors into a dull, barren moonscape of mud and concrete outside its dedicated parks, spaces which we shall later see had their own struggles.

It is worth noting too, that one of the reasons private housing was so sought after is precisely the thing we are not able to see in the pages of the newspaper—the right to privacy. The single-family apartment was, by definition, a private space, intended to give Soviet citizens their own refuge from the public sphere. As noted by Christine Varga Harris earlier in the chapter, this sense of entitlement to privacy had been completely unthinkable to those who lived through the communal apartment (and who witnessed the Terror as it had spread through them). The private apartment is where thousands of *Stalingradtsy* would have processed the political

⁶⁰⁸ See story of artel refrigerator installers, *Stalingradskaya pravda*, January 23, 1959.

implications of de-Stalinization and their personal thoughts on the matter, in close conversation with friends and family around the kitchen table or living room, rather than at party meetings on the factory floor. While these conversations obviously do not leave any real trace in the historical record, it is important to note that they were certainly taking place, and in no small part thanks to the initiative of Khrushchev to return a modicum of privacy to Soviet citizens long starved for it.

While mass-housing construction was not as geographically concentrated as other iconic public works of the period like the hydroelectric station, the scale of the project, its impact on Stalingrad's economy, and the implications for the daily lives of its citizens made it one of the biggest stories in the city at the time. The constant press coverage of construction sites around the city (even the critiques of building firms or tales of shoddy workmanship) showed the interest not just of party administrators but of everyday readers in the news of progress in this endeavor. Every new apartment turned over to new owners was a small yet significant step down the path toward communism, of a society in which all its citizens' material needs could be met by the state.

Public “Third” Spaces in the Modern Soviet City

As life was evolving both at work and in the home, so too did the contours of the Soviet experience continue to evolve in the public “third spaces” within the city, where *Stalingradtsy* could spend their hours of leisure and recreation. The newspaper served as a hub to showcase various activities, the achievements of various clubs, and opportunities for citizens to get involved in the city's social life. The rich tapestry of life playing out in the city's green spaces and broad avenues was starkly contrasted with scenes of poverty and racial strife that characterized depictions of American cities that sometimes appeared to contrast the ills of

capitalist society with the beatific new socialist modernity.⁶⁰⁹ Of course, these images were specifically crafted to show the idealized activities Soviet citizens should choose to engage in—activities deemed unsavory, like drinking culture and anything that could be labeled “hooliganism,” were either not pictured or were actively derided. Through the recent work of local historians and through the pages of *Stalingradskaia pravda*, we can begin to piece together the culture of Stalingrad’s public spaces in the 1950s-1960s.

Leisure activities could not simply occur in the vacuum outside of working hours. Places to take in a movie, to watch a soccer match, or even to just meet up with friends, all needed their own dedicated space within the city’s geography. Party organizations, cultural groups, artistic enclaves, and sporting clubs all needed physical space to act as their base of operation. The way that resources and funding to construct these spaces was a question of great importance, especially at a time when the high demands of housing and industry made competition for such resources high. Like all aspects of urban life, Soviet planners were keenly aware how these spaces would impact the lives of the city’s denizens and the prevailing social culture of the city. It was no wonder, then, that the spaces constructed to serve as the social hubs were to remain closely tied to the party and its cultural and political objectives.

Many historians have begun to explore how de-Stalinization reorganized Soviet public culture.⁶¹⁰ What recent studies have made clear is that far from a top down, singular vision by the party authority, culture in the Soviet Union continued to evolve during Khrushchev’s time in

⁶⁰⁹ For more on how the US was characterized in official party rhetoric during this time, see Rosa Magnúsdóttir, *Enemy Number One: The United States of America in Soviet Ideology and Propaganda, 1945-1959*. (United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2018), Richard Lentz and Karla K. Gower, *The Opinions of Mankind: Racial Issues, Press, and Propaganda in the Cold War*, (Colombia: University of Missouri Press, 2011), and Ivan N. Lopatkin and Ravilya R. Khisamutdinova, “‘Reconstruction’ of US Cultural Development within the Soviet Press during the ‘Thaw’ Period,” in *Vestnik Rossijskogo Universiteta Družby Narodov. Seriâ Istoriâ Rossii* 22, no. 2 (2023): 275–88.

⁶¹⁰ See for instance various works by Juliane Furst, Susan E. Reid, Christine Varga-Harris, and Ann Livshchiz.

myriad ways. Despite the state's best attempts to define and present an idealized public culture, the everyday experience of Soviet citizens remained one ultimately defined by their own choices of how to spend their time and how they interpreted the messages presented by new media. Soviet public culture continued to evolve in response to material circumstances, as innovations in technology and the built environment also greatly impacted public perception. However, Khrushchev's political disruption certainly impacted Soviet culture as he pursued his initiatives. Even as the state made efforts to better organize Soviet leisure time, these initiatives broadly matched the goals of Khrushchev's wider push to prioritize the needs and well-being of Soviet workers. During the Twentieth Party Congress, many resolutions reflected this change in policy, from the increase of funding towards cultural institutions that had languished in the hard decade following the war, to the adoption of a seven-hour working day without reducing worker salaries.⁶¹¹ In the late-1950s and early 1960s, Soviet citizens would have more to do and more time to do it than ever before.⁶¹²

As we examine various aspects of "everyday life" in the de-Stalinizing civilization of Stalingrad/Volgograd during this period, there is one aspect of life that we can only evaluate by its absence: the more time passed following Stalin's death, and particularly after the collective catharsis of the Secret Speech, the less one could consider the late 1950s-1960s as an era of terror. While Khrushchev never considered for a moment relinquishing the party's grasp on the levers of state power, he effectively reigned in the coercive arm of the state. The NKVD, the "secret" police that terrorized the Soviet population under Stalin was no more, rebranded as the KGB ("Komitet gosudarstvennoy bezopasnosti," the Committee for State Security) in 1954.

⁶¹¹ A. V. Lipatov and A. V. Val'kovskii, "Rol' kyl'nykh uchrezhdenii v organizatsii dosuga sovetskikh grazhdan v. 1953-1964 gg. (na primere Stalingrada-Volgograda)," *Izvestiia*, no. 4 (2015): 189-197, 190.

⁶¹² Gleb Tsipursky offers a sweeping study of Soviet leisure habits in *Socialist Fun: Youth, Consumption, and State-Sponsored Culture in the Soviet Union, 1945-1970*. (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2016).

Their operations monitoring political opposition and dissent were deliberately shadowy, and while individuals could still be persecuted for political crimes the years of show-trials, mass arrests, denunciations, and collective punishment were no more. Waves of prisoners from the Gulag were freed beginning almost immediately following Stalin's death, and the institution was consistently scaled back before it was done away with entirely in 1960.⁶¹³

By focusing instead on delivering a vision of communism in peacetime, Khrushchev's policies and public denunciations of Stalin would slowly but steadily release the pressure of the Stalinist terror on Soviet life, like a gradually deflating balloon that eventually becomes insignificant and intangible, a mere memory of something that is no longer there.

Public Amenities and Consumer Culture

One of the other cornerstones of public life for *Stalingradsty* was their interface with the goods and services provided by the state. This other critical aspect of modern urban life, that of access to resources necessary to human survival, was a core question for civic planners. As young people started to build their lives, careers, and start families, they became more keenly aware of what they had and what they still lacked. The core questions that ultimately defined one's life remained access to shelter, food, a job with secure income, access to medical care, and access to education to unlock career success in the future. We turn to examine examples of those spaces now.

The city's stores, cafeterias, restaurants, laundromats and even public transportation occupied another vital niche in the living tapestry of the city. They provided yet another space

⁶¹³ For more on how the return of Gulag inmates affected life in the Soviet Union, see Dobson, *Khrushchev's Cold Summer*.

where *Stalingradtsy* could gather and interact with their neighbors outside the home and workplace. Because these were primarily managed by the state, it was here that citizens saw the most direct impacts of party policies, and the pages of *Stalingradskaia pravda* provide a decent gauge to measure the populace's approval or disapproval with the services they were provided.

The distribution of foodstuffs, a resource almost entirely imported from the countryside, has always been one of the core questions of urban living. How residents could access basic foodstuffs was a question that was of no small import to Soviet city planners envisioning a utopian future where the question of need is all but alleviated. Even as Khrushchev struggled to reconfigure Soviet agriculture so that collective farms would produce more and increase the public's access to basic food items like eggs, milk, meat, there was still the question of how to distribute this food to residents.

In the immediate postwar area, rationing was still strictly overseen by the state. Without many residents having access to the amenities of a modern kitchen to cook their own food at home, cafeterias or canteens (*stolovaya*) were used to help feed mass numbers of workers and reduce their domestic labor. In the 1950s, as more and more residents gained access to housing, eating and cooking became a much more private affair (one that typically fell to Soviet women), but was still reliant on Soviet consumers being able to find and purchase their groceries with ease.⁶¹⁴ Instead of large-scale distribution hubs, a wider grid of smaller neighborhood shops were to create access for residents who may not have had access to easy means of transport. This created the logistical problem of ensuring that such multitudinous shops were fully stocked, which the state's transportation network often struggled to overcome.

⁶¹⁴ See Natasha Kolchevskaya, "Angels in the Home and at Work: Russian Women in the Khrushchev Years," in *Women's Studies Quarterly*. 33, no. 3/4, (2005): 114–37.

While in the 1950s American consumerism was propelled by brands built on the backs of multimillion dollar advertising campaigns in print magazines, billboards, and radio and television commercials, Soviet media never had the equivalent—with goods and services production and distribution controlled largely by the state and supplemented by unofficial but largely accepted black market. Soviet citizens were less concerned with who made their products and instead where they could procure them. Print media still had an important role to play to alert residents when and where they could expect to find the goods that were in high demand. In the 1950s, residents might check *Stalingradskaia pravda* to find an announcement about a fresh shipment of meat, butter, potatoes, or other foodstuffs arriving in the city.⁶¹⁵ Residents would even write letters to the editor giving their own advice to their neighbors of how to track down rare items, and often complained whenever they faced shelves stocked with perishables that had already begun to spoil.⁶¹⁶ By the 1960s, stories around foodstuffs and where to find them had become so prevalent in *Volgogradskaia pravda* that they made a special banner “We’ll give you more” (*dadim bol’she*) that marked out stories related to improving the access of consumer goods.

⁶¹⁵ See, among others, V. Der’entsev, “Kartofel’ dlia volgograda,” *Volgogradskaia pravda*, October 1964,

⁶¹⁶ P. Budanov, “Pora podumat’ o el’shanke,” *Stalingradskaia pravda*, July 26, 1956, 3.



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Alternatively, for the region's farmers, who could supplement their tables with the individual plots they were allowed to grow personal crops on and livestock they kept apart from the farm's collective holdings, finding the same consumer goods that were common in the city remained difficult for rural residents. One solution to this problem was holding special public market days aimed at collective and state farmers traveling to the city, particularly around the mass festival days that accompanied many state holidays. Markets were set up across the city in warehouses and public squares in various neighborhoods, where goods like fabrics, shoes, clothing, hats, household items, toys, and sports equipment might be found, while Stalingrad's residents could come to the market farmers would set up their own stalls to sell fresh produce from their own individual plots.⁶¹⁸

For non-produce items, *Stalingradtsy* may have needed to travel farther afield than just their local neighborhoods. For items like furniture, clothing, appliances, and other necessities, residents might once again rely on announcements in the newspaper for new shipments and items currently featured. The city's once fabled Central District "*Univermag*" department store, having become somewhat infamous during the battle as its basement became General Paulus's

⁶¹⁷ Left: Advertisement for ongoing sale at Stalingrad's "Univermag" department store, *Stalingradskaya pravda*, April 6, 1956, p. 2. Right: "We'll Give you More," this one for meat (*miasa*), milk (*mokoka*), eggs (*iaitsa*), and wool (*shersti*). *Volgogradskaya pravda*, May 9, 1963, 3.

⁶¹⁸ Vnimaniu kolkhozov i kholkhoznika! *Stalingradskaya pravda*, October 26, 1961.

command post, had been rebuilt and refurbished. The *Univermag* was once again the go-to spot in the city for all manner of Soviet-produced consumer items. The store had rotating exhibitions that may highlight various products, from new bicycles, silks and sewing machines, or kitchen appliances, which could focus consumer demands on the items they currently had in stock (and, one must assume, hopefully detract from those they did not).⁶¹⁹ As more and more Soviet citizens acquired their own apartments, furnishing these dwellings put a massive demand on everything from mattresses to refrigerators.⁶²⁰ Savvy consumers needed to employ every stratagem they could to lock down the items they sought.

However, even basic amenities such as access to clean water were still not a guarantee, even as more and more homes were completed. Returning water service to the city had one of the largest challenges following the battle, with so much of the old infrastructure corrupted or destroyed by the battle. As the city continued to expand geographically and demographically, water infrastructure sometimes lagged behind construction. It was 1954 before a general plan to consolidate and improve the city's water system was approved, and by this time demand was already beginning to outstrip supply.⁶²¹

By 1956, in the Voroshilov region south of the city center where a significant portion of the city's new houses were being built, the head of the city's department for Water Supply and Sewage, A. Revin, noted that "the growth of the population and industry has significantly outpaced the capabilities of the water supply."⁶²² Efforts had been made to create reservoirs on high-points in the city's geography, including Mamayev Kurgan and the Yel'shanka

⁶¹⁹ See for instance advert for *Univermag* in *Stalingradskaya pravda* April 6, 1955, 2.

⁶²⁰ See Stephen E. Harris, *Communism on Tomorrow Street: Mass Housing and Everyday Life after Stalin* (Washington D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2013).

⁶²¹ A. Revin, "Kak budet snabzhen vodoi Voroshilovskii raion," *Stalingradskaya pravda*, July 26, 1956, 3.

⁶²² Ibid.

neighborhood, and to build independent pipeline to supply water to the region, but a number of logistical difficulties, namely bypassing the city's longitudinal highway and crossing the Pionerka Riverbed, had slowed construction. The effort had already cost Stalingradstroy trust more than one million rubles and an additional three million rubles to the Santekhstroy (Sanitation) trust. Revin notes that additional need from the collective farms in the surrounding countryside was adding further complications as resources were stretched thin. He promised that with the construction slated for the next several months, residents in Voroshilov should see the problem permanently fixed by the following year.⁶²³

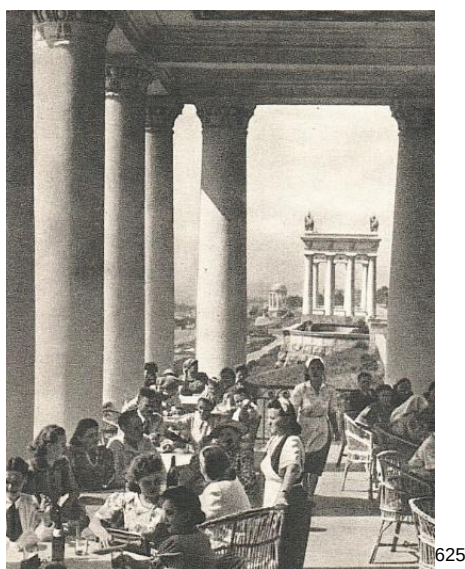
Despite these complications, for residents living in areas waiting for a steady flow from the taps in the bathrooms and kitchens, the struggle for such basic amenities was a source of sustained frustration. By August 1956, some Voroshilov residents complained that they had been hearing such promises for more than two years. Without water running to their buildings themselves, residents of Chembarsky Lane asked for at least the installation of a public spigot on their street. The chairman of the district Executive Committee, comrade Stepchikov, promised to give immediate instructions for such an effort to begin. A year later, there was still no spigot. By then, the district committee had a new Chair, comrade Lizunov. He also heard the citizens' request and promised that the installation would be completed by the third quarter of 1955. As winter set in and it was once again clear no spigot was forthcoming, the residents took their request once more to a new district Chairman, now comrade Stalyarov. He at least gave them an answer as for the delay—there simply wasn't any pipe to run the line. Stalyarov once again promised to look into the matter, but there was still no water pump in sight.⁶²⁴

⁶²³ Ibid.

⁶²⁴ Samoilov, Mezentseva, Klochkov, and other residents of Chembarsky Lane, "Ne skazka, a byl': Tri predsedatelia i odna kolonka," *Stalingradskia pravda*, August 21, 1956.

With such questions of access to water and basic foodstuffs facing many, it was no wonder that public dining spaces remained a core part of the city's geography. For all the long-sought privacy the single-family apartment allowed *Stalingradtsy*, there was still a high demand for public spaces where residents could gather, eat, and discuss the events of the day. Residents usually had two accessible options: the canteen or cafeteria (*stolovaya*), or the many cafes that offered slightly higher cuisine.

In the late 1950s, the city would see a burgeoning cafe culture as more public restaurants sprung up across the urban landscape. These cafes could serve as restaurants for families, destinations for tourists, and spaces for students and young people to gather. Like parks and other amenities, however, the concentration and quality of cafes in the city was not equally distributed. Trendy neighborhoods in the city center included some of the nicest cafes in the city, which could be frequented by guests staying in the city's hotels, but also party officials and notables that called the trendy neighborhoods along Ulitsa Mir and Lenin Prospect home.



⁶²⁵ Mikhail Bratsilo, *Moscultura*, Stalingrad collection (1950s), cafe attached to Musical Theater overlooking the river, with the 62nd Army Embankment to the south pictured in the background.

New cafes were opening all the time, particularly within neighborhood centers or on heavy traffic routes, like the approach on Lenin Prospect toward the city's new Central Stadium complex and the base of Mamayev Kurgan. This cafe experience was more purposely catered than the assembly line of the *stolovaya*, what you would typically expect from a sit-down restaurant where you are seated and order off the menu. Cafes might have access to ingredients that might be hard to find even in the shops. It was also, accordingly, much more costly, with meals costing usually a couple of rubles. This served another important social function, of an option where workers could meaningfully spend their wages.

However, patrons were not always pleased with the quality of these cafes, and reviews in the newspaper could be rather damning. Take for instance the notice broadcast by I. Grishin, a member of the State Control committee for the Red October region. In an October 1964 article dubbed "Magicians" (*fokusniki*), Grishin takes the management of the new "Ogonek" cafe to task for some dubious business practices. The cafe, whose menu featured steaks and other grilled meats, had begun reducing the quality of the cuts they served, buying cheaper products, but keeping the costs the same. In some instances, they substituted pork or lamb for beef, even though beef was listed on the menu, yet once again kept the same cost for the more expensive beef dishes. When investigating their records, in their accounting books Ogonek was adjusting the amount they were paying for deliveries and still logging the incoming product in their records as beef—meat of one type was turned into another type by the "magicians" at the Ogonek cafe!" They were even withholding the amount of sour cream they were using in their salads: 8g instead of 20g. Grishin estimated that the inflated cost per meal amounted to thirty to forty kopeks on average. He went so far as to ask the director of the restaurant, Sokolovsky, and his accountant, Budanov, if they might happen to know where the difference in cost was going and

suggesting perhaps the neighborhood committee should be asking them to turn out their pockets!⁶²⁶

While cafes were somewhat more formal venues, cafeterias continued to be a prevalent public space well into the 1950s and beyond.⁶²⁷ Many still utilized them for their convenience and the removal of the domestic labor needed to cook and clean for oneself—a high priority for workers coming off a shift or students busy with their studies, as well as unmarried bachelors who may never have learned the domestic art of cooking.⁶²⁸ With such public spaces in such high demand, when cafeterias failed to meet the expectations of their clientele, it became yet another source of public outcry. In the summers, cafeteria hygiene was of particular importance to help alleviate the swarms of biting black flies that each year emerged in broods from along the riverbanks. In the summer of 1956, residents in the north of the city wrote to the editor to complain of the pestilence that had descended upon the Olkhovsky canteen. Despite pest control coming once a week to keep the insects in check, poor sanitation in the facilities had made the establishment a hotbed for the flies, making eating (and working) there unbearable.

⁶²⁶ I. Grishin, "Fokusniki," *Volgogradskaia pravda*, October 18, 1964, 3.

⁶²⁷ This staple of Soviet culture that persists in Russian cities to this day, including *Stolovaya GOST*, a cafeteria just a short walk up Kommunisticheskaia Street from GAVO, which became a favorite lunch spot for its authentic cuisine on a cheap budget.

⁶²⁸ Many studies have shown how entrenched gender roles were in the Soviet Union at this time, and how ill-suited many Soviet men were to the tasks of homemaking. See for instance Kolchevska, Natasha. "Angels in the Home and at Work: Russian Women in the Khrushchev Years."



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Even into the 1960s, there were many residents who still had unfurnished home kitchens without refrigerators that were necessary to store perishable foods like milk and meat long term, making public dining options a still much needed service. In newer neighborhoods, grocery shops were likely to have their own small *stolovaya* attached, so residents could stop for a quick meal or grab food to go even as they did their shopping. This also helped consolidate logistical concerns like delivery and storage—rather than having to supply two locations with foodstuffs, it could all be bought and stored in one location. The standard array of staples—borsch, cutlets, *plov*, *salat*, and pierogi—could be found at most any canteen, and were incredibly affordable, with items often costing less than a dozen kopeks. A store with a clean, well-run canteen could become the talk of the town.⁶³⁰ The continued conversation about these spaces as a matter of local importance shows how important the city's food culture was to its residents.

Houses of Culture

In examining the roles of clubs and social institutions in the organization of leisure in Stalingrad from 1953-1964, A. V. Lipatov and A. V. Valkovsky argue that the main drivers of

⁶²⁹ Illustration by R. Ostrovskii, "Lodyri i mukhi," based on letter to the editor, in *Stalingradskaia pravda*, July 10, 1956, 3. The black fly problem in the city really hits its peak in the summer months of July and August, when the banks of the river become their ideal breeding grounds. I can attest it is a problem that the city still fights with to this day, as during my stay in the summer of 2018, they would come out in force in the cooling hours of the evening. Several managed to invade our hostel, congregating in the kitchen. Quite the pests!

⁶³⁰ I. Frolov, "Vkusno i devshevo," *Volgogradskaia pravda*, May 8, 1963, 2.

the city's cultural life were the Palaces of Culture, which served as multi-purpose meeting spaces, learning enclaves, and event venues for local residents. They argue that in Stalingrad as in wider Soviet society at this time, "Palaces of Culture acted as social transmitters of cultural codes, moral and ethical norms, social rules, as well as regulators for the development of social cultural life."⁶³¹ Their purpose, alongside providing a physical meeting space for the social functions of the city, were inherently ideological, forming "a special social and information space intended both for the physical and spiritual development of people, and for ideological and educational work among various categories of the population. Soviet citizens working in mass cultural and educational events of club organizations, the authors claim, became active creators of 'communist culture', bearers of 'advanced ideas and ideals.'"⁶³² These cultural institutions were tied directly to the city's government and party administration, and their programming carefully considered to match party objectives.

While houses and palaces of culture were to become the nexus of the city's social life, they were not always easily accessible to all residents. Due to its geographic location along the river, making one's way from the outskirts of the city to the Central District, which held the highest concentration of cultural intuitions, was no small task. However, by intentional design of the city planners, each neighborhood in Stalingrad was to have its own "center" that would attempt to replicate many of these amenities. Workers at the city's largest industrial enterprises were given priority, and soon there were houses of culture in the Traktorzavod, Soviet, Central, and Kirov neighborhoods, with another two serving the Krasnoarmeisk region. Across the river, the Palace of Culture for the "Dam Builders" made for one of the first dedicated cultural spaces

⁶³¹ V. A. Lipatov and A. V. Val'kovskii, "Rol' klubnykh uchredeni v organizatsii dosuga sovetskikh grazhdan v 1953 - 1964 gg. (Naf primere Stalingrada - Volgograda), in *Izvestiia*, no. 4 (2015): 189-197.

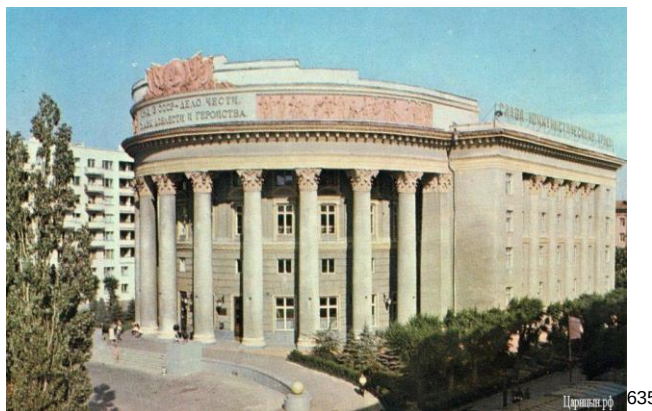
⁶³² Ibid.

in Volzhsky in 1956.⁶³³ While this distribution meant that these spaces were readily available to large portions of the city's population, perhaps even the majority, for many residents this would still require a substantial journey to access these institutions. Still, with increased funding, this network continued to grow during the Khrushchev years, as more clubs, trade union halls, and cultural spaces were being built across the city to increase access to even more residents.

In 1957, construction was completed on the Trade Unions Palace of Culture, located on the Western End of the Central district, facing Lenin Prospect. The neoclassical rotunda with its high columns became one of the largest such cultural houses in the city. Above it the lintel depicting collaboration between Soviet workers and farmers also carried the words ““ Labor in the USSR is a matter of honor, glory, valor and heroism,” a quote attributed to Stalin during the XVI Party Congress in 1930. The building was designed by architect V. E. Maslyayev in the years before Stalin's death and would be one of the last buildings in the city that was designed in the late-Stalinist imperial style. However, with the structure's gaudy facade strikingly out of place with the more practically built housing structures surrounding it, as well as its rounded shape, it became popularly known in the local parlance as “the toilet bowl.”⁶³⁴

⁶³³ *Stalingradskaia pravda*, March 8, 1956, 2.

⁶³⁴ I owe this piece of colorful local flavor to a friend I met while conducting research in Volgograd in 2018, Margarita Panasova. Margo was a student at VGU studying architecture, while also running her own small coffee shop on the ground floor of the apartment building where she lived that faced the courtyard in front of the *dvorets kultura profsoyuzov*. She graciously gave me a tour of several notable architectural sites in the Central district, as well as helping me visit Krasnoarmeisk without spending 4 hours on a bus. Her parents, who had been living in the same flat since the Soviet period, had celebrated their wedding in “the toilet bowl,” for which they still carried very fond memories.



Like major industrial enterprises, the programming output of the city's cultural institutions was carefully planned, with quotas for the number of events, ticket sales, and club memberships carefully calculated by the city's party administration.⁶³⁶ However, the content of this programming was not entirely a top-down process. Lipatov and Valkovsky note in their study how complaints from workers about available leisure options, usually written as letters to the editor within *Stalingradskaia pravda*, led to clubs attempting to meet public demand. Among the complaints, workers were tired of hearing recycled political lectures and pushed for more content related to sciences and the arts. Another issue raised was that the city's amateur theater groups and musical ensembles were not given the same access to the city's performance halls as the professional troupes. The following year saw an increase in such opportunities as more amateur theater productions were given a stage.⁶³⁷ The authors also note the challenges presented by the uneven demand for leisure activities posed—screenings of new movies quickly sold out of tickets, as there were not nearly enough seats to accommodate moviegoers, while many lectures and professional development events were sparsely attended. Eventually, by the 1960s, club organizers solved this conundrum by pairing lecture events with film screenings, with most

⁶³⁵ Photo credit tsartsyn.ru/2022/08/902-seryy-dom-profsoyuzov

⁶³⁶ Ibid, p. 191.

⁶³⁷ Ibid.

filmgoers willing to tolerate the former in order to view the latter. In addition, the promise of dancing after an event concluded remained a popular draw.⁶³⁸

Club organizers continued to invent new ways for clubs to draw in the public. Celebrations were thrown honoring the achievements of outstanding workers, where often those workers would be asked to speak on their methods or answer audience questions. Quiz nights were held on topics ranging from the writings of Marx and Lenin to science and history. Theme nights became very popular, particularly celebrations honoring Soviet space exploration. Book clubs and poetry readings were also popular events. On warm summer evenings, outdoor street dances, potlucks, and concerts could be held. Outside of events, palaces of culture served as libraries and meeting spaces for various hobby and interest groups. They also helped organize the city during holiday mass celebrations, such as May Day and the anniversary of the October Revolution.⁶³⁹ Their large event spaces were also frequently used for weddings, where large gatherings of celebrants could gather for feasting and dancing. Events that were well attended and well-received might also receive the praise of attendants in *Stalingradskaia pravda*, as letters to the editor would sometimes contain high praise as well as biting criticism.⁶⁴⁰

While Lipatov and Valkovsky note that worker criticism of cultural programming remained fairly constant throughout this period, there was still a marked increase in civilian interest and participation in official organized leisure activities hosted by Palaces of Culture throughout this period. In 1954, they estimated only six thousand people involved with one of 211 clubs and organizations across the city. By 1960, there were 1,873 clubs for more than

⁶³⁸ Ibid, 192.

⁶³⁹ See Malte Rolf, *Soviet Mass-Festivals, 1917-1991*, translated by Cynthia Klover (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2013).

⁶⁴⁰ See for instance N. Glukhov, "Interesno vecher," *Stalingradskaia pravda*, May 27, 1955.

thirty-two thousand members.⁶⁴¹ While this of course only speaks to membership in clubs, there were plenty of other ways for Stalingrad's residents to spend their leisure hours.

Theater Culture

As mentioned above, one of the most popular leisure time activities in the city was the cinema. Despite undergoing many shifts in the types of content available in Stalingrad's cinemas, the allure of the big screen continued to draw in crowds of Stalingradtsy on their nights off. Even in the earliest days of privation after the war, the party and city administration prioritized these institutions as critical for providing entertainment, as well as cultural and political education, to their citizens. As the party increased its investment in citizen's leisure activities, the role of the kino remained an important cultural staple.

In their study of Soviet film culture in Stalingrad before and after the war, I. V. Zagurnaya contends that the city was home to a robust film culture, both in the making and screening of films. In the years leading up to the German invasion, Soviet propaganda films were increasingly drawn to martial topics, and in 1941 the Vasilyev brothers (directors of the acclaimed 1934 Civil War epic "Chapayev") arrived in the city to begin a new project titled "The Defense of Tsaritsyn." They planned to film their new Civil War feature on-site in Stalingrad and spent much care in collecting reminiscences with veterans and surveying battlefields to accurately recreate the action. The screening of the film in April 1942 first debuted in Stalingrad in the Komsomolets theater to an estimated thirty thousand filmgoers in its opening run, just

⁶⁴¹ Ibid, p. 195.

months before General Paulus's 6th army would besiege the city for the second time in three decades.⁶⁴²

During the battle and until the end of the war, cinemas retained an important social function of delivering newsreels to the public. Stalingrad itself became the subject of many Red Army documentaries, even after the disruption of the war had passed, the city remained a subject of high interest for state authorities who sought to immortalize their victory at Stalingrad.⁶⁴³ While we shall see more of this effort in a subject in the subsequent chapter, it is important to note the influx of film professionals and technical expertise that flowed into the city during this time, as well as the perception of filmmaking and the cinema culture that accompanied this filmmaking boom. In 1943 alone there were five separate film festivals hosted in the Stalingrad region, a trend that would persist for several years.⁶⁴⁴

By the end of the decade, as the state once again could produce feature length propaganda epics, new movie releases were a cultural event. In 1948, upon the release of the war chronicle "The Young Guard,"⁶⁴⁵ promotions for the movie included leaflets dropped via airplane and advertisements for showtimes included in the pre-game announcements at local sporting events. Another major war epic, "The Battle of Stalingrad"⁶⁴⁶ was a dramatized recreation of the battle that was largely shot on site in the city amid real ruined structures, premiered in Stalingrad in 1949. Its release was advertised in newspapers, on the radio, at public meetings, and a ticket presale window that began a week prior to its opening, all which helped to make it the most

⁶⁴² N. V. Zagurnaya "Formirovanie repertuara kinoseti stalingradskoi oblasti i ego realizatsiia v 1941-m – nachale 1950-x gg." in *Izvestiia*, November 4, 2016. <https://cyberleninka.ru/>, accessed Jan. 4, 2013

⁶⁴³ See Denise J. Youngblood, "The Fate of Soviet Popular Cinema during the Stalin Revolution," in *The Russian Review* 50, no. 2 (1991): 148–62, and *Russian War Films: On the Cinema Front, 1914-2005*, (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006).

⁶⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 187.

⁶⁴⁵ "Molodaia gvardiia," dir. Gerasimov, (Kinostudia im. M. Gorkogo, 1948).

⁶⁴⁶ *Stalingradskaiia bit'va* dir. Vladimir Petrov (Mosfilm, 1949)

successful film of the decade in the city (at least by measure of ticket sales).⁶⁴⁷ In addition to new Soviet releases, many theaters played a collection of older films, including foreign films. However, Zagurnaya argues that ticket sales show that these were not as popular, and in particular Hollywood produced films, like “Tarzan’s New York Adventure” (dir. Thorpe, 1942), which also first screened in the city in 1949, did not generate much interest among *Stalingradtsy*.⁶⁴⁸



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After close to a decade of war celebrations and recreations, the tone of Soviet film shifted toward peacetime topics, depicting more day-to-day problems like romance, labor, and sport. There was still a considerable output regarding wartime themes at this time, but as life returned to a sense of normalcy and modernity, these themes were also reflected on screen.⁶⁵⁰

Before the Secret Speech, many Soviet films followed many of the socialist realist tropes that had defined 1930s filmmaking. Take for instance “There is such a guy,” the release of which

⁶⁴⁷ Zagurnaya, 190.

⁶⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁴⁹ Photo by M. Bratsi “Victory” Cinema (*kinoteatr “Pobeda”*),

⁶⁵⁰ For more on Soviet film being produced under Stalin and Khrushchev, Tony Shaw and Denise J. Youngblood, *Cinematic Cold War: The American and Soviet Struggle for Hearts and Minds*, (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2014), Rimgalia Salys, ed. *The Russian Cinema Reader: Volume two, the Thaw to the Present*, (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2013), John Haynes, *New Soviet Man: Gender and Masculinity in Stalinist Soviet Cinema* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), and Jamie Miller, *Soviet Cinema: Politics and Persuasion under Stalin* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2010).

was advertised in advance that summer in the section of *Stalingradskaia pravda* that listed the showtimes of the city's biggest theaters.⁶⁵¹ The film told the story of a young man who finds himself romantically entangled with his plant-manager's daughter, who proves a bad influence, leading the hero to take up drinking, alienate his friends, and slack on the job; in essence, becoming a regular hooligan. His foreman decides to mentor the young man, leading him to change his ways and become a leader on the shop floor, while a new romantic interest comes into the picture when he meets the foreman's daughter.⁶⁵² The tropes of many films from the 1930s, with the hero's transformation into an ideal Soviet citizen, are still mimicked here.

Later films created and released amidst the cultural "thaw" under Khrushchev lost much of the rosy patina of the late-socialist realist period. One such film, which premiered in color in the city in 1961 after a similar build-up in the press was "The Heart Does Not Forgive,"⁶⁵³ a somber romantic drama about a kolkhoznik who leaves behind his collective farm and his wife for a new job in the city. After many years of toil and not finding his fortune, he returns to his wife, but instead of returning to become a productive member of the kolkhoz, the protagonist attempts to make it big yet again by catching and selling fish as a private business.⁶⁵⁴ Under high Stalinism, this odd premise for a film would have assuredly been attacked for lacking sufficient ideological messaging, if it were even given permission to be screened at all. In addition to new releases, theaters bolstered their repertoire with older Soviet installments and foreign films, and films for children, (examples here?) meaning there was usually a diverse pool of movies showing across the city for *Stalingradtsy* to attend after working hours or on their days off.

⁶⁵¹ See Advertisement for "Est takoi paren," *Stalingradskaia Pravda*, August 11., 1956, 3. The film was directed by Ivchenko (Kievskaia Kinostudia, 1956), based on the novel *Wide Current* ("Shirokoe Techenie") by Alexander Andreev (1955).

⁶⁵² Plot synopsis informed by imdb.com.

⁶⁵³ "Serdtshe ne proshchaet," dir. Vladimir Dovgan and Ivan Kobozev, (Yaltaiskaia kinostudia, 1961)

⁶⁵⁴ Plot synopsis provided by kinoteatr.ru.



There were of course many other entertainment options beyond the cinema. Denizens of Stalingrad could also count on a wide variety of cultural productions gracing the stage at one of the city's many theaters. In addition to the Gorky Theater, the largest of the city's venues located off of the Square of Fallen Fighters in the city's Central district, there was also the Musical Theater situated along the 62nd Army Embankment, the Kamshinsky Drama Theater, the Youth Theater, the Opera and Ballet Theater, and the Cossack Theater in the Voroshilov Region, still housed in its original red-brick structure from Old Tsaritsyn that had somehow survived both battles for the city intact. Many of these spaces were refurbished, as well as repurposed, after the war. For instance, the Gorky Theater stood on the site of the former House of Science and Culture, which had been badly damaged during the siege. Theater troupes bounced from home to home and had to redefine their repertoires during the post-war period, and many of these spaces were shared by multiple artistic groups. In 1956, Stalingrad saw the return of another theater group that had its former headquarters destroyed during the battle: the Stalingrad Regional Puppet Theater would find its new home on the ground floor of the newly completed Hidrostoi building bordering the Square of Fallen Fighters. The troupe specialized in youth programming, putting on shows with elaborate casts of marionettes and miniature sets.

⁶⁵⁵ Left, advertisement for "Est Takoi Paren"; Right advertisement for "Serdtshe ne proshchaet"

In addition, most Palaces of Culture contained their own concert halls that could host performances. The Red October Palace of Culture, completed in 1962, housed one of the city's largest audience halls, with floor and balcony seating for more than eight hundred spectators.⁶⁵⁶ Across the river, the new city of Volzhskiy had several of its own theater locations for its residents to enjoy, including within the Palace of Culture of the VGS. Many of these sites also housed practice facilities with their own youth training programs that offered ballet, choir, opera, and orchestra opportunities to the city's aspiring artists.

Showtimes and listings for performances were compiled in the newspaper alongside cinema screenings so that residents could stay informed about upcoming events in their area. Schedules remained full throughout the year with a variety of programming, from classic plays and ballets alongside new shows from both Soviet and international playwrights. The Stalingrad Philharmonic played regular concerts showcasing a wide variety of musical styles and composers. Many concerts and shows were broadcast live over the city's radio networks, and eventually the audience would expand further when it was possible to film concerts for the city's television network. As time went on, the tastes of Soviet audiences changed as well. By the mid-1950s, the Volgograd Musical Theater had started to move away from its usual program of primarily operas, ballets, and philharmonic symphonies, and begun putting on distinctly Soviet musical comedies, which was proving a popular genre with audiences at this time, though not always reviewers.⁶⁵⁷

While Litsov's "The People of Stalingrad are Singing" was first performed by Stalingrad's Musical Theater in Moscow before it began its nation-wide tour, audiences would have found it distinct from most productions of the past 10 years. The established tropes of late-

⁶⁵⁶ Lipatov & Valkovsky, 191.

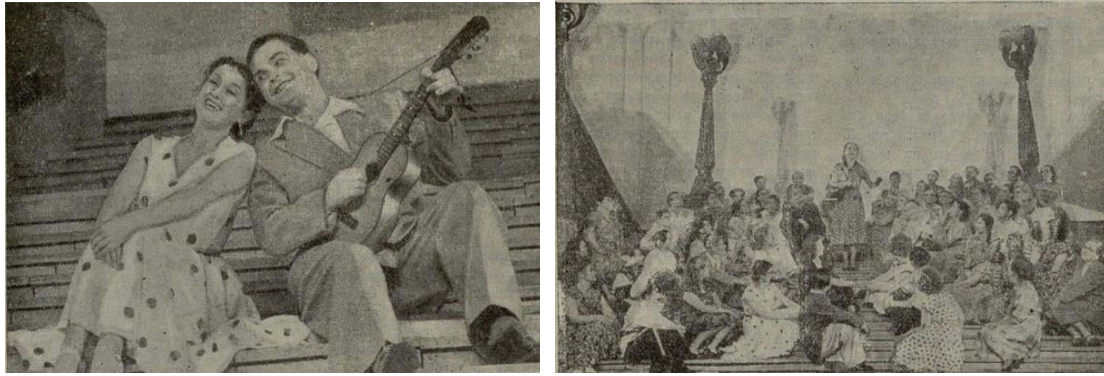
⁶⁵⁷ "O Volgogradskogo muzikal'nogo teatra," accessed 1/23/2024, <https://www.muzteatr-vlg.ru/oteatre/istoriya>.

Stalinist Socialist Realism were less present—while the story’s heroes and heroines are exemplary Soviet adults, the story has a less-typical narrative structure, and the heroic memory of the war is not brought to the forefront but is rather relegated to the scenery. While the reconstruction of the city provides the setting for the story, at its core it is a romantic comedy, and the tone is far from reverential.

The plot inevitably settles around the cast’s romantic entanglements, and like any good romantic comedy, things get a bit silly, leaving one reviewer writing for the music review journal *Vypusk*, K. Petrova, remarking that: “there is a lot that is far-fetched and illogical. There is little justification for their frequent disagreements, sometimes reminiscent of vaudeville misunderstandings: Andrei’s love letter gets to Zorka by mistake, then Tanya leaves for Moscow on the eve of her wedding but does not have time (?) to inform Andrei...”⁶⁵⁸ Petrova also dislikes that other important character moments happen “off-stage” instead of being depicted, such as a flashback of Mitya’s heroism during the battle, saving his brigade from a mine explosion (revealed only in passing dialogue). There is also, Petrova notes, an awful lot of swearing and adult themes—Zorka’s character is particularly inclined to innuendo and some rather colorful language (which, she admits, is quite humorous).⁶⁵⁹ Still, the reviewer was impressed by the cast’s vocal performances, the genuinely witty comedic moments, and the set design, which transforms within the play from ruins to a construction site to a beautifully reconstructed city by the final musical number.

⁶⁵⁸ K. Petrova, “Poyut stalingradtsy,” 94. The (?) is included in the original text, seemingly indicating the reviewer’s own disbelief at what would become a fairly standard trope of the modern romantic comedy formula: faulty communication.

⁶⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 97.



However, Petrova also uses her review to bemoan one of the unfortunate trends she sees in the Soviet theater at this time, the sudden unpopularity of the genre that had been the focus of the Soviet musical theater for the last decade. She writes that “composers and playwrights show strange indifference to the fate of the Soviet operetta. And who, if not the experienced Soviet artists, can help the formation of this young genre of Soviet art to be cheerful and graceful!” Productions of the last several had stagnated in the genre, with plots becoming dull clichés. She recognizes that audience tastes are clearly shifting but is hesitant herself to condone the new tone Soviet artists are taking. “The young, capable creative team of the Stalingrad Theater is full of strength and desire to work on new musical comedies. The duty of playwrights and composers is to create a worthy, artistically valuable repertoire for it.”³³ Listov would indeed continue to work with the company, pairing together in 1961 with the now Volgograd Musical-Comedy theater to stage another well-received comedy, “Sevastopol Waltz,” which debuted in Volgograd before appearing on stages throughout the Soviet Union. That show, which focuses on antics of Black Sea sailors in the titular port city, follows a very similar narrative structure to his earlier work,

⁶⁶⁰ Left: Zorka (T. Papina) and Mitya (V. Lovkosky) share a duet, Right: Tanya (N. Kuralesina) center stage during the musical finale of “*Stalingradtsy* are singing.” Ibid, photographs uncredited. Unfortunately, I do not have any account of this musical’s reception by the Stalingrad public, despite many issues of *Stalingradskaia pravda* in this time period. I would guess they were there, but I did not learn about this musical until after I had my initial archival access, and with some digging could probably find the exact dates of when the show premiered in the city. It would be interesting to see what the local reviewer might infer from the audience’s reactions if future research resumes on this subject.

introducing the characters in their naval days during the 1942 siege of Sevastopol, with the rest of the action taking place in the postwar years.⁶⁶¹

The city's artists were constantly innovating and producing original shows for their audiences that often reflected the themes of the day. Another example would be the production "Hello, Moon!" ("Zdravstvui luna!"), a children's ballet which first appeared on stage at the Kirov Palace of Culture in the city in 1962. It was written by the director of the local youth ballet, Nadezhda S. Dinar, with costume, scenery, and score all provided by other local artists. It was written for students, including roles for 60 students from the nearby secondary school #25, but also featuring dancers from Mrs. Dinar's own dance troupe. The stage is set at a Young Pioneer's youth camp, where the call of a bugle wakes the campers from their tents as they begin their daily routine of exercises. The children hear the latest news of Soviet cosmonauts' exploits in conquering the frontier of space travel, before they head back to bed exhausted. The campers then collectively dream of becoming astronauts who have landed on the moon. The second act features the young cosmonauts planting a Soviet flag on the lunar surface, as well as discovering and defeating a moon monster before once more awakening back at camp. The performance opened to a delighted audience, which was mostly classes of students from nearby primary schools, with a full schedule of performances for more schools in the weeks ahead.⁶⁶²

⁶⁶¹ Sevastopol's reconstruction follows a very similar path to that which took place in Stalingrad, for more see Qualls *From Ruins to Reconstruction*.

⁶⁶² S. Vladimirov, "Zdravstvui, Luna!" in *Stalingradskia pravda*, March 27, 1962, 2.



The arts scene in Stalingrad remained a vibrant part of the city's cultural life, and the content of new productions of this time spoke to greater themes of the Soviet *zeitgeist* of the day. These ambitious shows would not have been possible without dedicated funding and a vibrant community of theater professionals working in the city to innovate and train upcoming talent. While the themes they covered were very much in line with party narratives and subject to the same state sponsored critics that could make or break a theatrical run, they still offered theatergoers a reflection of their world that, for all its entertainment value, touched upon the same shared experience.

While not a physical space, a new entertainment sphere was emerging that could be enjoyed from the comforts of one's own home, provided one had both a home, electricity, and a rare consumer item: television. Television as a technology was only just beginning to be used in the Soviet Union at the outset of the war in 1941. It took much longer for the government for the funds to appropriate for such infrastructure, with housing and reconstruction consuming all available resources until roughly 1949, when Moscow and Leningrad both built their own local

⁶⁶³ Photograph by N. Sharlaeva, "Stsena iz baleta," *ibid*. The dancers gesture toward the peak of a hill where a Sputnik-esque satellite emblazoned with the letters СССР (USSR).

television stations.⁶⁶⁴ Stalingrad would not receive funding for their own station for some time, only after the October 22, 1955, meeting of the Council of Ministers of the USSR decided to commit to constructing more local stations and relay stations across the Union.⁶⁶⁵ The Stalingrad station would sit at a high point in local geography, the summit of Mamayev Kurgan (just a few hundred meters west of the future home of the massive memorial park). The signal tower was to reach a height of 192 m, and to be constructed by the Stal'montazh trust.⁶⁶⁶ Before that work could begin in 1956, the area had to be once more swept for mines and unexploded munitions that still littered the hill over a decade after fighting stopped.⁶⁶⁷ The project proceeded at pace and was finished on time, and in May of 1957 the State Committee for Radio Broadcasting and Television was formed under the Council of Ministers of the USSR, which promptly resolved on the creation of local editorial control boards for many major population hubs, among them Stalingrad. Stalingrad's local TV station went live for the first time on February 2, 1958, to mark the fifteenth anniversary since victory was declared in Stalingrad. The station was opened under the administration of Fedor Alekseevich Ushakov, who was assisted by a staff hired for their backgrounds in radio, film, and theater.⁶⁶⁸

The station was responsible for its own broadcasts, which would mean constructing a daily schedule of programming for the city. The daily line-up was given its own section within *Stalingradskaia pravda*, alongside the announcements for the films screening at the local cinema and shows on stage at the city's various theaters. At first, the station only had enough daily

⁶⁶⁴ See Kristin Roth-Ey, *Moscow Prime Time: How the Soviet Union Built the Media Empire that Lost the Cultural Cold War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011).

⁶⁶⁵ A.V. Utkina, "Istoriia stanovleniia stalingradskogo (volgogradskogo) televideniia v seredine 1950-x – 1960-e gg." Published in *Izvestiia* (October 21, 2016), pp. 191-97. accessed Jan. 4, 2013, via <https://cyberleninka.ru/>

⁶⁶⁶ The tower still stands today, clearly visible in the city skyline alongside *Rodina mat'*.

⁶⁶⁷ Ibid, 192.

⁶⁶⁸ Ibid, 193.

content for the evening “prime-time” hours between roughly 5:30PM-10:00PM. Programming included daily live broadcasts of regional and local news, as well as a variety of shows dedicated to topics such as science, homemaking and women’s issues (“*Vam, zhenshchiny!*”) and children’s entertainment.⁶⁶⁹ To supplement this programming, additional special out-of-studio broadcasts could be made, bringing live coverage of the performance of a circus, or momentous occasions such as the completion of the dam at the Kuibyshev hydroelectric station.⁶⁷⁰ Live events, such as concerts and plays being staged in the city’s theaters, could be broadcast to a wider audience.

As the station evolved and its repertoire grew in the early 1960s, Utkina notes that much more of the daily line-up was dedicated to what could be defined as “agit-prop” programming. By moving from live in-studio to pre-taped elements for broadcast, the station could create a wide variety of elements to be used and reused to fill the time schedule. The screening of feature films later in the day also increased the amount of time the station could stay on air. In addition to the news, which of course was interpreted very close to the party line, specialized programming highlighting the improved living conditions in the city: programs like “Where there was once a Wasteland,” and “For you, *Stalingradtsy*” focused specifically on the advance of housing and amenities. Programs were dedicated to the activities of the city’s various industries, from educational programming of how the hydroelectric station worked, to detailing the opening of a new line at the Tractor plant. Special reports covering labor competition, agricultural developments, youth events, and sport were also topics of focus. The station also endeavored to use their platform to promote civic engagement—twice a month special time was

⁶⁶⁹ See various issues of *Stalingradskaya pravda*, 1959.

⁶⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 194.

set aside for leaders of the city, districts, industries, and institutions to answer questions and concerns directly from citizens and workers.⁶⁷¹

While it is beyond the realm of possibility for this study to gauge the cultural impact of local television in Stalingrad, how it was received by the populace and how widespread its influence was, we can look at a few markers that mainly indicate the limits of its scope. According to Utkina's findings in the regional archive, in 1958 there were estimated to be only 9,700 television sets in all the Stalingrad region (which also included Volzhskii), but by 1959 that number had already almost doubled to 16,634. If more consumers were able to access and acquire television sets at the same rate as the national rate, which had gone from 14,800 receivers in 1950 to 2,538,600 receivers by 1958, then viewership in the city would continue to increase at a steady rate into the 1960s.⁶⁷² When a survey was polled in 1962 through a "telequestionnette," about two hundred viewers across the city took part, while a similar poll in 1965 resulted in over one thousand respondents, further indicating this exponential increase in Soviet families with access to televisions.

Though television viewing could be done in the privacy of one's own home, it remained a "public" spectacle, creating a shared experience between households who might have viewed the same programming. It is hard to measure how much the local television station had on the city's culture, but it also conveyed a sense of progress toward a modern, communist ideal. The inclusion of television programming in the newspaper meant that for even those who lacked a television set, much like those who had once been eagerly awaiting housing, it provided an aspirational vision for the future where every home would have its own unit. This vision was shared both by Soviet consumers and the Soviet state: consumers longed for the modern

⁶⁷¹ Ibid, 193.

⁶⁷² Ibid.

convenience of entertainment beamed straight into one's own home, while for state and party officials it was yet another avenue to push its cultural and political initiatives.

Other Cultural Institutions

The wave of enthusiasm in the Soviet Union for all things space and scientific progress kicked off by the launch of *Sputnik* in 1957 happened to coincide with the opening of one of the city's most cherished cultural landmarks. While the city had many educational cultural venues in addition to its artistic ones, the largest and most prominent of these was the city's Planetarium, the crown jewel of the city's central district, capping the northern end of the trendy neighborhood along Ulitsa Mir, where its neoclassical dome now rises above the surrounding apartment buildings.

The planetarium was a prestige project for the city—at the time, the only other planetariums in the Soviet Union were housed in Moscow and St. Petersburg. The idea for the project came as a “gift” from the German Democratic Republic for Joseph Stalin's seventieth birthday, with Stalingrad chosen as the location due to its historic role in the victory of communism over fascism. Speaking for GDR scientists who helped design the proposal, Dr. Johannes Hartling said “the gift will be a symbol of our people's desire for peace and progress [...] The Soviet Union saved world civilization, and we, German scientists, who dedicated our lives to optics, with great enthusiasm decided to build a planetarium on the heroic soil of Stalingrad.”⁶⁷³

⁶⁷³ “O planetarii: istoriia poslevoennyyi Stalingrad,” Accessed January 10, 2024, at <https://volgogradplanetarium.ru/about/history/poslevoennyy-stalingrad/>

The facility was to be a technological wonder for its time. Speaking to *Stalingradskaia Pravda* in 1950, one of the German scientific consultants on the project, Dr. Heilantz, attempted to paint a picture for *Stalingradsty* of just what it was they would be receiving:

Imagine a dome-shaped room with a diameter of 25 m. In the center of it there is an instrument consisting of two large balls. Each of them has sixteen projection devices. Several projection lights are mounted between them. This is, in fact, a planetarium - a complex optical device that provides images of celestial bodies on a dome-shaped screen in the form of a vault of heaven. It gives a person the opportunity not only to contemplate the mysterious, wonderful cosmos, but also introduces us to the phenomena that appear in the night sky. With the help of an electric motor, all this is set in motion, and then visitors to the planetarium can trace the “life” of the sky over the course of days in just a few minutes...⁶⁷⁴

The machinery and optical equipment were produced at a plant back in East Germany, and construction began in the summer of 1951 by Kultstroi, a branch of the Glavstalingradstroy trust. The domed observatory was to hold 525 seats, and its exterior would come to be crowned with a sculpture by renowned sculptor V.I. Mukhina, “A woman with a raised hand releases a dove of peace” (“*Zhenshchina s pripodniatoi ruki vypuskaet golubia mira*”).

According to *Stalingradskaia pravda*, the planetarium became something of an architectural puzzle requiring multiple trusts working together to complete the construction on schedule and proposing innovative solutions to meet the engineering needs of the complex machinery.⁶⁷⁵ No expense was spared in the interior, with expensive mirrors, wood inlays, and carpeting making the planetarium a temple to the ideals of scientific progress. Construction was completed in the summer of 1954, with the

⁶⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁷⁵ Ibid.

grand opening on September 19th, 1954, where guests heard lectures from visiting Moscow planetarium astronomers and local scientific experts in the observatory.⁶⁷⁶



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Once it was operational, announcements about planetarium programming appeared in *Stalingradskia pravda* just as movie, theater, and concert showtimes.⁶⁷⁸

Regular programs using the facilities' star mapping equipment ran most evenings, but the facilities were also used to host special lectures and films on astronomy and a wide variety of scientific topics.

For those interested in local history, the Central District offered one more attraction. While Stalingrad would come to house many museums commemorating the conflicts that took place here, as we shall explore in more depth in the following chapter, there was also the Regional Museum of Natural History (or “Local Lore,” “*kraevedcheskii muzei*”). This museum, located on Prospect Lenina a few blocks south of the Alley of Heroes, contained exhibits on everything from local archeology, geology,

⁶⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷⁷ Photo by Naum Granovsky, appearing in Daria Donina, “The Frightening Splendor of Stalinist-era Empire Style,” www.rbth.com/multimedia/pictures/2016/01/11/the-frightening-splendor-of-stalinist-era-empire-style_558403 (Accessed 6/10/2024).

⁶⁷⁸ See *Stalingradskia pravda*, July 24, 1956, 4.

native wildlife, as well as the history of the region's agricultural production and contributions to industry. The collection was maintained and curated in part by local historians on a volunteer basis, with the paid position of director and funding from the party covering the costs of operation. This meant displays would often also reflect and tie into the main party narratives of the day. For instance, in 1959, in an exhibition dedicated to completion of the Twenty-First Party Congress, which had centered around the question of the Virgin Lands initiative, was focused on how industrial agriculture had transformed the region's farming, complete with model displays of collective farms, milking machines, and all the various products farmers in Stalingrad oblast created for local consumption.

The city lacked a dedicated art museum until 1960, after the previous Stalingrad Museum of Fine Arts was destroyed by fire during the German bombardment in 1942. The new museum, built at the north end of the Central district near Lenin Square, relied on assistance from other regional and national galleries to build their new collection, including works by renowned artists such as Vladimir Mayakovsky and Ilya Repin, as well as acting as a permanent hall for the work of many noteworthy local artists operating in the city during the Thaw, such as painter Aleksei Borodin. While the old collection had featured artists from pre-Soviet times, this new collection covered much more modern themes (in this case meaning Socialist Realist and "agit-prop" subjects).⁶⁷⁹ In 1964, the museum would begin to acquire the works of artist Ilya Mashkov, who was a member of the "Jack of Diamonds" group, one of the first dedicated Russian *avant garde* emigre collectives that predated the revolution in the 1910s but would adapt his style to

⁶⁷⁹ Morozova and Monakhova, *Pute-voditel po Volgogradu*, 85-86.

become a socialist realist painter in the 1930s. Mashkov was born in a village not far from the city, and after he passed away in 1944, two decades later his widow decided to donate works to the museum of the city he had once regarded as his hometown. Eventually Mashkov would have his own dedicated exhibition hall, and the museum would take on his name to further honor the groundbreaking artist.



The two portraits above illustrate the shift that was taking place in Soviet art following the Secret Speech, as artists struggled to process what the new political moment might mean for their craft. In her contribution to *Dilemmas of De-Stalinization*, Susan Reid argued in her essay that Soviet artists attempt to modernize socialist realism during the “thaw” resulted in a new school known at the time as the “contemporary style,” (*sovremennyi stil’*) coined by aesthetician Nina Dmitrieva in the summer of 1958, which attempted to capture the mood of this new age. Works in the new style often still treated well-established socialist realist subjects—scenes of labor and the everyday triumphs of socialism—but in a new form. Colors were much more muted, forms more abstracted, and in general artists attempted to stress the “realism” aspect of

⁶⁸⁰ Left: Ilya Mashkov, “Collective Farm Woman with Pumpkins (1930), accessed via “The Volgograd Fine Arts Museum,” *Galeria*, <https://www.tretyakovgallerymagazine.com/articles/3-2005-08/volgograd-fine-arts-museum> on 1/17/2024. Right: Aleksei Borodin, “Volgograd Woman” (1960s), accessed via Paul Scott Gallery, <https://galleryrussia.com/artist/borodin-aleksei> on 1/17/2024. NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION.

the genre. Dmitrieva formed her perception of the “contemporary style” following the Fourth Moscow Youth Exhibition in 1958, where Reid notes one particularly “challenging” painting by Nikolai Andronov, “The Construction of the Kuibyshev Hydroelectric Station.”⁶⁸¹



Andronov had been assigned to cover the “great construction site” north of Stalingrad in 1956-57, which inspired this painting. The subject matter, the “promethean transformation of nature to produce electricity, had impeccable ‘contemporary’ credentials in a sense even conservatives could accept.”⁶⁸³ However, rather than a rosy work scene, Andronov’s painting depicts a dreary and monotonous landscape, the grime and mud of industry depicted in muted gray/brown tones. The workers, rather than the subjects of the painting, whose gazes might be fixed on the radiant future, are instead part of the landscape, passersby, disconnected from the viewer. The “clumsy, decidedly un-picturesque utilitarian forms” of the trucks dominate the scene, and there is a complete lack of vegetation to offer any color or warmth.⁶⁸⁴

The painting caused such a stir that it was ultimately removed from the show and became the subject of much controversy. Revisionists of the socialist realist school could not accept its failure “to find correct tonal relations” and its “coarse” style, critiques that even some more

⁶⁸¹ Susan Reid, “Modernizing Socialist Realism in the Khrushchev Thaw,” 219.

⁶⁸² Image borrowed from Reid, *ibid.*

⁶⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 220.

liberal critics agreed with, yet Vladimir Kostin, a supporter of the new school argued “at the same time I know of very few works that convey the severe working days of our construction sites so strictly, without any ostentation in the treatment of the motif, and without over-sweetness in the manner of painting” and that Andronov’s work possessed “a rhythm that well expressed the sense of strenuous labor characteristic at the present.”⁶⁸⁵ This refusal to shy away from the less aesthetic aspects of Soviet living became the basis of what Dmitrieva would coin as the contemporary style.

Later, while reflecting on what inspired the painting and the choices he made for it, Andronov “admitted that his visit to Kuibyshev had aroused in him conflicting emotions concerning the inexorable forward-march of progress and the means by which it was achieved. Andronov sought to depict Soviet modernity as it was, despite his misgivings about what that meant and the sacrifices deemed necessary to achieve it: “at the construction site of Kuibyshev Hydroelectric Station, where many prisoners worked, I witnessed the destruction and submergence of the ancient Russian town of Stavropol on the Volga. The drama and conflict sought expression in forms unexpected even for me. I wanted to convey the dramatic character of the whole atmosphere of labor in the means of painterly plasticity.”⁶⁸⁶

While relatively few Stalingradtsy and the Soviet public at large would have had the chance to see Andronov’s work, how many of them felt what he felt? The modernizing project under Khrushchev, while more humane than the obscene human cost demanded by Stalin, still necessitated sacrifice. Andronov is but one artist among thousands who were attempting to navigate this new world and share their work with the broader public. Stalingradtsy tuned into the city would have seen the products of this conversation firsthand, and while they may not

⁶⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁸⁶ Ibid, quoting Andronov.

have fully understood the full context, it would have challenged them to think more deeply about the world in which they lived.

A City of *Sportsmeny*

While cultural spaces made up one pole of the city's public sphere, the other polarity would be that which revolved around sport. Sporting had always been a huge part of the city's cultural life before the war, and from the moment the Battle had concluded, sport reemerged as an escape and distraction from the harsh postwar reality. The "Battle of the Ruins" between Stalingrad's Traktor and Moscow's legendary Spartak club in March of 1943 was the stuff of legend, and both taking part in sport and watching sporting events remained a favorite pastime of *Stalingradtsy* into the 1960s and beyond.⁶⁸⁷ When asked in 1962 what they wished to see more of on local stations, the city's top answer far and away was more live sports.⁶⁸⁸

M. G. Sotnikov, a local Volgograd historian, conducted a brief examination of how the city rebuilt its sports infrastructure in the decade immediately after the battle, and notes the difficulties of providing clubs and organizations physical space and equipment at a time when resources were scarce. However, Sotnikov notes, this did not mean that sport ceased as a social function in the city—the residents of Stalingrad were resilient and adaptive when it came to pursuing their favorite past times, even as the city was still struggling to emerge from under the rubble.

Looking at the sport infrastructure before the battle reached the city shows the extent of how prevalent physical culture (*physkultur*) was in the city's identity. Sotnikov categorizes pre-

⁶⁸⁷ For more on the legendary Moscow club, see Robert Edelman, "A Small Way of Saying 'No': Moscow Working Men, Spartak Soccer, and the Communist Party, 1900-1945," in *The American Historical Review* 107, no. 5 (2002): 1441-1474, and Edelman, *Spartak Moscow*.

⁶⁸⁸ Utkina, p. 195.

war Stalingrad as a “major sport city” for the southern RSFSR with a well-developed sport infrastructure, including a Palace of Physical Education, a large stadium that was home to Traktor, the city’s largest football club, six neighborhood stadiums equipped with both soccer pitch and track and field facilities along with substantial bleacher seating, four gymnastics halls, nine aquatics facilities, and even one ski jump.⁶⁸⁹ The city played host to numerous regional, All-Union, and even international competitions before much of said infrastructure was destroyed. With other pressing concerns, funding for sport languished, and much of the surviving infrastructure was repurposed. Such was the fate of the Palace of Physical Education, which in 1944 was restored instead as the new home of the Stalingrad Drama Theater. Sotnikov found that the city’s Culture Committee estimated the damages to Stalingrad’s sport infrastructure totaled close to one billion rubles.⁶⁹⁰

While several directives of the Central Committee started allocating money for the restoration of physical culture infrastructure in the Soviet Union starting as early as 1943, Sotnikov argues that it proved insubstantial for several years due to several factors. For one, money for sport was distributed unevenly in the USSR during this time, with cities like Moscow, Leningrad, and the resort town of Sochi first receiving funding, while many regional hubs had to wait longer for substantial investment to reach them. Stalingrad was only directly specified for injections of funding twice by the Central Committee, once in 1943, and then not again until 1947. In addition, once funds reached the city, they did not always find their way to their intended destination. Stalingrad sports organizations in the city at this time were volunteer organizations known as DSOs (*dobrovol’nyimi sportivnyi obshchestvami*). Most of these

⁶⁸⁹ M. G. Sotnikov, “Vosstanovleniie i razvitie material’nogo-tekhnicheskoi bazy sistemy fizicheskoi kultury i sporta stalingradskoi oblasti v 1943-1953 gg.” in *Izvestiia* 4, no. 127 (2018): 196-205, 197.

⁶⁹⁰ Ibid.

organizations were tied to a major industry or firm, which acted as a sort of official sponsor. However, in the early days of reconstruction, this sponsorship mostly went in the other direction, where the firms responsible for the disbursement of *physkultur* funding would keep the resources for themselves. Sotnikov estimates anywhere between 50%-60% was getting to the DSOs at this time, greatly hindering what the organizations could accomplish.⁶⁹¹

The largest and most popular DSO in the city was the Traktor DSO. As the Traktorzavod district had been home to the city's most prestigious soccer club and comprised primarily of workers at STZ, the organization was sponsored by the factory itself. In one instance, the director of the factory commandeered lumber meant for the DSO and used it for the needs of the plant, making a promise to allocate more lumber in the future. This agreement was legally shaky at best, as this agreement amounted to no contractual obligation, but rather was "limited to only a conversation and a promise."⁶⁹² Despite this lack of resources, the DSO did what it could—in the summer of 1945 it organized sports sections and classes in what remained of the old stadium. Other DSOs around the city also improvised as best they could, and by 1945 at least half the city's old stadiums were being used in some capacity, even though facilities and equipment were sorely lacking. Many DSOs led "Cherkasova" efforts to clean up and build new sport infrastructure. Other major clubs in the city included the DSO "Metallurg," DSO "Dynamo," DSO "Rotor," and DSO "Torpedo," all clubs which helped form the backbone of the intercity soccer league before the battle.

Due to the near constant struggle to secure labor and resources, the sports infrastructure in Stalingrad by the time of Stalin's death was a shadow of its former self. While several new gymnastics halls, basketball courts, swimming pools, and track and field had been built, many

⁶⁹¹ Ibid, see tables 198-99.

⁶⁹² Ibid, 199.

facilities lacked the equipment necessary to operate or host competitions, to the frustration of clubs and residents looking to sports for entertainment. Some sports that had previously been popular in the city—river sports like rowing and sailing, cycling, and winter sports like cross country skiing—had all but disappeared in the city due to lack of access to supplies. Low need sports, like basketball, soccer, volleyball, chess, and wrestling had started creating leagues for intercity competition, but spectators were all but excluded due to a lack of available venues with seating.⁶⁹³ In 1952, the city still did not have a single pool in operation that included a diving well.⁶⁹⁴

In the 1950s however, as construction trends moved toward being able to begin to meet mass demand, sport would finally begin to revive in the city. With most major industries back on their feet, sponsor organizations were less likely to fight with DSOs for funding, and the city government began taking a more active role in coordinating with DSOs to ensure needs were met. New schools that were being built during this time were much more likely to have sporting facilities attached,⁶⁹⁵ opening opportunities for young people to get involved. New facilities and equipment meant more and more Stalingradtsy could take part in sporting culture. Intercity competitions increased, and radio broadcasts of sporting matches allowed fans to follow their favorite clubs. Announcements for upcoming sporting events and postgame scores were regularly posted in *Stalingradskaia pravda*.⁶⁹⁶

The most ambitious project to return the city to the international stage and create a sporting destination for the city's residents was the Central Stadium project, a proposal that gained momentum at the end of the decade, riding the tide of development connected to the

⁶⁹³ Ibid, 200-201.

⁶⁹⁴ Ibid, 202.

⁶⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁹⁶ See for example *Stalingradskaia pravda*, October 24, 1961, 4.

construction of the Mamayev Kurgan memorial complex. At the foot of the hill lay a tract of hitherto undeveloped land, which would become the future home of the city's largest stadium and attached sporting complex and park. The proposed stadium would include seating for forty thousand, making it by far the largest in the region. It would quickly become a site of local legend, as it filled past capacity in 1961 when Fidel Castro visited the city and spoke at the stadium to a throng of enraptured fans.

At a meeting of the Regional Party Committee in February 1959, hundreds of Komsomol members came to the meeting hall to express their support for the project. The assembled committee heard suggestions from their young guests, and according to the reporter in attendance the mood was one of energy and optimism, and while there were many proposals and critiques with the plan, all the speakers sounded "youthful and excited, professional and businesslike, and not afraid to dream a little."⁶⁹⁷ In the plan outlined to the crowd by the city's Secretary of the Komsomol, comrade Andreyev, in addition to the "international-class" stadium, the complex would also include six indoor sport pavilions, an indoor running track, a swimming pool, and a Palace of Sport with audience seating for five thousand, training facilities for soccer, basketball, and tennis, and a boathouse on the riverfront where a tourist beach might also be built. The structures would be contained and connected by a tree-lined park.⁶⁹⁸ The Komsomol was already organizing to raise funds and volunteer the labor of its cadres to help build the monument on Mamayev Kurgan, and pushed to see the sport complex as part of a conjoined effort to beautify this region of the city. The meeting ended with a resolution calling for all Komsomol members in the city to pledge to contribute at least one hundred hours over each of the next two

⁶⁹⁷ L. Popova, "Stalingradskii stadion—udarnaia komsomol'skaia stroika," in *Stalingradskaiia pravda*, February 18, 1959, 3.

⁶⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

years to both projects.⁶⁹⁹ They cited the heroic example of the *Cherkasovets* who a generation before had helped rebuild Stalingrad, and pointed out how this was their generation's chance to honor their example.



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Construction of the complex would remain a work-in-progress for decades. Along with the stadium, one of the first buildings to be completed became the city's Institute of Physical Culture in 1960. The Institute employed nearly two hundred full-time teachers and coaches, which helped direct sports programming for youth organizations and clubs throughout the city. This institute also helped identify and train talent that might go on to represent the city on the national level, like three-time Olympic gold medal-winning rower Vyachaslav Ivanov, and European Swimming champion Ivan Karatnikov, just to name a few.⁷⁰¹ The institute also carried out research and helped design sports pedagogy for use across the Soviet Union. However, other facilities in the complex lagged behind schedule. For instance, the Palace of Sport that was planned as the main venue for indoor sports in the park, would not be completed until 1974.⁷⁰²

⁶⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰⁰ L. Moskvitina, "Plan tsentral'nogo stadiona v Stalingrade," alongside, L. Popova, "Stalingradskii stadion — udarnaia komsomol'skaia stroika," in *Stalingradskaiia pravda*, February 18, 1959, 3.

⁷⁰¹ Morozova and Monakhova, *Pute-voditel po Volgogradu*, 98.

⁷⁰² Ibid, 97.

Young people such as the *komsomoltsy* were the demographic in the city most invested with sporting opportunities, and even before the central stadium complex began construction, there were an increasing number of ways for them to get involved and prove themselves as *sportsmeny*. Citywide running competitions were popular in the summer months, with opportunities for teams and solo runners to compete in various challenges. *Stalingradskaiia pravda* acted as the sponsor for one such annual relay competition, where there were multi-stage challenges for all different skill levels for schools, industries, and neighborhood sports organizations to send teams of runners to race for bragging rights.⁷⁰³ By the 1960s, the Volgograd Marathon became one of the largest sporting events of the year, attracting competitors from the surrounding region to a course that would snake up and down the banks of the river past some of the city's biggest landmarks.

Cycling also saw a return in popularity, with regional tours spanning thousands of kilometers in stages that visited various cities, Stalingrad included. Each city fielded its own teams of cyclists, both men's and women's, to compete for top honors.⁷⁰⁴ The 1950s also saw the emergence of motorsport in Stalingrad, particularly off-road rally-style motorcycle racing. One spring competition in 1952 attracted more than sixty motorcyclists, racing more than 80 kilometers that wrapped along the western hinterlands of the city, mirroring the bend of the river from roughly Bekhetovka in the south and ending not far from the gates of STZ up north.⁷⁰⁵

The Volga also created unique opportunities for recreation and sport. During the summers, clubs dedicated to rowing, sailing, swimming, and diving (*vodnaya baza*—literally “water bases”) would practice and host regattas and other events on the river in view of

⁷⁰³ See announcement appearing in *Stalingradskaiia Pravda*, April 27, 1956, 1, and “Estafeta na priz Volgogradskoi pravdy,” in *Stalingradskaiia pravda*, April 27, 1963, 1.

⁷⁰⁴ *Stalingradskaiia Pravda*, Jun 6, 1956.

⁷⁰⁵ *Stalingradskaiia pravda*, May 13, 1952.

spectators along the banks.⁷⁰⁶ Recreational swimming beaches were also established and maintained by the city to encourage public use.⁷⁰⁷ The river also provided opportunities for some unexpectedly memorable moments. One such occasion was when in June of 1959 a flotilla of lifeboats (the same dinghies used by Soviet Navy vessels), stopped through the city on a much longer challenge journey to traverse the Union's waterways from Moscow to the Black Sea. The sailors in each boat were teams put together by various chapters of DOSAAF, the Volunteer Society for Cooperation with the Army, Aviation, and Navy (*Dobrovol'noe obshchestvo codeistvia armii, aviatsii i flotu*), and their arrival on the river made for an impromptu aquatic parade, as scores of boats and swimmers from the local city clubs swarmed out onto the water to guide the rowers in. The sailors were then welcomed by city officials and greeted by their comrades in the local DOSAAF chapter of Stalingrad, who acted as their hosts and tour guides while they stayed overnight in the city before continuing their journey the following day.⁷⁰⁸



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⁷⁰⁶ Sotnikov, "Vosstanovlenie i razvitie material'nogo-tekhnicheskoi bazy sistemy fizicheskoi kultury i sporta stalingradskoi oblasti v 1943-1953 gg.," 198.

⁷⁰⁷ Ibid. According to Sotnikov, this practice was established as early as the 1940s.

⁷⁰⁸ A. Igol'nikova, "Zvezdnyi pokhod shliupochnykh komand," *Stalingradskaia pravda*, June 19, 1955, 4.

⁷⁰⁹ Left: Photo by Mikhail Bratsilo, Stalingrad 1950s, Water base construction workers celebrate opening day in the Central district (Musical theater pictured in the background) Right: Photo by A. Igolnikov, appearing with "Zvezdnyi pokhod shliupochnykh komand"

For some extreme sportsmen, the river could become even a winter destination, with a small group gathering most years to brave a plunge into its icy waters. The “Walruses” (a nickname the group adopted for themselves) were formed in 1958 by V. Uluchenko and only five members, but the group attracted more and more regulars as word of the unorthodox exercise club spread. Uluchenko, in an interview with *Stalingradskaia pravda* in 1962, expounded on the supposed health benefits of ice swimming, while groups of spectators came out to witness the event from the shore bundled in furs, watching in equal parts fascination and dismay.⁷¹⁰

For other (arguably less insane) residents looking for winter activities, soccer leagues continued year-round with indoor games played in sports halls, alongside basketball, wrestling, and volleyball leagues. Figure skating and speed skating were practiced in both indoor and outdoor facilities, and cross-country skiing remained popular with residents refusing to spend the long winters cooped up indoors.⁷¹¹ Fishing on the river remained a popular pastime for many throughout the year, with ice fishing huts popping up out on the river when it froze during the winter.

There was one other unique pastime in Stalingrad during the 1950s—wolf hunting. Throughout the postwar period, the regional authorities turned to locals to help control the area’s wolf population that threatened livestock on the collective farms in the city’s hinterlands. Regional officials placed bounties to incentivize hunters, and hunters could receive hundreds of rubles for each confirmed kill. By 1955, the bounty had climbed up to five hundred rubles per pelt.⁷¹² While this “sport” still could involve long treks into the woods on foot, technology and

⁷¹⁰ S. Ryabinin, “Kupanie vo l’dakh,” *Stalingradskaia pravda*, February 6, 1962, 3.

⁷¹¹ See *Stalingradskaia pravda*, March 6, 1956, 4.

⁷¹² *Stalingradskaia pravda*, June 1, 1955.

the city's completion of its regional airfield led some hunters to instead take to the skies. In the early spring of 1953, local sharpshooter I. Maksimov paired with pilot B. Zabolotnev and two other hunters to slay thirty wolves in just five sorties from Zabolotnev's biplane, netting the crew a small fortune.⁷¹³ These hunters clearly fit the old archetype of the "new Soviet man" that was so prevalent in Soviet media in the 1930s: soldiers of progress, taming nature to their will, a narrative trope that would continue to persist in the post-Stalin era.



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Urban Public Spaces

Residents less interested in the sporting lifestyle but who still wished to spend time in nature had other options to find recreation in one of the city's numerous parks and designated green corridors throughout the city. The highest concentration of such spaces was undoubtedly in the Central District—with its wide squares, memorial parks, and broad boulevards—but city planners designed each neighborhood to have its own access to green space, each unique to their part of the city.

In Krasnoarmeisk, a sprawling park wrapped along the crescent formed from where the Volga-Don canal met the Volga, from the victory arch of the first lock to the massive statue of

⁷¹³ V. Smetanikov, "Okhota na volkov," *Stalingradskaia pravda*, March 3, 1953, 4.

⁷¹⁴ Ibid, photo by Smetanikov.

Stalin and later Lenin, offered park goers sweeping vistas of the river. In front of the rows of new houses in Red October was a singular continuous park, running the width of a city block for several kilometers, separating a new development of apartment housing. The Komsomol gardens in the Central District contained many activities and playgrounds for children, and the 62nd Army Embankment featured shaded benches and pathways along the river's scenic overlook. The ideal green space would be, as V. Mudriaakov writes for *Stalingradskaia pravda*, where residents “might find a concert or watch a play, read the latest newspapers and magazines, listen to a lecture, or find out the latest news of science and technology.”⁷¹⁵ Unfortunately, the author bemoans, not all the parks of Stalingrad could be said to be such types of places just yet.

The city's parks were to be installed and cared for by the “Green Industry Trust” (TZK—*tresta zelenogo khoziaistva*). While ample green space had been designated by the city throughout Stalingrad for parks, the work of TZK toward the beautification and upkeep of these spaces had lagged seriously behind. While some parks, like those along Alley of Heroes, saw large sums spent on flowers, other parks lacked trees or even grass (“green” spaces, indeed). Paved pathways were often installed unevenly, and squares and avenues lacked “artistic or architectural merit”—there were not enough monuments or sculptures to fill the various plinths dotted around new parks. Lighting was a major problem, with many of those spaces with electric lighting were merely bulbs strung on temporary wooden poles.⁷¹⁶ Poorly lit parks after dark could become gathering places for hooligans, drunks, and other unsavory elements of society. Mudriaakov, in consulting with engineers from visiting firms consulting on Stalingrad's parks, said there needed to be a concerted effort by TZK to increase the technical and engineering expertise of its staff to successfully transform the city's decrepit parks, to increase irrigation, to

⁷¹⁵ V. Mudryakov, “Stalingradu--khoroshie parki i sadi,” *Stalingradskaia pravda*, Feb 24, 1953, 3.

⁷¹⁶ *Ibid.*

work more closely with botanists about the environmental needs of various flora, and with the city's cultural institutions to provide decoration and host events.⁷¹⁷ The author also encouraged residents to do their part to keep their city's parks clean.

Other frustrations for the city's parkgoers were a lack of amenities within many parks, like benches for sitting and lack of on-site bathrooms and water spigots. Many residents also wished for opportunities to spend their money, with hopes for more stands selling kvass, snacks or ice cream.⁷¹⁸

Where the city could not provide such amenities, the city's residents were forced to adapt accordingly. One letter to the editor in 1953 that was transformed into a cartoon for publication shows a family of four headed for an excursion to the Embankment carrying their own kitchen chairs and a jug of refreshments.



While improvements would continue to be made over the next decade, the struggle by the municipal government to secure and allocate resources for recreational spaces would remain a source of disappointment for the city's residents eager to make use of their free time in the city's dedicated leisure spaces.

⁷¹⁷ Ibid.

⁷¹⁸ P. Budanov, "Pora podumat' o El'shanke," *Stalingradskaya pravda*, July 26, 1956, 2.

⁷¹⁹ Illustration by P. Ostrovskii, "Na naberezhnyu...", *Stalingradskaya pravda*, May 16, 1953, 3.

Of course, for those seeking time away from the hustle and bustle of city life, Soviet labor policies offered ample vacation time for residents who wished to travel or retreat to the country for rest and recovery. Stories in the newspaper helped residents imagine where they might want to spend their own vacation time. The Caucasus were a popular destination, with many resort cities easily reachable via train from the city's main station, with locales great for hiking, swimming, and camping, while in the winter skiers could hit the slopes.⁷²⁰

For those looking to travel farther afield, the city's riverport, near the southern tip of the 62nd Army Embankment, offered local river tours and cruises to other vacation destinations, such as Saratov to the North and Astrakhan and the Caspian Sea beyond to the South. The Volga-Don canal also connected the city's waterway to the Don River and its terminus in the Black Sea, home to some of the Soviet Union's prime vacation hotspots, like Sochi, Odessa, and Rostov-on-the-Don. Smaller water taxis could even be used to visit the small villages that lined the banks of the canal, which included dedicated vacation resorts.

Near the seventh lock, only about 15 kilometers southeast of the city, settled in the "picturesque" landscape sits a house that had once belonged to a minor noble, Prince Tundutov, now converted to a resort hotel. The grounds of the house have been landscaped into a park with hundreds of new trees and include water features made possible by the nearby lake formed by the canal. Guests could spend their days playing games on the lawn, making use of the resort's boathouse to learn how to row or sail, and there was a public beach for swimming. Inside the public spaces in the house, there were clubs and classes for chess, choir, drama, poetry, billiards, and sporting competitions for young visitors. Breakfasts, lunches, and dinners were all catered for, and in the evenings, there was often music and dancing. The site's director, Comrade

⁷²⁰ A. Makletsova, "Khorosho zdes' otdokhnut'!" *Stalingradskaya pravda*,

Kholkhlov, estimated that hundreds of families came to the house each month from Stalingrad for their vacations.⁷²¹ This was of course a small portion of the city's populace, and the question of who was able to access the resort remains another matter entirely. While such questions were never the focus of the stories in the newspaper, which advertised such amenities to showcase an idealized leisure destination as a possibility for all residents, this would make an excellent question for future research.



Public Transit and Urban Mobility

In a city the size of Volgograd, the location of its public amenities mattered greatly. Even into the 1960s, only a very small percentage of the city's population would have access to a personal automobile. Instead, citizens were entirely dependent on their own two feet and the city's public transport network, as well as whatever alternative mobility strategies they could devise. Questions of where one could easily go in the city ultimately determined access to goods and services, something city planners remained keenly aware of as they increasingly adopted the principles of the microdistrict, attempting to consolidate key amenities as close to housing as possible. Nevertheless, the geography of Stalingrad made travel between neighborhoods

⁷²¹ V. Gavrilov, "V dome otdykha 'Volgo-don,'" *Stalingradskaia pravda*, May 21, 1955, 4.

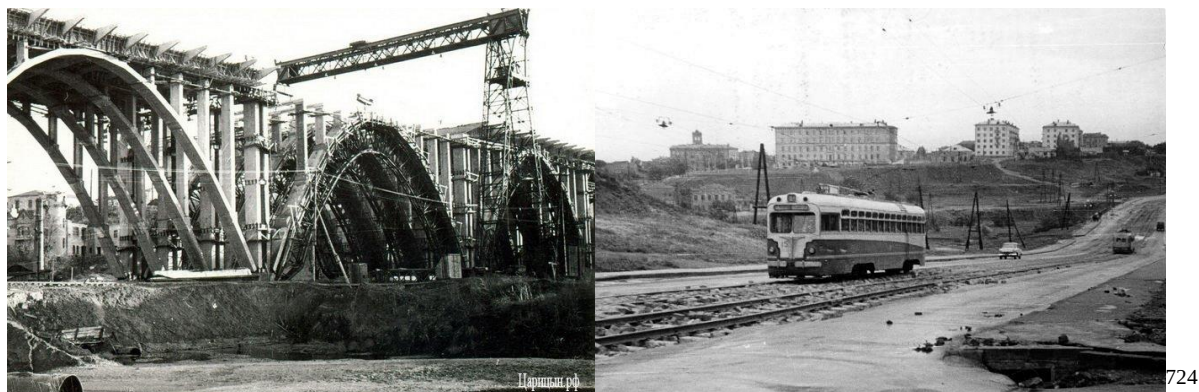
⁷²² Ibid, photo credit V. Gavrilov.

difficult, and even a trip from Traktorzavod or Krasnoarmeisk to the city center and back would have taken some serious logistical planning.

The central district was certainly the highest concentration of the city's cultural institutions, understandably due to its relatively (as named) Central location on the North-South access, but it also was the portion of the city that acted as host for international visitors, with several major hotels near the train station and river port, as well as a direct route in from the airfield. However, by the 1960s it was not necessarily the most densely populated,⁷²³ as the city's major industries and their workforces lived and worked in the city's satellite neighborhoods, meaning it was a destination for the majority of the city, rather than a part of their usual daily experience beyond their front door.

Despite images of Stalingrad often highlighting its wide streets and avenues stretching away into the distance, the small number of cars in operation made these often seem desolate and empty (traffic congestion was rarely a source of complaint in *Stalingradskaia pravda*). Instead, the city had a metro bus network, limited rail access, and one tram line that reached Dzerzhinsky Square in front of STZ in the north and terminated in the city's central district. With regular stops along Lenin Prospect, as well as in front of Barrikady, Red October, the Bread factory, and STZ, it would have been one of the most-traveled transport arteries in city, making the north of the city feel much more connected than the sprawling and scattered neighborhoods to the south. After the completion of the Astrakhan Bridge in the early 1960s, which spanned the old Tsaritsa riverbed near where it empties into the Volga, the tram line was extended south to Chekists Square in the Voroshilov region, but never further.

⁷²³ These would have also been the lucky or well-connected who secured housing early during the reconstruction, and the city's trendiest and well-connected neighborhoods near the Alley of Heroes, Peace Street, and Lenin Prospect would have had the highest concentration of the city's administration and party elite.



Ambitions for the bridge date at least back to the 1930s, but construction did not begin for more than two decades later, long long after the battle. The construction necessitated the demolition of some older houses that had stood as landmarks since before the battle, such as the “Miller House,” named for Vladimir Mikhailovich Miller, a wealthy pre-revolutionary entrepreneur who owned mills and mustard factories in the city. His ornate castle of a house, which somehow survived the war mostly intact, would not survive the march of progress.⁷²⁵ While the tram line did not extend far beyond the bridge, this did provide another major thoroughfare to connect cars and buses from the southern neighborhoods like Krasonarmeisk that were largely reliant on the city’s longitudinal highway. Though there were local train stations and water taxis that could dock at the Central District city riverport, it was still a nearly 50-kilometer trek from the city’s southern tip to the heart of the city.

With public transit playing such a large role in the lives of most residents, the pressure was on to deliver quality transit service day in and day out. The state’s attempts to live up to resident’s expectations—as the frequent complaints in *Stalingradskaia pravda* municipal services would indicate—often left much to be desired. In June of 1955, A. Yurova was so fed

⁷²⁴ Left, Construction of the Astrakhan Bridge, (early 1960s) from the records of G.P. Stepanov, an architect and faculty of the Institute of Municipal Engineers (Gorkhoz) who consulted on the project. Right, the completed bridge, looking from the Voroshilov bank back toward the central district (year and photographer unknown). Accessed via “zakopannye doma,” on tsaritsyn.rf, (<https://tsarvolga.livejournal.com/6167.html> on 1/18/24)

⁷²⁵ Ibid.

up with the city's bus drivers along her route that she felt the need to pen an open letter to the editor complaining about the service. She writes that "drivers of city buses often violate traffic rules. They don't take their passengers into account. Stops are not respected, and they often depart before all passengers have managed to board the bus." An artistic representation accompanied her letter as a scene "almost from life," depicted below. As the city's neighborhoods expanded and became more dense, public transit services were strained even further. In 1964, many commuters on the north end of the city complained of overcrowding on the tram lines, describing scenes of desperate riders hanging out of windows and onto the roof of the tram as the masses of riders between factory shifts created congested rush hours that lasted between 7:00AM and 9:00AM. The number of trams was well below what would be necessary to move such ridership, but even the trams in operation rarely arrived on schedule. By then the queue to board would balloon to sometimes dozens of prospective riders, only to be disappointed as the tram would roll on, already past capacity.⁷²⁶



With the state unable to adequately meet their need for urban mobility, the citizens of Stalingrad took matters into their own hands, devising alternative methods to get around the city.

⁷²⁶ Pestova, Sukach, Sheveyev, i Drugi / Kolesov, Mironov, Simonov, Kolchanov / V. Guznikova, "Tri pis'ma na odnu temu: Medvezh' i uslugi," *Stalingradskaia pravda*, October 18, 1964, 3.

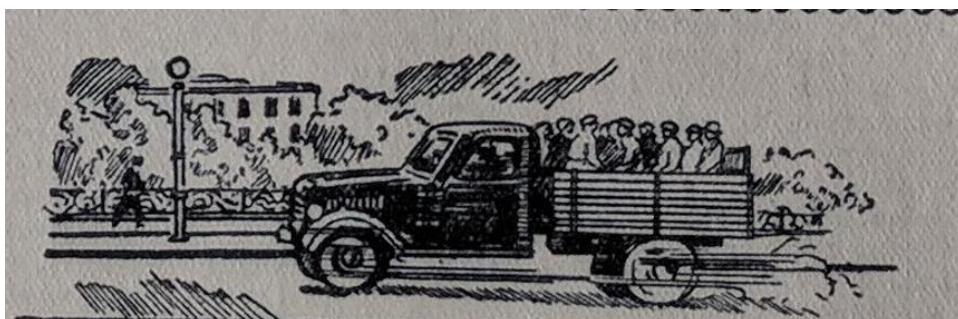
⁷²⁷ Illustration uncredited, "Iz pisma A. Yurov," *Stalingradskaia pravda*, June 15, 1955, 3.

⁷²⁸ Illustration by P. Ostrovskii, "Novyi nomer," October 18, 1964, 3.

One common form of “ride share” was flagging a ride on open bed work trucks that were often moving between worksites in the city. This was especially common for moving workers, but in the mid-1950s they also served as a sort of alternative bus service. The city’s traffic authority, purporting the dangers of traveling in trucks not designed for transit and not tied to any official service, issued new rules to crack down on such ridership and make it safer, while still implicitly accepting that such solutions were necessary to ease the strain on the city’s public transit infrastructure.

Starting in 1956, in order to carry passengers, trucks had to be equipped with seats or benches and have written approval to be used as such by the institution that owned them. Trucks used to transport people should be inspected by the head of the garage responsible for the vehicle and a marking of “fit for carrying (number) passengers” had to be visible somewhere on the exterior. Drivers had to, of course, be licensed and to carry passengers they should have a minimum of 2 years' driving experience and a clean record. The speed limit when carrying passengers was to not exceed 25 km/h. Limits for max passengers were set by the size/weight of the vehicle, ranging from a maximum of eighteen people for 1.5-ton trucks, twenty riders for three-ton trucks, and at max thirty riders per five-ton truck. Children riding in trucks were required to be supervised by an adult. Violation of any of these rules could result in fines or legal action against the drivers and institutions responsible for their upkeep.⁷²⁹

⁷²⁹ “Gosavtoinspektsiia upravleniia militsii po Stalingradskoi oblasti obl'iadlaet: pravila perevozki lyudei na gruzovyyk avtomashinakh,” *Stalingradskaia pravda*, July 24, 1956, 3.



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Another popular way for the able-bodied to traverse the city was via bicycle. While still a hard-to-find consumer good for much of the early 1950s, it was certainly more attainable for many Stalingradtsy than owning a car. Like in most urban areas throughout the history of cycling, at a certain point the city's authorities decided that the freedom achieved by cyclists had to be reined in.⁷³¹ In April of 1956, a new traffic ordinance for cyclists was meant to crack down on the perceived "dangerous" behaviors of the city's cyclists. First and foremost, riders aged thirteen and under could no longer ride on the streets but were limited to the pavements (which presented its own problems, as we shall soon see). Cyclists were to limit their speeds to no more than 15 kp/h and utilize proper hand signals when turning, ride no more than two abreast, and give at least two meters between bikes riding in a row. There was to be absolutely no riding without one's hands on the handlebars. Finally, every bike was required to be registered with their neighborhood district committee and equipped with a license plate, which had to be updated annually. Failure to follow any of these regulations could result in a three-ruble fine.⁷³²

Of course, for all of the city's inhabitants, from those riding buses and bicycles to pedestrians on the sidewalks, the question of mobility was also one of infrastructure and the

⁷³⁰ Ibid, uncredited illustration.

⁷³¹ This is solely the opinion of the author who is himself an avid cyclist who is frequently upset by the freedom cities always seem to prioritize to cars, rather than alternative modes of transportation. For an example of societies who prioritize the bicycle in urban design and the free mobility of their population, please see the Dutch.

⁷³² "Gosavtoinspektsiia upravleniia militsii po Stalingradskoi oblasti obl'iadlaet: pravila ezdy na velosipedakh," *Stalingradskaia pravda*, April 20, 1956, 3.

quality of the walking, riding, and driving surfaces within the city. Once again, the complaints in *Stalingradskaiia pravda* tell a story of the resident's frustration with the municipal government's seeming inability to provide these basics.

In the summer of 1956, that anger manifested itself in a multitude of public grievances that the city would be forced to be addressed. Correspondent V. Roldugin walked several blocks of Komsomolskaya Street in the city's center and found a host of problems. He wrote that "there are many beautiful streets, houses and architectural ensembles in our city that are pleasing to the eye and evoke a feeling of gratitude to the architects, engineers, and construction workers who created them. But *Stalingradtsy* are sometimes saddened to see how our careless trusts spoil the appearance of the city, starting projects but never finishing them." He described pedestrians having to contend with improperly housed power cables, fences that cut off large sections of sidewalk, piles of rubble still not cleared away, vertigo-inducing elevated walkways with no safety railings, and a huge pile of earth near the city garden that had remained uncleared "for more than a year," all in one short trip. He ends his article with an appeal to the Deputy Chairman of the Executive Committee of the City Council, Comrade Chernetsky, and the Head of the Department of Public Utilities, Comrade Chekanov, asking "when will you finally save the people of Stalingrad from seeing these types of depressing landscapes?"⁷³³

If things were this bad in the city center, it is little wonder that those living on the outskirts of the city felt abandoned entirely. P. Budonov writes that city residents in the former suburban village of Yel'shanka that had been absorbed into western reaches of the Voroshilov district, had an awful time trying to commute anywhere. Streets had no sidewalks but only dirt paths, and there were no streetlights. "As evening approaches, the squares and streets plunge into

⁷³³ V. Roldugina, "Unlye peizazhi," *Stalingradskaiia pravda*, July 26, 1956, 3.

pitch blackness. At night, people walk from work to home in the dark along the roads, and in inclement weather this is especially difficult.” The resident also complained that even their shops were serviced less often than other parts of the city, due to the poor roads leading up the hill on their side of town.⁷³⁴ Despite being a neighborhood where tens of thousands of residents lived and repeated demands to the Council of Workers Deputies to address these issues, little progress had been made.⁷³⁵

Another article published in the same issue from an “old communist” who was tired of watching the mismanagement of public spaces in the city and having to contend himself with the hazards of the city’s ongoing construction in his daily commutes. He specifically called out city authorities for what he sees as nonsensical decision-making and contends that whenever he sees residents attempt to do a good deed and help improve their neighborhood, they more often than not are hindered rather than helped by the authorities. “This is no accident. City leaders ignore public opinion and do not consult with workers on very important issues.” He instead cites as a model the city of Gorky, whose city council broadcast plans for public works in their local paper and invited public input at council meetings before the projects began. “If such a practice existed in our country, there would be more getting done and unnecessary costs would be reduced.”⁷³⁶

Clearly, the need for infrastructure to move both people and goods throughout the city was a task the municipal government struggled to handle and became yet another issue around which public outcry coalesced. While urban mobility was a common aspect of life in Stalingrad that most residents would have seen the need to improve, their complaints did not stop there. As

⁷³⁴ Yel’shanka was another rise in the city’s geography that saw fierce fighting in the days of the battle for its strategic importance, much like Mayaev Kurgan, but which changed hands much fewer times during the battle. It remained firmly behind German lines after a coordinated armor and air attack dislodged Soviet defenders as a precursor to Paulus’s advance on the city. See

⁷³⁵ P. Budanov, “*Pora podumat’ o El’shanke*,” *Stalingradskaia pravda*, July 26, 1956, 3.

⁷³⁶ V. Nikitin, “*Bez sviazi co massami*,” *Stalingradskaia pravda*, July 26, 1956, 2.

we shall see, while critiquing and poking fun at the shortcomings of public spaces had always had a place in the local paper, there was no shortage of topics for residents to fixate on.

Childhood in the City

As the postwar generation born just before or during the war began to come of age in the late 1950s-early 1960s, the city's housing stock would be of keen interest to many young couples who were getting married and looking to start families. Having a private space to raise children would certainly increase the likelihood of a family becoming pregnant. The new generation growing up in the city would have had a unique childhood, quite different from that of their parents. Of course, with the goal of keeping both mom and dad working, the modern socialist city would provide adequate supervision and education of the city's youth. Kindergartens (*detskii sad*) would look after infants and preschool aged children until they could start school. Other organizations, like the Young Pioneers, designed programs for the socialization of children instilled with the values of upstanding Soviet citizens.

In the early 1950s, despite continued praises sung to Stalin for "happy childhoods" that regularly appeared in the press, the city was still a hard place to raise a child. Not every child in the city had a home or even a family. In 1950, a documentary newsreel "Children of Stalingrad" was filmed in the city about children who had been orphaned during the siege still growing up within the city's orphanages.⁷³⁷ The film depicts a home with dozens of orphan children, mostly preteens, and follows them through a very picturesque day, as their caretakers lead them through exercises, take them to the beach on the river for swimming, go for a riverboat ride, and laying a

⁷³⁷ V. Tiukhmenev, *Deti Stalingrada, Nizhne-Volzhsy studio kino-khroniki* (1950). Accessed via <https://yandex.ru/video/preview/4802378014812362393> 1/25/2024.

wreath at the obelisk in the Square of Fallen Fighters for defenders of the city before attending a ballet at Gorky Theater. This manicured version of childhood is what was common in *Stalingradskaia pravda* as well, depicting happy scenes rather than the hardships many children undoubtedly faced.⁷³⁸ As Ann Livshiz notes, “the Stalin cult was not just for adults,” and indeed, indoctrination began in early childhood, both in formal schooling and in extracurricular activities like the Young Pioneers.⁷³⁹ Stalin was often pictured with children, acting as the national default father-figure, and the ubiquitous slogan chorused by millions of schoolchildren across the Soviet Union in the 1930s-40s was “Thank you, comrade Stalin, for our Happy Childhood!” De-Stalinization would have been particularly confusing for young children who had spent years internalizing this rhetoric, only to suddenly learn that the mythic Stalin was yet another *skazka*, a fairytale.

This motif remained in place well after Stalin’s death. In the summer of 1955, for instance, included a short article praising the communist party’s efforts to provide for the city’s children after the war: “I remember the year 1943. All around you, wherever you look, are the ruins of your hometown, cold, uncomfortable dugouts in which children and their parents were forced to huddle in the first days after the end of the Battle of Stalingrad. The Communist Party and the Soviet government did everything so that the little residents of Stalingrad [...] did not experience deprivation. Among the first buildings in our city, orphanages, kindergartens, and nurseries, hospitals and clinics, and schools began to be built...”⁷⁴⁰ Now the city was home to 175 kindergartens and nurseries, as well as a wide network of “children’s institutions,” clubs and organizations for youth. “Stalingrad residents are growing up vigorous and healthy [...] there are

⁷³⁸ See for instance, V. Smetannikov, Article Untitled, *Stalingradskaia pravda*, June 1, 1955, 2.

⁷³⁹ Ann Livshiz, “De-Stalinizing Soviet Childhood: The Quest for Moral Rebirth, 1953-58,” in *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization*, 117-134, (New York: Routledge, 2003).

⁷⁴⁰ V. Smetannikov, Article Untitled, *Stalingradskaia pravda*, June 1, 1955, 2.

no happier children in the world than our Soviet children, to whom the people give all the best they have!”⁷⁴¹



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However, for whatever resources the party devoted toward the city’s children, things were not always so rosy. Following the Secret Speech, as the newspaper began to more accurately reflect the lived experience of *Stalingradtsy*, many of the most vociferous complaints to the paper were made when the city was seen to be failing its children. Nothing could galvanize public support quite like the righteous anger of a parent worried for the well-being of their child.

By the mid-1950s, the city was still struggling to meet basic demand for kindergartens for the number of children in the city. In one cartoon that ran in the editorial section of *Stalingradskaiia pravda*, a municipal administrator sits atop a pile of loose bricks, talking to two young children. “Soon, children, we will build you a kindergarten here!” The caption belies the irony of the situation—”same old story” (*staraya skazka* (often used as synonymous with “fairytale”).⁷⁴³ Even kindergartens in operation couldn’t escape the clutter and chaos of new construction. Another complaint lodged in the summer of 1956 was about the state of the yard at the Traktorzavod kindergarten #62, where a several-foot deep water-supply trench snaked

⁷⁴¹ Ibid.

⁷⁴² Ibid, photos by Smetannikov.

⁷⁴³ Illustrated by P. Ostrovsky, “*Staraya skazka*,” *Stalingradskaiia pravda*, August 11, 1956, p. 2.

through the middle of their play yard, sitting empty and unfilled for more than a year. The chairman of the Parent Committee for the kindergarten, D. Vasil'kov, wrote "when it rains, there is water and mud in the trench, and in winter there is snow. And even in good weather, it interferes with children's games, and cases of injury are possible." After repeated reports made to the manager of the Vodokanalstroï trust responsible for the trench, comrade Blazhenov, on December 24, 1955, a "decision was made" to fill up the trench, but six months later this promise remained unfulfilled. Vasil'kov implored "it's time to finally give kindergarten teachers the opportunity to raise children normally."⁷⁴⁴



Despite the outcry, this problem would persist for the better part of the next decade.

Another article in 1964 titled "Do not offend the children!", parents of Istoricheskaiia Street who had been eagerly awaiting the city to open a *det'skii kombinata* (literally "children plant," though rather than a factory, this refers to a combined multi-age daycare facility, a sort of joint nursery, kindergarten, and daycare for school aged children), were thoroughly distressed once they had a chance to tour the facilities. The head of the facility as well as members of the Parent's Committee write that as the building was completed, the Head of Department #1 of

⁷⁴⁴ D. Vasil'kov, "Priniato reshenie...", *Stalinskagradskaiia pravda*, July 26, 1956, 3.

⁷⁴⁵ Ibid, Illustrations by P. Ostrovsky. Left, text reads: "Soon, children, we will build you a kindergarten here!" Right, banner reads: "Solution: fill up the hole"

Volgogradstroy trust, Androysiuk, handed over the keys and promised “they finished the *kombinata* to perfection, they did their best for the kids. You will remember the builders.” Not to be left out, the head of the Yuzhsanteh trust, which installed the plumbing, added “Don’t forget us plumbers, too!” As the facility opened, the builders and plumbers were certainly remembered, though not fondly—pipes leaked, drains were improperly installed, the heating system was not ready, and the building appears to lack any insulation from the cold. “We have repeatedly contacted the construction managers and asked them to return to fix these issues. They have not. They do not refuse us; they promise to come to our place. But the cart, as they say, is still there.”⁷⁴⁶



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While adequately providing safe and clean facilities remained a struggle for the city, various civic groups helped fill the void to give young residents space to find a sense of place and purpose. Palaces of Culture offered programming specifically for kids to explore the arts, music, science, and sport. During the summer months, when students were on holiday, but their parents nonetheless still had work, schools and other organizations in the city strived to provide summer programming that was an alternative to children running loose in the city or stuck in their homes. Some clubs helped facilitate excursions to local landmarks for young people there on holiday break from school. During the summer, pioneer groups might tour the city’s

⁷⁴⁶ L. Kashchenko and N. Kuznetsov, “Ne obizhaite detei!” *Volgogradskaya pravda*, October 18, 1964.

⁷⁴⁷ Ibid, illustration by VI. Smetanikova.

industries, visit landmarks, or take trips to nearby collective farms to learn about agriculture. In addition, "thousands of schoolchildren from the cities and towns around Stalingrad region" would take trips to the city to see its sights and interface with the children's groups there.⁷⁴⁸

Older students could travel even further afield. One such group from the Voroshilov region's #11 School had a club facilitated and overseen by its Physical Education teacher, D. D. Kurykin, which offered summer programs that included hiking, boat trips, and climbing. In 1955, a group of upper-level students hiked along the banks of the Volga-Don canal to both see the architectural marvels of the locks and retracing the battle sites of the German Invasion and the Soviet counteroffensive. The 220 students who would set off on the hike spent the winter and spring months preparing and training for the trek, which would cover hundreds of kilometers.⁷⁴⁹



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Philosophies on student leisure time were shifting during this time within the realm of Soviet pedagogy, which held that these hours outside of school were just as critical in developing whole citizens. As one educator put it,

Teaching children how to make active and purposeful use of leisure time is one of the main elements of our system of education. We consider that recreation involves the rational variation of activity, work that satisfies aesthetic

⁷⁴⁸ R. Ezhkova, "Excursia scholnikov letom," *Stalingradskaia pravda*, May 21, 1955, 2.

⁷⁴⁹ K. Barykin, "Molodtsy touristy," *Stalingradskaia pravda*, May 31, 1955, 2.

⁷⁵⁰ Ibid, photo K. Barynka.

requirements and creative appreciation of the beauty of nature. With such an approach, children enjoy leisure every day, which has great significance for their normal physical and psychological development⁷⁵¹

Recently, historians have confirmed that these were the driving principles for those responsible for youth culture in the city of Stalingrad. Much of youth programming was dedicated to the formation of a “conscious builder of communism” through sports programs, arts training, and socialization.⁷⁵² Camps and excursions, like the ones described above, were a chance for students to learn independence, as they were forced to learn to care for themselves with limited support from chaperones.⁷⁵³ With the well-being and development of children into productive adults a high-priority of the Khrushchev administration, the children in the city would face no shortage of leisure opportunities and cultural development during this time.

Livshiz argues that the importance of the next generation to the Party was a constant concern and topic of debate at the highest levels of Soviet governance: “Anxiety over the state of the minds, hearts, and souls of the youngest Soviet citizens was a consistent feature of both public and behind-the-scenes discussions over childhood matters throughout the Soviet era. After all, the future of the Soviet project hinged on the moral purity of the youngest generation.”⁷⁵⁴ De-Stalinization of early childhood culture was not only limited to reigning in the “cult of personality,” however. The Khrushchev administration had broader goals, “concerns about the quality of literature, juvenile delinquency, educational reforms, and labor education,” all of

⁷⁵¹ Vasyl Sukhomolynsky, *Our School in Pavlysh: A Holistic Approach to Education*, (Devon: EJR Publishing, 2021), 174. This text was composed of work by the author working as a teacher in Ukraine SSR in the 1960s.

⁷⁵² Lipatov, A. V., Merkuryeva, V. S., Taktasheva, F. A. “Tourism and Excursions as Forms of Organization of Leisure of Children and Youth in USSR in 1953—1964 (on Materials of Stalingrad (Volgograd) Region),” *Scientific dialogue* 12 (2018): 377-392, 379.

⁷⁵³ Ibid.

⁷⁵⁴ Livshiz, “De-Stalinizing Soviet Childhood,” 117.

which they believed would need to be addressed with changes to early childhood education. Livshiz also notes that most professional educators had been keen to implement reforms of problematic policies that simply would have been impossible while Stalin had been alive: “Most officials were neither revolutionaries, nor anti-Stalinists, but rather professionals vested in improving the workings of specific institutions under their jurisdiction or tutelage, namely children’s education and upbringing (*vospitanie*). Driven by a blend of professional pride and ideological belief in the importance of their work as guardians of the souls of the future Soviet citizens, some of them were eager to launch structural changes and reforms.”⁷⁵⁵

Conformity and Counterculture

Of course, while many of the city’s youth would grow into model, upstanding Soviet citizens, there would still be those who pushed against the bounds of social acceptability, either through anti-social behaviors such as alcoholism and petty crime, or a rejection of the predominant social order presented by the party. While Miriam Dodson notes that the party’s campaign against publicly indecent behavior extends back before Khrushchev’s ascendancy, it certainly becomes a central focus of the culture during his time as Premier.⁷⁵⁶

In the 1950s the Communist Party was grappling with what it saw as a “crisis” in juvenile delinquency. Childhood truancy, poor marks in school, and delinquent behaviors were seen as directly linked to “hooliganism” later in life. What’s more, the Soviet Union was in the midst of a spike in violent crime—murder, banditry, robbery, sex crimes, and group (“gang”) crimes” [...] saw significant increases during this period. Schools were understood to be at the frontlines

⁷⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁵⁶ See Miriam Dobson, “Show the Bandit-Enemies No Mercy!': Amnesty, Criminality and Public Response in 1953,” in *The Dilemmas of De-Stalinization*, ed. Polly Jones, 21-40, (New York: Routledge, 2003).

in this battle, as Soviet home life in the wake of the war was so disrupted that school was expected to provide this structure and direction for the immediate postwar generation. Up until Stalin's death (and beyond), this discussion in both high party circles and public discourse centered around questions of discipline. Stalinist expectations of crime and punishment were applied even to the realm of children, with calls for expulsion or even imprisonment for repeat offenders. Nikolai Bulganin (the interterm Soviet Premier before Khrushchev) in May of 1954, argued:

We must immediately bring some order to the schools. If necessary, open schools with [stricter rules] In the children's sphere, we need to destroy the 'theory of impunity.' A decisive battle against hooliganism in public places is necessary... People are afraid of hooliganism. Hooliganism is a form of fascism⁷⁵⁷

However, when the Secret Speech opened discussion of reform to include the failings of Stalinist policies in 1956, the tone of this discourse changed dramatically. Many officials within the Soviet education system now were able to give voice to concerns that the "cult of personality" itself was eroding the moral education of young people. Livshiz argues that "the Stalin cult was seen as particularly damaging to children: "'the cult of personality promoted the development in schoolchildren of a soulless dogmatic attitude towards questions of worldview and morality.' Children spoke perfect 'Bolshevik,' but to the dismay of officials this did not translate into proper behavior in real life."⁷⁵⁸ As they grew up and entered the workforce and party, these internalized Stalinist values were seen to lead "to an increase in manifestations of improper public behavior, but also to two-facedness and careerist aspirations, negative attitudes towards physical labor and a disinterest in the pioneer organization and socially useful work."⁷⁵⁹

⁷⁵⁷ Ibid, 120.

⁷⁵⁸ Ibid, 122.

⁷⁵⁹ Ibid.

Many felt that the Central Committee, after unleashing de-Stalinization with the Secret Speech, but offering few alternatives to replace the gaping hole left in Soviet public life by the Cult of Personality, should play a bigger role in replacing it. Another letter that Livshiz uncovers, this one addressed to Khrushchev himself, argued that:

The overwhelming majority of young people are amoral, uncultured; foul language has entered the conversational lexicon; feelings have coarsened; girls give birth without shame and, most importantly calmly respond—I am a single mother. But all the population younger than 47 years old graduated from our Soviet schools, and what is the result? ... When are we going to create a new cult of morality?⁷⁶⁰

While this sense of moral panic was nothing new in Soviet society (each generation, Livshiz notes, believes the younger generation has somehow lost the moral clarity of their elders), the question of how to de-Stalinize Soviet childhood contained many hard questions regarding how best to rebuild the value hierarchy and what would replace it. Livshiz goes on to explore how this search played out in the realm of children's literature, reforms to the scholastic disciplinary system, and within organizations dedicated to the development of Soviet youth. Many used this period of reform to advocate for a return to “ordinary feelings” --non-ideological values like “love, tenderness, and compassion” were to be reestablished as the central pillars for those responsible in shaping the Soviet childhood experience.⁷⁶¹

Livshiz concludes that this basic value shift could not have happened without the broader movement of de-Stalinization: “Perhaps the greatest achievement of the Thaw was the opportunity to discuss and debate important social issues, with morality and behavioral problems of the youngest Soviet citizens often at the forefront. Since many of these problems were attributed to the ill effects of the Stalin cult, de-Stalinization carried with it great hope for a

⁷⁶⁰ Ibid, 123.

⁷⁶¹ Ibid, 130.

moral renewal and rebirth of Soviet society in general, and the younger generations in particular.” While she notes that this process, like many other initiatives under Khrushchev, would not be resolved overnight, nor would reforms completely eliminate the underlying problems that remained entrenched from Stalinist times, this campaign did have a profound impact on the Soviet childhood experience. In Stalingrad, the future teachers at the pedological institute being trained as new educators would have been embroiled in many of the discussions and debates that Livshiz explores, and it also would have marked a significant cultural shift for the city’s youngest generation growing up in a post-Stalin world.

De-Stalinization gave a new language to the postwar generation of young adults’ sense of rebellion. While “hooliganism” represented the ossified establishment’s fear of moral decline, it was also a catchall term that was used to label all non-conforming or subversive behavior. As Furst notes, “youth hooliganism, fuelled by high consumption of alcohol, was a problem both in town and countryside. The modesty of dress and behavior propagated by Party and Komsomol was challenged on every street corner by fashion-conscious and jazz-hungry young urbanites.”⁷⁶² On the other hand, the Komsomol was struggling in the early 1950s to “regain (or gain control) of lost spaces: streets, dance squares, and dormitories, which were dominated by a value system that tolerated, rather than condemned, the hooligans.”⁷⁶³

Similarly, the Komsomol actively defined itself as the antithesis to the *stiliagi* (roughly equivalent with the english slang “hipsters”), and the organization encouraged members to reject the values of the “pleasure seeking“ and “parasitic” fashionistas. For years, however, Soviet propagandists sought to cast the two groups as protagonists and antagonists, with the campaign

⁷⁶² Ibid, 135-136.

⁷⁶³ Ibid, 136-37.

becoming so heated that it led to the creation of Komsomol “light cavalry” units who were supposed to act as street patrolling deterrents to hooligans and *stilagi* openly socializing.

The effects of these policies, Fürst concludes, were counterproductive to their original aims. “Ultimately Khrushchev was left with the same problems he had set out to eradicate—if anything, on a much larger scale. [...] The youth problem was not solved. Youth continued to find alternative platforms of collective experience, pursue interests different to those receiving ideological sanction, and to deplore the bureaucratic, out-of-touch Komsomol. If anything, the policies introduced hardened the fronts between official and unofficial youth cultures.” This generational struggle would set the stage for decades to come, as counterculture movements remained a thorn in the side of Soviet and Eastern bloc regimes all the way through perestroika and have even been shown to have had a profound social role in the ultimate dissolution of communist party rule in Europe.⁷⁶⁴

Policing Public Behavior in the Party Press

This campaign against moral rot among the youth of the day meant that there was no shortage of transparent party propaganda idealizing the proper youth culture for a country on the path towards the building of communism. As Fürst states succinctly in her study, “youth was a favorite topic of Soviet discourse,”⁷⁶⁵ and naturally this held true to the pages of the local Stalingrad press as well. The paper was ripe with biographies of remarkable young *Stalinigradtsy*, and scenes depicting upstanding Soviet youth attending club gatherings or acceptable leisure outings.

⁷⁶⁴ See Padraic Kenney, *A Carnival of Revolution: Central Europe 1989* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002) and Alexei Yurchak, *Everything was Forever, Until it was No More*.

⁷⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 136.

With such a preeminent focus on the moral development of Soviet youth and the dangers of hooliganism as a social ill, it is little wonder to see these narratives replicated in the party press. However, local stories came with their own local flavor, and complaints by residents against their ill-behaved neighbors were as loud as any calls by the party, and in fact could be weaponized to help drive the anti-hooliganism campaign. Even before Khrushchev's administration made it a priority, we can still see outcry from the local populace regarding episodes of antisocial behavior. Even as the newspapers printed residents' often scathing criticisms of the city's management, the editors at *Stalingradskaiia/Volgogradskaiia pravda* could wield public criticisms to their advantage when engaging in some agit-prop of their own toward pursuing the party's goals. In the case of the party's war on "hooliganism," public criticism was as good as any poster or slogan.

Soviet and Russian culture has long grappled with the social impact of alcoholism, where vodka remained a source of revenue for the state, and Stalingrad was no different. Drunks in their homes was one thing, but drunks in public were another issue entirely. In one particularly scandalous episode in the spring of 1953, a rather high-ranking manager of the power station StalGRES, Stepan Frolov, wandered into a Krasnoarmeisk cinema, visibly drunk. The cinema employees refused to sell him a ticket, reminding him that it was against the law to cause a drunken public disturbance. Frolov was seen leaving the theater, headed for a local substation, vowing "I'll give you a show! I'll show you art!" Ten minutes later, the lights went out in the cinema, and the streets and squares in the surrounding neighborhood were also plunged into darkness. The episode caused an outcry against Frolov, with sustained calls for discipline from the head of his department and even the regional prosecutor, but no investigation was ever brought and no action taken. The lack of action caused further scandal, as aggrieved residents

saw Frolov as protected by his connections to the regional government. The issue was relegated to the court of public opinion in *Stalingradskaia pravda*, with the appeal that “It is time to deal with both the hooligan and his ‘patrons!’”⁷⁶⁶

Collections of letters decrying drinking culture within the city were picked up by the paper and used to call for both temperance and regulation. Public spaces that served alcohol were seen as hubs where uncouth elements could gather, spawning fights and other lewd public behaviors. One collection of letters from 1959 included submissions from concerned residents and parents who wanted to speak out against the establishments in their neighborhood. V. Archikov writes that “there are neighborhoods behind the Volga-Don Canal, good houses there, and good people live in them. And drunken strangers spoil their moods every day with their ugly appearance and obscene expressions.” Down the block, a non-descript building in Block #30 the trade department established a pub, simply advertised by the sign “beer” (*pivo*) hanging above the door. Archikov argues “Decent people do not need such establishments. We must either put things in order or close them!” A pensioner, N. Brusinsky from the Krasnooktiabr’sk district, complains that at the 39th Gvardeyskaya St. Bar, “fights and scandals often occur. Here many children go to school, to the library, and on their way they listen to all sorts of trash. We value the fate of our children. It is necessary to close down gatherings of drunkards, to protect children and all honest citizens from drunken hooligans!”⁷⁶⁷

“Hooliganism” also reveals an aspect of the gender dynamic in Soviet society at this time, as hooliganism was primarily seen as a masculine problem. Almost all of the stories and complaints lodged in *Stalingradskaia pravda* related to the behavior of men. Women were seen as less prone to such destructive diversions, if only because they were seen as tied to the

⁷⁶⁶ G. Pan’kin, A. Bereiutin, “Khuligan u rubil’nika,” *Stalingradskaia pravda*, March 8, 1953, 2.

⁷⁶⁷ Gorchinchnik, “*Takie pivnye ne nuzhny*,” *Stalingradskaia pravda*, Jan. 8, 1959, 4. Illustration uncredited.

responsibilities of homemaking and raising the children. Drunks were a further strain on the family unit, as men who stayed out late drinking were seen to be neglecting their children and their husbandly duties. Even as criticisms against drunken behaviors appeared somewhat regularly in the press, they seemingly did little to eradicate the problem. Complaints against “hooligans” would continue throughout the Khrushchev period and beyond.



While largely altogether absent from *Stalingradskaia pravda*, another party priority throughout this period was the war against the vestiges of religious culture among the Soviet people. While I did not come across any stories directly pertaining to the campaign against religion, Russian historian M. I. Sokolova conducted her own survey of the Stalingrad press to attempt to understand how religion was being discussed during the “thaw.”⁷⁶⁹ In a survey of all issues from 1953 through 1964, Sokolova only found eighty-four articles discussing religious topics, with forty-nine discussing religion in general, while some cover specific confessions: 22 related to Orthodox Christianity, 3 to Islam, and 10 to various sects. She contends that after a period of laxity toward religious belief in the immediate postwar, the campaign against religion

⁷⁶⁸ Left: “Khuligan u rubil’nika,” illustration by P. Ostrovskii, Center: “Takie pivnye ne nuzhny,” Illustration uncredited, Right: P. Ostrovskii, “Oporya sem’i”

⁷⁶⁹ M. I. Sokolova, “Religioznaia situatsiia v stalingradskoi oblasti v gody ‘Khrushchevskoi ottepeli’: Po materialam gorodskoi i oblastnoi periodiki,” in *Otechestvennaia istoriia* 1, no. 15, (2009), 29-34.

was renewed by Khrushchev, in tandem with his push toward a more technocratic society based around the principles of scientific progress toward communism.⁷⁷⁰

Spaces devoted to this campaign manifest in Stalingrad as in the rest of the country, with “Houses of the Atheist” becoming clubs dedicated to stigmatizing religious practice in the city. Members of these houses might host talks, lectures, or pair with Palaces of Culture to promote speakers who had broken with religion, while also promoting leaders in careers like science and medicine who were professed atheists. Their members were often the ones who wrote the editorials for publication in *Stalingradskaia/Volgogradskaia pravda*, contesting things like the celebration of the Easter holiday on collective farmers (which took the place of valuable work days), or “charlatan” leaders of the church, like revealing that a Muslim elder who had come to Stalingrad from Saratov was a known horse thief in his early life. They also railed against homeopathy that still held sway in religious communities, telling horror stories of babies taken to religious healers instead of the hospital, or of clergy who decried illness as an act of God, rather than a disease to be understood and overcome.⁷⁷¹ When the space race began to dominate headlines after the launch of Sputnik and the flights of Yuri Gagarin, German Titov, and Alexandra Volkov, topics of astronomy were used to further attack superstitions and promote science and technology as the true means of understanding the universe. Sokolova concludes that these articles clearly had two main aims: “the first was aimed at the enlightenment of the population, increasing its educational level, and the second to reduce religion to a subject of everyday ridicule, as themes for the satirical and humorous.”⁷⁷²

⁷⁷⁰ For more on Soviet scientific literacy and anti-religious propaganda, see Roland Elliot Brown, *Godless Utopia: Soviet Anti-Religious Propaganda*, (London: Murray & Sorrell Fuel Ltd, 2019).

⁷⁷¹ Ibid, 30.

⁷⁷² Ibid, 32-33.

While the attacks in the press were intermittent compared to other sustained campaigns, like that against hooliganism, what is also revealing is the absence of any positive coverage—no worship services were announced, nor were the activities of the church or mosque reported on. While there were certainly still those who practiced religion in Stalingrad at this time, their religious activities made them a marginalized segment of the population.

Conclusions

As we have seen, the stated goals of Khrushchev's reforms aimed at modernizing the Soviet lived experience often clashed with the stark realities of what the Soviet economy could produce, creating a severe disconnect for residents whose expectations were much higher than what was being offered to them. This disconnect was often a source of disappointment and frustration, both within the private space of the new single-family apartment and the public sphere alike. Yet while this lived experience was far less than ideal, at least in the pages of the party press, one could see slow yet steady improvements being made to the quality of life in the city throughout this period.

While the single-family apartment remained the long-held dream for many, once ownership of a flat was achieved one challenge gave way to a multitude of new ones. Residents would now have to navigate providing for themselves within a shortage economy. Both the party and *Stalingradtsy* used the press as a tool to connect consumers with goods and services. What is more, the newspaper provided an outlet for the often-angry populace to advocate for their interests by calling out the incompetence, corruption, and graft of the city's administration and the management of major construction enterprises.

The desire to improve life in the city also demanded that urban planners and the state account for the demand for public spaces the community shared. While the party pushed for amenities and entertainment around officially prescribed and acceptable forms of leisure, from art and culture to sport, the people of the city also formed their own communities around shared interests. Stories in the newspaper on residents' struggles to navigate the city's public spaces provided yet another backdrop for the political fights of de-Stalinization, allowing public input to pressure the technocratic elite left over from Stalin. In addition, stories of life outside the home, whether rosy depictions of leisure or vocal complaints about state services, served to make the socialist city seem a vibrant, interconnected space and helped create a shared identity among *Volgogradtsy*. Even if one did not live close to the wide green terraces of the 62nd embankment, or the shaded banks of the Volga-Don canal, there was intended a shared sense of pride that one's city contained such marvelous locales for its citizens to enjoy.

The party's voice can certainly be heard on every page of *Stalingradskaia/Volgogradskaia pravda*, but it was also to an extent a reflection of its community, even if the looking glass was distorted by the party editorial line. Even when carefully choosing the stories it ran and crafting the language in which those stories were framed, the press remained dependent on the contributions of the people of the city for its content, whatever their motivations may have been. They still highlighted the efforts of real, skilled individuals who became leaders in their communities, of community spaces, of the collective project of building the city around them as they continued to live in it. They also used the paper as a means to attempt to police and prescribe acceptable public behaviors, particularly in the realm of youth culture, where Khrushchev and his supporters understood it as a crucial front for the overall success of his reforms.

Rather than think of the editors of *Stalingradskaia/Volgogradskaia pravda* as trying to paint an image of an ideal modern socialist city of Stalingrad, instead I think of it as the editors continuously moving a mirror to focus on various points of the city and region, resting on the aspects of the community the party deemed could fit their broader political objectives. In doing so, this mirror also reflected the view of the residents back to the party, allowing citizens to share aspects of their everyday experiences, in all their imperfections. It gave space for common people to voice their criticisms—which were strategically selected with political objectives in mind. Through this reflection each side was given a view of the other. For readers, however, it also had the effect of forming a sense of a shared experience with their neighbors and countrymen.

While the impact of de-Stalinization on daily life remains hard to measure, it is clear that Khrushchev's policies in practice made for dramatic changes to the Soviet lived experience in Stalingrad. Residents were invited to hope for a better tomorrow, but unlike in Stalin's time, they were free to join the conversation of how to get there, so long as their critiques fell within the range of what the party deemed acceptable. It shows that in many ways, Khrushchev understood what the Soviet people demanded from a socialist economy, and that many residents bought into the dream that the Communist Party was offering. While frustrations were rampant on all sides and the entrenched failures of the Stalinist economy continued to stymie what was possible, both sides were invariably working toward the same goal of an improved quality of life inside the modern socialist city.

CHAPTER 6

De-Stalinizing the War Myth: The Hero-City as a Museum, Pilgrimage Site, and Mausoleum

Introduction

During the Battle of Stalingrad, stories of the city's defenders' heroism were spread far and wide by the Red Army's *Zvezda* newspaper and other propaganda media. With the rest of the nation besieged, with Leningrad surrounded and Hitler's armies only 30 miles from the gates of Moscow, these tales of superhuman bravery were meant to inspire the bedraggled populace not to give up. The stories of Sergeant Pavlov, his regiment holding a single building for 58 days and nights despite near total encirclement, or the sniper Vasily Zaitsev, who during the battle was reported to have killed some 225 enemy soldiers and officers and survived tense battles with at least 11 Nazi sharpshooters, were broadcast domestically and internationally. Even among the Soviet Union's western allies, this coverage of the soldiers' impossible defense of Stalingrad held audiences enraptured as the fate of the Eastern front was decided. The eventual encirclement and surrender of Paulus's Sixth Army was cause célèbre around the world, dealing the seemingly unstoppable Wehrmacht its first real defeat on the battlefield.⁷⁷³ Even as the tide turned and the Allied armies closed in on Berlin, the Battle of Stalingrad remained one of the most important stories of hope, resilience, and of victory for the Soviet people and enemies of fascism everywhere.

In the city itself, the defenders of the 62nd Army finally joined with the liberators from Operation Uranus in the Square of Fallen fighters to hear the news of Paulus's final surrender and the end to the battle. On February 4th, the hundreds of soldiers gathered there held what was

⁷⁷³ See Catherine Merridale, *Ivan's War: Life and Death in the Red Army, 1939-1945*, (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006). She explores how news of the Stalingrad front was received by Soviet partisans behind Nazi lines, as well as Soviet soldiers in other fronts. 184-85.

possibly the Soviet Union's first ever victory celebration amidst the ruins of the city's center (which had only days before remained in the hands of the enemy). This moment added a profound significance to this square, which was already a storied locale from the Bolshevik's defense of Tsaritsyn during the Civil War. In attendance that day was the commissar who oversaw the defense of the city during the siege, Nikita S. Khrushchev.⁷⁷⁴



⁷⁷⁴ For more on Khrushchev's contributions during the battle, see Hellbeck, *Stalingrad*.



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However, these troops would see little respite, as soon they would begin their slow march westward towards Berlin. As they emptied the city, the few survivors of the battle and those who would return faced the harsh realities left behind by the departing Red Army. The stories and celebration of victory at Stalingrad had concealed the cost of the battle. In its coverage of Stalingrad (and every other front of the war), the party press carefully controlled the information distributed to the public. Words like “retreat” and “surrender” were universally excluded from reports, as well as death tolls.⁷⁷⁶ At Stalingrad, for instance, nearly half a million Soviet soldiers were killed, wounded, or left missing in action during the months of November 1942-February 1943 as Operation Uranus went into action.⁷⁷⁷ In comparison, Paulus’s armies suffered 147,000 deaths, with an additional 91,000 prisoners of war captured, meaning that the Soviet “victory” at

⁷⁷⁵ Above: Photographer uncredited, Victory Rally on the Square of Fallen Fighters, from “The Capture of Field Marshal Paulus,” from Hellbeck, *Stalingrad*, via erenow.org/www/stalingrad-city-that-defeated-third-reich/22.php (accessed 6/12/2024). Middle: Photographer uncredited, Nikita Khrushchev in front of the Stalingrad Department Store, February 1943, *Ibid*. Bottom: Photographer uncredited, aerial view of the February 4, 1943 rally, <https://albumwar2.com/meeting-to-commemorate-the-end-of-the-battle-of-stalingrad-from-a-birds-eye-view>, (accessed 6/12/2024).

⁷⁷⁶ See Karel C. Berkhoff, *Motherland in Danger: Soviet Propaganda during World War II* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012).

⁷⁷⁷ *Ibid*, Merridale puts the official deaths the Red Army experienced at this time at 485,735, but notes that this does not include the period of August-October 1942 when the Germans launched their initial offensive to take the city. The civilian death tolls are even harder to pin down. See Merridale, *Ivan’s War*, 414.

Stalingrad had only been achieved through nearly double the casualties of the losing side. While the figures of “fascist dead” were readily broadcast, the sacrifices extracted from soldiers who had died for Soviet victory were subsumed by the stories of heroism of the survivors. The party would not allow the population to lament the dead, only to celebrate living. Even as the war still raged and the citizens of Stalingrad began to return to shift through the rubble of their former lives, the war myth was already being carefully cultivated by the Communist Party, the boundaries of acceptable memory erected and policed by the Soviet state.

We have already seen how the story of *Dom Pavlova* was used as justification for what inspired the schoolteachers of the Cherkasova brigade to begin their mission to restore the city, a movement that would be emulated in destroyed cities across the country. The ruined house remained a focal point for impromptu memorials by the party and public. What little was left of the ruined structure attracted a steady stream of flowers and wreaths, and year-round was bedecked in banners bearing slogans toting the sacrifices of the city’s defenders as well as exultations for the citizens struggling to restore Stalingrad. Another important site in the earliest days of the city’s cultivation of the war myth was the Square of Fallen Fighters, where annual gatherings were held to celebrate the German surrender, as citizens braved the cold and returned to the same square that soldiers had occupied in celebration that first day following the Soviet victory to hear speakers, music, and see the skies lit up with fireworks. Around Stalingrad, other small, inexpensive memorials began to spring up, often through the initiative of local neighborhood councils—plaques of commemoration, obelisks, and podiums mounted with tank turrets marked important sites on the battlefield, giving neighborhoods all throughout the city focal points for their own memorials. In May 1945, the Square of Fallen Fighters would once

again fill with revelers to celebrate the news of the German's final surrender and the end of the war.

The one-year commemoration of the victory in Europe celebrated in Stalingrad and elsewhere in May of 1946 would be the last of its kind for nearly a decade. Nina Tikhmarkin argues that the one-year celebration Victory Day in 1946 rivaled those of the October Revolution in 1918 or May Day as a holiday, which "combined official management with popular enthusiasm. ... People gathered in squares and parks to congratulate bemedaled veterans, to listen to street musicians and orchestras, and to revel in the thrill of victory."⁷⁷⁸ How jarring it must have been, then, for the residents of the city when Stalin began to restrict public displays celebrating the Soviet victory. As Merridale states, "Stalin would set a new official tone. He was proud to take credit for the victory but reluctant to share it. He was also aware that stories of his own mistakes were waiting to be told..."⁷⁷⁹

Indeed, the wounds of the war were still fresh and apparent in the Soviet Union, with veterans returning home suddenly cast into a society where scarcity and destruction reigned, leaving little support for those who sacrificed so much and needed it most. Many mutilated soldiers, unable to work, lined city streets begging, hawking cigarettes, and doing whatever they could to make money to supplement their meager (or sometimes non-existent) pensions. According to Tikhmarkin, "Stalin had evidently decided that the presence of those mutilated war victims was upsetting to the people, and that they should no longer be in evidence to remind the public of the horror of the past war. They were rounded up off the streets of larger cities and sent off to special colonies in the far north to live out the rest of their days."⁷⁸⁰

⁷⁷⁸ Nina Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead*, 103.

⁷⁷⁹ Merridale, *Ivan's War*, 362.

⁷⁸⁰ Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead*, 98.

While mutilated veterans remained a sore reminder about what was lost, Stalin was equally keen to cap the prestige of some of the war's most impressive characters. Across the Soviet Union, the erstwhile heroes of the war were demoted and scattered to remote outposts. Some even ended up in the Gulag, an ignominious reward for their years of service.⁷⁸¹ Memoirs of the war were also censored or denied publication. In the case of one memoir accepted for publication by the Military Publishing House titled *From Stalingrad to Vienna*, Stalin himself rejected its publication arguing that "it was too early to be writing memoirs so soon after these great events, at a time when passions were still too much aroused, and thus the memoirs would never have the required objectivity."⁷⁸² The "required objectivity" Stalin had in mind clearly meant a narrative that directly served the needs of the state, rather than any cathartic release for both the authors and the audiences still very much living with the fallout of these events.

With new conflicts looming large in the Soviet dictator's mind, Stalin directed a cessation of holidays and public memorials to the war. Instead, days tied to war holidays were used to remind Soviet citizens of the challenges that lay ahead and the looming threat of the imperialist West, no less potentially deadly than Hitler. In Stalingrad in the years following 1946 one can see a definite shift in the party press. On important holidays, *Stalingradskaia pravda* no longer dedicated days-worth of page space to commemorations or public letters of thanks given to the city's defenders and the accompanying promises to rebuild Stalingrad. When the war was mentioned, it was in the form of exultations to Stalin and his purported role.⁷⁸³ There were still fireworks in the night sky of Stalingrad, as well as all other "hero-cities," but in 1947 Stalin returned all war holidays to regular working days, leaving citizens little time to make the trek to

⁷⁸¹ Ibid, 102

⁷⁸² Ibid, 104.

⁷⁸³ As evidenced in *Stalingradskaia pravda*, February 3, 1948, and May 9, 1948.

the city center amidst their long days struggling to rebuild. While commemorations still took place in many cities, Tumarkin notes they were necessarily informal, “with meetings of veterans, visits to cemeteries, and public strolling.” As the state retreated from the war myth, it became smaller and more personal, but lost its grand design. What is more, the war myth became a closeted affair, a memory that could not be shared too loudly so as not to subvert the party’s focus on the future, rather than the past.

It is little wonder, then, that there was an explosion of pent-up demand for memorialization in the wake of Stalin’s death. In the case of Stalingrad, as we shall see, the city was like a frontier town amidst a gold rush, as opportunistic artists and party politicians rushed to fill the vacuum left by Stalin’s absence. In the decade and a half following Stalin’s death, the rapid construction of monuments and museums commemorating the war dead and other war themes would further shape the landscape of the “hero-city,” a retooling of the socialist city to accommodate not just the future generations, but one attempting to come to grips with its past. This rush to memorialize the Battle of Stalingrad re-opened the contours of the war myth, as clashing interpretations in theme and scope and vision lead to new struggles between the party and the public, and between central party leadership and local officials.⁷⁸⁴ As these statues and monuments rose around the city, mingling with the triumphalist Stalinist architecture and the brutalist practical structures of the mass-housing drive, Stalingrad began to take on the shape of something resembling a giant open-air museum. What is unique, however, is that museums are inherently exhibits that require the participation of spectators, and Stalingrad was no different. In transforming the city into a museum, it also became a city not just for its inhabitants, but for its

⁷⁸⁴ See Scott Palmer, “How the Myth was Made.”

visitors as well. The war myth provided an important lesson that needed to be imparted not just on non-*Stalingradtsy* Soviet citizens, but international audiences as well.

Methodology and Historiography

This chapter looks at the city as two entities: the built environment of the city of Stalingrad/Volgograd, and “Stalingrad,” the mythical entity that is embodied in the city through the memorialization and ritualization of the Soviet war myth surrounding the battle that took place here. While many hero-city’s experienced this similar dichotomy, in no other was the legacy of Stalin so entrenched as the city that bore his name.⁷⁸⁵ For a time, in official Soviet parlance the war in the city would be known as “The Battle on the Volga” (*Bit’ve na Volge*), in order to remove its association with his name. This is also why, despite the legendary status of the world-renowned “Stalingrad,” the name of the city would finally be changed in 1961 and statues of Stalin removed, the ultimate iconoclasm in what had been the city of Stalin.

In pairing the study of de-Stalinization with the study of the war myth, we see how many of the major inventions and rituals were developed during this time.⁷⁸⁶ Stalin had famously downplayed celebrations of the war after the first few initial years. He brought Victory Day celebrations to an end in 1946. When Khrushchev came to power nearly a decade later, he inherited an already established war myth from Stalin, which would take concerted effort to revise. In keeping with other breaks with his predecessor, Khrushchev would never be able to undo Stalin’s legacy in its entirety or risk unraveling the whole system. In his elevation of the War Myth through massive projects like the memorial complex at Mamayev Kurgan, he relied

⁷⁸⁵ For more on shared themes and differences among Soviet Hero Cities, see Mijnssen, *Russia’s Hero Cities*.

⁷⁸⁶ For more on the political dynamics that shaped the war myth under Stalin and Khrushchev, see Jonathan Brunstedt, *The Soviet Myth of World War II*.

on many Stalinist tropes to build up the war's symbology, both to his own citizens and an international audience. To give it power, the war myth needed public participation.⁷⁸⁷ It needed its own language, iconography, and its own dedicated sacred sites within the built environment. It needed rituals and traditions that could be passed down to future generations. The hero city—its statues, museums, and graveyards—had to become a sacred site in which these rituals might be given meaning. The “hero-city” identity had to be ingrained into the city's life and culture.

As Khrushchev continued to steer the war myth toward truly epic proportions within the built environment of the city, the steady flow of visitors helped establish the rhythms and rituals of remembrance. One metaphor I find compelling is to think of the city as a monastery in the medieval period that would proclaim to hold the reliquary or remains of a sacred figure. Pilgrims who visited this monastery would pay homage to the sacred artifact, expected to follow prescribed ritual observances to display proper reverence, guided by the monks and priests who preserve the legend. In this metaphor, international visitors to the city are the pilgrims. Whether they had come to the city seeking to honor the war myth or not, those observances would be expected of them nonetheless. The people of Stalingrad/Volgograd, particularly its elected leadership, had to serve in the role of the priests and monks who receive said pilgrims and lead them through the rituals. In order to explore this process, this examination will explore how the built environment honoring the war myth was a core element of how it was practiced in the city, as well as how the rituals of memorialization became codified during this period.

This study has been informed by the groundbreaking work of several other notable scholars involved in unpacking the “memory work” that has been done surrounding the Second World War in the Soviet Union. Two seminal works mentioned above, Nina Tumarkin's *The*

⁷⁸⁷ See Vicky Davis, *Mythmaking in the Soviet Union and Modern Russia*, (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2017).

Living and the Dead and Catherine Merridale's *Ivan's War*, examine these trends on a nationwide scale. Tumarkin's work greatly informed this study due to her own exploration of monuments and physical culture, as well as the rituals and how different generations have interpreted and shaped the war myth through the Soviet Union's demise and co-opted the Soviet war experience into their understanding of modern Russia.⁷⁸⁸ Merridale's work, on the other hand, is focused specifically on the Soviet experience of the war and its immediate aftermath. Both histories have done a significant job advancing our understanding of how the war myth came to be in its current form, as well as the ideological repercussions it holds when considering the Soviet and post-Soviet past.⁷⁸⁹

Other scholars have taken Merridale's approach to the experience of the war and applied it to the period beyond. Amir Weiner has done valuable work in this field, and his *Making Sense of War* shows how impactful the experience of war was to the generations that lived through and survived it, where one's role in the war (veteran, civilian, victim, partisan, orphan, etc.) shaped one's social standing in postwar Soviet society as well as the way Soviet citizens viewed their country, the revolution, and their role in it. Lisa Kirschenbaum is another scholar who chose to examine the war myth as it grew in a specific locality. Her 2006 work, *The Legacy of the Siege of Leningrad, 1941-1995*, traces the war myth around the 900-day siege of Leningrad. There she argues that "everyday memories of the war amounted to a complicated fusion of official myths and subjective experiences as survivors and their offspring sought to process the trauma of the experience. She makes an important observation, that as the postwar Soviet leadership repeatedly failed to deliver on the promises of socialist prosperity, public disillusionment of the war myth

⁷⁸⁸ Nina Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead*.

⁷⁸⁹ Catherine Merridale, *Ivan's War*.

and its symbols continued to grow. They became concrete markers of the party's ideological bankruptcy, which played a significant factor in the ultimate collapse of the Soviet Union.

Despite its historic significance as the turning point of the war, several other myth-making projects predated efforts in Stalingrad. The Treptower Park monument in Berlin was one of the earliest such efforts. The Soviet-built monument received plenty of attention for the sheer scale of the compound as well as the implications of the triumphant Soviet Union imposing such a monument on foreign soil, expressly for the consumption of their defeated enemies and generations of Germans to come.⁷⁹⁰ The sculptor behind that monument, Evgeny Vuchetich, would become one of the core figures of the memorialization effort in Stalingrad, including acting as lead designer for the massive complex that was installed atop of Mamayev Kurgan. While that monument is the most well known of Stalingrad's war memorials, it is but one of many.⁷⁹¹ If we were to think of the city as a quilt, with various memorials linking together to form a more substantial artistic narrative. While Mamayev Kurgan is certainly the centerpiece and the focal point of this tapestry, to fully understand it we must also look at the elements that surround it and situate it, effectively holding it in place and enhancing its significance.

As many of the works above note, the story of postwar Soviet monuments is irrevocably tied to the broader political trends in the Soviet Union at the time of their construction, and the single greatest factor of these usually revolves around the role of Stalin. Polly Jones also makes an important contribution to the discourse of Soviet memory of the war in her seminal work on Destalinization, *Myth, Memory, Trauma: Rethinking the Stalinist Past in the Soviet Union 1953-70*. Jones notes that the Cult of Personality reached its apotheosis in the immediate postwar period, where tributes to Stalin occupied the same rhetorical space that the war myth would come

⁷⁹⁰ Paul Stangl, "The Soviet War Memorial in Treptow, Berlin," in *Geographical Review* 93 (2003): 213-36.

⁷⁹¹ Scott Palmer, "How the Myth was Made."

to occupy. She argues that “the myth of Stalin’s military and civilian prowess and the discourse of popular gratitude to him [...] were mutually constitutive. The more Stalin gave to the Soviet people, the more thanks was due to him.”⁷⁹² Detangling Stalin from the war myth and reconstruction was one of the trickiest aspects the Khrushchev era party leadership faced as they pushed de-Stalinization.⁷⁹³ While Jones explores this question through the world of postwar literature, her findings illustrate just how closely de-Stalinization, and the development of the war myth became following the Secret Speech. In Stalingrad, we can see this same struggle played out in the monuments and museums within the city, as the carefully constructed narrative of Stalin’s legacy was challenged and eventually toppled (quite literally, in the case of many statues).

As we have seen, Stalin’s own suppression of state-sponsored memorialization of the war allowed his Cult of Personality to thrive in its absence. Jones makes a compelling argument challenging the way we view de-Stalinization, beyond the standard narrative that typically begins with the Secret Speech in 1956. Based on this, it can be argued that the sudden revival of the war myth following Stalin’s death in 1953 could be said to mark one of the earliest forms of de-Stalinization. Even though there is no singular moment or policy to point toward, no executive fiat or proclamation by the state, the tacit agreement between party and public to begin once again exploring ways to memorialize the war victory and commemorate the war dead was one of the most unified and popular examples of a policy shift following Stalin’s death. That said, while the rapid reversal of Stalin’s policy regarding the war may show early signs of pushing back on his legacy, the content of the war myth remained thoroughly in the grips of the Cult of

⁷⁹² Jones, *Myth, Memory, Trauma*, 7.

⁷⁹³ See also Yan Mann, “Situating Stalin in the History of the Second World War,” in *The Memory of the Second World War in Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia*, ed David Hoffman, (New York: Routledge, 2022).

Personality for the three years leading up to the Secret Speech in 1956. It is worth noting, as Jones highlights, that the Speech itself was explicit in its excoriation of Stalin's handling of the war itself: "the shocking picture of Stalin's military incompetence ... provoked some of the strongest reactions among listeners when the speech reached them."⁷⁹⁴

The monument culture in Volgograd, though dominated by the war myth and the memory of the battle, would eventually subsume the story of reconstruction and the city's revival into the war legacy. The two stories were impossible to separate, as every triumph in reconstruction was only made possible through the victory won here. In addition, this chapter will further explore the iconoclastic attack on Stalin's memory within the city, as depictions of the dead Soviet leader proliferated in the city's depiction of the war myth in the absence of dedicated war memorials. The presence of Stalin dominated the city, in both physical depictions as well as rhetorical ones, embedded in the narrative of the city's history as it is told by the state. When Stalin was removed, it left a real and metaphorical vacuum for the Party to fill, often with new monuments dedicated either to the war myth or reaching back even further into the Soviet canon, as we will see a push to re-center Lenin and reclaim the mantle of the original Bolshevik vision. In identifying these monuments as part of the "museum city" as well, I will show how the war myth, reconstruction, and de-Stalinization were all linked in the building of the city's post-Stalin "hero-city" identity.

Before investigating some of the city's most iconic monuments, I will begin by examining how the Stalin cult and the war myth were irrevocably linked. Even before looking at the physical spaces within the city, it is important to note how Stalingrad and the Stalin cult were already being conflated, most notably in the 1948 film "The Battle of Stalingrad"

⁷⁹⁴ Jones, *Myth, Memory, Trauma*, 23.

(“*Stalingradskaia bit’va*”). With the city, of course, there are a number of sites where the influence of the Stalin cult was readily apparent, including several statues of the Soviet leader that we have already alluded to in this work. In addition to these statues of Stalin, Stalin’s name was everywhere: streets, museums, neighborhoods, and of course even the city itself all bore his name. The record of the careful cultivation of the exhibits there shows how the center policed local efforts to build their own interpretation of the war myth, instead recentering Stalin as the principal character of both the Civil War and the Second World War in the city’s history. This relatively small museum, located in an old Tsaritsyn era red-brick house on the northwestern corner of the Square of Fallen Fighters, as well as the city’s statues of Stalin, would constitute some of the earliest physical battlegrounds in the campaign against the Cult of Personality as it kicked off in 1956 and was dealt the “final” blow in 1961.

During this same period that the waves of de-Stalinization began to sweep over the city bearing Stalin’s name, new monuments and memorial spaces became new focal points for the war myth to be built fresh, free of the preexisting taint of Stalin’s corrupting influence. Sites like the memorial complex atop Mamayev Kurgan, first announced to the public in 1957 but envisioned much earlier by Soviet artists sensing fertile ground for their own work in the storied hero-city, would soon wrest the mantle of the war myth away from the Defense Museum in terms of scope and scale of their grand memorial visions. The increased attention from the center over these massive construction contracts brought additional oversight and capital into the city, but also frustration for local officials and the city’s denizens who were in the midst of the struggle to meet the challenges of mass-housing during this same time (as evidenced in Chapter 3). For many locals and officials, already frustrated by the city’s inept handling to shift to new

methods of construction and meet the staggering demand for new housing, the memorial complex was seen as an unnecessary and expensive drag on public resources.⁷⁹⁵

While the proposed “Monument to Military Glory” was still in the design and development stage, other sites in the city already tied to the war myth were being transformed. One of the starkest examples of this is the creation of the “Square of Lenin” (*ploshchad’ Lenina*) at the northern terminal of the city center and the fate of the fabled Dom Pavlova, the ruins of which had stood untouched more than a decade at the eastern corner of the old square. The decision to dedicate this space to Lenin is a perfect illustration of the administration’s attempt to refocus Soviet patriotism around the legacy of the revolution’s original hero in place of the Stalin cult.⁷⁹⁶ As the square was transformed into a crisp, clean piece of the modern city, the future of the nearby ruins was called into question. However, once again, direct intervention from the center would decide the future of the House of Pavlov, as well as the ruins of a nearby mill, as the site became the future location of yet another museum to the Battle. This museum, built to house the massive panorama painting commemorating the battle that had originally been commissioned as part of the Mamayev Kurgan memorial complex, would further increase the physical presence of the war myth within the city.

While the three locations listed above are some of the most visible sites where the war myth was constructed in the city, they remain still but a part of a much greater whole. Over time, all of Volgograd would prove fertile ground for memorialization, as various groups, civilians, and military, were incorporated into the tapestry of the museum city. To give a better sense of the larger whole, I intend to extend our tour of the city to include many of these smaller

⁷⁹⁵ See Scott Palmer, “How the Myth was Made.”

⁷⁹⁶ Another important aspect of de-Stalinization pointed to by Jones and others, see for instance Jones, *Myth, Memory, Trauma*, 7.

memorial sites, as well as the rituals that surround them. I argue that these monuments also play a significant role in the museum city's meta-narrative of resilience and renewal, as the war myth was tied to the city's purportedly miraculous, "Phoenix-like" resurrection.⁷⁹⁷ In addition, I will illustrate how the myth of Stalingrad was being exported during this time through its depictions in Soviet cultural production. Even while these monuments were still in the construction phases, Stalingrad was becoming a tourist destination for both Soviet and international travel, and these depictions of the battle and the city in popular culture were important drivers in drawing public interest.

Finally, I intend to show how Stalingrad as a destination became a piece of Soviet foreign policy by looking at foreign travel to the city. In addition to tourists from within the Soviet Union and abroad, delegations of visiting state dignitaries were not an uncommon sight in Stalingrad.⁷⁹⁸ In particular, I will examine two important of the highest profile state visits to the city that took place during this time: one by the Yugoslav leader Marshal Josip Broz Tito in 1956, the other by Cuban revolutionary hero Fidel Castro in 1963. During these visits, the city served as a stage for the Khrushchev administration to pursue its larger foreign policy objectives, and in doing so further increased the potency of the war myth by helping establish rituals around some of the city's most important sites as the delegations toured the museum city. I argue that the memorials and monuments were deliberately sculpted for an international audience, and the inherent malleability of its symbolism allowed for the language of memorialization for the Battle of Stalingrad to be used to service other political goals.

⁷⁹⁷ Aberlando Pineiro, translated to Russian by Iu. Plotnikov, "Volgograd-ptitsa feniks," *Volgogradskaia pravda*, October 11, 1964, 3.

⁷⁹⁸ For more on Soviet tourism trends, see Diane P. Koenker, *Club Red: Vacation Travel and the Soviet Dream* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013).

Through a process of constant repetition, the built environment means generations of Stalingradtsy experience a constant process of semiotic transference from the world around them, from the city's skylines, parks, walkways, and street corners, on their movie screens, and later their TV screens. It was in the news, it was the mantra of politicians, it imbued everyday life with a grander narrative of resilience and survival in a time of great and lasting hardship. It provided a shared language and history to see themselves as *Stalingradtsy/Volgogradtsy* would form a core backbone of the city's collective identity.

Stalin and the War Myth in Stalingrad

The film *Stalingradskaia bitva* (Mosfilm, 1949), directed by Vladimir Petrov, was a massive undertaking, using real Red Army troops to recreate massive set pieces of some of the most memorable scenes from the battle. It included the rising star of Aleksei Dikiy in the role of Stalin himself, who ultimately remains the central character of the film. The film opens with Stalin surveying a map of the battlefield, musing about the strategic importance of Stalingrad, and how this would not be the first time he was responsible for the city's defense. Dikiy's portrayal of Stalin is that of a calm strategic mastermind—he understands the workings of the German strategy, and calmly explains to his subordinates that the Soviet retreat up to this point had merely been a ploy to extend the German flanks. Stalingrad is the crux of the plan's success: the Red Army must hold it, in order for his ultimate grand strategy for winning the war to succeed. Early and often, he compares the task of holding the city to his time defending Tsaritsyn during the Civil War.



The film cuts back and forth between recreations of real scenes from the battlefield, such as the German bombardment of the city, or the heroic stand of the soldiers of Dom Pavlova, with scenes of Stalin's cool, calm deliberations, one step ahead of the enemy and even his own generals. Hitler is depicted in the film as a raving lunatic, providing a sharp contrast compared to Stalin's calm, collected behavior. Representatives of the U.S. and U.K., who Stalin meets with to plan the opening of a Western front, are scheming and non-committal—as Dikiy makes clear to his audience, their hesitation is a deliberate action so that the Soviets will “bleed to death” and will not be able to oppose their post-war designs on Europe. The Soviets would be forced to bear the brunt of the Nazi onslaught on their own.

Many of the scenes of the battle were filmed on location in Stalingrad, and the arrival of the crew and the project were announced in *Stalingradskaja pravda* in June 1948. Petrov was interviewed about the challenges the film presented, which he confirmed was no easy task as he sought to accurately recreate the conditions of the battlefield. For example, despite hoping to film the scenes of Sergeant Pavlov and his men on site, because of the work continuing around Dom Pavlova those scenes would have to be filmed on a soundstage. However, this was nothing compared to the larger battle shots, which faced daunting logistical challenges. These scenes

⁷⁹⁹ Left: Dikiy as Stalin in *Stalingradskaja bit'va*. (GIS), Right: Still from “Stalingradskaja bitva” showing how existing Ruins served as the backdrop for action shots within the movie. “S'emki filma “Stalingradskaja bitva,

would take place in the field, sometimes amidst the actual ruins of the city that still stood at this time but called for a substantial number of participants. To fill out the ranks of extras, Petrov had turned to organizations within the city—worker militias, the Komsomol, and other volunteer organizations were asked to participate. Petrov explained, “in these shots, we will have to show how the heroic people of Stalingrad at the most difficult moment stood proudly against the enemy. The masses are the main thing in these shots. Up to three thousand people will have to participate in some filming. Therefore, without the active help of the city's public organizations, it will be difficult for us to cope with our task.”⁸⁰⁰ The filming in the city would last several weeks, in locations from the city center, its outskirts, Mamayev Kurgan, and the banks of the Volga. Thousands of locals were involved in the production experience, both as extras and as hosts for the cinematic team. For the local party press, the filming of such a major motion picture in the city was proof of the growing legacy of the battle. Petrov's interview concludes with the reporter stressing the importance of the project: “for the most progressive mankind, the word “Stalingrad” has become the prototype of military valor, iron fortitude, heroism, the prototype of unsurpassed patriotism, boundless love and loyalty to the Motherland. Making a film worthy of this heroic city and its wonderful people is an honorable and challenging task.”⁸⁰¹

While the scenes focused on Stalin are calm and composed, the shots of the battle are what make the film a true war epic. The mass public participation of *Stalingradtsy* allowed Petrov to create the kind of awe-inspiring spectacles pioneered in Eisenstein's early propaganda films. Petrov's montage compositions, set to triumphant music, make it clear to the audience that both the Nazis and the Allied powers have clearly underestimated the Soviet resolve. As the Red Army marches toward battle, flanked by legions of plain clothes proletarians headed toward the

⁸⁰⁰ “Stalingradskaia bit’va,” *Stalingradskaia pravda*, June 15, 1948, (No. 118), p. 3.

⁸⁰¹ Ibid.

city's factories (which in reality had ceased production at this point), they are reminded by their commanders that "comrade Stalin is always with you!" Though at times the outlook is grim, the film builds to its climax of the encirclement and finally the surrender of the German troops. The closing scene shows the victorious ranks of Soviet triumphantly uniting in singing of the Soviet anthem, leaving the viewer with little doubt that now that the decisive battle has been won, there is little that can stop their inevitable march on Berlin.

The film attempts to cement Stalin's leadership as the primary driver of the Soviet victory in the battle. He is depicted as both guardian and steward of the October Revolution. It is important to note, too, that Soviet films in the postwar were targeted at not just a Soviet audience, but to audiences in the newly minted People's Democracies of Eastern Europe as well. *Stalingradskaia bit'va* was part of the official party line for loyal socialists of the world to follow.⁸⁰² The film represents an important piece of Soviet cinema that codifies much of the early war myth around the battle, driving home all the main themes of patriotism and self-sacrifice of the city's defenders.

The Square of Fallen Fighters

Long before *Rodina Mat'* would raise her sword above the heights of Mamayev Kurgan (and even before the battle on those slopes would take place), the most sacred site in the city belonged to a different war myth. This was the "Square of Fallen Fighters of the Revolution" (most often referred to in its short form, *Pavshikh bortsov*). It honored the revolutionary soldiers of the Red Army who fought to hold the city against the advancing White Army. A young

⁸⁰² For more on Soviet film's role in shaping and distributing the war myth, see Jeremy Hicks, *The Victory Banner of the Reichstag: Film, Document, and Ritual in Russia's Contested Memory of World War II*, (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh University Press, 2020).

comrade by the name of Stalin would be dispatched by Red Army commander Lev Trotsky to organize the defense of the city and enforce Soviet power, an important part of the city's war myth that justified changing its name from Tsaritsyn to Stalingrad in 1925.



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The fight in Tsaritsyn was a years-long struggle, with the control of the city itself changing hands between Red and White armies on multiple occasions. The two armies would clash on the streets and squares of the city in urban combat, which remained a relatively new discipline of military strategy at this time (though neither side had access to the air and artillery the Germans had during their siege, so the damage to the built environment was not nearly as profound). When the Civil War ended and Soviet power was well established, the memorialization and myth making around the Battle of Tsaritsyn began.

The Square of Fallen Fighters of the Revolution, as it was known in the interwar years, was established in the previous century on the far Western outskirts of Tsarytsin, but as the city grew to surround it became the Alexander Square (*Alexandrovskaja ploschad*), named for the

⁸⁰³ Mitrophan Grekov, "Joseph Stalin, Kliment Voroshilov, and Efim Shchadenko in the trenches of Stalingrad," (1933). We will see Grekov's name again later in the chapter: his collective will play a part in the creation of the new war myth as well.

Alexander Nevsky Cathedral that stood on the northern end of the square. During the late-tsarist period, the square became a site of frequent protests and disruption, particularly around the city's burgeoning labor movement, a legacy that made the city one of the most well-organized and engaged labor movements in the region, willing to partner with the Red Army when the revolution began in 1917. The Red Army took the city for the final time on February 8, 1920. On that day, the liberating forces found the corpses of more than fifty prisoners, Red Army soldiers and civilians, who had been purportedly tortured to death by their White Army captors near the square. These victims of the White Terror were buried together in a mass grave at the northern end of the square, where in 1925 an obelisk would be placed to commemorate their memory, and the square took on its new moniker as the "Square of Fallen Fighters."

The area, located near the city's main rail station, became one of the main hubs of life in the city in the prewar era, with many multi-story apartment complexes, hotels, and the famed Univermag department store ringing the square. A statue of Lenin commissioned from V. V. Kozlov was also erected in 1925 just in front of Alexander Nevsky Cathedral, which was then mined and demolished in 1932 during the party's anti-religious campaigns under Stalin. Its bricks were used to pave the paths and streets around the square, their deep red brick a clear sign of Tsaritsyn's past identity. The square itself was decorated with green paths, flowers, and trees. The square became the main site of Communist Party mass demonstrations in the city, with the planned and scripted celebrations of May Day, the October revolution, and other holidays annually held here.



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As seen at the start of the chapter, this area would see some of the Battle's heaviest fighting, with street-to-street battles and aerial and artillery bombardment of the area turning the flattened square into a pock-marked moonscape of destroyed structures. Remarkably, somehow the obelisk standing over the mass grave still stood (along with a single tree that survived the Battle, now marked with its own commemorative plaque as the new walking paths bend around its roots to honor its resilience).



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⁸⁰⁴ Ibid. View of The Square of Fallen Fighters of the Revolution, 1941, looking north. The line of buildings at the far end of the square was destroyed during the Battle in 1942. At the edge of the square, the Obelisk memorial that stands atop a mass grave site of Red Army defenders of the city who died in the Russian Civil War can just be made out.

⁸⁰⁵ Obelisk at the Square of Fallen Fighters, 1943. In the background the burned-out husk of the Univermag department store, the basement of which housed General Paulus's command post at the time of his surrender. Image from "Kak ostraivali novyi Stalingrad: Planetarii, Allei Geroev i zhiloi fond," in *Stat'i* (<https://dzen.ru/a/XQomdAUKMACvYUCD>, accessed 2/9/2024)

The legacy of the square, now the site of memory for two major battles in the revolution's history, would be further entrenched in the war myth. Even in the early days following the battle, there would be no doubt that in the revived Stalingrad the Square of Fallen Heroes would eventually once more become the physical nucleus of the city's pride. A second mass grave in the middle of the square would become the final resting place for another 100 unidentified defenders of the city, further establishing the square as both a public site of remembrance and physical mausoleum for the war dead. Even before it could be restored, the Square remained a traditional gathering site for celebration. In 1945, with the buildings all around still little more than heaps of rubble, thousands of *Stalingradtsy* flocked to the square to ring in the New Year. When the news came three years later of the Fall of Berlin, the square was packed with revelers far into the night, the night sky above streaked with fireworks.⁸⁰⁶

As was explored in Chapter 2, the square went through a number of proposals, connecting the ensemble of the square with the proposed Alley of Heroes and 62nd Army Embankment, and the surrounding buildings heir composition was to embody the victory of the city and become the focal space of the war myth within the city. However, implementing those plans would take the better part of the decade, as first the ruins had to be cleared away. Many of the new structures bordering the square, like the Hidrostoi building and the Stalingrad Medical Institute, were not completed by the time Khrushchev had consolidated power. The planned Palace of the Soviets that would sit atop the former site of the Alexander Nevsky Cathedral would never come to fruition. In the place of these grand projects, simple monuments were all that marked the space as a memorial site: the obelisk atop the mass grave, plaques on the walls of buildings facing the square, and impromptu popular memorials like the one dedicated to Major

⁸⁰⁶ *Stalingradskia pravda*, May 10, 1945, 1.

Vladimir G. Kamenshchikov mentioned previously. The biggest addition to the square during this time was the statue of Stalin that would replace the statue of Lenin that had been destroyed during the fighting.



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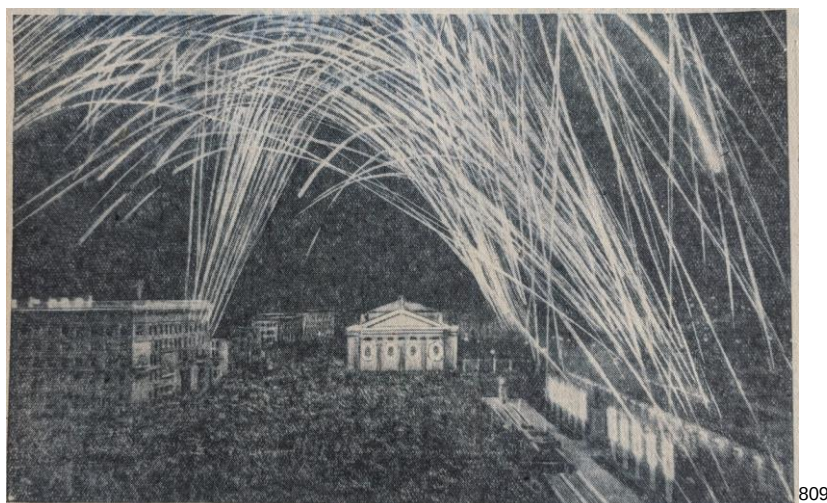
The Square remained the focal point for the city's ritual observances of holidays and the gathering point for mass festivals and parades. Somewhat ironically, given the square's association with the war, May 9th Victory Day celebrations were not mass celebrations here, as

⁸⁰⁷ Top: Photograph by Mikhail Bratsilo, Gorky Theater and the statue of Joseph I. Stalin at the north end of the Square of Fallen Fighters, looking west (1950s), Bottom: Photographs by V. Roldulgina, "Stalingrad. Ploshchad' Pavshikh bortsov 9 marta 1953 goda," *Stalingradskaya pravda*, March 9, 1953, 1. The pedestal of Stalin's monument stacked high with memorial wreaths, flowers, and banners, and crowds fill the square, with the Univermag department store and construction cranes in the background, looking north.

the day would only become a non-work holiday in 1965, after Khrushchev had already vacated the premiership. Still, it remained a place of ritual observance site for both residents and visitors to the city. It was within a short walk from the train station, many travelers to Volgograd, particularly those on official visits, would be expected to lay flowers or a wreath at the obelisk, while residents made their own regular offerings.

However, celebrations like May Day drew thousands to the square to take part in state-sponsored revelry. Parades would form up on Ulitsa Mir, marching to the Square of Fallen Fighters. Groups from all over the city and region formed the parade, representing clubs, industries, schools, sports organizations, and nearby collective farms. In the style typical of other Soviet mass festivals, they carried banners, flags, portraits of Soviet leaders, while bands and orchestras played music and young athletes performed displays of physical prowess. Tractors from STZ rolled through the square alongside Belarus models favored by the region's corn growers.⁸⁰⁸ Much like their counterparts in Moscow, where the Soviet leadership would watch from atop Lenin's mausoleum, in Stalingrad the party leadership of the municipal and regional branches of the Communist party would watch the proceedings from a podium erected on the north end of the Square (with the statue of Stalin looking on in his place). At the end of a long day of celebrations, thousands packed the square for fireworks displays set from atop the surrounding structures.

⁸⁰⁸ "Pervaia Maia demonstratsia v Stalingrade," *Stalingradskaia pravda*, May 4, 1955, p. 2.



In 1957, new beautification efforts took place in the square, with new trees planted and fountains installed. The old obelisk which had withstood the war was removed during this time, replaced with a red granite obelisk and accompanying composition designed by architect V. E. Shalashov and A. P. Kibalnikov. The composition is set atop a large granite headstone covering the original gravesite. A year later another red granite stele designed by E. I. Levitan was added along with a bas-relief of a Red Army soldier.⁸¹⁰ Though it would be some time, this red granite would become the signature motif of the Square through the Alley of Heroes toward the river, when celebrations for the 40th anniversary of the battle saw the installation of several more large stele bearing the names of the cities defenders flanking the main path connecting the square to the Embankment. While the square remained one of the main cultural focus points of the city for many aspects of life, it was indelibly tied to its place in the war myth. Nearby, another site was even more explicitly dedicated to preserving and shaping that myth was helping to further codify the legend of Stalingrad.

⁸⁰⁹ V. Smetaninkova, "Pervoe Maia v Stalingrade. Prazdnichnyi saliut na ploshchadi Pavshikh bortsov," *Stalingradskaia pravda*, May 4, 1995, 3.

⁸¹⁰ Morozova and Monakhova, *Pute-voditel po Volgogradu*, 69.

The Museum for the Defenders of Tsaritsyn-Stalingrad

Within the city, one of the first institutions dedicated to preserving the history of the battle was the State Museum for the Defense of Tsaritsyn, its purview now expanded to include the events of the Battle of Stalingrad. The original museum had been founded in 1937 in an old red brick building near *Pavshikh bortsov* that was built in 1903, formerly known as the Repnikov mansion. The structure had survived the Civil War, but the museum there only operated for five years before it was nearly destroyed in the battle. During the restoration, the building itself would be preserved and restored to its original state, making it one of the few buildings from old Tsaritsyn that still stand in the city's center today. The new collection would re-open in 1948 under the direction of local historian M. A. Vodolagin, who in 1945 published one of the earliest histories of the city's defense. The collection would house artifacts from both conflicts, and while the two battles were distinct, there was a natural conflation of the two events as they were housed in the same building, with the city's defense in both cases attributed to Stalin himself.



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However, after nearly a year of operation, the Museum's collection would come under fire for not making sufficiently clear the central role Stalin had played in the city's history

⁸¹¹ Left: damage inflicted to the Museum of the Defense of Tsaritsyn-Stalingrad during the war (1943), from *Informatsionnoe agentstvo volgograda: Gorodskie vesti*, gorvesti.ru/text/osobnyak-repnikovykh-v-volgograde-muzey-letopisi-dvukh-voyn-53515.html (accessed 6/11/2024) Right: the museum after restorations were completed, Image from *Gen-Volga*, <http://www.gen-volga.ru/gallery/ts039.htm> (accessed 6/11/2024).

(though it had been dedicated as the “I. V. Stalin” Museum upon its reopening). The criticism came following a visit by the Stalingrad Regional Committee in November of 1949. Through their complaint lodged with the Head of the Department of Museums of the Committee for Cultural and Educational Institutions under the Council of Ministers of the RSFSR, Comrade V.N. Ignatiev, we can see how the local party sought to shape one of the earliest narratives around the war myth and the battle.

The museum, the committee notes, was already extremely popular. In the short time it had been in operation, it had already received thousands of visitors—estimated 112,000 in 1949 alone. As the only such institution dedicated to the preservation of the war experience it was the natural focal point for the war myth in the city, though its content was direct as much at visitors from farther afield than the city itself. However, in April 1950, an audit of the museum conducted by the Department of State Museums asserted that drastic measures were necessary to update its collection. The report was issued by the committee head Voronin and a senior researcher of Local History and Museum Work, M. P. Simkin.

In a memorandum addressed to M. A. Vodolagina, the director of the museum, Voronin applauds that “the Museum of the Defense of Tsaritsyn-Stalingrad is dedicated to topics that are extremely important for the history of our Motherland and all of humanity. The defense of Tsaritsyn, carried out under the leadership of I. V. Stalin, was one of the most important stages of the civil war, and the Battle of Stalingrad, the greatest battle in the history of the war that led to, according to I. V. Stalin, ‘the decline of the German fascist army.’ Due to the exceptional relevance of its subject matter, the museum is extremely popular; numerous visitors who come to Stalingrad from all over the Soviet Union and from abroad get acquainted with its exposition.”⁸¹²

⁸¹² GARF, f. 10010, d. 1, op. 445, l. 1.

The report then goes on to highlight the apparent challenges the museum has faced due to its unique situation. They note the museum is the only one of its kind dedicated to two separate battles. What is more, in the ruined city, there were “great difficulties faced by the workers of the museum.” The report acknowledges that the museum was still struggling to connect its work with the wider network of national museums dedicated to the war, as well as the difficulties faced by the local Stalingrad Research Institute of Local History and Museum Work headed by Professor F. N. Petrov, which was seen as crucial to the museum’s future success. In particular, the museums lacked a sufficient collection of *fondy* (historical documents and other materials) that are necessary to facilitate meaningful historical research.⁸¹³

However, Voronin’s chief concerns were about the museum’s public displays, which lacked any form of concrete narration for visitors to follow through a seemingly hodge-podge assortment of maps, photographs, uniforms, soldiers’ kits, salvaged vehicles, and other artifacts and documents.⁸¹⁴ The committee complained that “exposition is not built systematically enough, without a strict chronological and thematic sequence and route guidance; without a guide, a visitor to the museum finds himself in a difficult situation.”⁸¹⁵ This point is of particular importance—the last thing the state would want is visitors engaging with this collection and transposing their own meaning onto it... the narrative must already be in place, ready to be consumed!

However, chief among the committee’s concerns was the portrayal (or lack thereof) of Comrade Stalin’s role in these events. For instance, on their tour the council saw the display of

⁸¹³ Ibid, 2.

⁸¹⁴ For more on how physical artifact collections have been used to frame the memory of the war, see Brandon M. Schechter, *The Stuff of Soldiers: A History of the Red Army in World War II through Objects*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2019).

⁸¹⁵ GARF, f. 10010, d. 1, op. 445, l. 5.

the telegraph apparatus used by Comrade Stalin during the defense of Tsaritsyn, an artifact “of exceptionally unique and memorial value.” But there was no plaque or identification to properly convey its importance. The list of “major gaps and particular shortcomings” in the museum's exhibits continue to mount: “the growth of revolutionary forces in the city after the arrival of Comrade Stalin, as well as the work of Comrade Stalin in sending food to the workers' centers, was not sufficiently shown” and “the speeches of Comrade Stalin during the war were not properly highlighted...”⁸¹⁶

Some of the other “gaps” raised by the committee illustrate important aspects of the war myth under Stalin. For instance, the committee believed the link between the two battles needed to be made more specific, in that the fight against Hitler’s invasion was also a part of Stalin’s defense of the revolution. The battle was also inadequately linked to the larger campaign and the Red Army’s march to Berlin, as “the inextricable connection between the defense of the city and the general course of the Patriotic War was not shown.”⁸¹⁷ Of all their complaints, the most specific and assuredly out of place in a local museum was that “the exposition has hardly ever included materials revealing the treacherous policies of the reactionary Anglo-American circles.” That this point is raised at all shows how central that theme of Western betrayal had become within the Stalinist variant of the war myth, especially in the Cold War world.

The committee’s complaints could only be directed so far at the museum’s actual curators and staff, who were operating in extraordinary circumstances. The number of documents and photographs that survived the war were slim, and many of the collections were based on oral histories, rather than the written record. This reliance on subjective memory, however, was another problem that the committee saw the need to address. Just as Stalin was wary that postwar

⁸¹⁶ Ibid, 4-5.

⁸¹⁷ Ibid, 5.

memoirs would not have the “required objectivity,” the committee objected to how the museum’s current collection appears to have been built: “the museum has established a connection with the participants in the defense of Tsaritsyn-Stalingrad, and a significant amount of testimonies, memoirs, and artifacts have been accumulated for the collection. However, this connection cannot be considered sufficient.” The museum, they argue, was named for Stalin (though it lacked a memorial plaque sufficiently explaining this), and therefore the collection must address “the most important question of the connection between the building in which the museum is located and the life and work of Comrade Stalin. Thus, the museum had a lot of work to do on the planned collection of monuments (as well as information) of the defense of Tsaritsyn-Stalingrad, their inventory and scientific description.”⁸¹⁸

The good news for the museum’s curators, however, was that to address the perceived faults in the museum’s core operations, the regional committee was submitting a formal request to increase their access to funding and support to develop their exhibits, collections, and community outreach. The committee and the director came to an understanding of a path moving forward. Preliminary plans for the “re-exposition” were discussed, and the core themes were agreed upon (with all new materials subject to final approval by the regional committee). At the same time, Vodolagina and her staff used the opportunity to advocate for better tools to make sure the museum would be up for the task, citing the need to establish links with the research institute of local history and museum work and other museums. Museum staffers were to be trained in proper methodological techniques for public history and collection management. In addition, increased funding was to be procured to begin to develop “excursions” for tour groups based out of the museum to travel around the city to important battle sites, including the creation

⁸¹⁸ Ibid, 3-4.

of an excursion expressly tailored for children.⁸¹⁹ The extra funding would be used for the upkeep of the facilities too, which suffered through the winter of 1948-49 with a defunct heating system (the new system would be installed at an estimated cost of ten thousand rubles). Finally, their report asks for the “immediate” replacement of the statue of Stalin that sat in the building’s courtyard—it had spent two years partially buried and was in a state quite unbecoming of the museum’s namesake.⁸²⁰

This intervention by the committee had two main effects. In increasing the museum's access to other state historical entities and imposing more rigorous adherence to the historical discipline on the staff, the museum would move away from an ad-hoc collection of artifacts to a more carefully curated memorial experience. However, once these methods were in place, the museum would also be much more closely tied to the official party line that was maintained by the Department of State Museums, which meant it would be required to parrot the centralized war myth in regard to the battle. That line was already apparent in the committee's report, which laid out the main objectives that the new collection must highlight:

The Tsaritsyn-Stalingrad defense museum must be designed, firstly, to display the heroic epic of the civil war, when the fate of the young Soviet republic was being decided near Tsaritsyn, on the banks of the Volga, and, secondly, to show the massive heroism of the Soviet people shown in the defense of the Motherland and Stalingrad, the defeat of the German fascist army, the leading and inspiring role of the great organizer of the victory of the Soviet people, Comrade Stalin.⁸²¹

The committee was optimistic that their vision for the museum would be achieved. “The museum is currently at a turning point. The right way to create a new, more correct, anchored and politically sharpened exhibition has been mapped out.” They also voiced their full faith for

⁸¹⁹ Ibid, 4.

⁸²⁰ Ibid, 5.

⁸²¹ Ibid, 2.

the museum's director Vodolagin, whose personal research interests were so closely aligned with the work of the museum. There is one final aspect of their report that bears mentioning, however. With the museum housed in such a small space, the committee expressed concern that it would be increasingly difficult as the collection grew to do proper justice to both battles. For the first time, they raised the question of the creation of a separate museum for the battle of Stalingrad, and actually theorized converting Dom Pavlova into the basis for this new exhibition space. Though such an endeavor would take years of planning and development, the rush to build a museum or memorial that could do proper justice to the historic nature of the battle was to begin in true earnest in a few more years, following Stalin's death. From that flurry of activities, not one but two new memory sites would arise dedicated to that very purpose, and while the State Museum to the Defenders of Tsaritsyn-Stalingrad still operates to this day out of that same red-brick building just off the Square, it is dwarfed in size and scope by the mammoth temples of the war myth that were yet to come.

Stalinist Iconography and the Impact of De-Stalinization

The changing of value structures had major political and social implications during de-Stalinization, but its cultural impact was also substantial. It affected the way generations of Soviet citizens would understand their own history and their identity within the revolution. Any change to the cultural pantheon of heroes and villains in the national collective story was bound to have myriad cultural repercussions. Stalingrad illustrates this point as poignantly as any place in the Soviet Union, and in many ways is emblematic of the wider Soviet experience. De-Stalinization and the denunciation of the "cult of personality" ended the deification of Stalin, but Khrushchev and his conservative counterparts in the Presidium were still distrustful of outright

(especially popular, unplanned) iconoclasm. It was an ongoing process to replace the image of the former Soviet leader and supplant it with a new mythology, a cultural production taking place across multiple fronts, from the arts, literature, poetry, song, film, history, and perhaps the most profound battlefield in this fight: memory.

In a town bearing Stalin's own name, suffice to say that physical depictions of the leader in the city of Stalingrad while he was still alive were too many to count. However, there were two statues of particular note: one for its location in the heart of the city's central district on the Square of Fallen Fighters; the other for its scale. This was one of the largest depictions of the Soviet leader anywhere in the world at that time, looking out over the mouth of the Volga-Don Canal.

We return to the fates of these statues now, along with the museum bearing his name, to give focus to problems that local party leaders would soon face in the years following his death. De-Stalinization has been an implicit theme underlying much of this work up to this point—the turn to mass housing, for instance, was a concerted effort by Khrushchev to undo Stalin's obsession with monumentalism in architecture. Now we turn to de-Stalinization in its most explicit, direct sense: the attack on the “Cult of Personality” that had elevated the image and persona of Joseph Stalin to an almost deific status.

While news of the “Secret Speech” would reach Stalingrad in the days following its delivery to the Twentieth Party Congress, no official record of the monumental event would ever appear in *Stalingradskaia pravda*. In *Myth, Memory, Trauma*, Polly Jones offers one of the most complete accounts of how the speech was disseminated in the Soviet Union, and her account even briefly tracks how the news broke in Stalingrad, as well as the reception it found there.

It is important to note here how de-Stalinization ties into our discussion of the war myth. Jones notes that the two aspects of Stalin's legacy that bore the brunt of the most scrutiny in the wake of the speech were Stalin's role in the terror and his leadership during the war. While many found Stalin's personal role in the elimination of the Bolshevik old guard profoundly disturbing, the charge that Stalin had bungled the Soviet war effort when the country was invaded cut to the heart of the myth that had been so carefully crafted in the decade following its conclusion. While the discussion of the Terror focused on the "thousands" of victims in the 1930s, the war remained "a vastly more relevant and resonant memory ... for most of the Soviet population."⁸²² However, unlike the numerous well-documented allegations Khrushchev brought against Stalin for his role in the terror, in regards to the war Khrushchev's denunciations were hasty additions, mostly regarding wartime deportations, a brief mention of the Civil War and how Soviet historiography had elevated Stalin's service therein, and a few specific episodes from World War II—both of which were central events in the city's personal mythology of Stalin and his role in the battles of Tsaritsyn and Stalingrad.

Though Jones's study of public memory is not focused on any one particular locale, she notes that these topics "were particularly resonant in Stalingrad, reflecting the city's special importance to the myth of Stalin's military prowess, but there too, listeners appealed to the party leaders to clarify for them the truth about local events."⁸²³ What's more, the city that bore Stalin's name was home to innumerable cult symbols, including the statue overlooking the Volga-Don Canal that was specifically called out by Khrushchev in the speech:

Was it without his knowledge that Stalin monuments were erected in the whole country – these "memorials to the living?" It is a fact that Stalin himself had

⁸²² Jones, *Myth, Memory, Trauma*, 25.

⁸²³ *Ibid*, 25.

signed on July 2, 1951 a resolution of the USSR Council of Ministers concerning the erection on the Volga-Don Canal of an impressive monument to Stalin; on September 4 of the same year, he issued an order making 33 tons of copper available for the construction of this impressive monument. Anyone who has visited the Stalingrad area must have seen the huge statue, which is being built there, and that on a site which hardly any people frequent. Huge sums were spent to build it at a time when people of this area had lived since the war in huts.⁸²⁴

Khrushchev's final summation—that this statue to Stalin had been erected at Stalin's own orders and at a great expense while the housing situation in the city had been so dire—was particularly cutting. This denunciation brought into sharp relief the “persistent tensions between reward and sacrifice in Bolshevik ideology”⁸²⁵--while the people sacrificed and experienced privation on a daily basis, Stalin spared no expense at his own glorification.

While Khrushchev's attack certainly would have found its share of supporters eager to denounce the crimes of Stalin, Jones also illustrates that there was no shortage of Soviet citizens who pushed back against the attacks on a man they still considered to be a great leader, even despite these allegations. Of the letters written to the Central Committee to protest the attack on Stalin's name, “one of the most popular arguments against de-Stalinization was [his] leadership of the war and the construction of socialism. Both the war victory and also this economic and social transformation had the power to redeem (or permanently secure) Stalin's good reputation.” After all, “propaganda for the Five-Year Plans, collectivization, and the war effort had justified virtually any means (and any collateral damage) in the pursuit of the higher goal of communism.”⁸²⁶

⁸²⁴ Nikita S. Khrushchev, “On the Cult of Personality and its Consequences,” presented at the XX Party Congress of the CPSU, February 25, 1956, in *A Documentary History of Communism in Russia: From Lenin to Gorbachev*, ed. Robert V. Daniels, 254-258 (Burlington: University of Vermont, 1993).

⁸²⁵ Jones, *Myth, Memory, Trauma*, 36.

⁸²⁶ *Ibid*, 45.

Stalingrad itself proved a bastion of such detractors from the new party line. One letter writer, who addressed his complaint directly to Molotov on the Central Committee (an ally of Stalin's memory in the conservative camp) couched his rationale "using cult language to describe Stalin, calling him 'a great and consistent Leninist' and 'an outstanding proletarian revolutionary and a genius of the Leninist school.' By contrast, the Secret Speech was 'lies from start to finish,' and its supposedly historical investigation based on 'little so-called facts.' This author believed that anyone who tried to 'belittle or not perceive' Stalin's immeasurable merits was a 'cretin, ignoramus, or evil enemy.'" The letter writer was not alone in his visceral reaction against Khrushchev, who increasingly the butt of jokes "lampooning him as 'a little Napoleon' (in contrast to the purportedly towering figure of Stalin) and as a 'vulgarian and a hooligan.'" Another anonymous letter writer highlighted by Jones wrote to Malenkov the prescient assessment that the Central Committee "were not at liberty to impose new memories 'from above': the 'masses' had their own memories of Stalin that would not be easily or willingly forgotten."⁸²⁷

This sudden pushback "from below" did influence the Central Committee's deliberation on how to proceed, and the sizeable pushback *against* de-Stalinization tied Khrushchev's hands and gave the conservative wing of collective leadership a leg to stand on to limit de-Stalinization's scope.

In June of 1956, Khrushchev issued a statement clarifying the party's position on de-Stalinization, effectively putting some limits on public response, but also what the initiative was meant to accomplish. This notice ran in the national *Pravda* as well as its local variants, and we will come back in the full text later in the chapter. However, Jones highlights the Central

⁸²⁷ Ibid, 46-47.

Committee's guidelines now called for a gradual approach with dealing with local symbols of the Stalin cult, specifically to avoid a "'campaign' to 'obliterate the memory of Stalin. To that end, it had even reversed some local changes to portraits, monuments, and place names, citing the need for a more orderly and rational approach to identifying and reducing the cult.'" This meant that Stalingrad would retain its name and even the statue on the Volga-Don even beyond 1956. The smaller monument of Stalin that stood on the Square of Fallen Fighters, however, would be gone by the end of the year, removed in the middle of the night with no notification to the city's denizens of where it had gone. Eventually, all traces of where the statue stood would be erased, replaced by an open traffic circle at the Western end of the Square.

Stalingrad of course was not the only city named for Stalin, and many local bodies faced the same challenge in regard to their own connections to the cult of personality, but no place was connected to the war myth quite like Stalingrad. The resolution hoped to address the contradiction apparent in the war myth and the attacks of the Secret Speech. Jones shows how this careful line was shifting even as the resolution made its way through committee to final approval. The initial draft of the resolution offered the following formulation:

One must not forget alongside this [Stalin's crimes] that Stalin, for all his faults and errors, manifestations of personal arbitrariness and infractions of socialist law, fought for the interests of socialism, for the protection of the Soviet Union from the incursion of enemies.

Whereas the final draft read:

One must not forget that alongside this, the Soviet people knew Stalin as someone who always rose up to protect the USSR from the incursions of enemies and fought for the cause of socialism.

While the resolution of June 1956 was meant to stabilize the process of de-Stalinization, the turbulent summer as the speech was received in Eastern Europe proved that the ongoing

project to be anything but. Following the turmoil in Poland (though this would go unreported in the local press), *Stalingradskaia pravda* rebroadcast a resolution penned by Khrushchev that sought to defend the Central Committee's handling of the "Cult of Personality." While Khrushchev's tone was defensive, still acutely aware of the unrest de-Stalinization was capable of unleashing, he nonetheless laid out the party's rationale for pursuing its present path:

In criticizing the culture of personality, the Party proceeds from the principles of Marxism-Leninism. For more than three years our party has been waging a post-conflict struggle against the personality cult of I. V. Stalin and has been persistently overcoming its harmful consequences [...] The facts of violations of socialist legality and other misconceptions related to the personality cult of JV Stalin, made public by the party, naturally evoke feelings of bitterness and deep regret. But Soviet people understand that the condemnation of the personality cult was necessary in the interests of building communism, of which they are active participants. The Soviet people see that in recent years the Party has been persistently carrying out practical measures aimed at eliminating the consequences of the personality cult in all areas of the Party's state, economic and cultural building. As a result of this work, the party, whose inner strength is now free, has drawn even closer to the people and is now in a state of unprecedented creative activity.⁸²⁸

His words would have served as one of the first public markers many readers would have seen regarding the Secret Speech in the local party press, and its contents were instructive for those who still had reservations about what to make of the abrupt change in policy (and the limits of their own ability to participate in critiques of Stalin). In addition, the "creative activity" of the party was soon to be put on full display in the city, as the state hurried to build concrete replacements to the vacuum left by the Stalin cult in the cultural landscape. For the next five years, Khrushchev strove to refocus the efforts of his reforms away from the person of Stalin and instead toward concrete policy objectives in the domestic and international arenas. It would take

⁸²⁸ N. S. Khrushchev, "Postanovlenie tsentral'nogo komiteta KPSS: o preodolenii kul'ta lichnosti i ego posledstviï," in *Stalingradskaia Pravda*, July 3, 1956 (No. 153), p. 1.

time (and a period of relative stability) before the progressives in the Committee would once again go on the offensive against the Cult of Personality.

Eventually in 1961, as part of the final push against the Cult of Personality following the XXII Party Congress, which would also see Stalingrad renamed to Volgograd, the statue at the mouth of the Volga-Don would also be removed. In its place, the sculptor Vuchetich would be commissioned for an equally massive statue of Lenin, but the work would take years to plan and complete, leaving an empty pedestal. Though this created an ideological vacuum of meaning, the site was still a destination for visitors to the Krasnoarmeisk region. Even as Stalin's likeness and namesake were taken down, the party built up a new war mythos to take his place atop the hierarchical value pantheon. Moving forward, de-Stalinization proved an exercise in selective memory, or "forgetting within limits," that illustrates the power and pitfalls of mass propaganda efforts.⁸²⁹



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The Motherland Calls: The Proposal for Mamayev Kurgan

⁸²⁹ See Jones, *Myth, Memory, Trauma*.

⁸³⁰ Compilation of photographs showing the evolution of the statue composition at the mouth of the Volga-Don canal, feature Stalin (left, circa 1958), empty (middle, circa 1969), and with the current statue of Lenin (right, installed 1973), via <https://pastvu.com/p/351288> (accessed 6/12/2024).

Known as “Height 102.0” during the Battle of Stalingrad, Mamayev Kurgan stands between the city’s Central and Krasnooktiabr’sk districts, and even after a decade had passed since the battle’s conclusion, the hill remained largely devoid of habitation. The rise, which had seen some of the most intense battle’s most intense fighting as it changed hands from defenders to invaders multiple times, remained a hazard, covered in unexploded ordinance and rife with the remains of hurriedly buried war dead. Though hard to imagine now, the hill that would become the city’s most identifiable landmark lay cold and empty through the first fifteen years of reconstruction. The only landmark for those who trekked up the desolate path to its summit was a simple plinth, topped with the turret of a T-34 tank that had fallen to disrepair on the hilltop with a small plaque commemorating the site’s historic role in the battle.



Even as the echoes of de-Stalinization reverberated throughout the city, plans were being laid to expand and give form to the war myth in Stalingrad. To the planners of this new temple to the city’s wartime defenders, the lonely hilltop presented a unique opportunity. Residents of Stalingrad would first learn of plans being laid for a massive new memorial complex that would crest the famous hilltop. On April 15, 1958, *Stalingradskaia pravda* ran a half-page exposé on

⁸³¹ View from Mamayev Kurgan hilltop circa 1957, before construction of the Memorial Complex began, from Jans Bock-Schroeder, “Mamayev Hill, the most significant hill in Russia” January 23, 2023, via <https://bock-schroeder.com/item-06-stalingrad-1956-vintageprint> (accessed 6/12/2024).

the proposed monument, inviting readers to come along on a tour of the grounds as they would come to be experienced by throngs of future tourists to the sacred city: “A sunny morning. A large bus, driven along the central highway of Stalingrad—Lenin Prospect—stops at the base of Mamayev Kurgan. From the bus steps a group of sightseers, proceeding through a stark archway, on the front of which are engraved the words: ‘Monument to the Soldiers of the Soviet Army who fought in the Battle of Stalingrad during the Great Patriotic War, 1941-1945’”⁸³²

With artists’ renderings of the most grandiose of the monument’s compositions alongside the vivid descriptions of the park’s features, the article successfully evokes the experience of passing through the memorial and the emotions one might feel: “Walking through the archway, visitors pass figures in poses of mourning worked into its columns, guarding the rest of those who sleep here forever, as well as those who will visit them in the park. A clear green and beds of flowers stand around a powerful fountain, spouting jets of water 10 meters in the air. Everything here speaks to a peaceful life, tranquility and happiness. Green planters hold busts of the best people of Stalingrad, heroes of its pre-war Five-Year Plans.”⁸³³

From the fountain, the park opens into a poplar lined corridor, with two staircases rising to the peak of Mamayev Kurgan along the sides of a green lawn. Two sculptures flank the staircases—on the left, a “folk-figure of a mother with a child in her hands. Her face and her whole figure convey horror and confusion. The woman has gone for a walk with her child, only to be surprised by the fascist vultures flying overhead, their sights set firmly on her baby.” On the right, “the same woman and a man with a pack on his back, a rifle slung over his shoulder.

⁸³² “Pamyatnik voinskoi slavy na Mamayevom kurgane,” *Stalingradskaia Pravda*, April 15, 1958, 2.

⁸³³ *Ibid.*

The wife is seeing off her husband to the front. It is hard for her to part with her love, but duty demands this of him, so he heads towards the sounds of war.”⁸³⁴

The layout of the park is clearly deliberate, as visitors are set to experience Stalingrad’s history as its inhabitants had—the story of a thriving city, suddenly torn asunder by war. Along the staircase are stone slabs inscribed with the names of other cities who were swallowed up by the Nazi advance, other hero cities whose stories mirror Stalingrad’s own. The green between the staircases would have a massive red marble slab in its center, the headstone of what was to be a massive common grave of soldiers who could not receive a proper burial amidst the fighting. On the first rise before the hilltop, one of the memorials iconic statues would sit—“a large circle lined with red stone from which a huge stone slab rises, growing into a heroic figure, stripped to the waist, a warrior with a machine gun in one hand and a grenade in the other. The composition stands a full twelve meters. On the face of the slab, you can read ‘we fulfill the demands of motherland and party!’, ‘guardians, do not allow the fascists to reach the Volga!’, and many other inscriptions which in the days of the fierce battle echoed on the walls of the city’s buildings and resounded as an oath.” Though many of the elements of the planned complex would change in final implementation, this statue—titled “Stand to Death!”--would be fully realized and was one of the first elements of the whole complex to see completion, its official public unveiling happening on July 23, 1962.⁸³⁵

⁸³⁴ Ibid.

⁸³⁵ Palmer, “How Memory was Made,” 389.



Along the next section of the staircase rising to the peak stand two walls that would resemble the facades of gigantic, ruined buildings. The guide in *Stalingradskaia pravda* helps readers to imagine “on the walls before the eyes of admirers, as if through the haze of time, imprinted in bas-relief figures and scenes from the war. The walls still hold the scars and ruptures caused by artillery bombardment, aerial bombs, and mine explosions. On the left, reliefs depict the oath of the Stalingrad party and its people; on the right, episodes from the struggle in the city. These compositions’ depictions introduce the viewer to the atmosphere of the war.”⁸³⁷

As visitors crest this set of stairs, they would enter the main square of the monument, and the ultimate culmination of this story: victory. It was to be a solemn space—in the center the square would hold another mass grave, blanketed by red flowers. Around the square (which would be known as the “Square of Heroes”) would stand depictions of Soviet victories and set into the hillside would be a chamber to hold the composition’s original centerpiece: a great

⁸³⁶ Proposal on the left from *Stalingradskaia pravda* article, the right is the statue as it stands today. The only major difference between the two is the raised right arm holding the grenade in the original composition, lowered in the final draft.

⁸³⁷ “Pamyatnik voinskoi slavy na Mamayevom kurgane”

panorama that would depict the Soviet encirclement of the German 6th Army, as viewed from the heights of this very hill. The initial plan called for a great cupola built into the hillside to house the panorama, and the original plans also called for a sculpture of “powerful men breaking a sword and forging a plow” at its center.⁸³⁸ As we shall see, the fate of this panorama would be the cause of one of the most bitter fights over the nature of the memorial, all the while presenting a logistical nightmare for the engineers tasked with figuring out how to hollow out a hill that would still support a giant statue sitting atop it. Eventually, the cupola and the panorama would undergo intense revisions, a story which we will return to shortly.

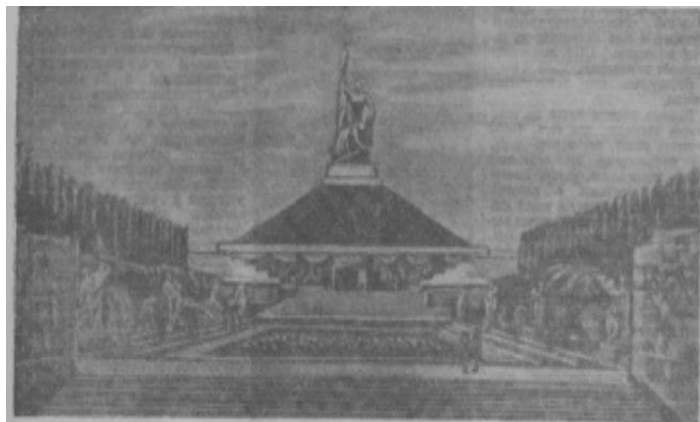
The memorial hall would exit onto a scenic overlook from atop the hill, one of the highest points in the surrounding countryside. In an ingenious stroke of architectural design, the viewer emerges from the horrors of war to be greeted by “a wondrous view of the city risen from the ruins. To the left, smoke rises from the enterprises of Stalingrad’s factory district. Before you stretches the glinting silvery ribbon of the Volga, with the Hydroelectric station and the locks of the Volga-Don canal visible in the distance, and beyond lies a spacious overflowing horizon of Stalingrad’s grassy steppe.” Like everything else about the memorial, this was meant to convey an important experience, which the readers of *Stalingradskii pravda* were told long before this dream might ever become reality. “After passing through the complex’s architecture and the sculptures of the structure of the monument-memorial of the heroes of the battle of Stalingrad, before the eyes of the visitors opens a mighty panorama of the present day, which resonates like a victorious anthem for those who rest in eternal peace atop Mamayev Kurgan.”⁸³⁹

The proposed monument that would eventually crown the memorial complex was actually less grandiose than the one that stands today, Rodina Mat’ (which is the largest statue in

⁸³⁸ Ibid.

⁸³⁹ Ibid.

the world). Still the initial call was for “a massive composition (30 meters), a Russian woman representing the motherland holding in one hand a golden sheaf of wheat, and in the other the banner of victory, the banner of the Soviet fatherland. Before her on bended knee, laying a sword at her feet, stand warriors having fulfilled both their party and international duty: the liberation of Europe from Hitler’s rapists, rescuing the people of the world from the yoke of fascism.” The warriors upturned faces with grateful expressions to the motherland, “ready to offer her labor and new acts of devotion.”⁸⁴⁰ As the author notes as he walks his readers through the as-of-yet fictional monument, every aspect of the piece is meant to stir emotional attachment to the Soviet Union and its sacrifice.



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Several things stand out about the article’s description of the proposed memorial complex that are telling in regard to the state of the war myth as it stood and the vision that its curators hoped would make it the most grandiose memorial of the war to date. First, it should be noted that the name of Stalin does not appear once outside of reference to the city. This is a huge departure from the narrative that would have been prevalent just two years prior, where a

⁸⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁸⁴¹ This image that ran in *Stalingradskaya pravda* accompanying the article shows a slightly revised proposal that much more closely resembles how this section of the memorial looks today, depicting the top of the stairs beyond “Stand to Death” and the ruined walls, looking out over the “Square of Heroes” towards the entrance to the Panorama’s cupola and the statue atop the hill.

discussion of the Soviet victory that omitted Stalin's leadership would have been unthinkable. This de-emphasis on the man is correspondingly replaced by an emphasis on both the individual (particularly in terms of self-sacrifice) and the homogenous "Soviet people" and their spirit (from collective graves to anthropomorphic depictions of said spirit). In doing so, the present Soviet leadership can invite both their own citizens and the people of the world to feel contact with the Soviet Union's greatest accomplishments without encroaching into the dangerous and divisive world of Stalin's failings. This emphasis on viewers from beyond the city is also important. While *Stalingradtsy* are certainly meant to experience the monument for themselves, they are also to serve as its stewards, welcoming and cultivating the experience for outsiders, pilgrims from around the Soviet Union and further abroad. The emphasis on the international dimension of the Soviet sacrifice, particularly in "liberating Europe" and "the rest of the World" from the threat of fascism, was to be enshrined in stone at Mamayev Kurgan.⁸⁴²

Vuchetich—The Stalinist Sculptor and Opportunist Behind the Memorial

The man who was responsible for the proposal was none other than People's Artist Evgeny V. Vuchetich, who had already been commissioned once in Stalingrad for the massive Stalin statue at the mouth of the Volga-Don Canal. Vuchetich had come up as a sculptor in the Stalinist 1930s, and through his career never wavered from the style of those times: Socialist Realism. While at work on the doomed "Palace of Soviets" project, Vuchetich met and was taken under the wing of Vladimir Shchuko, a leading proponent of neoclassicism in monumental architecture. During the war with Germany, Vuchetich enlisted, but was severely wounded and was discharged from service by 1943. He returned to the art world and joined up with the

⁸⁴² Palmer, "How Memory was Made."

Moscow-based Grekov Studio, which had been formed under Voroshilov in 1934 when he was the Commissar of War for the express purpose of creating art exulting the Red Army. As Scott Palmer notes, “it was an ideal location for a sculptor intent on undertaking monumental compositions devoted to military subjects.”⁸⁴³ It was also the ideal position for a man of Vuchetitch’s ambition to begin to cultivate relationships with powerful patrons within the army and the Central Committee itself.

To understand the art of Vuchetitch, which came to define so much of the war myth’s physical presence in the Soviet Union and what is now so central now to the city’s identity, we must first understand the man. In Palmer’s accounting, the man himself was a Stalinist, an opportunist, and a shameless political operator. Capturing the memory of the war in stone would define Vuchetich’s artistic career. He created the first official Soviet monument of the Great Patriotic War, a composition of Lt. Gen. Mikhail Efremov—a soldier who committed suicide rather than fall into the hands of the Germans—and for it would win his first Stalin Prize. He was commissioned by a number of major Red Army figures to set their own visages in stone, allowing him a chance to rub elbows with the top army brass, including one General Chuikov, commander of the 62nd Army that had defended Stalingrad. From there, his profile would skyrocket as he was selected to head the “artists’ brigade” working on the Treptower Park memorial in Berlin in 1949. This monument to the Soviet war dead would become Vuchetitch’s signature style—monumental architecture merged with colossal art pieces. The larger the scope and scale of the project, the greater the prestige of the artist, after all. His apparent drive for notoriety was not constrained to the bounds of reality, either—Vuchetich used his connections on the project to nominate his wife for a Stalin Prize for work on the monument that she did not

⁸⁴³ Ibid, 379. See also A. Fedorov, *Evgenii Viktorovich Vuchetich* (Moscow, 1972).

complete, and would even take credit himself for work that had been completed by junior artists on the project. His connections and loyalty to the *vozhd* would shield him, even after the allegations against him proved true, as he remained in the good graces of Stalin through his death.⁸⁴⁴

Truly, he was an artist fit for the era of Stalinist politics. Palmer calls Vuchetich a “serial” artist, who would copy his own style to the point of redundancy between commissions. He revisits and recycles themes constantly, making up for originality with sheer scale and a dedication to the themes expressly approved by the regime. Within two years of the completion of the monument in Berlin, Vuchetich was already scheming how to secure his next big commission. In 1952, he wrote to Malenkov on the Central Committee to ask, “why to this day there has not been built in the city of Stalingrad on Mamaev Kurgan a memorial-cemetery to commemorate the great battle?”⁸⁴⁵ As momentum for the project gained steam, Vuchetich would often claim that the idea for a Stalingrad memorial had originated with him. The sculptor’s interest in Stalingrad is certainly framed as a patriotic response to questions being posed by the city’s own residents. Vuchetich clearly saw the city’s history as a lucrative opportunity to advance his own brand. As he moved to pitch the idea, rather than innovate a new artistic version inspired by the city’s experience of the battle, Vuchetich would mainly recycle tried and tested elements and themes from the Treptower Park memorial in Berlin.⁸⁴⁶ That work, after all, had garnered him a Stalin prize, so why try to innovate on an already proven formula? Eventually, after his commission here was complete, Vuchetich would even sell the Soviet leadership on a final composition for the city of Magnitogorsk, retroactively casting the

⁸⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁴⁵ Ibid, 380.

⁸⁴⁶ Ibid, 383.

Treptower and Stalingrad memorials as part of a “triptych” dedicated to the war effort that spanned from the heroic efforts of the Soviet home front beyond the Urals to the victory at Stalingrad and on to Berlin.⁸⁴⁷

When Vuchetich was interviewed about his vision for the memorial complex, Vuchetich attempted to sell his vision to the city’s readers with an exaltation of the familiar themes he hoped to forever imbed into the hillside. “We have tried,” Vuchetich said in an interview for the piece, “to create a tribute for the warriors of the great battle of Stalingrad, who crushed the fascist invaders here, who turned the tide of war to our favor. My comrades and I want to create a simple and at the same time uplifting image that is clear testimony to the courage and heroism displayed by the Soviet people, fearless patriots of our Socialist Fatherland. We hope that their descendants will come here, in order to grasp the high price, the great bloodshed to win their happiness, their freedom, and their joyful lives, and in immense gratitude bow their heads before the memory and ashes of the heroes who were stronger than steel, stronger than fire.”⁸⁴⁸

Vuchetich even gave the interviewer a timeline to completion, aiming to open the grounds of the memorial complex by 1963 in celebration of the twentieth anniversary of the victory at Stalingrad.

While this timeline proved predictably optimistic, as we shall see, the memorial’s decade-long development gave Vuchetich ample opportunities to refine his original vision, elevating elements of his own work while sacrificing much of the original plan promised in the 1957 announcement. Though practical considerations often lay at the heart of the changes, Vuchetich

⁸⁴⁷ For more on Vuchetich’s other “Sword of Victory” compositions see Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead*. For dedicated information to the Treptower park composition, see Stangl, *Soviet War Memorial*, and for the Magnitogorsk composition, see Viktor Smeiushchev, “Simvol Magnitki: Iz istorii sozdaniia monumenta ‘Tyl-frontu,’” *Magnitogorskii metall*, August 1, 2006, <http://www.mm gazeta.ru/index.htm?pg=2468>.

⁸⁴⁸ “Pamyatnik voinskoi slavy na Mamayevom kurgane”

used his connections in the Army and Presidium to systematically shape the work to his own personal vision, which somewhat predictably would emphasize the sculptural compositions that he could claim as his own.

It is important to understand Vuchetich's motivations to understand the underlying nature of the project, which remained inherently "Stalinist" even in the midst of the campaign of de-Stalinization. Vuchetich worked predominantly in the medium of monumentalism that was heavily influenced by Stalin's imperial style in architecture, and his roots in Socialist Realist art remain at the core of his artistic persona. More than that, however, the construction of the monument was dictated by the personal whims of Soviet leadership, with all the corruption and cronyism that had so characterized the Stalin era. Vuchetich was a creature of Stalinism, and he proved adept not only at manipulating the system to his advantage, but enshrining Stalinist concepts in the art itself. It is in no small part thanks to Vuchetich that the war myth might be said to be the true inheritor of Stalin's legacy. Left adrift by Khrushchev's turn away from monumentalism in his mass-housing initiative, the monumentalists of the Stalinist era found an eager new home in the burgeoning new industry of giving physical form to the myth of the Great Patriotic War. True, these memorials are devoid of any overt (or even covert) references to the "Cult of Personality" of Stalin, and even go to great lengths to erase the figure of the Soviet leader from their compositions. But this distinction is surface level, a thin veneer to appear in keeping with the political whims of the era—the war myth was to become, one could say, "Stalinist in form, de-Stalinized in content."

As we will see, the monumentalist instincts of Vuchetich will come to the fore time and again until they literally dominate and overshadow the whole project. One of the best ways to examine this is through an exploration of the history of one of the most contested elements of the

whole complex, which was first proposed as its central selling point: the panorama. This element of the composition would prove the most challenging, not just from an engineering standpoint, but in balancing the interest of the project's various patrons and their competing artistic sensibilities. Ultimately, the chaos created by the battle over the panorama's fate provided Vuchetich with yet another opportunity to take control over the memorial's final form.⁸⁴⁹

The Battle of the Panorama

As noted above, the initial vision of the monument presented in 1957 would undergo significant changes before its final implementation, and the timeline for completion revised time and again before the site finally opened to great fanfare in 1967. The driving factors behind these changes were a mix of practical and ideological concerns—budgetary, labor, and technical constraints constantly threatened to derail the project from its initial vision, but the substance of the exhibits also underwent significant reworks as artists and politicians attempted to navigate the political implications of the work at hand.⁸⁵⁰ The artists in the Grekov studio were tasked with no small feat: the exhibitions needed to be sufficiently solemn, yet hopeful. Depictions of the bravery of soldiers and defenders must be balanced with also showing the wisdom and leadership of the party. While the 1958 proposal that appeared in *Stalingradskaia pravda* provided one interpretation of how the Soviet state would memorialize the mythical battle, countless other influences would eventually weigh in with their own version before the final product would be realized. While at times local input was sought, often these discussions were well out of the hands of the people of Stalingrad themselves.⁸⁵¹ Ironically, those who would

⁸⁴⁹ Ibid, 385.

⁸⁵⁰ Palmer, "How Memory was Made," 385-390.

⁸⁵¹ Ibid.

build and live with the memorial complex as a part of their city ultimately had very little say on what form it might take.

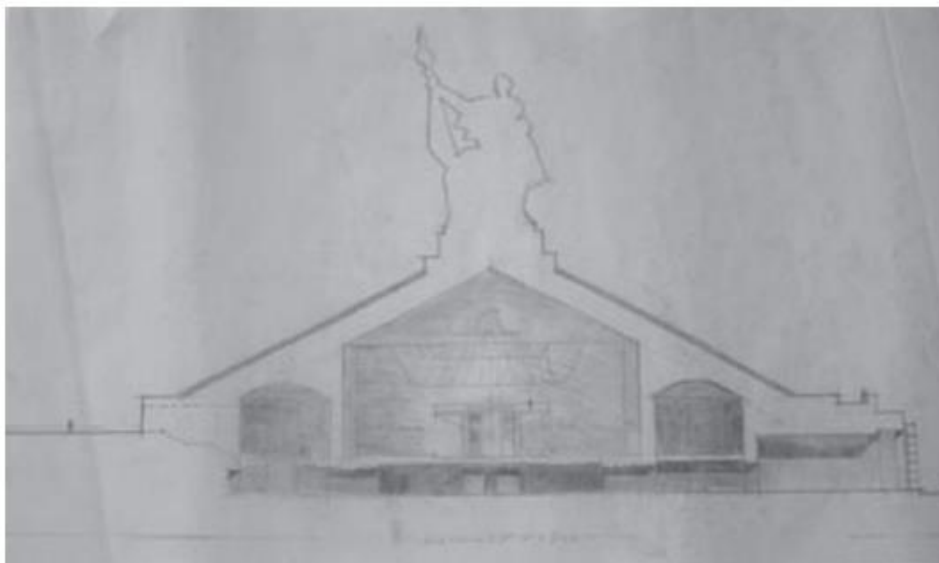
One of the earliest battlegrounds in terms of the overall vision of the memorial complex was over the proposed panorama that was to adorn the walls of the penultimate rotunda that visitors would have to pass through to crest the hill's summit. This type of composition was already a refined form in Russian artistic tradition, as this panorama was to be modeled after and influenced by other famous compositions, such as the panorama depicting the Battle of Borodino in Russia's war against Napoleon, or the Battle of Sevastopol during the Crimean War.⁸⁵² Stalingrad would be the latest historic battle to enter the proud canon of heroic defenses of the Russian homeland. While the initial concept was sound, the devil turned out to be in the details. The Soviet system of political oversight over artistic production meant that the artists composing the panorama were subject to the subjective whims of bureaucrats and politicians each with their own interpretations and agendas.⁸⁵³ What is more, they were tasked with creating a piece of memory work that comprised a deeply personal experience for many members of the Soviet military, many of whom were still currently living. As we shall see, the invitation for input from prominent military figures--many of whom could lay claim to the status as "heroic defenders of Stalingrad" that the monument was being built for--profoundly shaped the outcome of the project.

However, the engineering challenges posed by the cupola were proving an existential threat to the panorama's very concept. The statue that was to sit at the top of the hill, even in its initial relatively modest form, was a substantial amount of weight that would have to be

⁸⁵² See Susan E. Reid, "The Soviet Art World in the Early Thaw," in *Third Text* 20, no. 2 (2006): 161-175.

⁸⁵³ Palmer, "How Memory was Made," 390-394.

supported, even as the ground below was supposed to be hollowed away to make space for the cupola.



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The responsibility for preparing the site had been delegated to the Stalingrad Regional Executive Committee, and their survey crews began doing geological investigations in the Fall of 1958. Almost immediately as surveyors began conducting their tests on the site of the proposed construction, problems with this design came to light. The earliest work that began in the spring of 1959 was “surface level,” creating the stepped terraces up the side of the hill and mapping out the main squares and construction sites relative to the engineer’s designs. Even this relatively simple work, which had been subcontracted to the firm *Volgogradgidrostoi* (experienced earth movers that had done work on digging the Volga-Don Canal and the sluice for the Kuibyshev dam), proved exceedingly difficult and time consuming, as the earth on the hill was rife with freshly exhumed corpses and unspent ordinance.

When they came to the cupola, however, the surveyors quickly realized that any attempt to hollow out the hill would cause catastrophic damage to the hill’s integrity, even before a

⁸⁵⁴ The original design for the cupola inset into the hillside beneath the statue, Ia. B. Belopol'skii, “The Panorama. Section.” Draft project [date unknown], from Palmer “How Memory was Made.”

several-ton concrete statue was to be placed above it. Instead, the square at the top of the Wall Ruins staircase would need to be substantially altered. Vuchetich made the most of this opportunity for his own artistic gain. The mass grave planned as its centerpiece was scrapped, instead it would become a reflecting pool that would catch the image of the composition atop the hill. Instead of entering the cupola straight on, a new building to house the panorama would be offset to the north. To balance out this composition, Vuchetich proposed an additional statue composition (which he would design). The “Grief of the Motherland,” as it would come to be known, is another recycling of a motif Vuchetich had used at the Treptower Park complex that he clearly modeled after the *Pieta* of Michaelangelo⁸⁵⁵

The new building designed to house the Panorama was to be six-stories tall and 425 feet in diameter.⁸⁵⁶ Despite being moved from the literal “heart” of the composition, this was still a substantial undertaking, and one that would need to be completed quickly to stick to the initial deadline. Despite the ongoing debates about the panorama’s final design, the panorama itself was meant to fill this impressive space—its diameter would take up 393 feet of the chamber, and it was set to stand a towering sixteen meters tall. The designers of the space were told to account for complex electrical systems that would recreate “historically correct lighting,” as well as a sound system that would fill the chamber with audio recordings meant to simulate the sounds of battle. Even if the idea of the “film panorama” was being dismissed, the designers remained fixated on the idea of creating an immersive sensory experience for viewers, even going so far as to speculate on including life-size, interactive dioramas in the center of the floor, recreating trenches and bunkers, with mannequins or even live reenactors complete with period costumes and replica weapons.

⁸⁵⁵ Palmer, “How Memory was Made,” 389.

⁸⁵⁶ Ibid, 388-89.

However, the challenge of building the structure to house it further decreased its viability. In a city in the midst of its own struggle to implement Khrushchev's mass-housing vision, construction materials in the city were in incredibly short supply. In February 1960, just as construction of the cupola was set to begin, the Stalingrad Regional Executive Committee warned that "delays in the acquisition of building materials, an absence of technical documentation, and the irregular delivery of concrete" would hamper construction efforts and bemoaned that "serious organizational deficiencies" rampant on the site would thoroughly derail the project.⁸⁵⁷ The site also faced a serious labor shortage, and despite attempts to recruit volunteer workers from the local Komsomol, the site eventually resorted to calling up conscripts from the Red Army, whose generals were willing to dedicate the army's own resources in order to secure what they believed to be its deservedly glorious place within the memorial complex.

The initial sketches were sent to the Stalingrad Defense Museum for the review of local historians and the public. However, before that could happen, the Secretary of the Soviet Artists' Union, E. Belashova, announced that before being opened to local input, the drawing would be viewed and critiqued in Moscow first.⁸⁵⁸ The Stalingrad public was then introduced to the concept of the panorama early in the planning stages, with articles in *Stalingradskaiia pravda* touting the progress of the author's work with the memorial committee. Public figures like Chuikov were eager to get public feedback and for the artists to explain their vision, even hosting "town hall" style events in the Museum of the Defense of Tsaritsyn-Stalingrad in the spring of 1959. The March 4 assembly heard opinions of the artists, project managers, and the populace for the project.

⁸⁵⁷ Palmer, 389, quoting from documents found in GAVO, f. r-71, op. 1, d. 1841.

⁸⁵⁸ RGANI f. 5 d. 36 l. 128.

Thousands of Stalingrad residents took to heart the news that artists from the Grekov studio had arrived in our city, who were entrusted with the creation of a Panorama of the Battle of Stalingrad. What will it be like? Will it be possible to capture the historical truth of the battle of Stalingrad, the spirit of the heroic feat of the Soviet people, to preserve its memory for generations and centuries? [...] This question worries not only the authors of the panorama, it worries each of the defenders of our city, every *Stalingradtsy*.⁸⁵⁹

Artists took comments and questions from the audience, and met with veterans who had fought at Stalingrad, including one of the survivors from Dom Pavlova. F. P. Usypenko, one of the artists on the team, reassured listeners that “we feel great responsibility to all soldiers, commanders, all veterans of Stalingrad, to the memory of those who died here. We have to bring to the hearts of people the spirit of this battle, which is unlike any other.” There was also enthusiastic support for a new memorial complex, and agreement that the current museum did not do proper justice to impart the scope of the battle in all its stages.⁸⁶⁰



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Meanwhile, the content of the panorama itself proved a contentious issue. The work was subject to numerous reviews by state, local, and specialist review panels, where it would repeatedly stall in committee, always awaiting but never receiving final approval of just what the

⁸⁵⁹ V. Roldugina, “Vestrecha khudozhnikov—avtorov Panoramy s zashchitnikami Stalingrada,” *Stalingradskaya pravda*, March 5, 1959, 4.

⁸⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁸⁶¹ Ibid, photo by V. Roldugina. Pictured from left to right: F. Afanasiev (survivor of Dom Pavlova), Museum director N. M. Shevtsova, artist A. A. Gorpenko, and Marshal of the Soviet Union V. I. Chuikov.

panorama would depict once it was actually installed. The artistic work had begun in the summer of 1960, as artists working for the Grekov studio, joined by those in the Maltsev and Gorpenko studios (both also high-profile Moscow-based artist collectives of the period), created more than five hundred sketches for the scene that would depict an amalgam of stories from the battle, all happening simultaneously within the contiguous view of the observer. The creation of the panorama was given such high priority that Marshall Vasily I. Chuikov, who had commanded troops at Stalingrad, was brought on to the project as a consultant for the artists, who were flown to Stalingrad to see the space of the memorial and the views of the city for themselves. Another military consultant on the project, Lieutenant General M. G. Weintrub (also a participant in the battle), recalled: "For two weeks I dealt with the artists of the Grekov studio, I looked after them, provided them with anything, even to the point that I created snow for them."⁸⁶²

On September 3, 1960, Belashova sent a memo to the artists and the Stalingrad defense museum curators, she reasoned that "the particular importance to the ideological and artistic quality of the future panorama, which should correspond to the monument to the heroic defense of Stalingrad [...] it is necessary to organize their wide public discussion in the city of Moscow," and asks that they suspend opening the local exhibition of the sketches for one month.⁸⁶³ After a viewing on and discussion on September 23, which was attended by the Deputy Minister of Culture RSFSR, Filippov among other notable guests, the sketches were allowed be displayed briefly in Stalingrad before being returned to Moscow "in order to give the artists of Moscow an opportunity to get acquainted with them before the final approval of our art-expert council."⁸⁶⁴ While *Stalingradtsy* would be invited to share their thoughts on the work, it was clear that

⁸⁶² Mikhail Gerzhon, "Rodina rasskazivaet istoriiu sozdaniia Stalingradskaia bitva," in *Rodina* No. 5 (515), May 1, 2015, <https://rg.ru/2015/05/06/rodina-stalingrad.html>.

⁸⁶³ RGANI f. 5 d. 36 l. 128.

⁸⁶⁴ Ibid.

Moscow would have the final say in the panorama's composition. However, final approval was delayed for an additional two years, and in that time criticisms of the panorama began to mount on a number of fronts.

The voices critical of the composition raised objections for a host of reasons. Marshall Chuikov, who was intended to be the work's prime patron, turned out not to be a fan of the panorama itself. In January 1962, when veterans of the Battle were invited to comment, Chuikov put forward a long list of his concerns with the work. He stated that he had advised the artists that "there should be three main themes in the work: the power of the people, the heroism of the army, the leadership of the party," yet the panorama in its current form was insufficient in all three respects. The role of the working class was absent entirely, though: "We remember how the repaired tanks left the factory gates and immediately went into battle. Stalingrad life is not shown." He also decries that the Volga, which took up nearly a quarter of the panorama, was frozen and empty, with no sign of the "heroic sailors" of the Volga flotilla. In addition, the compression of time within the work, attempting to depict anecdotal scenes from across the battle, only created confusion for the viewer. For example, he highlights the heroic feat of Mikhail Panikakha, "who, with a bottle of combustible mixture, throws himself at a German tank and burns it. And how is it shown in the panorama? Thousands and thousands of prisoners are being led, German troops are surrounded, are at their last gasp, and against this background he looks like a suicide, not a hero. Why would he have to rush when everything is already broken?"⁸⁶⁵

Other critiques from that event questioned the artists' attempts to highlight the extraordinary moments in the battle, rather than a more grounded, realistic depiction of the

⁸⁶⁵ RGALI, f. 2329. op. 2, d. 898. l. 125.4.

experience of the troops. Many commenters argued that the panorama simply did not line up with their own memories of the battle. One commentator, Colonel General A.I. Rodimtsev, believed that “it is very important that the battle be shown without embellishment, as it was in real life.”⁸⁶⁶ He even went as far as to suggest that the memorial should include a recreation of trenches and bunkers that were such tenets of the average soldier’s experience. However, Rodimtsev also expressed the difficulty of the artists’ task to capture all the facets of the battle in a single image: “The battle on the Volga is an extremely complex and varied event. You can create a separate panorama about each day.”⁸⁶⁷

In the meantime, the idea for the panorama was already being questioned by the installation’s chief architect, Vuchetich himself. A few months before the discussion took place, in a November 15 meeting of the Ministry of Culture of the RSFSR, Vuchetich had raised the idea of replacing the panorama with a “film demonstration” that would “to replace the picturesque panorama with a complex work, which would include painting, cinema, word, and music.”⁸⁶⁸ The idea stemmed from the financial pressures being placed on Vuchetich by the Soviet presidium, as the project was already beginning to balloon well beyond its original budget, and a film installation would be much cheaper than the estimated 1-1.5 years of work by Maltsev’s artist collective from the time the canvas was placed in the rotunda. Creating the panorama had already proven a costly project. All told, the creation of the sketches alone accumulated a cost of 271,000 rubles, with another 600,000 rubles allocated for the actual installation of the art in the rotunda when the time came. The Soviet presidium, which followed the development of the monument complex closely, had by this time started looking for ways to

⁸⁶⁶ Gerzhon, “*Rodina rasskazivaet istoriiu sozdaniia Stalingradskaia bitva*”

⁸⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁶⁸ Ibid.

cut costs back. Vuchetich had also apparently been influenced by Marshall Chuikov, who had already privately disclosed his misgivings to the project chief. However, this idea of scrapping the panorama garnered little support among the gathered artists, with only A. M. Gerasimov voting in favor of Vuchetich's film proposal.⁸⁶⁹

Despite the lack of initial support, as more objections to the panorama continued to be raised by its critics, discussions on the film version of the display, or at least some version of it, continued to gather steam. Two months after the film had been voted down, it was brought up for discussion by the veterans commenting on the panorama. Chuikov this time voiced his views publicly, arguing that replacing the “static” panorama with a “moving” one would ideally shape the experience “so that a person who entered this panorama would have all his five senses occupied, and maybe even a sixth sense, if it exists.” The solemn, reflective space of the rotunda would be replaced with an immersive experience, where a visitor may think “that he stumbled on the trenches of Stalingrad, on destruction, so that he could hear exploding bombs, so that when he went out, he understood how people “easily” got this victory.”⁸⁷⁰ A small contingent of others came forward to comment in support of a film version of the exhibit. Colonel General I. I. Lyudnikov remarked that “it is impossible to show in one panorama everything that decided the fate of the Volgograd battle. We must look for new forms.” Yet again, however, support for the idea of a film replacing the panorama was not unanimous. According to Grezhov, yet another high-profile commander of the Stalingrad Front, Marshal A.I. Eremenko, spoke out in favor of preserving the panorama: “If there is cinema, music, sculpture, and paintings, there will be such a pile up that nothing can be made out. Cinema may die, but the panorama never will.”⁸⁷¹

⁸⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁷⁰ RGALI, f. 2329. op. 2, d. 898. l. 125.4.

⁸⁷¹ Ibid.

According to Grezhov, in the wake of the discussion with veterans of the battle, the Central Committee itself pressured the Ministry of Culture to reconsider the film. Shortly after, the public discussion of panorama revealed deep seeded reservations among the participating veterans. A. N. Kuznetsov, the first Deputy Minister of Culture of the USSR, reported that “the Central Committee has been instructed to sort out this complex issue, and sort it out calmly and objectively.”⁸⁷² On January 29, 1962, the Collegium of the USSR Ministry of Culture was convened specifically to discuss the further progress of work on the construction of the memorial complex. Among these ministers, E. A. Furtseva went on record as a proponent of the film and argued for at least discussing the proposals of “comrades who are thinking about how to build a more modern monument to the Battle of Stalingrad.” Discussions made it as far as whether such a film would be logistically possible. According to Grezhov, the leadership of the Central Documentary Film Studio was also involved in the preparation of the discussion. The chief engineer of this studio, I. Milkin, as well as the operators of “circular” cinema films, I. Bessarabov and A. Semin. These experts faced much the same challenge that the artists of the panorama already confronted: there was just too much to contain. They advised that “to create a circular film panorama about the Volgograd battle, it would be necessary to organize reenactments of past hostilities while maintaining their scale and shoot with a special filming installation. From our point of view, this is practically impracticable.”⁸⁷³

Even with the idea of a film variation of the panorama effectively quashed, developments on site threatened the very inclusion of a panorama at all. The practical concerns of the memorial's construction had created a chaotic worksite, the timeline to completion having been bogged down due to a chronic lack of labor and resources. With the initial vision of the complex

⁸⁷² Ibid.

⁸⁷³ Ibid.

already so thoroughly compromised, new ideas to replace the original draft were necessary. It was an environment where a perpetual careerist, already in a position with elevated creative control over the direction of the project, could use his connections within the Soviet leadership to ensure he had the final say in how the war myth would be forever enshrined in the city of Volgograd. The final blow to the Panorama would come from Vuchetich himself.

The Rise of *Rodina Mat'*

With the cupola removed from the hillside, Vuchetich's originally restrained idea for the hilltop's crowning statue composition would soon lose out to his monumentalist instincts. The original plan called for a merger of two ideas—the figure of the Motherland, “*Rodina mat'*” was to be joined by a Red Army soldier—symbolically connecting the efforts of the city's defenders with its people. Even in the early drafts, however, it was *Rodina mat'* who would draw the focus of the composition—the female figure was to stand proud, holding a banner aloft, while the male soldier would be shown kneeling, laying a sword at her feet.⁸⁷⁴ In early 1961, just as the deliberations about the nature of the Panorama within the military were reaching their crescendo, Vuchetich announced his plans to revise the composition. The new version would excise the soldier entirely, focusing instead on the motherland holding the sword aloft, calling the nation into battle. Palmer notes that the way in which Vuchetich made the announcement, as if the decision had already been reached without the consultation from the military at all, likely points to the fact that he already had the tacit backing of the Presidium. He even announced that he had already found his model, a twenty-six-year-old waitress in the city named Valentina

⁸⁷⁴ Palmer, “How Memory was Made,” 387.

Izotova.⁸⁷⁵ Though she could hardly realize it then, her countenance was to become the very face of Volgograd for decades to come.

However, this pronouncement would bring to the fore a confrontation that had been long stewing with a wing of the Army leadership led most vociferously by Marshal Eremenko, who already felt increasingly sidelined in what was supposed to be a monument in their honor. As it became clear the cupola must be moved out from underneath the hill itself, Eremenko had been pushing for the sculpture composition atop the hill to be replaced with the panorama itself, arguing that “to do otherwise amounted to a failure to acknowledge the central role of those who had fought the Battle of Stalingrad: the Red Army soldiers.”⁸⁷⁶ The opposition from the military figures involved in consultations supporting Eremenko was swift and vociferous. Colonel General Mikhail Shumilov argued that visitors won’t even know what the female figure is meant to represent, and regardless “people shouldn’t make their way toward some woman standing symbolically with a sword. They should be directed to the Panorama. But now, the Panorama has been reduced to playing only a secondary role... This woman with a sword, the one you have shown me, calling to the Volga—this is no monument.”⁸⁷⁷

Those in opposition felt that the military was being pushed out of their own narrative by artists reducing everything to mere symbolism, while real Red Army soldiers had fought and died on this very spot. They would be shocked to learn, however, that it was Vuchetich, not the army, who had deduced the predilections of the current members of the Presidium, who were focused not just on the past, but the future. The prestige of Stalingrad, of the Soviet Union’s role in defeating the Nazi menace, was to be leveraged as a part of a Soviet soft power initiative in

⁸⁷⁵ Ibid, 391.

⁸⁷⁶ Palmer paraphrasing Eremenko from GARF, f. A-501, op. 1, d. 3498, l. 7, in “How Memory was Made,” p. 390.

⁸⁷⁷ Ibid, 392.

their Cold War competition with the USA. Eremenko's proposal to move the panorama to the top of the hill was rejected. Meanwhile, Vuchetich's new monument was not only approved, but the artist would soon be told to expand its scope. The monument, initially proposed with a height from the base to the tip of the sword just over 30 meters, would be nearly doubled, rising to a towering 52 meters from the highest point on the hill. The directive for this massive change is believed to have come from none other than Nikita Khrushchev himself, who wished the statue to surpass the American Statue of Liberty.⁸⁷⁸

As a monumentalist, this was Vuchetich's dream come true. He leaned into the Greco-Roman aesthetic, merging the scale of the Colossus of Rhodes and the flowing movement of "Nike of Samothrace," depicting *Rodina mat'* wrapped in a simple toga billowing around her.⁸⁷⁹ The return to neoclassical, rather than recognizably Soviet motifs, was a deliberate attempt to appeal to an international audience. Vuchetich even argued that the Battle of Stalingrad was "an international event," and therefore depicting the figure in a national costume would be "inaccurate."⁸⁸⁰ Vuchetich's justifications were simply used to cover his true intentions—neoclassicism remained his preferred style from his days as a socialist realist artist of the Stalinist 1930s, and it was also "an idiom that invited admiration from the widest possible audience and that sustained Vuchetich's pretensions at crafting works of universal significance." Still, his rationale was enough for the artist-expert committee overseeing the work to unanimously accept this new vision for the complex in December 1962.⁸⁸¹

⁸⁷⁸ Ibid, p. 394.

⁸⁷⁹ The legendary Colossus of Rhodes, depicting the Greek god Helios, stood at the mouth of the city's harbor, and was regarded as one of the "Seven Wonders of the Ancient World," though it collapsed during an earthquake more than 200 years BCE. Nike, on the other hand, was the goddess of Victory.

⁸⁸⁰ Ibid, 396.

⁸⁸¹ Palmer, "How Memory was Made," 396.

While the construction of this massive centerpiece would inevitably prove costly and pose a logistical nightmare for *Vologradproekt*, the local engineering firm entrusted with its realization, it would ultimately prove the death knell for the embattled Panorama. Construction on the exterior rotunda had been consistently delayed through 1962, when in the summer efforts were brought to a near complete stop by lack of materials and construction vehicles (which had been commandeered to help bring in the local harvest).⁸⁸² After the new plan was approved in 1963, Vuchetich raised further concern that the rotunda, as currently envisioned, would stand tall enough to block sightlines of the memorial's new crowning composition from the northwest, where one of the city's main traffic thoroughfares ran. To address the issue, Vuchetich proposed lowering the height of the building by four meters—this of course would require a corresponding reduction in the height of the Panorama itself.

His suggestion kicked off a wave of concern about the future of the project, with the Ministry of Culture, the Council of Ministers, and even Gosplan sending delegations to Volgograd to take stock of the situation and weigh in on the solutions. As deliberations proceeded, more problems continued to compound. Hydrological tests revealed that water from the memorial park's various features was leaking into the soil, potentially destabilizing the very ground on which the structure was being built. Progress was halted for nearly another year as tests were conducted to affirm the viability of the structure, and in the meantime, Vuchetich was free to lobby for his own cause against a stopped clock.

In the Fall of 1963, Khrushchev himself came to Volgograd as part of his tour of the USSR with Fidel Castro (a visit that will be explored in greater depth later in the chapter). The pair visited the site of Mamayev Kurgan, and Vuchetich acted as their personal guide. According

⁸⁸² Ibid, 399.

to Palmer, this is the moment Vuchetich seized to eliminate the final aspect of the memorial complex he did not have direct control over. He proposed to the Soviet leader replacing the Panorama with a “Pantheon,” a mural that would carry the names of 7,200 soldiers who had fallen in battle defending the hill, arguing that it would make possible “a deeper revelation of the ideological-artistic content of the entire memorial complex.” In addition, Vuchetich argued, it would save the project time and money—no longer would the issue of the cupola’s foundation need to be addressed, and without the need to preserve the Panorama’s canvases they could scrap the costly climate control systems that would need to be installed. All told, this change would save the project 2.57 million rubles. A small statue composition (of his own design, of course) could be set in the middle of the cavernous space to act as a focal point and centerpiece. With the revised plans, Vuchetich told Khrushchev, there was even a chance the monument complex could be completed in time for the (then) proposed opening date of May 9, 1965. While his timeline would prove drastically overambitious (the park would not open until 1967), Khrushchev still approved all of the recommendations, and the Ministry of Culture approved the changes to be ratified by the Council of Ministers in April 1964.⁸⁸³

With his patient political maneuvering and clever manipulations of the definition of the war myth, Vuchetich cemented his legacy as one of the core visionaries of postwar Soviet monument culture. The iconic figure of *Rodina mat'* would become, as intended, an internationally recognized symbol associated both with the city and the battle that took place there. While the cult of personality had been torn down by Khrushchev, through Vuchetich the mantle of Stalinist architecture had been passed on to the burgeoning cult of the war myth.

⁸⁸³ Ibid, 400-01.

The elimination of the Panorama was the last of the large changes to be made to the memorial, and after 1964 work began once more in earnest. There were still labor shortages, delays caused by insufficient or inadequate materials, and general waste that was common in many major Soviet construction projects of the era. For the Regional Executive Committee, who had spent the last several years trying to get the city's construction industries reigned in so they could meet the massive challenge posed by Khrushchev's mass-housing initiative, the memorial complex was a costly distraction. Vuchetich's vanity project was a huge drain on key material resources and personnel that could be better deployed in service of actual living residents of the city instead of some grandiose tribute to the dead. It sucked up countless meters of fresh concrete, fleets of construction vehicles, a veritable jungle of scaffolding, and scores of specialized workers, survey crews, and, perhaps most gallingly, millions of rubles that could have been flowing from the center into other local projects. Throughout the process, the Volgograd regional committee attempted to reign in the project and return it to some form of efficiency, as they had done for the city's construction industries. However, their efforts would often be overruled by the well-connected artists and engineers heading the project like Vuchetich, who had the ear of powerful sponsors in the Presidium and even Khrushchev himself.

The generals who worked on the project found themselves in a difficult position. As the "recipients" of the glory the monument nominally stood for, the involvement of the military in shaping the monument was an important part of the memorial's story, even if their ideas were often excluded from its final form. Marshall Chuikov, as well as Eremenko and others, put a great deal of effort and political capital to try to influence the monument to meet their own vision. Both Generals clearly felt a responsibility to the men that fought and died for him in the city, many on the very slopes of Mamayev Kurgan itself, and throughout their involvement in the

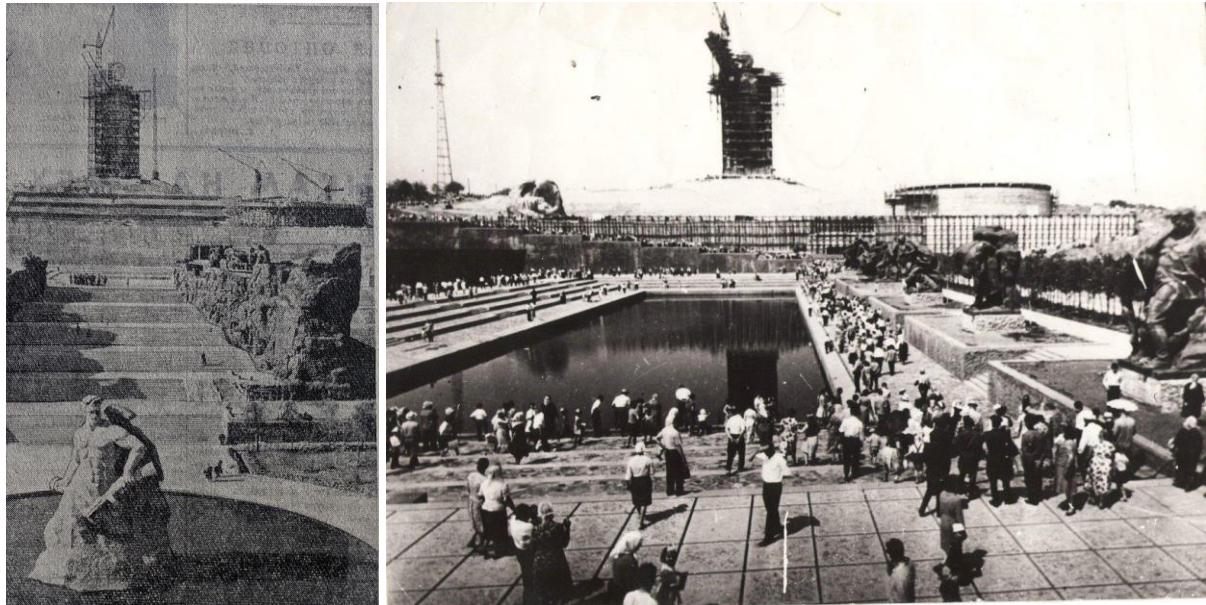
project they attempted to honor their memory in whatever way he saw best. In the end, neither of their visions would make the final cut on Mamayev Kurgan, as Vuchetich looked after his own legacy first and foremost. Eremenko became so disillusioned with the project that when it came time to sign the ceremonial deed of delivery, Eremenko refused to sign in symbolic protest.⁸⁸⁴ In order to secure Chuikov's continued support even through the removal of the panorama, Vuchetich appealed to his vanity, using his visage for the face of the soldier of the "Stand to Death" composition at the base of the hill.⁸⁸⁵

By 1964, almost all the elements besides Rodina Mat' had been completed, and the site was already receiving visitors. One story that appeared on the eve of celebrations of the October revolution estimated that thousands of guests from the Soviet Union and beyond, boasting of delegations from all over the world, had already visited the site: "guests from England, the United Arab Republics, Cuba, India, Burma, and Argentina, people from all corners of the earth, government officials and ordinary workers –everyone who visits our city comes here to honor the memory of those whose heroic death meant life for millions of people." The first statue composition of "Stand to the Death" and its reflecting pool was also one of the first elements of the composition to be completed, and this space acted as the first "reception hall" for visitors to the site. Pilgrims could then proceed up the staircase surrounded by the wall effigies, which are charred and blackened "as if scorched and melted by fire," past the six statues and their reflecting pool toward the cupola, where Vuchetich's sculpture of the hand holding the eternal flamed is ringed by banners, names, and portraits of heroes of the battle. The author of the piece, Y. Baranov asserted that visitors he had accompanied to the site had been very moved, "People emerge and look back at the Volga with misty eyes ... Everything here is significant, everything

⁸⁸⁴ Palmer, "How Memory was Made," 394.

⁸⁸⁵ Ibid.

is subordinated to the one idea: “do not forget, people, the horrors of war! Bow to the heroes who defended your life, freedom and happiness.”⁸⁸⁶



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Mamayev Kurgan would not celebrate its grand opening for another three years (which we shall return to later in the chapter). Hundreds of workers were still in the process of constructing the colossal form of *Rodina mat'* and installing the technical elements of the park, like lighting and audio equipment through which solemn music might further enhance the mood of the memorial's guests. However, if a visitor to the park at this time were to follow Prospekt Lenin south from the base of the hill, past the newly constructed sports complex and back into the heart of the Central District, another site integral to the war myth was undergoing its own renaissance.⁸⁸⁸

The House of Pavlov, Lenin Square, and the Panorama Museum

⁸⁸⁶ Iu. Baranov, "Ne zabyvaite, liudi!" *Volgogradskaia pravda*, October 24, 1964, 2.

⁸⁸⁷ Left, Photo by A. Nozoryakov, Ibid., showing the general view of the construction of Mamayev Kurgan. Right: View of the reflecting pool and statues at the top of the staircase. with television tower, rotunda, and Rodina Mat' in the background. Image from "50 let nazad v Volgograde na Mamaevom kurgane otkryli znamentityi memorial," v.102.ru News (<https://v102.ru/news/67918.html>, accessed 2/8/2024)

⁸⁸⁸ Palmer,

One of the most famous stories of the Battle of Stalingrad, the House of Pavlov (*Dom Pavlova*), was known around the world. The story of the encircled unit of twenty-four soldiers of the 13th Guards Rifle Division holding fast in their defense against overwhelming odds for fifty-eight days without surrendering captured hearts and minds across the Soviet Union and around the world. In late September, as the Germans advanced, Yakov Pavlov led a small group of soldiers to secure the building, where a number of civilians remained trapped. With most every other structure in the surrounding area destroyed in the firestorm unleashed by the initial German bombing campaign, the four-story brick building provided defenders sightlines to fire on German attackers approaching from any direction, making it an ideal stronghold, while underground tunnels dug into the structure's basement allowed supplies to reach the encircled platoon. Sappers mined the surrounding streets and approached the square with anti-tank and anti-personnel mines, making the barren square approaching the house a lethal killing field. The Red Army's propaganda organ, the "Red Star," wrote on October 1, 1942, that "every day the guards take on 12-15 attacks from enemy tanks and infantry, supported by aviation and artillery. And they always repel the enemy's onslaught to the last opportunity, covering the earth with dozens and hundreds of new fascist corpses."⁸⁸⁹ While the actual amount of fighting that took place around the house is contested, the story of the brave defenders of Stalingrad digging in and refusing to cede any more ground created the perfect propaganda narrative as the tide of the battle turned and the Wehrmacht began its retreat in 1943.

After the battle, the legend of Dom Pavlova continued to grow, as this was also famously the site where Alexandra M. Cherkasova led her small group of teachers to lend their aid in the cleanup of the city that sparked the Cherkasova movement. However, nearly two decades after

⁸⁸⁹ Morozova and Monakhova, *Pute-voditel po Volgogradu*, 92.

the battle had been won, few measures had been taken to mark the site other than the fragmented remains of the ruined structure that still stood.

The House of Pavlov was situated at the northern end of the city's Central District, just off a square where the Nikolskaya Church of Old Tsaritsyn once stood. The square—long referred to as “Balkan Square,” as it had been dubbed by Volga fishermen in the early days of Tsaritsyn—had its own history tied to the city's labor movement, where strikes and rallies had been held as far back as the revolution of 1905. Across the street to the east toward the riverbank stood the remains of the Old Mill (officially named after K. N. Grudinin, a Bolshevik mill worker at the time of the revolution who was assassinated in 1922),⁸⁹⁰ one of the few ruined structures in the area that was never pulled down, itself a monument to the destruction wrought by the German siege.



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For years, the only memorial site at Dom Pavlova was a simple plinth, topped with the turret of a destroyed German tank, one of several scattered around the city. It was only in the late 1950s that plans were laid to transform the site and surrounding square facing Lenin Prospect. The project was given to G. A. Zakharov to design the square's structural components and none other than Vuchetitch to lead its artistic design. However, instead of explicitly dedicating the square to

⁸⁹⁰ Ibid, 94.

⁸⁹¹ Dom Pavlova (foreground) following the battle, with the Grudinin Mill visible in the background to the left. Images accessed via Wikipedia commons.

the fighters of Dom Pavlova, the square was dedicated to Vladimir Lenin, father of the revolution. Zakharov was a classicist, and his design closed the square with a towering ringed colonnade, hiding many of the new houses and the ruins beyond the main street. The center of the composition was a massive statue of Lenin himself, depicted in his iconic greatcoat, arm outstretched to the horizon, atop a large plinth bearing his name. However, the square also serves as a gravesite. Behind the monument to Lenin, denoted by a small plaque on its base, visitors to the square could learn that “The Soldiers of the Thirteenth Guards Order of Lenin Rifle Division and Troops of Tenth Division of the NKVD who died in the battle of Stalingrad are buried here.”⁸⁹² Construction of the square began in 1959, while many of the multi-story apartment buildings surrounding it were still under construction themselves. In addition, the city’s tram line, which previously passed in front of the square, was rerouted underground, making Ploshad Lenin one of the few covered stations on its route.

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Dedicating the square to Lenin further cemented the semantic de-Stalinization of the city, as the last vestiges of the Stalin cult were continuing to be dismantled during this time. While the square began as a largely “secular” site in terms of its relation to the sacred war myth, it would not remain so for long. The space would continue to evolve. It would come to include a large stone mural depicting a Soviet soldier that would be added to the center of the colonnade further denoting this as the former site of Dom Pavlova, and later, the square beside the ruined mill would become the eventual home of the Panorama museum after the element was removed from the final plans of Mamayev Kurgan.

On April 18, 1964, the Council of Ministers of the RSFSR passed a resolution instructing the Volgograd Regional Executive Committee to begin working on a proposal for a museum that would house the panorama. The design for the museum, a large, cylindrical shape which would

⁸⁹³ A. Iaitskii, photo of Lenin Square, *Volgogradskaya pravda*, November 6, 1964.

house the circular panorama at its crown on the topmost floor, was submitted by the People's Architect of the USSR V. E. Maslayaev and chief designer E. V. Temnikov. Ground was broken on the project on February 2, 1964, on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the German surrender. The memorial was to sit beside the still uncleared ruins of the old Mill, so that “the architectural design of the memorial ensemble is based on the dramatic contrast of the ruins of the mill and the modern building.”⁸⁹⁴ Outside in the square, an obelisk rising 77 meters in height was said to be the furthest ever point of the German advance to the Volga. The enormous canvas for the panorama itself measured more than two thousand square meters and was hand-painted by dozens of artists copying the designs of the original panorama commissioned for the Mamayev Kurgan project before being mounted in place within the museum only in 1982.⁸⁹⁵

Though the House of Pavlov no longer stood, replaced by new residential buildings, in 1985, facing the new museum, a new memorial would be constructed in the old brick style of the original building: a sliver representing the old structure as it looked in the days following the battle. Upon its face are the words “in this house, feats of arms and labor merged together,” along with a plaque commemorating the names of the soldiers who fought there, alongside pseudo-graffiti at its base, where the etched letters of “We will defend you, dear Stalingrad!” (*otstoim tebia rodnoi Stalingrad!*) have been amended with a character added to change the phrase to “We will build you, dear Stalingrad!” (*ot stroim tebia rodnoi Stalingrad!*), below which the names of Cherkasova and her companions are signed.

⁸⁹⁴ “O istoriie: Muzei-panorama ‘Stalingradskaia bitva’ accessed February 2, 2024, via <https://stalingrad-battle.ru/about/about-museum-inner/2301/>

⁸⁹⁵ Ibid.



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The City as a Pilgrimage Site

In the 1950s and 1960s, the worldwide renown of Stalingrad's role in World War Two made it an international city, a destination for travelers from the Soviet Union, the People's Republics, the Third World, and even the West. The Soviet government encouraged this travel, as the city represented the victory over fascism, the resilience and ingenuity of the Soviet people, and soon, would represent the model socialist city, a superior form of urban design that would rival and overtake those presented by the capitalist west. There is a marked increase in stories in *Stalingradskiaia pravda* regarding international visits in 1955 and beyond, as Khrushchev was already attempting to de-Stalinize the Soviet Union's international image.

The turbulent political campaigns that were unleashed by de-Stalinization were not the only forces that shaped life in the city on the Volga. The increasingly warming Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union was ratcheted up steadily through this period—the Soviet procurement of atomic weapons, the launch of Sputnik and the subsequent space race, and the tensions of decolonization had an impact on daily life in Stalingrad as well. With the

⁸⁹⁶ Left: View of the Panorama museum, old mill, obelisk, Dom Pavlova monument, Lenin Square in the background, image hosted by Yandex image search. Right: Dom Pavlova monument, photo by author, Volgograd 2018.

city's economy once more booming, the "hero city" on the Volga was to become a stage for some historic international visits. These carefully choreographed spectacles all held roughly the same patterns, as the city's welcoming committee became accustomed to the tour they gave to visitors—which usually included a welcoming reception with much fanfare, displays of adoration from *Stalingradtsy*, as well as opportunities to address the public.

In the period of Khrushchev's tenure at the helm of Soviet politics between 1956-1964, many foreign dignitaries visited the city. Delegations from the United States, India, France, Czechoslovakia, China, Korea, and Albania (to name a few) all made visits to the city during this time. These delegations were composed of everything from students to engineers, representatives of state departments, and even heads of state themselves. Almost all of these groups would have spent a significant portion of their time in the city on carefully crafted tours, visiting famous battle sites as well as some of the most impressive sites of the newly revitalized city. Many of these visits were typically recorded in the pages of *Stalingradskaiia pravda*, and some high-profile visits more closely than others.⁸⁹⁷

These visits were instructive for visitors to the city and its inhabitants. Visitors to the city followed well established protocols as they traveled to many of the same destinations, the "sacred" sites of the battle and the heroic efforts to rebuild the city into a beacon of socialist modernity. In particular, as we shall see, the standardization of practice regarding official state visits created a ritualization for outsiders experiencing the city and for residents whose participation was also necessary. The expectation became that visitors, regardless of their official duties and wider diplomatic objectives, had to pay homage to the historic legacy of the city and its defenders. They had to perform the giving of thanks for the sacrifices made by the Soviet

⁸⁹⁷ See for instance coverage of the visits of Jawaharlal Nehru, *Stalingradskaiia pravda*, June 12, 1955, Josip Broz Tito, *Stalingradskaiia pravda*, June 12, 1956, and Fidel Castro, *Volgogradskaiia pravda*, May 7, 1963.

people in the defeat of fascism, for which the world must be forever grateful. These rituals also entrenched the sacred nature of these sites in the mind of the local populace and gave further meaning to their own ritual observances celebrating the war myth.

Foreign travel to the city also provided Khrushchev with a means to advertise and promote his version of Soviet modernity to an international audience. The city became a sort of “showroom” exhibition, where guests had the chance to observe a model socialist city of the post-Stalin era: the promise of mass housing construction, the supposed strength of the planned economy and the benefits of to workers under socialism, and of the mammoth construction projects that displayed man’s mastery over nature, with both the Volga-Don Canal and the Hydroelectric Station becoming favorite destinations for these city-spanning tours.

Even with the Cold War near its peak, the city still hosted guests from the Soviet Union’s dreaded rival, the United States. Much like the Kitchen Debates, these visits gave Khrushchev an opportunity to showcase the supposed superiority of Soviet modernity to their American counterparts. In 1956, a group of US architects headed by the former chairman of the National Association of Housing Construction, Earl Smith, visited Stalingrad to learn more about Soviet urban planning and construction techniques. The guests were met at the airport by executives of the City and Regional Councils as well as the heads of many construction trusts within the city. Before any business was conducted, however, the party made a trip to Mamayev Kurgan to lay a wreath on the mass grave for the defenders of Stalingrad, even though at this time no memorial complex stood beyond a few simple plinths and plaques. From there, they returned to the House of the Architects in the city’s central district, where they reviewed a model of the city’s planned development and were shown a film displaying the destruction wrought on the city’s infrastructure by the Battle of Stalingrad. The next day, the group toured construction sites

around the city and across the river in Volzhsky, as well as the hydroelectric station where they showed “great interest in the development of the main waterworks,” before the chairman of the Stalingrad City Council, A. V. Dynkin, gave a dinner to honor the US builders.⁸⁹⁸



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Surprisingly, American delegates were not an altogether uncommon site in Stalingrad. Five years later, an American senator, Allen J. Ellender (a conservative segregationist southern democrat who voted against the Voting Rights Act in 1965), visited Stalingrad in October of 1961, just a few weeks before the changing of the city’s name, as part of a tour where he aimed to produce a film on life in the Soviet Union. The senator stayed in the city for several days, his second visit to the city after another trip in 1956. He remarked on the incredible progress the city had made in that time and was “amazed” at the appearance of the new city of Volzhskii and an “excellent” hydroelectric power station praising it as “the largest and most beautiful I have ever seen. This is one of the most striking examples of the remarkable engineering art of Soviet specialists..” He stated that his mission on his journey was to build an understanding between the American and Soviet people, and that the development of trade “will create a favorable

⁸⁹⁸ A. Iaitsskii, “Americanskii stroitelei v Stalingrade,” *Stalingradskaia pravda*, July 10, 1956, 2.

⁸⁹⁹ Ibid, photo by Iaitsskii.

atmosphere for building relationships between our countries,” and praised his hosts as “good people.”⁹⁰⁰ Whatever motivations and objectives the senator had of his own for this “goodwill” tour, the party press was able to use his visit for their own objectives, capturing the praise of the enemy to further laud the progress made by the Communist Party.

Beyond official visits, there were plenty who came to the city for recreational travel as well. The city made a particularly popular destination for youth organizations aligned with the communist party of the Soviet Union and other People’s Democracies in Europe. This “youth diplomacy” allowed greater contact between the socialist countries and of course exposed a new generation to the war myth. Tourist groups of young people fostered particularly by the Young Pioneers and the Komsomol, where international visitors would meet and mingle with hosts of their own age from the city’s chapters of those organizations. Summer tourists could spend days exploring the city, and while they could not rival their resort counterparts on the Black Sea, visitors could make the most of enjoying the heat of the Southern Russian steppe. All sorts of tour groups and even local *Stalingradtsy* exploring their own city was a common occurrence during the summer months. The city’s rail-line, and increasingly the new airfield and riverboat station helped carry more travelers to the region in the late 1950s. Most visitors, particularly high-profile international delegations, probably stayed at the Stalingrad/Volgograd Hotel or Inturist Hotel, both of which stood on the Square of Fallen Fighters, making it an inevitable part of their first experience of the city.

⁹⁰⁰ “Amerikanskii senator v Stalingrade,” *Stalingradskaia pravda*, October 24, 1961.



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One of the highest profile visits to the city to date came on June 11, 1955, when Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru made a stop in Stalingrad on his tour of the Soviet Union. Fresh off the heels of the Bandung conference in April of that year, where India, China, Egypt, and other states were first publicly announcing their intent to go their own way as they attempted to navigate the postcolonial arena of international politics, right as the tensions of the Cold War superpower struggle between the Soviet Union and the United States was increasing. Khrushchev, who understood the importance of the Soviet's international image in his desire to prove the benefits of socialist modernity to his own people as well as the developing "Third World," made diplomacy one of the earliest aspects of de-Stalinization he was able to pursue.⁹⁰² The Bandung Conference was a major step toward the formation of the "Non-Aligned Movement," though Khrushchev still hoped that Nehru's turn away from the West would translate into closer economic relations between India and the Soviet Union.⁹⁰³ He saw the

⁹⁰¹ A group of Czech Young Pioneers visiting the city during summer holiday head for the beach. "Chekhoslovatskie pionery v Stalingrade," *Stalingradskaya pravda*, August 3, 1956, 4.

⁹⁰² See Matthew D. Cotton, "Marshalling Tito" (PhD Thesis: University of Washington, 2015).

⁹⁰³ For more on Soviet-India diplomatic ties and economic relations during this period, see David C. Engerman, *The Price of Aid: The Economic Cold War in India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), R. K. Sharma, *Indo-Soviet Cooperation and India's Economic Development*, (New Delhi: Allied, 1982), and Anna Evgenevna Shtoda, "Establishing of the Soviet Trade Representation in India as a Way to Strengthen Economic Ties Between Countries," in *Kilo*, no. 1 (2022): 69–74. For more on the rise of the "Third World" as a geopolitical force, see on the

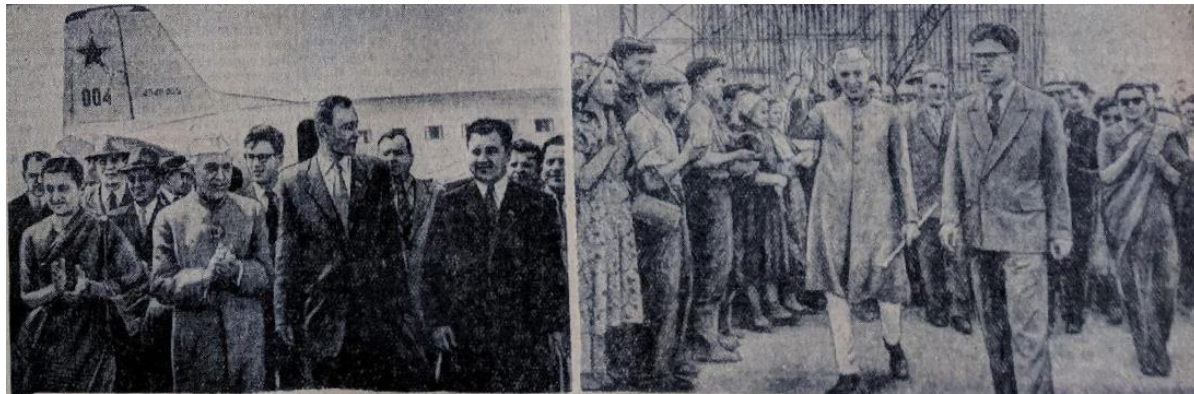
massive potential of manufacturing exports for the modernizing markets of the “Third World,” and saw the Prime Minister visit as a chance to showcase the supposed strength of the Soviet economic model.

Nehru was received at the Stalingrad airfield by cheering crowds of workers bearing the colors of the Indian flag, while young pioneers offered bouquets of roses. Here Nehru addressed the assembled crowd, proclaiming that “the glorious name of Stalingrad is known to the whole world. Your city is known for its heroism both during the war and during years of peace. I came here to see your city, to see how you live, and I bow in honor to your glorious city.” From the airfield, Nehru, along with members of the Stalingrad Executive committee, met with heads of the heads of Agriculture (which was of particular interest), the Volga-Don Canal, and the Hydroelectric plant. Later in the day, Nehru and his entourage, including Indira Gandhi and a score of Hindu-language press officers, toured the Defense Museum and the Square of Fallen Fighters, before being driven to Mamayev Kurgan, where Nehru was said to have “reverentially placed his hand to his heart and bowed his head in tribute” to the memory of the defenders of Stalingrad. The party made brief stop through the Red October Steelworks, before boarding a riverboat to head to the site of the Hydroelectric station, where Nehru saw the operation in its entirety, going down into the pits where construction was taking place and into the towers of cranes that could oversee the grand scale of the project. Before leaving the city the following day, Nehru was quoted as having remarked that “in Stalingrad he was especially convinced of the genuine, sincerely friendly feelings of the Soviet people towards the Indian people.”⁹⁰⁴ The effort to impress the Indian delegation was an early sign of Khrushchev’s broader foreign policy

origins of the Third World and non-alignment in the Cold War, Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations* (New York: The New Press, 2007).

⁹⁰⁴ “Prebyvanie v Stalingrade prem’er-Ministra Respubliki Indii Dzhadakharlala Neru,” *Stalingradskaia pravda*, June 12, 1955.

ambitions, the results of which would soon bring about two of the most important state visits in the city's history.



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De-Stalinizing Soviet Diplomacy

In the years following Nehru's visit, on two occasions the visiting party was of such significance to Soviet foreign policy that Khrushchev himself came to the city to play the role of host: the first being Marshal Josip Broz Tito of Yugoslavia in 1956 and Fidel Castro of Cuba in 1963. When Khrushchev arrived at Stalingrad alongside the Marshall on part of their nation-wide goodwill tour, it was the first time a Soviet head of state visited the city since before the war (Stalin had of course been invited to attend the opening of the Volga-Don canal in 1952, but ultimately declined to attend, and died shortly thereafter). Khrushchev's return to the city gave him a chance to revitalize his own political priorities and make his case directly to the Soviet public, and reestablished Stalingrad as a city important to the Soviet national character. For *Stalingradtsy*, it further cemented their prestige as an internationally recognized city, an affirmation of Stalingrad's return to life following the destruction of the battle.

Both of Khrushchev's visits during his time as Premier were a chance for him to make bold statements, reflecting his new strategy of post-Stalin Soviet foreign policy, and the city

⁹⁰⁵ Ibid, photos by V. Smetaninov. Left: Nehru's arrival at the Stalingrad airfield, Right: Nehru touring the Hydroelectric power station.

provided a stage for Khrushchev to push his own agenda. In both cases, the language of the war myth provided a common ground for both Soviet and visiting delegations to connect their message of communism's superiority to capitalism and rejection of the Western imperial order. In the case of Marshall Tito, both he and Khrushchev shared direct experience in the struggle to protect their homeland against fascist invaders, and this solidarity between the Soviet and Yugoslav people was a common theme of his visit. This also deflected from the Stalinist attacks on Tito during the 1948 Soviet-Yugoslav split, the damage from which Khrushchev had made a priority to try to repair.⁹⁰⁶ Even before the Secret Speech, Khrushchev was already engaged in diplomatic overtures to Marshall Tito of Yugoslavia attempting to revive the alliance Stalin had shattered by forcibly removing the Yugoslav Communist Party from the Cominform, the postwar order of Soviet aligned national parties. He was able to re-open the relationship with the Marshall by promising the existence of "national paths to socialism" in the Belgrade Declaration of May 1955, a feat which greatly raised his standing as a leader within the party as Khrushchev was still attempting to consolidate his power base against his Central Committee rivals.

In the case of comrade Fidel Castro in 1963, the war myth proved malleable. Though the Cuban revolution would never have to face the threat of Nazi invasion, the language of the struggle against fascism could be conflated with the Cuban revolutionaries' struggle to remain independent in the face of the imperial aggression of the United States. As both the Bay of Pigs debacle and Cuban Missile Crisis remained fresh in the minds of both leaders and their

⁹⁰⁶ For more on the Soviet-Yugoslav diplomatic split in 1948, see Ivo Banac, *With Stalin against Tito: Cominformist Splits in Yugoslav Communism*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), Jeronim Perović, "The Tito-Stalin Split: A Reassessment in Light of New Evidence," in *Journal of Cold War Studies* 9, no: 2 (2007): 32-63, Richard Mills, "Cold War Football: Soviet Defence and Yugoslav Attack Following the Tito-Stalin Split of 1948," in *Europe-Asia Studies* 68, no. 10 (2016): 1736-58, and Iu. S. Girenko, *Stalin-Tito*, (Moscow: Izd-vo polit. lit-ry, 1991). For more on Khrushchev's diplomatic efforts to repair the damage, see Svetozar Rajak, *Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union in the Early Cold War: Reconciliation, Comradeship, Confrontation, 1953-57* (New York: Routledge, 2010).

audiences, a story of a heroic struggle for independence could be adapted to fit the current situation the Cubans faced. In using the language of the war myth, these leaders' visits further reinforced the narrative tropes that were being so carefully crafted by Soviet authorities during this time.

De-Stalinization, however, was fraught with unexpected turmoil, both at home and abroad. Unfortunately for Khrushchev, this new narrative of socialist unity would not be enough to erase the sins of the Stalinist past in Eastern Europe—de-Stalinization also unleashed the language of victimhood not at the hands of fascists, but by the Soviet state and Stalinized national communist parties. Scarcely a few weeks after Tito's visit to Stalingrad, anti-Soviet riots in Poznan, Poland would challenge Khrushchev's new position of a more accommodating Soviet leadership.⁹⁰⁷ Barely able to contain this crisis, later that summer Hungary would erupt as well, forcing Khrushchev to call in Warsaw Pact troops to quell another anti-communist revolt.⁹⁰⁸ The Soviet handling of these situations drew swift condemnation from Tito, and once again the Yugoslav communists would find themselves ostracized from the socialist world.⁹⁰⁹ The welcome that Tito received at Stalingrad underscores how the official party line on foreign policy was connected to the war myth, which resonated much more deeply in a city so shaped by the struggle to survive against a common enemy.

The State Visit of Marshall Tito: Hero of the Yugoslav Revolution

⁹⁰⁷ See Mark Kramer, "The Soviet Union and the 1956 Crises in Hungary and Poland: Reassessments and New Findings," in *Journal of Contemporary History* 33, no. 2 (1998): 163-214, Paweł Machcewicz and Maya Latynski, *Rebellious Satellite : Poland, 1956* (Washington, D.C: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2009).

⁹⁰⁸ See Kramer, "The Soviet Union and the 1956 Crises in Hungary and Poland," Jenő Györkei and Miklós Horváth, *Soviet Military Intervention in Hungary, 1956* (New York: Central European University Press, 1999).

⁹⁰⁹ For more on this subject, see Matthew D. Cotton, "The Marshaling Tito: Soviet Foreign Policy, Yugoslavia, and the Crisis of International Stalinism in -the Early Cold War, 1948-56" (Ph.D thesis: University of Washington, 2014), and Rajak, *Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union in the Early Cold War*.

Tito's story before his visit to Stalingrad is an important aspect of the broader discussion of de-Stalinization and its impact for a number of reasons. The Yugoslav President began as a candidate recruited by the Comintern for potential leadership within the Communist Party of Yugoslavia and trained in the Soviet Union during Stalin's reign. During the Second World War, he transformed his party into a multiethnic guerrilla band capable of resisting the Nazi takeover of his country, as well as the local fascist groups that supported it. The Yugoslav partisans were the only Eastern European country that proved capable of liberating their country from the Nazis without direct intervention from the Red Army, and as such retained a degree of autonomy from Soviet domination in the postwar order. While Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union remained close allies for nearly three years after the Allied victory, in 1948, Tito proved resistant to Stalin's crackdown on Eastern European Communist parties. This feud between the two leaders became a state-wide rift, creating the first open international dispute between two communist-controlled states, and subjecting Tito and the Yugoslavs to the full brunt of Stalin's displeasure. At its worst, Tito feared a Soviet invasion of his country, and many attempts on his life by Soviet-backed assassins were thwarted before Stalin's death in 1953.⁹¹⁰

Stalin's potential successors were left with the decision on whether to proceed with the Soviet campaign against Tito. In hindsight, the forced split with Yugoslavia marked one the most glaring failures of Stalin's foreign policy. After surviving the initial onslaught of criticism in the Cominform (the postwar organization of the Comintern), Tito and his inner circle had tactfully adapted to their new circumstances, and instead turned to aid the West for aid and reinventing Yugoslavia's communist party platform to promote the national right to self-determination and peaceful coexistence in the international arena, in direct opposition to the Soviet Union's heavy-

⁹¹⁰ See Banac, *With Stalin against Tito*, Perović, "The Tito-Stalin Split."

handed interventionist approach toward the rest of Eastern Europe.⁹¹¹ Though Soviet attempts to thaw relations with the Yugoslavs began within mere months of Stalin's death, for nearly two years Tito remained wary of his erstwhile ally. However, by the spring of 1955, the situation would drastically change.

In the midst of his struggle for power within the Politburo, Khrushchev used the Yugoslav question to exert renewed leverage against his chief rivals within the ruling troika, Vyacheslav Molotov and Georgy Malenkov (both former members of Stalin's innermost circle). By boldly calling for reconciliation with Tito, Khrushchev simultaneously cemented his position as a leading Soviet statesman as well as a reformer willing to revise Stalin's political order. Staking a great deal on his claim to be able to bring Yugoslavia back into the fold, in the spring of 1955 Khrushchev agreed to fly to Belgrade for a summit with Tito. The resulting joint-resolution of these talks, known as the Belgrade Declaration, was an exceptional document in the course of Soviet diplomacy. Not only did it lay the framework for the further normalization of diplomatic relations between the two states, but also asserted both parties' "respect for the sovereignty, independence, integrity, and for equality among states in their mutual relations" no matter their "internal structure, differences of social systems and differences of concrete forms in developing socialism." Khrushchev's implicit recognition of a separate, national Yugoslav "path to socialism" marked the first hints of de-Stalinization in the international arena, which he would later make explicit in his infamous "secret speech" at the Twentieth Party Congress.⁹¹²

⁹¹¹ See Lorraine M. Lees, *Keeping Tito Afloat: The United States, Yugoslavia, and the Cold War*, (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997),

⁹¹² For more, see again Cotton, "Marshalling Tito." In that essay, I have argued that the rehabilitation of Tito was an important and often overlooked aspect of de-Stalinization in the realm of foreign policy, which had profound implications for Khrushchev's political ambitions at home.

The culmination of Tito's rehabilitation—when Soviet-Yugoslav relations were arguably at their closest since 1945 and as they would be for the remainder of the Cold War—would lead Khrushchev to invite the Yugoslav President on a highly publicized tour of the Soviet Union in the summer of 1956.⁹¹³ As part of the multi-city tour, Khrushchev would bring Tito to Stalingrad, the city bearing the name of a man who had tried to destroy him. Despite the defamation campaign that had been drummed into observers for half a decade, Tito remained a figure of popular adoration from the tales of his heroic leadership of Yugoslav partisans during World War II. The reception of Tito highlights the limits of Soviet propaganda and the ability of the Soviet people to critically process information—despite the tales that Tito was a secret fascist in the employ of the West that became the official “reality” from 1948-53.⁹¹⁴ The image of a partisan commander driving the Nazis from his homeland still resonated with the Soviet people, particularly the citizens of Stalingrad.

When Yugoslav president and his entourage arrived at the city's train station on the morning of June 11, 1956, he received a hero's reception. An estimated crowd of around one hundred thousand *Stalingradtsy* gathered to greet the Tito and Khrushchev, waving banners that read “long live the unbreakable fraternal friendship & close fellowship between the peoples of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia” and “Warm greetings to the President, Comrade Tito!” A huge portrait of Lenin (not Stalin) was hung from the station's clock tower, and a color guard was present to play the states' anthems as the visiting retinue emerged. Addressing the assembly first was the Chairman of the Committee of the Stalingrad City Soviet, A. V. Dynkin. Dynkin

⁹¹³ The unrest in Hungary later this same summer, including an episode where the popular national leader Imre Nagy was kidnapped from the Yugoslav embassy in Budapest as Warsaw Pact troops suppressed the attempted Hungarian Revolution, meant much of the goodwill built on this trip between the two leaders would quickly unravel.

⁹¹⁴ Ibid.

told the crown how pleased he was to “wholeheartedly welcome you to our city, against the walls of which a decisive blow was dealt against the fascist troops.” He went on to declare that “the people of Stalingrad, like all Soviet people, are happy to draw closer with your countries. We invite you to become familiar with our city. Everywhere you wish to visit you will find a warm, cordial welcome.”⁹¹⁵

The mood from the outset was one of warm solidarity, and the willingness to avoid the subject of Stalin evident. If the gathered audience hoped to hear more of the causes of the feud between their two countries that had still been raging just a few years prior, they would be dashed as Tito himself would then take the podium. He conveyed that he and his comrades were “glad to have the opportunity to come to the hero city that dealt the first resolute blow to the fascist invaders. To us in Yugoslavia, the history of this historic struggle is well known! For then we were within the fascist fortress, we watched the heroic struggle that was taking place here, in this city. The victory in this city, the defeat of the fascist troops, was a tremendous morale boost for us, as we fought against the same enemy. We came here to witness the tremendous successes you have achieved after the Second World War! With great ecstasy, we saw here that in the short time of just a few years you have managed to create a new city on the same place the old one once stood.” He compared the struggle the *Stalingradtsy* faced to the plight of his own people: “Our country was terribly ruined, but we rebuilt her, built new factories and industries, a new life! Yugoslavia, in times of peace and in times of war, goes shoulder to shoulder with the Soviet people toward our one and only goal: toward the victory of socialism!”⁹¹⁶

⁹¹⁵ “Tovarishchi Iosip Broz Tito, N. C. Khrushchev, i A. I. Mikoian v Stalingrade,” *Stalingradskaya pravda*, June 12, 1956, 1.

⁹¹⁶ “Rech tovarishcha Iosip Broz Tito,” *Stalingradskaya pravda*, June 12, 1956, 1.



Митинг на привокзальной площади. Справа: товарищ Носен Ефим Титов у микрофона.

Фото В. Сметаникова.

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Khrushchev, who made the final address of the morning, echoed similar themes: “the people survived living in Stalingrad during the war, and the workers of Yugoslavia survived these same hardships. The Soviet troops fought heroically against fascism. We know how heroically the partisans of Yugoslavia, organized by the leadership of the Communist Party headed by our friend Tito, fought against fascism. Long live the friendship of the peoples of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia!”⁹¹⁷ Conspicuously absent from the address of either man was any mention of Stalin (other, of course, than in mentioning the city’s name). Far from regarding this ceremony as the simple pomp and flowery language of the average diplomatic visit, I argue that this careful narrative put forward by Khrushchev and Tito at Stalingrad was a conscious first

⁹¹⁷ Ibid, Photographs by V. Smetanikova. Top: Khrushchev and Tito exit the Train Station. Bottom: a crowd assembled for the speeches of the visiting dignitaries.

⁹¹⁸ “Rech’ tovarishcha N. S. Khrushcheva,” *Stalingradskaya pravda*, June 12, 1956, 1.

effort to de-Stalinize the narrative of the war, by reducing Soviet supreme role as liberators and focusing on the shared struggle of the people, rather than parties.

This goal was a pressing one for both leaders, but particularly Khrushchev, as he sought to reconsolidate Eastern Europe around a more accommodating message of socialist solidarity in order to attract the newly decolonized nations of the emerging “Third World” to the Soviet camp. For Tito, his relationship with the Soviets was still on unsure ground. Despite Khrushchev’s overtures and concessions, there was little to lose in the rehabilitation of his image in the brotherhood of People’s Democracies, but much to gain (especially as he could use any promises of aid from the Soviets to extract greater concessions from the West as they tried to keep the socialist bloc fractured). The city served too, as the perfect backdrop for Khrushchev to try to solidify his personal connection with the Yugoslav president. During the course of the day, it was reported that Khrushchev and the commander of the Stalingrad Military District, Marshal Andrei I. Yeremenko, regaled Tito with stories of the defense of the city, as the men had served together here during its defense. The delegation toured Stalingrad in an open convertible, with both leaders easily recognizable to the onlookers lining the streets on their route.⁹¹⁹

The delegation worked their way from the train station in the city center to the north. They visited the site of Dom Pavlova, and together then both men would together climb the face of Mamayev Kurgan to lay a wreath at the then (relatively) modest memorial that stood there honoring the fallen heroes of Stalingrad. Other stops on their route included STZ and a boat trip to the site of the Kuibyshev dam, which at this point had yet to span the Volga.

⁹¹⁹ “Tovarishchi Iosip Broz Tito, N. C. Khrushchev, i A. I. Mikoian v Stalingrad,” 1.



Фото А. Монько и А. Манлещова.

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Notably, this route took them in the opposite direction of the Volga-Don Canal, which was undoubtedly another tourist hotspot in the years immediately following its opening. Though I have yet to uncover documentation of how this visit was planned, it is possible to speculate that this decision by the Soviet hosts was to avoid any discomfort for Tito at the site of the massive statue of Stalin that still stood atop its plinth at the mouth of the canal at this time. In addition, along their carefully planned route, which kept to the Central District and along the main drag of Prospect Lenina, the crisp facades of newly completed buildings and those still in progress spoke to a city on the mend. Still, this was less than fifteen years after the battle had concluded, and these views would have looked radically different just a few years short of a decade later when Castro paid his visit. In 1956, there would have still been an unmistakable amount of uncleared rubble to serve as a stark reminder of the fighting that had taken place.

Regardless of the leadership's rationale for the day's narrative, the people of Stalingrad proved an extraordinarily accommodating audience. The crowds that mobbed Tito at the rail station persisted throughout the day, as word of the entourage's movements were relayed by word of mouth. The genuine admiration for Tito far surpassed the state's ability to manufacture adoration, and the crowds that organically formed would pose a challenge to the city's police

⁹²⁰ Photographer A. Mon'ko i A. Makletsova, *Stalingradskaja pravda*, June 13, 1956, 2. Left: Tito, Khrushchev, and Mikoyan aboard the river steamship "Aleksandr Polezhaev," Right: Tito, Khrushchev, and the director of Stalingradgidrostroy, Aleksandrov, examine a model of the future outlet sluice for the hydroelectric station.

forces. Their acceptance of Tito as a comrade, despite years of official abuse in the media, points to both the ability of Soviet subjects to critically analyze the narratives they consumed and the strength of the narrative of solidarity now placed before them. It did not hurt, of course, that Tito was an extremely charismatic man and a renowned public speaker capable of addressing those gathered in their native tongue (which he learned while being trained in the Soviet Union as part of the Comintern's Stalinist party-building initiative of the 1930s). Yet the narrative of this shared revolutionary identity, of peoples united in struggle against a common enemy and toward a common goal, was amplified by Stalingrad's prestige as the city that turned the tide of the war in which Soviets and Yugoslavs were last allied. The rituals observed by the Soviet and Yugoslav leadership that visited that day created a universal language of grief, resilience, and victory, which could be shared by all, regardless of one's past relation to Stalinist power structures.

The State Visit of Fidel Castro: Hero of the Cuban Revolution

When Khrushchev next returned to the city, his guest had much less diplomatic baggage and even bigger celebrity. In the 1950s, a young Cuban revolutionary had been operating at large across Latin America, adapting the tenets of Marxism to fight against American imperialism that held the region firmly in its grip. After finally toppling the U.S. backed Cuban dictator Fulgencia Bautista, Fidel Castro and his brother Raul, along with comrade Che Guevara, established a socialist republic on the island just a scant 90 miles from American shores. The surprising success of Castro's revolution caught both the Americans and Soviets unawares—though the Soviets would be quick to offer their support just as the Americans rushed to quash the Marxist insurgency. After the fragile Cuban state weathered the disastrously bungled Bay of Pigs

invasion in 1961, Castro would accept the Soviet's offer to transfer nuclear arms to the island as a deterrent against American aggression, which ultimately saw one of the most terrifying tests of Cold War diplomacy under the threat of nuclear war.⁹²¹

While Khrushchev had ultimately backed down in the Cuban Missile Crisis, tarnishing his leadership's image at home, Castro remained a revolutionary darling across the socialist world. The handsome young statesman was brash in his stand against the massive might of the United States, and his speeches enthralled crowds with his message against the forces of global imperialism. Politically weakened by the strains of de-Stalinization, economic struggles, and mounting challenges by the conservative wing of the party, Khrushchev reached out to the Cuban leader with an invitation to tour the Soviet Union in hopes of bolstering his own popularity, a much-needed victory lap as enthusiasm for his reforms was sagging. The tour would present an opportunity to affirm the mission of the revolution and the historic mission of the party and invite a welcome diversion from the problems facing his administration. It would also add another chapter to the city's storied historical memory.

As we shall see, the ritual of the visit would follow much of the same paths of Tito and even Nehru before him, yet in the intervening eight years the backdrop of the city had fundamentally changed. The memorial complex atop Mamayev Kurgan was still being built, but the Hydroelectric station was completed, no longer a construction site but a living monument to Soviet engineering. When Fidel Castro arrived in Volgograd on May 7, 1963, the day would proceed remarkably like that of Tito's visit seven years earlier, though on an even grander scale.

⁹²¹ See A. A. Fursenko and Timothy J Naftali, *One Hell of a Gamble : Khrushchev, Castro, and Kennedy, 1958-1964* (New York: Norton, 1997), Jonathan Colman, *The Cuban Missile Crisis: Origins, Course and Aftermath* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), and Alice George, *The Cuban Missile Crisis: The Threshold of Nuclear War*, (United Kingdom: Routledge, 2013).

Instead of arriving by train, Khrushchev and the young Castro flew into Volgograd's new airport, where thousands of *Volgogradsty* were waiting to welcome him among the pomp of flags, portraits of the two leaders, banners reading "Welcome, dear Cuban friends!" and "Greetings, Courageous fighter for the Freedom and Happiness of the Cuban People, Fidel Castro," and chants of "Viva Castro!" The entourage was received by the first secretaries of the Volgograd Industrial and Agricultural committees, as well as the Chairman of the City Soviet's Executive Committee, Sergei Krylov. A military band blared out the Soviet and Cuban national anthems, while brigades of Pioneers gave their guests flowers and Castro conducted an honorary review of the guard.⁹²²



На аэродроме. Выступает Фидель Кастро. Рус.

Фото Л. КУКАНОВА и В. РОЛДУГИНА. 923

Krylov was the first to address the assembled crowd: "We have sincerely been anticipating your arrival. The workers of our city will give the ambassadors of the Island of Freedom the most cordial and welcoming reception, expressing our admiration for the courage and perseverance of the Cuban people and their accomplishments, so understood in the hearts of

⁹²² "Kube, Fidel Castro-Slava!: Vozhd' kubinskogo naroda v serdechnykh ob"iatiiakh volgogradtsev!" *Volgogradskaya pravda*, May 7, 1963.

⁹²³ Photograph by L. Kukanova and V. Roldugina, *ibid.* Castro addresses the crowd gathered to welcome him at the airport.

the Soviet people.” Krylov continued to evoke the citizenry in his praise of the Cuban revolutionaries: “Near to us is the historic Island of Freedom, its revolutionary spirit, its aspirations. After all, twenty years ago, here on the banks of the Volga within the walls of our city we claimed victory over the dark forces of aggression. Waiting for you, dear Fidel, are Volgogradtsy who love you. They open their souls to introduce you to our lives, labors, studies, and recreations.”⁹²⁴ The adoration of the people of Volgograd became part of the narrative, as preserving the legacy of the city’s role in the most decisive battle of the Great Patriotic War was their responsibility, a connection that by all accounts seems genuine rather than manufactured. The mystique of the young revolutionary, still reveling in his own romantic victory, was quite compelling.

Castro would respond (unlike Tito, he addressed the crowd through a translator) with equal warmth for his hosts and their accomplishments: “It is a great joy to visit Volgograd, whose great history is well known. We have heard of the developments of your city, about your huge victories achieved in the realms of economic development, in culture. We know that the inhabitants of this city are not able to do otherwise—for they will always be accompanied by victory! We see the same heroism at work as that which was shown during the Great Patriotic War.”⁹²⁵

Castro’s short address here is remarkable, as already he was using his praise of the city to both extoll the heroism of the city’s defenders, but also suggest that they were now a notably peace-time city. In accepting his praise as a leader of the new generation of revolutionary fighters, he was also subtly suggesting that the frontlines in this global struggle have shifted away from Europe, while the “Third World” had become the main theater. The great threat that

⁹²⁴ Ibid.

⁹²⁵ Ibid.

faced the cause of world socialism no longer stemmed from European fascism, but from the worldwide ambitions of the United States. Castro's experience of fighting American imperialism in Latin America and throughout the Cuban revolution was as instrumental in shaping his worldview as the fight against Hitler was for Tito or Khrushchev. While the battlegrounds were different, the lessons were the same; veterans of two vastly different campaigns were able to feel as though they were a part of the same struggle. However, as Castro would continue to make clear during his trip, Cuba's communists were the ones currently serving as the vanguard of the revolution, while the Soviets as a Cold War superpower now fulfilled a much different role.

Castro's visit to the city mirrored Tito's in a number of ways, particularly the sites which the delegation would choose to visit. The day began laying wreaths at one of the city's many common graves where the defenders of the "Hero City" are buried, and from there the entourage made a trip to the memorial at Mamayev Kurgan, at the time still in the early stages of construction.⁹²⁶

⁹²⁶ "Druzhba! Bratstvo! Solidarnost'!: Gorod-geroi burno rukopleshchet Fidelio Castro," *Volgogradskaya pravda*, May 8, 1963, 1.



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After fulfilling their obligatory tributes to the city's mythology, the delegation proceeded to visit some of the city's premier industries, to the Tractor Factory to see the latest models coming off the line, and the now operational hydroelectric plant, named in honor of the 22nd Party Congress. Finally, the delegation heads for the city's Central Stadium, its construction completed just a year prior. According to the party press, some sixty thousand *Volgogradtsy* were recorded in attendance, piling into both the stands and the field to hear the Cuban leader speak.⁹²⁸ After hearing from several exemplary members of the public—a “hero of Soviet labor,” a professor at the city's medical institute, a mechanic of agricultural machinery, and an award-winning student of the pedagogical institute—Castro took to the podium.

By all accounts the speech that followed was a crowd pleaser, and the Cuban leader often had to halt his speech to wait for the raucous applause to die down. With every line, Castro stoked his audience's fervor:

⁹²⁷ Left: Photograph by L. Kukanova and V Roldugina, *ibid*, Castro holding two local children in front of “Stand to Death” on Mamayev Kurgan. Right: Castro tours the statues bordering the reflecting pool below the rotunda and empty plinth at the summit of Mamayev Kurgan,

⁹²⁸ “Druzhba! Bratstvo! Solidarnost’!: Gorod-geroi burno rukopleshchet Fideliu Castro,” *Volgogradskaya pravda*, May 8, 1963, 1.

We will always remember the distinguished role of the heroic defenders of Stalingrad... not only in their resistance to and victory over fascism, because they have bequeathed to humanity an immortal example that history will forever include in its textbooks! Volgograd is a courageous city. This is an example of heroism, an example of patriotism, an example of solidarity, and perseverance of the will. History should forever celebrate this great example of the heroism of your city! Your example will always be a symbol for patriots struggling in all corners of the world. And we Cubans, when we came up against hardship and dangerous situations, when we are being threatened with aggression, when we think about how our enemies may attack with superior force, we always say ‘we will protect every city, every street, every apartment, every house, every building, like the historic figures of Volgograd! At this dangerous moment for our homeland, your example has given us strength, served to support us, and given us inspiration!’⁹²⁹

Even while Castro recalled the past, he kept his audience enthralled with his bravery and that of the Cuban people in the face of the grim realities of the present. Even as he spoke of the battle that decided World War II, he reminded his audience that the greatest battle was far from over.

Castro continued to extoll the virtues of the city’s defenders and their role in the grand narrative of war, but eventually turned his praises toward the city’s peacetime accomplishments, and his ire toward the United States and its allies: “Reactionaries of all stripes, imperialists, even now, even forty-five years after the revolution, continue to level lies and slander against the Soviet Union. They try to hide your victories and achievements, try to hide from the eyes and ears of other peoples, all that you have done and what might yet be done. And how wonderful would it be if the working people of the capitalist countries could see what we saw, could it be that we feel the same when we see your life, your growth, the strength and the spirit of your people?”⁹³⁰ Indeed, the slander leveled against the Soviet people stemmed from the same aggressive imperialism of the United States, the biggest threat to Cuba’s fledgling revolution. “For us Cubans, who inherited a very poor country without industry... The capitalists, like birds

⁹²⁹ Ibid.

⁹³⁰ Ibid.

of prey, tore away the wealth of our country, which had been created by its people. American imperialists for fifty years exploited the Cuban people, plundered us, and plunged us into poverty. And after this they blockaded Cuba, created all sorts of difficulties, and threatened our existence. The great lesson for the whole world was that a country very far from the island where our revolution took place became the first to show solidarity with us, helping us stand before the attacks and blockade of imperialism. This is a valuable lesson, and a great truth.” At this, the stadium exploded in applause.⁹³¹



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While Castro’s “great truth” cast the Soviets and Cubans as allies in the revolutionary struggle, along with all countries who might follow their example, he continued to drive home that it must be recognized that the Soviet Union was no longer facing the same threats that his people now faced. After praising the completion of the city’s hydroelectric power station, Castro reveals to his audience that the plant has the capacity to output five times as much electricity as that which can be produced across all of Cuba. The message, of course, is clear—to do their part in sustaining the revolution, the Soviets must now act to help its revolutionary brethren achieve the same success. It was not enough to rest on the laurels of their victory twenty years prior, as

⁹³¹ Ibid.

⁹³² Photographer A. Mon’ko, A. Iantskii, *ibid*, Castro’s speech delivered to a full-capacity crowd at Volgograd’s Central Stadium.

the battle still raged on—“let the *Volgogradtsy* serve as an example for the workers of the world to attain victory!”⁹³³

While Castro uses the “lessons” of the city’s defense to rile up the home crowd, he is also very subtly co-opting the Soviet war myth to romanticize and add to the prestige of his own revolution. This trip to Volgograd was an opportunity for the Cuban leader to connect his own successful revolution on an island a hemisphere away to arguably the most important military victory of the twentieth century. Khrushchev, on the other hand, had found a way to once again put the city once known as Stalingrad back on the world stage, if only for a moment. In addition to highlighting the city as a Soviet success story, it served as an affirmation that despite the fact the name had changed, the importance of the city in the memory of both the Union and the world had not been diminished.

The De-Stalinized “Hero City”: Mamayev Kurgan opens to the Public

Despite his years of oversight of the project over the course of his time as Premier, Khrushchev would not return to the city for one of the biggest events in the city’s postwar history: the completion and opening of the Mamayev Kurgan memorial park to the public in 1967. That event would be overseen by his replacement, Leonid Brezhnev, who became the new representative of the conservative collective leadership atop the party in 1964.

The park was set to open as part of ongoing celebration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Soviet victory at Stalingrad, and the buildup to the fanfare surrounding this event essentially acted as an unveiling of both the new and improved war myth of Stalingrad and the new collective identity for residents of the “Hero City” of Volgograd. The run-up to the 1967 opening

⁹³³ Ibid.

saw an unprecedented amount of fanfare even within the pages of the party press, with nearly daily stories in *Volgogradskaia pravda* counting down the weeks until the ceremony that would officially christen the park.

On October 1, 1967, a piece penned by Vuchetich himself would give the artist a direct line to local residents to elaborate on his designs and the themes the memorial would explore. Never one to back away from the significance of his own work, Vuchetich argued that “the creation of the Volgograd ensemble was extremely important due to the fact that it was located on a historical site, precisely where the most intense part of the event to which it was dedicated took place. The monument was supposed to resurrect the images of those who stood here to their death. And although this event is separated from our days by more than two decades, we wanted to talk about it as if on behalf of the participants in the events depicted, to perpetuate the images of the heroes for future generations.” The space, he says, was meant to invite audience participation, with spaces dedicated for the laying of wreaths, flowers, and other tokens. He also thanks the thousands of Volgograd laborers, engineers, and public figures who helped bring the project into being, and to the people of Volgograd in whose veins “run the waters of the Volga.” Vuchetich is thrilled by the prospect that soon “endless streams of people” will come here “to bow to the graves and pay tribute to the memory of those who have been immortalized.”⁹³⁴

Shortly after Vuchetich’s piece ran, after nearly a decade of construction, the slopes of Mamayev Kurgan fell silent. No longer did the rumble of trucks, the swinging of hammers, or the sight of cranes break the still reverence of the memorial site. The scaffolding around *Rodina Mat’* was removed, and for the first time her iconic silhouette could be seen rising above the city’s skyline for kilometers around. The artists and engineers involved in the project marveled at

⁹³⁴ E. Vuchetich, “S Vershiny kurgana,” *Volgogradskaia pravda*, October 1, 1967, 2.

what they accomplished. Chief engineer of Volgogradgidrostroy Yuri S. Abramov who oversaw the team of carpenters, concrete workers, welders, crane operators, and engineers who worked on the monument could not help but boast of his team's ingenuity in putting together such a complex structure. He recalls "every day, every hour, there were surprises. They laid in wait for the builders in a complex labyrinth of hundreds of intertwining threads of reinforced iron, deep in the ground where the foundation lay, and thousands of other places. The engineers had to be constantly alert. They overcame the unexpected with knowledge, intelligence, experience, resourcefulness, and collective creativity." They knew they could not fail in their task, and the team held themselves to the highest standards of quality as "all the builders understood perfectly well that in constructing the monument-ensemble, it is necessary to work especially conscientiously," since their work must properly reflect the glory of the feats of heroism that took place here.⁹³⁵

In the weeks leading up to the official ceremony, articles continued to highlight various parts of the memorial complex, going into detail the stories of their construction and the historical narratives that inspired them. In familiarizing readers with the complex itself, the war myth was retold in memetic fashion, each piece reinforcing the others. There were stories about soldiers whose visages had been immortalized in the Wall Ruins. Another piece detailed the story of a new composition in honor of Margarita Sergeeva, the nineteen-year-old nurse turned fighter from Stalingrad, whose likeness was used for "Mother's Sorrow," a massive rendition of a woman holding the corpse of a fallen soldier evocative of the *pieta*. A nearby birch tree marked her grave on the slope, the young sapling "grows up slender and tender, like a girl, like one whose image, never dying, lives in the hearts of the people."⁹³⁶ *Volgogradtsy* were invited to

⁹³⁵ Iu. Baranov, "Na Mamaevom kurgane tishina...", *Volgogradskaia pravda*, October 4, 1967, 2.

⁹³⁶ L. Merinova, "Rastet ural'skaia berezka," *Volgogradskaia pravda*.

walk the park's slopes and see for themselves the honor the memorial bestowed on their city. Special tours were organized for veterans' groups, members of the press, and other notable figures.



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On October 13th, *Volgogradtsy* had the chance to hear the impressions of one of the city's legends, Alexandra Cherkasova herself. Cherkasova joined a group of veteran officers from the 284th Infantry Division who had fought on these very slopes, along with former war correspondent Yuri A. Levin. As they toured the facility, the group shared their reminiscences of their experience of the battle. Levin remembers sharing meals with famed Red Army journalist Vasily Grossman alongside soldiers in the shadow of the hill when it was in the hands of the Germans. Cherkasova recalls that her house during the battle sat at the very foot of the hill, near a spring close to the factory "Metiz." She recalls the day in September 1942 when a shell fired from the hill killed two of her neighbors and the fear they felt when they knew the hill was in German hands. Cherkasova and others moved out of their houses and into a series of dug outs

⁹³⁷ Ibid, photo uncredited.

where they stayed until the end of the battle, taking care of the neighborhood children and praying for the Red Army to bring their salvation.

Cherkasova and her sister had already returned once to plant flowers well off the main path of the monument in roughly the area where their dugout had sat, in remembrance of those of their neighbors who did not survive that impossible winter. She tells the group that “this is where our gap was, but now it’s a grave. Seven people are buried. I remember some of the names - Lavel, Fedya, Sasha... I forgot the names. Can you really remember everyone?... but when I remember things, it touches my heart. Does Mamayev truly hold such power itself?” Standing atop the hill beside the mass grave, Cherkasova remarked that it was if images of those days came flooding back to her: “I look, and before my eyes are those soldiers: how they were in sheepskin coats, fur coats, *ushankas*, some sitting, some leaning on the parapet, appearing so alive. Yet if you move to touch them, the vision fades. We buried them here. [...] So much blood has been shed for this earth!”⁹³⁸



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⁹³⁸ B. Sapov, “Veterany srazheniia na kurgane,” *Volgogradskaia pravda*, October 13, 1967, 2.

⁹³⁹ Ibid, photo by V. Roldugin, Cherkasova third from the left, Levin far right.

At last, the ceremonial day arrived. On Sunday, October 15, Leonid Brezhnev, along with a host of top-ranking CPSU and military officials, descended on Volgograd along with throngs of veterans and crowds from all across the city and Soviet Union. The day was designed to both commemorate and consecrate the heroic victory at Stalingrad, while also projecting the Red Army's current military might. Festivities began at the Square of Fallen Fighters, where speakers addressed the thronging crowds, and a military parade allowed heroes of the Second World War to conduct an honorary inspection of the guard and the Red Army showcased its latest military hardware.⁹⁴⁰ The spectacle then moved to Mamayev Kurgan itself, where grandstands had been set up along the reflecting pool outside the rotunda to hold the thousands of spectators. Here the final speeches were made by party officials, the memorial's biggest proponents and project managers, and famous figures of the city's war myth.⁹⁴¹

Brezhnev was the first to speak, using his address to laud the historic importance of the battle, but also make a defiant statement about the Soviet Union's current struggle against the forces of the capitalist West. The themes of his speech, much like Castro's six years prior, tied the legacy of the battle to the existential struggle the communist party still faced. "This monument," he declared "is a tribute to heroes—to the sons and daughters of the Soviet motherland, who stood their ground, and through their selfless courage, won victory with their blood. Here, on this earth, they turned the course of fate, forcing it from darkness to light, from enslavement to freedom, and from death to life."⁹⁴²

⁹⁴⁰ "Gori, vechnyi ogon' zhizni!," *Volgogradskaiia pravda*, October 16, 1967, 2.

⁹⁴¹ "Liudi zemli, pomnite!," *Volgogradskaiia pravda*, October 16, 1967, 2.

⁹⁴² "Rech' tovarishcha L. I. Brezhneva," *Volgogradskaiia pravda*, October 16, 1967, 1-2.

From the hilltop, he invited spectators to look out over the city around them at the achievements of the last twenty-five years of efforts to return the city to life. Brezhnev cast the restored city itself is a monument, a testament to repay those who laid down their lives:

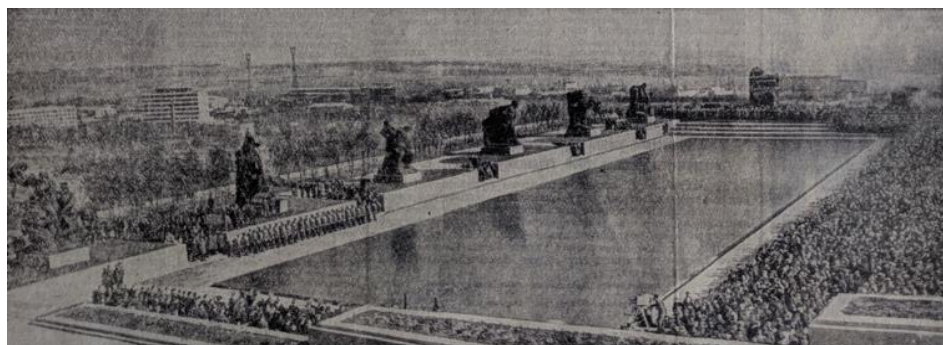
We appeal to those who were destined to die: sleep well, heroes of Stalingrad. Millions of hands have picked up your banner and are carrying it forward to communism! Where there were ruins and ashes, a bright and joyful city grew up—a city of wide embankments and avenues immersed in greenery, modern plants and factories. New Volgograd is also a monument to our victory—victory in peaceful labor, victory in creation.⁹⁴³

After lauding the various achievements of the city, including the Volga-Don Canal and the Hydroelectric Station, Brezhnev inevitably turned to a warning, that the peace so hard won by the heroes of the Second World War remained under threat:

The US criminal aggression against Vietnam continues. And in other places on earth, blood is being shed by peoples upon whom the imperialists are trying to impose their rule by force, threatening to plunge humanity into a new world war. We cannot allow this! The Communist Party and the Soviet government are doing everything to ensure the defense of our indestructible Motherland. The power of the community of socialist countries will always be an insurmountable barrier in the way of lovers of military adventures. We are confident in our abilities, we are confident in our future, and confident in the victory of Communism!

His address was met with thunderous applause, with further praises sung to the defenders of the city, the living and the dead, as well as the future generations who would come, the “grandchildren and great-grandchildren” to continue to honor the legacy of the war.

⁹⁴³ Ibid.



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Others featured to address the crowd included the heroic Sergeant Yakov Pavlov, who found it hard to express the emotions and excitement he felt in this historic moment, but nonetheless expressed his thanks to all his fallen comrades as well as those who continued to live on and make such a masterwork possible.⁹⁴⁵ His sentiments were echoed by General Chuikov, who had been with the project since its inception, who thanked all of the workers, veterans, and artists who had helped shape the project and make it a reality.⁹⁴⁶

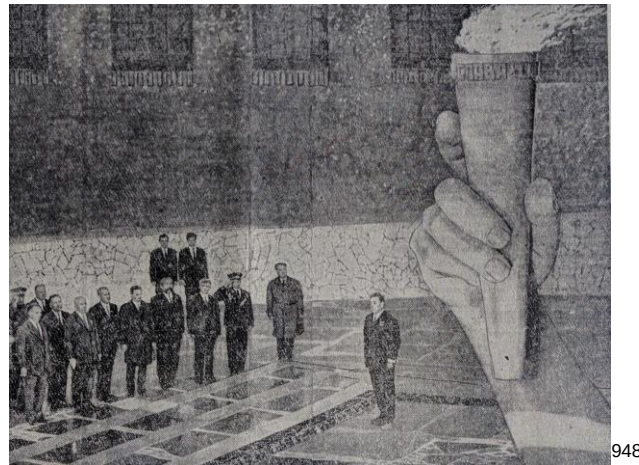
One figure, however, remained notably absent in the praise given. Outside the name of the Battle itself, echoed countless times throughout the speeches of the day, no thought was given to the head of the Soviet army during the war. Stalin had been removed from the memory of the Battle of Stalingrad. Chuikov offered an alternate rhetorical strategy, instead arguing that it was in fact Lenin who gave the fighters at Stalingrad the strength to overcome the fascist invaders: “We, living participants in the battles for Stalingrad, testify that here our soldiers knew no fear in battle, did not retreat before death, fought with such determination that even the dead did not let go of their weapons, and the slain fell with their heads to the west. This is how the Leninist party raised us, this is how we fulfilled the task set by our Motherland. This was not blind execution of orders, as spiteful bourgeois historians are trying to claim, but deep

⁹⁴⁴ V. Smetannikova, “Ploshchad’ geroev pamiatnika-ansambliia na mamaevom kurgane vo vremia mitinga.” *Volgogradskaiia pravda*, October 16, 1967, p. 2.

⁹⁴⁵ “Rech’ Ia. F. Pavlova,” *Volgogradskaiia pravda*, October 16, 1967, 2.

⁹⁴⁶ “Rech’ V. I. Chuikova,” *Volgogradskaiia pravda*, October 16, 1967, 2.

remembering of the historical mission, a high consciousness of the duty of a patriot of the Land of the Soviets.”⁹⁴⁷ By tying the legacy of the fighters to Lenin rather than Stalin, Chuikov, a product of the Stalinist military, was preserving his own legacy as well.



Chuikov remained a remarkable figure in the history of Mamayev Kurgan. During the time he consulted on the project, he remained the Commander-in-Chief of the Soviet armed ground forces. However, in the age of atomic weapons, which had necessitated a strategic shift toward Soviet air and sea power, another land war on the scale of the struggle against the fascist invaders seemed less likely. By the time of the park’s opening, the legendary general’s fighting days were behind him, but the memorial became a mission to which he attached great meaning and devoted a fair amount of his energy in his attempts to see it done right. When the Marshall finally died in 1982, he would be interred beneath a marble gravestone along the switchback path leading to the crest of the hill, laid to rest in the very shadow of *Radina mat’*.⁹⁴⁹ Though he may not have realized it at the time, Marshall Chuikov was helping to design his own cemetery plot. Many of the notable figures involved in the Battle who were in attendance that day would

⁹⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁴⁸ Photo by I. Surovtseva, V. Roldugina. “Vechnyi ogon’ v zale voinskoi slavi na mamaevom kurgane zazhzen.” *Volgogradskaya pravda*, October 16, 1967, p. 3.

⁹⁴⁹ Eremenko’s remains, on the other hand, are interred in the Kremlin wall in Moscow. See Palmer, “How the Myth was Made,” 394.

eventually be returned for their final rest, their tombstones lining the path of the final approach to the summit of the hill above the cupola.

With the ceremony complete, the memorial complex at Mamayev Kurgan took its place as the most sacred site of the war myth in the city (and perhaps, one could contend, in the whole of the Soviet Union). Though Stalin had been scrubbed from his place as the supreme commander whose genius turned the tide of war, to say the war myth was completely “de-Stalinized” would be a misnomer. From Vuchetitch’s monumental, neo-classical sensibilities to the near deification of the memory of the defenders who died in the city, the memorial complex was the embodiment of well-established Stalinist tropes. Still, Khrushchev’s ability to separate Stalin from the war myth even in name was its own accomplishment, even if the rest of the trappings of the war myth he inherited from his predecessor proved valuable to the Soviet nation building project in the postwar era.

Conclusions

Though the image of the Motherland towering from atop Mamayev Kurgan was and remains one of the most iconic physical embodiments of the war myth in Volgograd, it is not alone. Countless other markers tie the history of the city together, like threads spider-webbing out from a central point, all important parts of the larger whole. As *Rodina mat’* slowly came together, Volgograd had become a city of monuments large and small, of tombstones and memorials of all shapes and sizes. The corridors of the city’s streets led visitors and city-dwellers from one exhibit to the next in one great outdoor museum, so that no one might forget the sacrifices that had been made here that fateful winter of 1942-43.

As we have seen, the mythmaking around the Battle of Stalingrad began almost immediately and remained a priority of three generations of Soviet leadership. Under Stalin, the Battle was inevitably linked to the personality cult of the Generalissimo, the victory at the city bearing his name the result of his strategic cunning and the devotion of the Soviet people to their leader. As Khrushchev pursued de-Stalinization, extricating Stalin from the myth of the battle would include removing the former leader's name from the city itself, even as his vision to expand and entrench the legend of the "Hero City" would reach well beyond even the massive Stalinist projects of his predecessor. Brezhnev continued their work to further connect the war myth to the core of Soviet identity, with Volgograd given special honor even among the storied ranks of hero cities. The party understood propagation of the war myth was instrumental to the preservation of Soviet power: it was a means to unite the Soviet citizens with the state in common objectives against common enemies. Neither Stalin nor his successors could have foreseen that, ultimately, the war myth they helped recreate would outlive the Soviet state entirely, providing a valuable rhetorical framework for the post-Soviet Russian Republic to pursue its own aims.⁹⁵⁰

The project to construct the legend of the battle was multifaceted, spanning the mediums of the arts, film, architecture, urban design, and historical preservation. The amount of funding and labor dedicated to constructing the war myth over two decades is incalculable, but we can measure its impact on the built environment of the city itself. The sacred sites of the city, the Square of Fallen Fighters, Lenin Square and Dom Pavlova, and Mamayev Kurgan became fundamental spaces in the lived experience of Stalingrad/Volgograd during this time, and their importance has only continued to grow, rather than diminish. There are countless other memorial

⁹⁵⁰ See Davis, *Myth Making in the Soviet Union and Modern Russia*, Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead*.

sites scattered throughout the city, taking the forms of statues, plaques, plinths, and parks, far too many to cover in this study alone. The city itself has become a massive museum experience, the memetic repetition driving home that while some sites are dedicated to remembrance, the whole of the city is in fact sacred.

Though the war myth has become monolithic in its consistency, its legacy at this time was constantly contested, be it from the highest echelons of Soviet power pursuing their own objectives, or through the work of artists, veterans, and civilians who each wanted to preserve and honor the memory of the city's defenders in their own way. The political struggles between Vuchetich, Chuikov, and Eremenko highlight how divisive these competing visions could be, even as they all ultimately served the same purpose of elevating the war myth in the mind of the public. Even more battles were taking place further removed from the public eye. Vasily Grossman spent years composing his masterwork of literature, *Life and Fate* (*Zhizn i sudba*), to further memorialize the events of the battle, only for Khrushchev's censors to deem the work too subversive, even for the standards of the Thaw.⁹⁵¹

Yet even as the myth was contested, aspects of remembrance were being codified through the ritualization of public spectacle, as the city played host to a never-ending stream of pilgrims who (whether they planned to or not) had to complete the prescribed shows of deference to the city's defenders. These visits, particularly those of international heads of state, where state resources were mobilized to shape the agendas of the day, created a shared understanding of the rhetorical significance of various places to the war myth, reinforcing practices for future visits as

⁹⁵¹ Other scholars have investigated Grossman more thoroughly than I could have here, see Jones, *Myth, Memory, Trauma*, and Ian Roland Garner, *The Myth of Stalingrad in Soviet Literature, 1942-1963* (Ph.D diss.: University of Toronto, 2018), and Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead*.

well as residents of the city itself. These spaces only grew in significance and ritual practice as the built environment grew to match the enormity of what the war myth represented.

For all the hesitance toward Vuchetich's vision for Mamayev Kurgan, it is inarguable that the memorial complex became the defining symbol of the war myth in the city. The colossal size of the statue and its prominent place on one of the highest points in the city mark its rhetorical significance, making it a nearly inescapable part of the experience of the city. The form and silhouette of the statue have become inseparable from the identity of the city, endlessly repeated in images, graphics, tchotchkes, and bumper stickers. The park was nominated for the status of a UNESCO World Heritage site in 2014, as each aspect of the composition "is thoroughly planned, deeply felt and has a constructed ideological and artistic concept, all together telling a vivid and exciting story about the glory of the victorious nation" and "is an outstanding example of monumental art dedicated to the war events and to the memory of the fallen in the devastating wars of the twentieth century." The Russian committee responsible for the nomination argued that the site meets the organization's criteria as "the international importance and the results of the Battle of Stalingrad determined the post-war balance of military and political power in the world."⁹⁵²

As Brezhnev's speech in 1967 shows, *Rodina Mat'* was not to be understood as simply a figure of victory in battle, but a victory of the Soviet people's ingenuity and resilience in rebuilding the city that had been destroyed, an equally legendary and heroic effort. This linking of the war myth with the image of the new modern socialist city was another conscious effort by the party, an attempt to entrench the pride of *Volgogradtsy* to both the battle and their current

⁹⁵² Permanent Delegation of the Russian Federation to UNESCO, "Mamayev Kurgan Memorial Complex 'To the Heroes of the Battle of Stalingrad,'" UNESCO (Tentative Lists), (accessed via <https://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/5936/> on 2/14/2024).

home, even as the legendary name of “Stalingrad” was stripped away. The reconstruction itself became a core part of the city’s international reputation and prestige, proof that Volgograd remained a world-class city with its own place on the global stage. In words of Cuban journalists who visited in 1964 writing for their readers back home, the city was akin to the Phoenix, the legendary firebird which after death is born anew, for “Volgograd did the same, it emerged from the ashes again even more beautiful and stronger than ever.”⁹⁵³

⁹⁵³ Pineiro, “Volgograd-ptitsa feniks.”



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⁹⁵⁴ *Rodina mat'* atop Mamayev Kurgan, looking north toward contemporary Volgograd's Central District (2016). CC BY-SA 3.0, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Motherland_Calls#/](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Motherland_Calls#/media/File:Rodina_mat'_atop_Mamayev_Kurgan.jpg), (accessed 6/14/2024).

Conclusion

When the conservative wing of the Communist Party drove Khrushchev from high office in 1964, the Soviet Union was in a very different situation compared to when he had secured his seat as Premier in 1956. While unwilling to completely remake the civilizational model that had been left to him by Stalin, Khrushchev had spent both his political career and political capital to distinguish his vision for the Soviet Union from that of his predecessor. The process was not uncontested. Challenges both foreign and domestic strained the limits of the state and its economic system, and substantially limited his options of what could realistically be accomplished. De-Stalinization, the combined set of initiatives to dismantle the cult of infallibility around Stalin (and thus give political cover for a rejection of his policies), touched every corner of Soviet life: from the dinner table to the factory floor, from the classroom to the movie theater, and from the collective farm to the city. De-Stalinization was as much as anything a rhetorical campaign to re-frame the way Soviet citizens understood their country and the collective vision of communism the Party proclaimed to be guiding them toward.

Khrushchev's efforts to reshape Soviet civilization were conducted both through a vast series of interwoven state policies: the rationalization of industries, renegotiating the social contract between state and labor, renewed investment in industrial agriculture, educational reform, the “thaw” in official cultural production, the return of private housing, attempting to reign in state bureaucracy, and pursuing a new strategy of international diplomacy around “peaceful competition” with the West. Collectively, they produced something of a hybridization with the Stalinist model he inherited. In agronomy, (a science so pivotal to Khrushchev’s plans), hybridization means to genetically crossbreed a new, more resilient and productive strand of crop by blending traits of each. In arboreal plants, this can occur through the process of grafting, but

amongst seed crops (like corn), this involves growing two strands adjacent to one another and allowing them to cross-pollinate. Either metaphor might be used to understand how post-Stalinist civilization gradually grew out of the Stalinist variant that preceded it.

I argue Khrushchev's proposed vision for the Soviet Union was still very much derived from Stalin's, but with significant alterations: a promise to focus on housing, to create an abundance of consumer goods, and to do away with political terror as a means of social control. As the Stalinist model was altered, this had a significant impact on the way Soviet citizens experienced their lives. While Khrushchev's successors would attempt to scale back some many of his policies, there would be no "de-Khrushchevication."⁹⁵⁵ After they had removed Khrushchev from his role as head of the Party, his conservative rivals would choose to leave the underlying form of his political model intact. While many scholars have pointed to the Brezhnev era as giving birth to the economic mire and social atrophy that would bring the Soviet Union to political crisis down the line, they have also noted that this was a period of stability and relative prosperity. While consumer goods remained scarce, there were no longer periods of famine where large parts of the population went hungry, nor were there the disruptions of mass deportation and state terror. Despite increased dissent and disillusion with the party, there were no revolutionary challenges against its control of society, and therefore none of the economic disruption and social chaos that such events inevitably cause. The next real attempt to meaningfully change post-Stalinist civilization would come from Gorbachev and his attempts at

⁹⁵⁵ Though there were criticisms leveled at Khrushchev that he had been attempting to cultivate his own "cult of personality," these were more an expedient way to justify the political coup that was taking place within party circles. Khrushchev never played the symbolic role Stalin had for the party throughout much of his rule. In Volgograd, for instance, there are no and have never been any Statues of Khrushchev. For more on how Khrushchev's tenure as Premier came to an end, see Khrushchev, *Khrushchev Remembers*, Suny, *The Soviet Experiment*, and William J. Tompson, "The Fall of Nikita Khrushchev" in *Soviet Studies* 43, no. 6 (1991): 1101-1121.

glasnost’ (“openness”) and *perestroika* (“restructuring”).⁹⁵⁶ However, his gamble at reform ultimately failed at the expense of Soviet power. On December 25, 1991, with Gorbachev’s acquiescence, the Soviet Union was split into fifteen new national entities.⁹⁵⁷ For Volgograd, this meant the simultaneous introduction of both Russian nationalism and capitalism. The resultant model, which we might call a “post-Soviet civilization,” has shaped the evolution of the city in its current form.⁹⁵⁸

For generations born in the postwar era, too young to remember the traumas of collectivization, terror, and Nazi occupation, at the time of the Soviet collapse, their experience of post-Stalinist civilization was all the only one they had ever known.⁹⁵⁹ After the economic chaos unleashed by privatization and the political turmoil in Russia through the 1990s, as well as the loss of their country’s prestige and influence on the global stage, there remains amidst segments of the Russian public that holds a nostalgia for post-Stalinist civilization, particularly among those that personally struggled through the Soviet collapse. For all its failings, the stability of Khrushchev’s system, even as it stagnated and decayed under Brezhnev, offered a chance at modernity and prosperity that had remained a far-off promise for the generation who survived the Soviet 1930s-40s. Whether citizens bought into the party’s ideological rhetoric or

⁹⁵⁶ See Suny, *The Soviet Experiment*, Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More*, Jonathan Harris, *Subverting the System: Gorbachev’s Reform of the Party Apparatus, 1986-1991* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004), Valerie Bunce, “Domestic Reform and International Change: The Gorbachev Reforms in Historical Perspective,” in *International Organization* 47, no. 1 (1993): 107-138, Richard Sakwa, *Gorbachev and his Reforms, 1985-1990* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1991).

⁹⁵⁷ For more on the growth of nationalism in Soviet politics under Gorbachev, see Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism and the Collapse of the Soviet Union*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993).

⁹⁵⁸ Historians have offered numerous explanations that explore the multifaceted nature of the failure of the Soviet system. For an economic perspective, see Stephen Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted*. For an anthropological exploration, see Yurchak, *Everything was Forever, Until it was No More*. For more on the strain of the geopolitical power struggle with the United States on Soviet institutions, see Zubok, *A Failed Empire*.

⁹⁵⁹ For more on this generational divide, see Liudmila Alekseeva, *The Thaw Generation: Coming of Age in the Post-Stalin Era* (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh University Press, 1993) and Donald J. Raleigh, *Russia’s Sputnik Generation: Soviet Baby Boomers Talk about Their Lives* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006).

not, the project of building communism offered at least a hope that even greater prosperity was coming.

This study has shown the efforts of both the communist party and the city's residents to restore Soviet civilization at Stalingrad under both Stalin and Khrushchev, and how life in the city was transformed as a result of their efforts. While the approaches and priorities of both leaders were substantially different, it is impossible to fully separate these efforts into two separate projects. Though the methods and goals may have differed, they both contributed toward the same product: a socialist civilization based on the rejection of capitalism.

The planned economy that Stalin had engineered in the 1930s remained both the backbone of the civilizational model and the core limiting factor in how quickly the recovery could proceed following the war under the leadership of both men. State control of economic production and new construction was both a boon and a detriment when tackling a project on the scale of the city's reconstruction. The ability to mobilize mass labor under Stalin through both social and legal coercion in the early years following the battle was the most pressing issue at the time, though as the ruins were cleared away and new building techniques adopted, specialized labor became more necessary. Despite Khrushchev's efforts to rationalize and revitalize the Soviet economy, construction was still limited largely by the country's industrial base to transform raw materials into finished products—the lumber, concrete, steel, piping, and wiring necessary to build modern housing—a problem which was never meaningfully solved. Though de-Stalinization in part attempted to tackle the question of bureaucratic graft, this tendency of party and organizational leadership to look out for their own interests first was never fully erased.

Stalin and Khrushchev both had their favored prestige projects on which they placed personal and political significance. Stalin's insistence on restarting the Volga-Don canal in the immediate postwar period, while garnering additional attention for Stalingrad in the national economy (and therefore state investment) still meant that the resources and labor necessary for its construction ultimately detracted from efforts that could have more directly helped the city's residents. The monumental architecture of the locks that came to define the Krasnoarmeisk region were embodiments of Stalin's "imperial style" that grew synonymous with his own cult of personality. These structures were as much an aspect of how the "cult of personality" shaped the city as the massive statue of Stalin that for many years stood overlooking the canal's Volga terminus. Khrushchev, on the other hand, had his own predilection for the monumental, as evidenced by his obsession with the city's hydroelectric facility and his continued support of Vuchetich's vision for the Mamayev Kurgan memorial complex, both projects that were just as labor and resource intensive as any of those undertaken by his predecessor. Khrushchev at least can be said to have benefitted from the city having reestablished its industrial construction and labor base necessary to complete the project by the time construction began. Though it was Lenin, rather than Khrushchev, who would replace Stalin in the party's iconography within the city, these structures stand as the lasting legacy of his impact on the city.

Not all of the Soviet Premier's works would survive. Many of Khrushchev's most ambitious reforms were done away with in short order upon his ouster. The Central Committee under Brezhnev was quick to abolish the regional economic administrations, reclaiming the state's centralized control over the economy from local party authorities.⁹⁶⁰ His conservative government walked back many of the educational policies that had been pushed by Khrushchev

⁹⁶⁰ See Suny, *The Soviet Experiment*, 451-453, Yoram Gorlizki, "Too Much Trust: Regional Party Leaders and Local Political Networks under Brezhnev," in *Slavic Review* 69, no. 3 (2010): 676-700.

during his tenure. They also notably distanced themselves from Khrushchev's utopian promise of "building communism," with Brezhnev instead turning to speak of the task of the "building of a developed socialist society."⁹⁶¹

The new central committee also rolled back many of Khrushchev's foreign policy initiatives, particularly his predecessor's concession of different "national paths to socialism."⁹⁶² When in 1968 Czechoslovak dissidents called for major reforms to Communist Party rule in their country, Brezhnev mobilized Warsaw Pact troops to invade their central European ally, a shocking international incident that effectively quashed hopes for reform across the Soviet bloc for more than a decade.⁹⁶³ Later this "Brezhnev doctrine" to intervene wherever communist rule was threatened would lead to the disastrous Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1980.⁹⁶⁴

Despite his negation of many of Khrushchev's landmark policies, Brezhnev inherited a Soviet Union in much less dire straits than the one Khrushchev had inherited from Stalin. Khrushchev's efforts to revive the social contract between party and state and to create an economic base capable of meeting the basic needs of the people left Brezhnev a political climate largely free (for a time) of widespread dissent, and an economy that was on a trend of healthy growth for the better part of the 1960s. However, historians have come to characterize Brezhnev's more than a decade in high office as a period of stagnation and cultural decay.⁹⁶⁵

⁹⁶¹ Ibid.

⁹⁶² Suny, *The Soviet Experiment*, 464.

⁹⁶³ See Jeremi Suri, "The Promise and Failure of 'Developed Socialism': The Soviet 'Thaw' and the Crucible of the Prague Spring, 1964-1972, in *Contemporary European History* 15, no. 2 (2006): 133-158.

⁹⁶⁴ For more on Brezhnev's foreign policy including the "Brezhnev Doctrine" aimed at maintaining communist power internationally, see Zubok, *A Failed Empire*, Susanna Schattenberg, *Brezhnev: The Making of a Statesman* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2022), R. Judson Mitchell, "The Brezhnev Doctrine and Communist Ideology," in *The Review of Politics* 34, no. 2 (1972): 190-209. For more on the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, see Yaacov Ro'i, *The Bleeding Wound: The Soviet War in Afghanistan and the Collapse of the Soviet System*, (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 2022).

⁹⁶⁵ See Yurchak, *Everything was Forever, Until it Was No More*.

As socially acceptable forms of dissent and public pressure on the party were further restricted by Brezhnev's conservative government, those frustrated with the direction of Soviet life increasingly became dissidents against the party regime and even the socialist project. Rather than outspoken calls for reform, this disillusionment simmered, slowly circulating within well-educated urban circles of professionals who rejected the kitsch of the party institutions.⁹⁶⁶ As historian Moshe Lewin sees it, Soviet history had "come full circle" back to the situation of the late tsarist period: "It all began with the bulk of society being composed of a rather primitive, not very dynamic peasantry, facing an action-oriented, bureaucratic state, and ended with a complex urban society, pushing for change, facing a stagnating bureaucratic state."⁹⁶⁷ By the 1980s, the erosion of the communist party's legitimacy, constraints on the average citizens' social mobility, and a sluggish economy that failed to meet consumer demands had caused a political nightmare that the party's ailing, elderly conservative wing, which allowed a young reformer like Gorbachev to rise to the fore.⁹⁶⁸

Volgograd as a Post-Stalinist Civilization

In the two decades following the Soviet victory in the Battle of Stalingrad, the city that had been reduced to a few thousand residents scraping together an existence amongst the ruins

⁹⁶⁶ See Vladimir A Kozlov, Sheila Fitzpatrick, Sergei V Mironenko, State Archive (GARF) Russian Federation, and Olga Livshin, *Sedition: Everyday Resistance in the Soviet Union under Khrushchev and Brezhnev* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), Galina Oustanova-Stjepanovic, "One is the Biggest Number: Estrangement, Intimacy, and Totalitarianism in late-Soviet Russia, in *The Intimate Life of Dissent: Anthropological Perspectives*, Harini Amarasuriya et. al., 22-45, (London: UCL Press, 2015).

⁹⁶⁷ Ibid, 447-448.

⁹⁶⁸ Gorbachev appears to be the only Soviet leader after Stalin (other than the short tenured Andropov and Chernenko) who never visited the city in an official capacity while in office. He would visit the city for the first time in 1996 alongside Boris Yeltsin, who Gorbachev supported for reelection in that year. For more on Gorbachev's political career, see Zhores A. Medvedev, *Gorbachev* (New York: W.W. Norton), A. S. Grachev, *Gorbachev* (Moscow: Vagrius, 2001).

was by the 1960s home to more than half a million residents and still experiencing healthy population growth. The built environment of the once-burgeoning Soviet metropolis had been restored, with a sprawling network of new structures comprising neighborhoods from Krasnoarmeisk to Traktorzavod. The *Volgogradtsy* who lived in its apartments, worked in its factories and shops, studied in its schools, visited its parks, and frequented its many theaters shared a well-developed sense of civic pride in their new city. The Twenty-Second Party Congress Hydroelectric Station was a source of both power and prestige, connecting the city physically to the new town of Volzhsky and further integrating it with the rest of the surrounding agrarian oblast, where the country's collective farms were responsible for the produce in their stores. And despite once having heard it declared that "where there is Stalin, there is victory!," his absence in name and visage within the city had done little to dull its perceived prestige. The towering figure of *Rodina Mat'* offered a new unifying symbol of the city's storied history.

The path to reclaim the city's status as a beacon of socialist modernity was no easy task. The labor-intensive work of clearing away rubble, unexploded munitions, and corpses—the detritus left behind by six months of hard fighting—took millions of man-hours by ordinary workers, volunteers, and coerced labor of prisoners. To restore the city's infrastructure to be able to provide citizens with basic amenities such as water, sewage, housing, power, heat, food, healthcare, and education was a slow and still ongoing process that taxed the planned economy to (and arguably past) its limits. In the years of privation following the war's conclusion, the raw demand for building materials by the city's construction firms regularly outstripped supply. Stalin's reconstruction efforts were simultaneous with his attempt to reassert the party's control over society and the means of production following the disruption of the war. The continued production by the city's largest industries, the Tractor Factory, the Red October Steelworks, and

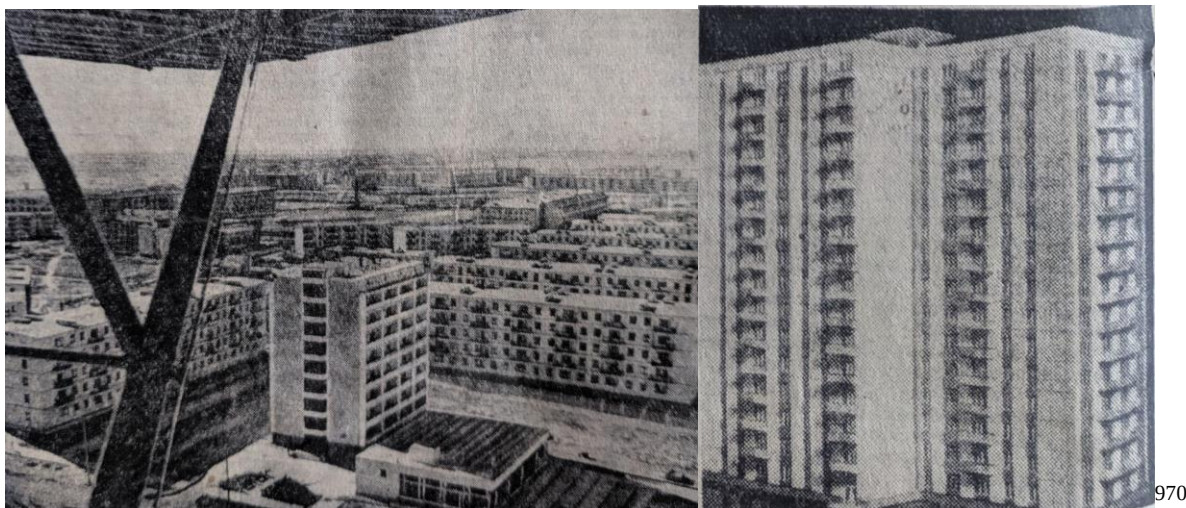
the Barricades munitions factories, was prioritized over the long-term comfort of the city's residents, forcing citizens invested in improving their living station to "volunteer" their labor to the state's rebuilding efforts. Driven by the wish to enshrine the Soviet victory in the Battle into the city itself, millions of rubles and man hours were poured into grandiose buildings and in the Stalinist "Imperial" style and prestige projects like the Volga-Don canal, rather than pragmatic projects that addressed the real needs of the city's population. To compensate, the party attempted to reassert strict Stalinist political control of the city's labor force and society. The party's propaganda arms such as the newspaper *Stalingradskaia pravda*, churned out new narratives of heroic sacrifice attempting to justify why conditions for most *Stalingradtsy* remained dire even many years after the Battle concluded.

As we have seen, the trajectory of the city's reconstruction would change radically in the years following Stalin's death. As Khrushchev's policies of mass-housing, economic reform, focus on agricultural production, and of course de-Stalinization came into effect, the shifting priorities were reflected in the built environment and cultural life of the city. Khrushchev's initiatives did not immediately solve the problems the city faced at the time of Stalin's death—an inadequate housing supply, a sluggish and inefficient economy, a demoralized and exhausted workforce, and an entrenched party bureaucracy keen to protect its own interests—but over time, the effects of these attempted reforms reverberated across many aspects of life for the city's residents. Though construction of new housing increased substantially as Khrushchev turned toward prefabrication and the *mikroraion* model of urban planning, the quality of this housing remained poor, a constant frustration of even those lucky enough to receive their own private apartment. Still, his effort to transform Stalingrad into a mass housing city saw the creation of hundreds of thousands of new single-family apartment units, though the emphasis on quantity

over quality meant that these *khrushchevki* that most of the city's residents would come to inhabit were far from the ideal living space. While the Soviet diet saw many improvements at this time as corn growing efforts and the "Virgin Lands" saw increased state investment in agriculture, collective and state farms struggled to shake the inertia of decades of poor management and logistics. Even as Soviet cosmonauts conquered the stars, the prospect of living in a time of "built communism" was an expectation for the future, rather than the present.

Even with Khrushchev's concerted efforts to revitalize the postwar urban experience through the adoption of his mass-housing policies, the challenge for urban planners to properly build out the city's urban infrastructure was a daunting task. Meeting the logistical challenges of the city's infrastructure—water and sewer lines, the electrical grid, and the roads and transportation networks necessary to move people and goods throughout the massive city—was a constant struggle for the city administration. While there was no shortage of space along the Volga for new developments, neither leader entertained allowing the kind of suburban sprawl that dominated American planning at this time. Designing self-contained neighborhoods allowed Soviet planners to pool their limited resources together in one place and deploy the city's massive construction trusts on projects that would benefit the collective good, rather than individual homeowners (and deemphasize car ownership, which remained a luxury out of reach for many Soviet consumers). While many of Khrushchev's economic priorities were rolled back under Brezhnev, the mass-housing initiative was not one of them. The built environment would continue to evolve as new construction continued to shape life in Volgograd. As the city continued to grow and the industrial base continued to expand and construction methods were improved, the mass-housing initiative would continue to shape the city with bigger and better models of single-family apartment complexes and microdistrict style neighborhoods. Already by

the end of Khrushchev's tenure in power, construction firms in the city were rolling out new "high-rises." Housing blocks eight or nine stories high loomed over the first generation of five-story *khreshchevki*. Since this would become the predominant mode of new housing construction for the next decade and a half, these new taller models would come to sometimes be referred to as "*brezhnevki*."⁹⁶⁹



Despite many setbacks and challenges, after untold man-hours, nearly two decades after the events that brought it to ruin, the city could finally rightfully reclaim its former title as a socialist metropolis. By the time the city's name was changed to Volgograd, it was a city already known for the towering achievement of its hydroelectric station, for its cultural contributions to Soviet life, and for its raucous sporting culture. More than that, it was a "hero city," a place of legendary sacrifice to be honored by its residents, as well as visitors from all around the Soviet

⁹⁶⁹ For more on how the mass-apartment culture of the Soviet Union changed under Brezhnev, see Lynne Atwood, *Gender and Housing in Soviet Russia: Private Life in a Public Space*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010).

⁹⁷⁰ Left: Photo by L. Polikashina (taken from plane flown by V. Gubinyan), *Stalingradskaya pravda*, November 24, 1964, 2. Central structure is the 10-story Hotel Volzhskaya in Volzhsky, built in the same prefabricated style as the buildings around it. Right: Photo by G. Demyashenko, accompanying caption reads "Model of a 16-story residential building made of silicate and reinforced silicate products. In the coming years, several such houses will rise in different places in Volgograd," in V. Masliaev, "S arkhitektorom po ulitsam goroda: Novaia zastroika volgograda," *Stalingradskaya pravda*, November 22, 1964, 2.

Union and the world. Both the party and the city's denizens would act as gracious hosts and guides to those who wished to see the miraculous revival that had taken place here.

After the Battle of Stalingrad, we can see how communist ideology and a state-planned economy responded to this question, though even between the leadership of Stalin and Khrushchev, this approach was not entirely uniform. The reconstruction under Stalin, with his prioritization on enshrining the glory of the "hero city" in the built environment, was more focused on quality than speed or quantity, with greater architectural consideration given to aesthetics than raw pragmatic use. Reconstruction in Stalin's time was also severely limited by the constraints of technology, the country's industrial base and logistical framework, and the city's labor pool. Still tied to the old *montazhak* style of housing that was dependent on traditional masonry and brickwork, these labor-intensive efforts required masses of relatively unskilled laborers to complete, but the process of construction was slow going. In the meantime, temporary solutions like crude barracks housing, individual dugouts, and even small-scale private residences were allowed to fill the gap.

Comparatively, Khrushchev attempted to shift reconstruction toward speed and quantity, willing to sacrifice quality in the long run if it meant putting more unhoused residents back into new homes. To do so, he relied on the relatively new construction method of prefabricated reinforced concrete panels, while placing relatively little emphasis on the finished product's quality. Inefficiencies in the already logistically deficient Soviet economy were further exacerbated by the speed at which Khrushchev demanded new homes, leading to sub-par and amenity deficient housing stock, which would still come to house hundreds of thousands of residents in the city. Even in its harried state, this effort could not move forward without the necessary industrial base to produce the reinforced concrete panels and the fleet of industrial

machinery (and trained operators) needed for the construction. Even when construction standards were raised following the city-wide construction audit of 1959, this tension between the speed, quantity, and quality in creating Volgograd's new housing stock remained.

As in Volgograd, in cities across the Soviet Union and the Eastern European block Soviet-style urban planning created swathes of homogeneous neighborhoods of densely packed apartment buildings and the amenities that served them, which remain the core feature of the built environment in these cities to this day. Many of these structures built in the postwar era are approaching the end of their lifespan, as reinforced concrete is by no means a permanent substance, and is subject to forces of stress, wear, and decay.⁹⁷¹ The degree to which these structures have been incorporated into the capitalist economic system that replaced the control of the socialist state, and how much investment the owners of these structures are willing to sink into their upkeep, will be an interesting story moving forward, especially if and when structural failures begin to occur, which could prove catastrophic. This is another area that requires further study, but a housing crisis could very well be looming on the horizon in Russia and other former Soviet states. The ultimate legacy of Khrushchev's housing policies is a story that will continue to play out in the decades to come as the fate of the *khrushchevki* must be decided.

The reconstruction effort at Volgograd can offer a cautionary tale for future reconstruction efforts, as well as point to strategies that worked and should be considered. First and foremost, there is the consideration of time. Even after nearly a decade and a half of concerted reconstruction efforts that conscripted untold millions of man hours and billions of rubles in state investment, the housing supply in Volgograd still well outstripped demand. As more and more workers were brought in to aid in the city's various construction and industrial enterprises, the

⁹⁷¹ See Mark Barnes, "The Disappearing Mass Housing of the Soviet Union," *Bloomberg*, March 8, 2017, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-03-08/the-disappearing-mass-housing-of-the-soviet-union>.

question of where to house them remained an acute concern. It also illustrates how in cases of catastrophic urban destruction, even the process of clearing away the rubble is a problem measured not in months, but years.

Beyond housing, the basic needs of the population also needed consideration: how to distribute access to basic amenities like food, healthcare, education, and recreation were of prime importance to Soviet planners from the outset. The shape of modern Volgograd still reflects these choices, with schools, hospitals, clinics, shops, cafeterias, parks, and theaters spaced relatively regularly throughout the city. Each neighborhood was designed with its own economic and cultural center. Since under the socialist economy these entities were not dependent on concerns like return on capital investment or future profit margins, granting residents access to necessary facilities was a priority of the state, not individual organizations or enterprises. Rather than viewed as separate entities, the state could create multi-use spaces where housing and services were mixed. Eventually the *mikroraion* model further enshrined how essential services were tied into the home building project as a matter of efficiency. While I have not offered any direct comparisons to reconstruction efforts in the capitalist west to refer to in this study, it would be a worthy pursuit to see how these considerations differed from the Soviet model and to attempt to assess the relative strengths and weaknesses of each from an urban planning perspective.⁹⁷²

The *Volgogradtsy* that resided in the city as the period of de-Stalinization reached its close had lived amidst a seemingly never-ending construction site. Just as the advent of the single-family apartment was ushering in a profound change in the spaces Soviet citizens lived their

⁹⁷² See Jeffry M. Diefendorf, "Urban Reconstruction in Europe after World War II," in *Urban Studies* 26, no. 1 (1989): 128-143, Virag Eszter Molnar, *Building the State: Architecture, Politics, and State Formation in post-war Central Europe* (London: Routledge, 2013).

lives, other ripples of de-Stalinization further shaped their experience of the city. Despite Khrushchev's policies that were meant to rationalize the regional economy and increase production in both its major industries and in the agricultural areas around it, Volgograd residents still were in constant contention with the limits of a shortage economy. Housing, amenities, furniture, and foodstuffs remained in limited supply, and as such residents had to be cunning consumers.⁹⁷³ Sometimes this became manifest in articles in the newspaper announcing new shipments of key items or offering advice on how to make-do with creative homemaking solutions. Sometimes it manifested in connected insiders tipping the scales in their or their employee's favor, securing limited resources before they became available to others. Advancing one's career depended on education, skill, and drive, but also the ability to navigate the language and rhythms of an ever-changing political climate. The "little tactics of the habitat" that Soviet citizens had used to navigate the Stalinist system had to be adapted to fit new circumstances.⁹⁷⁴

While it is undoubtedly true that Stalin had psychologically conditioned the Soviet population through years of political surveillance, subsuming the demands of workers to the demands of the planned economy, and the terror of an unrestrained police state, Khrushchev gambled that the communist party would be able to retain its power without such outright oppression. Key to this assumption would be the ability to win the support of citizens who "bought in" to vision of the communist society promised by the party (at least enough not to openly challenge its rule). Though few would experience the rosy kitsch of the kind of clean, well-stocked apartments that Khrushchev toured with Richard Nixon in the Moscow Exposition

⁹⁷³ For more on how these problems persisted under Brezhnev, see Natalya Chernyshova, *Shopping with Brezhnev: Soviet Consumer Culture, 1964-1985* (Diss. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses, 2007), James R. Miller, "The Little Deal: Brezhnev's Contribution to Acquisitive Socialism," in *Slavic Review* 44, no. 4 (1985): 694-706.

⁹⁷⁴ See again Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*.

of 1959, the ambition of that goal certainly held an appeal, especially compared with the privation experienced by those who had lived through the war and its immediate aftermath.

The local press, *Stalingradskaia/Volgogradskaia pravda*, played a pivotal role in framing the party's messaging around the core issues facing the city's residents. In addition to being the party's biggest cheerleader, it helped to sell Khrushchev's specific vision for the communist future and justify his reforms to the public. Beyond this, it framed the language in which the political debates of the day were carried out. It even went so far as to invite public participation, giving residents a platform to advocate for their own interests (so long as their interests aligned with the wider goals of the party). This did not necessitate that individual members of the party were off limits. Foremen, trust directors, and even members of the city bureaucracy were not above reproach when their intransigence or incompetence failed to serve the public good. Even as the 4 walls of the private apartment allowed Soviet citizens the chance to share and formulate opinions beyond the surveillance of the state, thousands would take up pen to air their grievances publicly through letters to the editor in service of their own personal crusades.

Despite the undisputed influence of the party on the editorial line of the press, regular readers of the city's main newspaper might have found it a valuable resource. It remained a means for *Volgogradtsy* to connect to their communities. *Volgogradskaia pravda* provided a centralized resource on the latest activities of clubs, the latest productions in the city's theaters, and the city's numerous sporting organizations. It promoted the cultural contributions of the city's artists and touted the triumphs of the city's laborers, as though their successes in industry, agriculture, and the arts were the triumphs of the city itself. It promoted a shared narrative for the city, a point of shared experience that defined what it meant to be *Volgogradtsy*.

The legacy of the city's reconstruction would be forever tied to the party's myth of the city's wartime sacrifice and its unyielding resilience. Rather than the completion of Mamayev Kurgan representing the culmination of the party's mythmaking efforts, the process would continue for the remainder of the Soviet period. The physical embodiments of the war myth within the urban landscape of Volgograd would continue to propagate, with additional statues, museums, and memorials increasing in both their number and specificity. More than twenty years since it was first conceived of as the centerpiece for the Mamayev Kurgan memorial, it would be housed in the Battle of Stalingrad Museum of opened its doors in 1982 (the same year that Brezhnev died in office).⁹⁷⁵ The Alley of Heroes received additional adornments in the form of large standing plinths of granite that honored the names of soldiers recognized for acts of heroism during the battle and other symbols of the Soviet war myth. Innumerable other statues and plaques dot the city remembering the contributions of various commanders, regiments, and victims of Nazi atrocities. Year after year, the newspaper continued to honor anniversaries of the battle with new retellings of the battle and the victory of communism over fascism.

Yet while much of the city's identity was wrapped in its past, the party press played an important role in imagining its future. Even though Brezhnev scaled back some of the more "utopian" aspects of Khrushchev's vision of a communist society, the party was inherently tied to the ideas of modernity and progress. After the scientific achievements of the atomic age and the Space Race, however, that bar was significantly raised, and the imaginations of Soviet citizens expanded accordingly. Take for instance in 1970, when as part of its New Years day coverage, *Volgogradskaya pravda* included several artistic renderings of the "future" of Volgograd. According to their imaginings, commuters downtown who needed to get to the city's

⁹⁷⁵ "O muzee: Muzei-panorama "Stalingradskaia bitva," *Stalingradskaia bitva*, accessed July 4, 2024, <https://stalingrad-battle.ru/about/about-museum-inner/2301/>

outer districts would no longer need to wait on the bus or tram but could catch an “air taxi” helicopter that would take them there in minutes. Visitors to the city by airplane could skip the airport and rather dock straight with ships on the river. In the countryside, corn would grow more than twice the height of a man, and hungry residents could procure meals from mobile food kitchens.⁹⁷⁶

While none of those visions would come to pass, few residents could have predicted that in the next twenty-one years, the Soviet Union itself would be a thing of the past. After three decades, the post-Stalinist civilization, the only mode of living a whole generation of Soviet citizens would have ever known, came apart at the seams. While the national revolutions that led to the collapse of Communist power in Russia and the former Union republics were bloodless compared to that which preceded it, the transformation of society that followed was no less radical.

Volgograd as a Post-Soviet Civilization

The advent of the capitalist civilization of the Russian Federation, much like the coming of Stalinist civilization and post-Stalinist civilization, was a long time coming. Through years of economic and political upheaval, few aspects of postwar Soviet life have remained unchanged. As *Volgogradtsy* were forced to change their “little tactics of the environment” to compensate for the changing cultural and economic tides, the war myth was one touchstone that held a sense of stability.

Even today, though the Soviet Union is more than thirty years gone, the city of Volgograd remains a central fixture of Russian national identity. The memory of the Battle of

⁹⁷⁶ *Volgogradskaya pravda*, January 1, 1970, 1.

Stalingrad, and the symbols and rituals associated were given new meaning within the fledgling Russian Federation. While the first president Boris Yeltsin would be slow to associate himself with the Sovietized war myth, his successor Vladimir Putin, would co-opt the memory of World War II into a new Russian context.⁹⁷⁷ The city, its museums, monuments, and even its name, would continue to play a major role in this new imagining of the war-myth. Today *Volgogradtsy* remain the keepers of their city's historic legacy, dutifully preserving the war myth and passing it on to new generations and imparting its significance to all who visit the city.

That is not to say that this legacy has not been contested. In the aftermath of the Soviet Union's dissolution, many of its core symbols were caught in the limbo of the new political milieu. Initially Yeltsin, whose political identity and prestige was based on his role as a disruptive Russian nationalist leader, was loath to associate with any symbols tied to the Soviet past. This included the war myth and Volgograd's role in it. In that vacuum, the war myth was first co-opted by two seemingly otherwise estranged groups: the communist opposition faction and extremist Russian nationalists. Both groups sought to repurpose the myth to fit their new narrative. For the political left, honoring the Battle of Stalingrad meant glorification of the Soviet past, while the extreme nationalists sought to graft it to the specifically Russian national persona. This failure by Yeltsin to formally adopt the war myth had dire repercussions. On February 2, 1993, the celebrations in Volgograd were attended almost exclusively to groups opposed to Yeltsin, where rival politicians called for a "second Stalingrad" to be fought against his economic reforms. These same players would be involved in the attempted coup to oust Yeltsin that led to the attack on the White House in Moscow in September 1993.⁹⁷⁸

⁹⁷⁷ Ivan Kurilla, "Who is at the Gate?: The Symbolic Battle of Stalingrad in Contemporary Russia," in *PONARS Policy Memo No. 268*, (2002), 1-4. https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy_files/files/media/csis/pubs/pm_0268.pdf

⁹⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 2-3.

Yeltsin learned an important lesson on the dangers of being on the wrong side of such powerfully ingrained symbolism. While he remained wary in the ways he embraced the war-myth, he would make at least a halting effort to adopt aspects of it to re-enforce his shaky political platform. During his reelection campaign in 1996, Yeltsin visited Volgograd on May 9 to join in the city's official celebrations of the end of World War II.⁹⁷⁹

However, Yeltsin's hand-picked successor, former KGB officer Vladimir Putin, held a much more intuitive grasp of the power of former Soviet symbols, and began a decades-long project to ensure his vision for the Russian Federation was tied directly to the heroic past. On February 22, 2000, he made his first visit to the Volgograd as acting president to give a patriotic speech.⁹⁸⁰ He was not alone in the effort to find ways to score quick political points by borrowing on war-myth's prestige. Local politicians also recognized the power of the city's historical narrative and sought to harness it for their own devices. Nikolai Maksiuta, the Communist party governor of the Volgograd Region from 1997-2010, attempted as early as 2001 to petition to re-change the city's name *back* to Stalingrad in commemoration of the upcoming 60-year anniversary of victory in the Battle.⁹⁸¹

Though this effort would fail, the discussion of the city's name has not gone away, despite repeated polling that shows the residents of Volgograd steadfastly oppose this change. In 2013, the city's name was "unofficially" restored by the Volgograd City Council for use on certain holidays tied with the Battle, despite this symbolic gesture being purely aesthetic. One opposition politician bemoaned that "the Volgograd-Stalingrad issue comes up before every election, then drops back down when the election is over."⁹⁸² Shortly thereafter in 2014, Putin

⁹⁷⁹ Ibid, 3.

⁹⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁹⁸¹ Ibid, 2.

⁹⁸² "Stalingrad name to be revived for anniversaries," BBC News, February 1, 2013. <https://www.bbc.com/news/>

was asked to weigh in and went on record that he would only support such a move if the people of Volgograd supported it. The prospect has proven consistently unpopular. The most recent theatrics around the city's name came in 2023, prior to Putin's visit to the city for the celebration of the eightieth anniversary of the battle's conclusion. Road signs leading to "Stalingrad" appeared on the highways leading toward Volgograd, but these were only temporary. Polling of Volgograd residents about a prospective change showed that an overwhelming 67% opposed any thought of making such an alteration permanent.⁹⁸³

Still, just as the change of the city's name in 1961 could only scratch the surface of the transformation taking place within the city, these efforts to revert the city back to Stalingrad could not hide the fact that Volgograd was undergoing an even more radical metamorphosis. After more than 5 decades of representing the embodiment of a socialist city, the economic reforms unleashed by Yeltsin had given rise to a capitalist takeover. As privatization of national industries and the market instability of "shock therapy" decimated the former planned economy, many of the city's prize industries were caught in the crossfire. Already by 1992, the Tractor Factory had become a joint-stock private company, and immediately saw a massive drop-off in productivity. The plant was floated on the stock market in 1995, gaining new ownership, but production woes continued. In the latter half of the 1990s, the plant was producing fewer than three thousand tractors per year. After a series of restructuring efforts, the plant finally ceased production of tractors in 2015, though parts of the shop are now used by defense contractors producing equipment for the Russian military. As of 2019, unused parts of the plant were being cleared away to make way for a new community center that would house shops, stores,

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⁹⁸³ Brendan Cole, "Volgograd Opposes Stalingrad Name Change as Putin Comes to Town," *Newsweek*, February 2, 2023, <https://www.newsweek.com/russia-volgograd-stalingrad-name-change-putin-1778577>

restaurants, and new luxury apartments.⁹⁸⁴ The Red October Steel suffered an even sharper decline. By 1999 the plant had filed for bankruptcy, after which point it was sold to a series of private shareholders and eventually became a subsidiary of Russpetsstal, which itself filed for bankruptcy in 2009 when its owner was charged with embezzlement.⁹⁸⁵ After six years of complete inactivity, the steel works was partially “re-nationalized,” with a state-backed financial rescue initiated to return operations to select areas of the plant. However, large swaths of the sprawling steelworks campus remain dormant, a vast patch of urban blight situated directly on the city’s valuable riverfront.

As the powerhouses of the Soviet economy declined, Volgograd was forced to carve a new economic niche. As a large population center with plenty of available real estate, the city became attractive for investors looking to tap into the consumer marketplace. Large scale urban malls and other large retailers began popping up around the city. Retail workers, along with those employed in restaurants, cafes, shops, and other service industries make up the majority of the city’s jobs, approximately 62.5% of the overall labor force.⁹⁸⁶ The city made use of its established rail, river, and pipeline infrastructure to become a major shipping hub, and its connections to Russian oil-fields made the refining, storage, and transport of oil and natural gas became the backbone of the city economy. Volgograd also leveraged its competitive advantages in education, as the city’s many schools and universities drew in students from around the region and abroad. The city’s hospitals, fed by graduates of the city’s renowned Medical Institute, made

⁹⁸⁴ Aleksei Alekseev, “Traktor, tank, trgovyi tsentr... Kak rozhdalsia, zhil i umiral pervyi sovetskii traktorny zavod,” in *Tsentr Strategicheskikh otsenok i prognozov: avtonomnaia nekommercheskaia organizatsiia*, June 14, 2019. csef.ru

⁹⁸⁵ Rinat Sardiev, Ansastasiia Dagaeva, Irina Reznik, Alisa Failko, “Kak razvalilas’ ‘Russpetsstal,’” in *Tamozhenniia soiuz*, November 21, 2011. <http://www.customsunion.ru/info/2577.html>

⁹⁸⁶ “Volgograd, Russian Federation,” in *Metroverse: The Growth Lab’s Urban Economy Navigator*, (Cambridge, Harvard Growth Lab, 2024). <https://metroverse.cid.harvard.edu/city/4571/overview>

it a healthcare destination for the predominantly rural oblast.⁹⁸⁷ Agriculture remains a big part of the regional economy, though it largely is an exporter of grain crops, vegetables, and sunflower seeds, but lags behind livestock related products such as meat and milk.⁹⁸⁸ While the city retained many smaller manufacturers producing goods and foodstuffs, the city was becoming more reliant on its reputation as a tourist destination. The city's sporting reputation has also bolstered this, and in the summer 2018 Volgograd acted as a host city for the group stage of the World Cup, when several thousands of foreign football fans descended on the city to watch the matches played in the city's newly revitalized Central Stadium.

As in the Soviet era, Volgograd remains a tourist destination not for its climate, its sanitariums, or its beaches, but rather for its museums, monuments, and memories of the past. Travelers from around Russia and around the world visit the city as part of the decades old pilgrimage to pay respects to the defenders of the city. Outside the train station, a giant concrete map of the city has been erected to direct visitors where to find these "Historic Sites of Volgograd." One can start just steps away at the obelisk and eternal flame in the Square of Fallen Fighters and take a walk along the Alley of Heroes to the 62nd Army Embankment. But while tourists can easily traverse the city center and northern neighborhoods using the tramline, the public transport infrastructure has not grown much since Soviet times, and those on city buses can expect long ride times. The city is much more car-dependent than it once was, with new riverfront expressways meant to ease congestion within the city center. Without access to a car, one of the most reliable ways to traverse the city and across the river to Volzhsky is to hop on a *marshrutka* (usually passenger vans that act as rideshares with set routes).

⁹⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸⁸ Tatyana V. Slevkova and Marina E. Buyanova, "Sel'skoe khoziaistvo Volgogradskoi oblasti: sovermennye tendentsii i perspektivy rosta," in *Usloviia, resursy, faktory i mekhanizmy razvitiia iuga Rossii*, (Volgograd: Volgograd State University, 2019).



Pilgrimage to Mamayev Kurgan remains central to the tourist experience of Volgograd. At the memorial complex new rituals are practiced on its steps to connect the legacy of the battle to the new Russian state, while other groups still gather at the site in order to mourn the loss of Soviet power. Young people still act as honor guards and recipients of the war myth, observing the same rituals established decades prior. Veterans' organizations still use the site as a gathering point, and different generations of veterans (from Stalingrad, Afghanistan, and even Chechnya) commingle. In addition to the regular traffic of visitors to the memorial, on important anniversaries and new state holidays like June 12th, "Day of Russia" (*Den' Rossii*), the memorial complex serves as the backdrop for official celebrations.⁹⁹⁰ As part of the city's official program for "Day of Russia" in 2018, various local organizations descended on the monument to sing

⁹⁸⁹ Photograph provided by author, taken June 11, 2018.

⁹⁹⁰ I can attest to this personally, as I unintentionally visited the memorial on June 12th, one of my first days in the city, and was able to observe the celebrations firsthand.

patriotic songs and honor the sacrifice of the war dead. Those present included multiple children's choirs from schools around the city, veterans' organizations, several cultural preservation societies (wearing traditional Russian national costume), and members of the Orthodox clergy, several hundreds in all. No matter the event, the complex adds an additional symbolic layer tying the residents of the city today with the heroic sacrifice of the defenders of Stalingrad and their great triumph.



The memetic function of the iconic Rodina Mat' statue cannot be understated. The silhouette of the Motherland calling is instantly recognizable and has become synonymous with Volgograd. The image features heavily in promotional materials, logos, graphics, and stickers, endlessly reproducing the connection of the city to the war myth.

Other aspects of the city's identity which had long been suppressed have reemerged and reincorporated into the war myth. In the postwar Soviet era, the city was almost totally barren in

⁹⁹¹ Photo provided by Author, Steps of Mamayev Kurgan and the Walls of Ruins, Day of Russia ("*Den' Rossii*") celebrations, June 12, 2018.

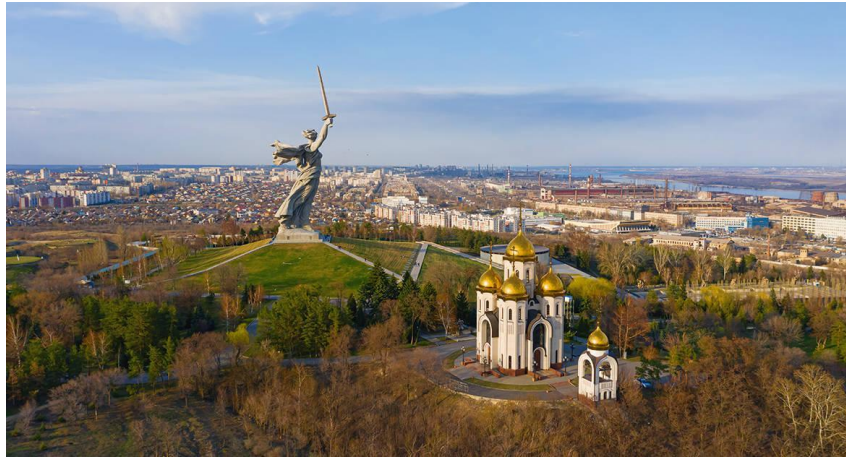
terms of culturally significant religious spaces, with the few structures that managed to survive the Battle and those that remained found little help from communist authorities. Following *glasnost* and into the post-Soviet period when religious groups were once more able to operate openly, new churches and cathedrals (particularly Orthodox) began to reclaim their space in the urban landscape. Under Putin, who sought to re-tie Russian national identity with the Russian Orthodox Church, this process continued to accelerate. With the backing of the Patriarchate in Moscow, a concerted campaign of “de-secularization” of the post-Soviet city began as new churches and cathedrals were planned for Volgograd, often near significant memorial sites.

Atop Mamayev Kurgan, the Church of All Saints (*Khram vseskh sviatykh*) was initially founded in 1993, when Patriarch Alexei II visited Volgograd alongside the Archimandrite Kirill, who was himself a veteran of the Battle of Stalingrad. As part of the fiftieth Anniversary jubilee, the Patriarch consecrated Mamayev Kurgan, blessing the mass graves on its slopes and allowing for the construction of a modest chapel. Designs for the church were approved by 1995, but construction was slowed by opposition from the Volgograd city administration, who claimed the public and veterans’ groups were against adding the structure to the grounds of the memorial complex. The decision was overturned in 1997, when a survey of veterans showed 80% support in favor of the church. The first stone was finally laid in 2002, and while construction would take nearly 4 years to complete, a temporary building erected alongside the chapel began holding services during this time. Many of the congregants were builders working on the site, who made the trek to the top of the hill every Sunday.⁹⁹² Even more recently, in the heart of the city, the city’s newest Orthodox church is also its largest. On the north end of the Square of Fallen Fighters, on the site where Stalin’s statue once stood and had long been held as the future site of

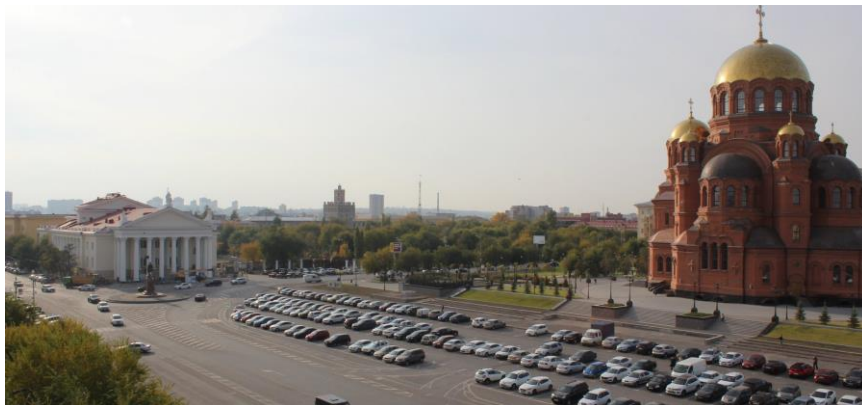
⁹⁹² “Khram vsekhi sviatykh (Volgograd),” *Azbyka palomnika*, last edited on 12 May 2020, <https://azbyka.ru/palomnik/>

the city's Palace of the Soviets, the cathedral of Alexander Nevsky has finally been rebuilt.

Consecrated by Patriarch Kirill in 2021, its glittering gold domes gleam bright in the sky above surrounding Stalinist structures and the red granite memorials to defenders of the city.⁹⁹³



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In addition to attempting to tailor the war myth to a specifically Russian context, there have also been efforts as of late to roll back Khrushchev's efforts to separate it from the legacy of Stalin. A slow but steady "re-Stalinization" has been taking place within Russian memory as the increasingly authoritarian Putin sought to rehabilitate a man that by all accounts he seems to admire. In 2006, a new museum dedicated specifically to Stalin was constructed on the western

⁹⁹³ See "Patriarch Kirill Consecrates Restored St. Alexander Nevsky Cathedral in Volgograd," September 20, 2021, <https://www.pravmir.com/patriarch-kirill-consecrates-restored-st-alexander-nevsky-cathedral-in-volgograd/> (accessed 6/14/2024).

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⁹⁹⁵ Image from Hotel Intourist (located across the square from the Cathedral), <https://volgaintour.ru/en/> (accessed 6/14/2024).

slope of Mamayev Kurgan just beyond the bounds of the memorial complex.⁹⁹⁶ While the museum was founded and financed by a private collector and has no official ties to the state, it opened with support of several veterans organizations (some of the same groups who have supported the efforts of returning the city's name to Stalingrad). The collection glorifies Stalin's role in the defense of the city and his contributions to Russian society, even including a recreation of his office in the Kremlin complete with a wax Stalin replica. Though the existence of the museum remains controversial, it has become yet another site within the tapestry of the war myth within the city's built environment.

More recently, the image of Stalin has even been reintroduced to the official iconography of the state-backed Battle of Stalingrad Panorama Museum. Ahead of Putin's trip to the city to honor the eightieth anniversary of the Battle in February of 2023, a new bust of Stalin was unveiled alongside those of Georgy Zhukov and Aleksandr Vasilyevski on the square leading to the museum's entrance. The inclusion of Stalin in the composition celebrating the "architects of the Stalingrad victory" marks the first time that the Soviet leader has been concretely linked to a site of memorialization since his statue was torn down from the Square of Fallen Fighters at the height of de-Stalinization.⁹⁹⁷

⁹⁹⁶ "Muzei Stalina na Mamaevom kurgane," May 5, 2019, *Mirtesen*, <https://sovsojuz.mirtesen.ru/blog/43563790326/Muzey-Stalina-na-Mamayevom-kurgane>.

⁹⁹⁷ RFE/RL's Russian Service, "Bust of Stalin Erected in Volgograd Ahead of Putin Visit to Mark Anniversary of WWII Victory," *Radio Free Europe*, February 2, 2023, <https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-volgograd-stalin-bust-putin-visit-stalingrad/32251951.html>.



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These examples within Volgograd alone illustrate how in the post-Soviet era both Orthodoxy and the personality cult of Stalin have become increasingly entwined (or re-entwined) in the new Russian war myth. Despite the shift in the rhetorical context in which it is based, the memory of the Battle of Stalingrad remains an integral piece of the city's identity and its role as a cultural touchstone in the greater identity of the Russian federation. Even now, more than

⁹⁹⁸ Photograph by Sir Bean Navi, *ibid.* A guide leads a group of visitors past the wax figure of Stalin in the recreation of his Kremlin office.

⁹⁹⁹ Photo by Associated Press, *ibid.* Bust of Stalin at official unveiling in February 2023, flanked by replicas of the Soviet battle flag that flew above the Reichstag upon the taking of Berlin in 1945.

seventy years on, one can see how the efforts to de-Stalinize the war myth irrevocably shaped the city on the Volga and continues to shape political narratives to this day.

Following the outbreak of the war against Ukraine, the Russian variant of the war myth has been further co-opted to justify Putin's aggression towards their western neighbor and former fellow Socialist Republic. Tensions between the two states had been ratcheting up ever since the pro-Russian Viktor Yanukovich was driven from office during the Euromaidan protest movement that paralyzed Kyiv in the winter of 2013. Using pro-Russian separatists and shadow regiments of the Russian armed forces, Putin aggressively invaded and annexed the Crimean Peninsula, locking the two states in a prolonged conflict. Amidst the backdrop of Ukraine's pro-Western president Vladimir Zelensky making overtures to join the European Union and NATO, Putin ordered a full on invasion of Ukraine on February 23, 2022. Though initial advances saw Russian troops fight to within a few dozen miles of Kyiv, the Ukrainian counterattack held out long enough to drive the over-extended invaders back to the Belarusian border. However, fighting in the East, where pro-Russian separatist forces coordinated with invading Russian units reinforced by its Black Sea fleet and through the Russian foothold in Crimea, saw the Ukrainian regions of Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk and Zaporizhzhia fall under Russian control. Able to secure crucial military aid from the United States and its allies, Zelensky's government remains locked in a prolonged struggle to reclaim its lost territory against now well-entrenched Russian defenses. The situation after nearly two and a half years of fighting is currently a costly stalemate.

Few foresaw the outbreak of open hostilities between these two states, who had long and deep ties among the Soviet brotherhood of nations. However, close observers of Putin's platform have pointed to consistent underlying rhetoric towards returning Russia to its former Soviet and

imperial glory, including consolidating territories he sees as historically and culturally Russian. Crimea, which was gifted from Russia to the Ukrainian SSR during his tenure as Premier, was in many ways easier for Putin to justify. An invasion and subsequent mobilization involving hundreds of thousands of Russian troops against a peaceful neighbor was not. However, in this rhetorical conundrum, the war myth of World War II contained a solution.

From the earliest days of the Russian “special military operation” that kicked off the invasion, Putin and his allies in the Russian media sphere insisted that the aim was to “de-Nazify” Ukraine, alleging that Zelensky and his government were a group of “drug-addicted neo-Nazis” (Zelensky is in fact Jewish and has never espoused sympathy with the neo-Nazi movement in Ukraine).¹⁰⁰⁰ Drawing from the legacy of World War II, during which certain elements of the population did act as collaborators with the Third Reich while it occupied Soviet Ukraine, Putin fabricated a lie in which his adversaries were extensions of the ideology of the greatest enemy that Russia ever faced.¹⁰⁰¹ While Western observers treated his claims with rightful incredulity, this justification was parroted *ad nauseum* by Russian propagandists in support of Putin’s war of aggression.

Under Stalin and his successors, the war myth was always carefully cultivated to pertain to the Soviet Union as a whole, in many ways erasing the fact that it was the SSRs in the West that faced the bulk of the Nazi atrocities. For the Ukrainians, who had stood as the first line of defense against the Wehrmacht's onslaught and who lived for years under Nazi occupation, this

¹⁰⁰⁰ See Anton Troianovski, “Why Vladimir Putin Invokes Nazis to Justify His Invasion of Ukraine,” *The New York Times*, March 17, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/17/world/europe/ukraine-putin-nazis.html>

¹⁰⁰¹ While certain far-right aspects of the Ukrainian political spectrum indeed hold white-nationalist views, take for instance the infamous Azov battalion which fought against the Russian invaders, this remains a fringe political ideology. See Tara John, “A Far-Right Battalion has a key role in Ukraine’s Resistance. Its Neo-Nazi History has been exploited by Putin,” *CNN*, March 30, 2022, <https://www.cnn.com/2022/03/29/europe/ukraine-azov-movement-far-right-intl-cmd/index.html>.

false equivalence was especially galling. However, in the newly Russianized variant of the war myth, the war in Ukraine was the duty of all Russia patriots to carry on the legacy of protecting the world from the Nazi menace. It was what the defenders of Stalingrad had fought for, and despite this war involving the surprise invasion of a peaceful neighbor, Putin and his allies insisted that it was still linked to that heroic past. There is no small irony that in the course of the war the Russian army has leveled cities amidst stout Ukrainian defense, urban centers like Mariupol and Kherson that rivaled wartime Stalingrad in size.

Putin's most recent visit to the city further illustrates his desire to further symbolically tie his regime to the legacy of Stalingrad. With the war in Ukraine entering its second year, the Russian army's inability to bring the war had proven politically disruptive. After the initial invasion failed to dislodge Zelensky and fighting dragged on in the east, Putin issued a conscription order that proved politically divisive as hundreds of thousands of fighting-age men reported for duty, while thousands more fled the country. Some disgruntled Russians opposed to the mobilization even burned down draft offices and attacked army recruiters.¹⁰⁰² As untested and undersupplied reserves proved less than reliable on the battlefield, the Russian army increasingly relied on mercenary troops to bear the brunt of the heaviest fighting, like Yevgeny Prigozhin's Wagner Group, which conducted its own mobilization efforts with the support of the Russian state, promising convicts in Russian prisons commuted sentences in exchange for their service.¹⁰⁰³ In an attempt to drum up support for the war effort at home, Putin visited Volgograd

¹⁰⁰² Andrew Roth, "Kremlin attempts to calm Russian fury over chaotic mobilisation," in *The Guardian*, October 1, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/oct/01/kremlin-attempts-to-calm-russian-fury-over-chaotic-mobilisation>.

¹⁰⁰³ Nathan Luna, Leah Vredenbret, and Ivan Pereira, "What is the Wagner Group? The 'brutal' Russian military unit in Ukraine," *ABC News*, August 23, 2023, <https://abcnews.go.com/International/International/wagner-group-brutal-russian-military-group-fighting-ukraine/story?id=96665326>.

to part in the city's anniversary commemorations and to pay his respects to the war dead. As part of the visit, he and his retinue climbed the snow covered slopes of Mamayev Kurgan to lay a wreath at the eternal flame in the memorial's rotunda.

In his following address, he quipped that once again Russia's soldiers are facing German tanks in Ukraine (a reference to the German Leopard tanks supplied to Zelensky's defenders), but also argued that "Russia is not sending its tanks to the borders of Western countries. We have something to respond to the threats with—and it will not end with the use of armored vehicles" (a reference to Russia's nuclear arsenal, which he has been all too eager to keep in the forefront of the minds of Ukraine's western allies).¹⁰⁰⁴



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In an event held at the Panorama Museum where he met with family members of veterans who fought in the battle of Stalingrad, Putin displayed his own deep knowledge of the war myth, speaking at length on the role of Stalingrad and other hero cities and the conditions defenders

¹⁰⁰⁴ "K priezdu Putina v Volgograd ischezli bezdomnye sobaki i gubernator," *GorizontIn'aia rossii*, February 2, 2023, <https://semnasem.org/news/2023/02/02/nam-vnov-ugrozhayut-nemeckimi-tankami-cto-skazal-putin-v-volgograd>.

¹⁰⁰⁵ Photo by Dimitry Lobakin/Getty Images, in Brendan Cole, "Volgograd Opposes Stalingrad Name Change as Putin Comes to Town," *Newsweek*, February 2, 2023, <https://www.newsweek.com/russia-volgograd-stalingrad-name-change-putin-1778577>.

faced. He reiterated his support for the role of historical preservation works doing memory work in the city around the battle, and expressed a desire to see that work brought to wider audiences, including more films about World War II subjects that engage viewers at “an emotional level.”¹⁰⁰⁶ He spoke on the importance of preserving Russia’s historical legacy, because the memory of the past is “an extremely important thing, because a people without memory has no future, without knowing the past, there will never be a future. We will lose everything, everything that we value and on the basis of which we develop and move forward.” In a statement that encapsulates either a cynical understanding of the power of the war myth or a true belief in his version of events, Putin ultimately argued that “in order to fight for people's minds, the most important weapon is the truth.”¹⁰⁰⁷

For all of his rhetorical inventions to justify his war, it is clear that Putin has a firm grasp of the political power and cultural significance of the war myth in Russian society. While the outcome of this new conflict is unclear, Putin clearly understands that his own legitimacy now is deeply tied to his ability to bring military victory. A few short months after his visit to the city, his former ally and confidant Prigozhin, frustrated by Putin’s handling of the war and the conditions faced by his mercenaries, turned and marched his troops on Moscow before ultimately aborting his *putsch* in exchange for clemency (he was later killed in a plane crash shortly thereafter that bore the hallmarks of a state backed assassination).¹⁰⁰⁸ Though Putin survived the attempt, it revealed how fragile his political position actually was as the costs of war continued to put strain on Russian support for his costly military adventure.

¹⁰⁰⁶ Vladimir Putin, “Vestrecha s predstaviteliami obshchestvennykh patrioticheskikh i molodezhnykh organizatsiia,” *President Rossii*, February 2, 2023, <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/70435>.

¹⁰⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰⁸ Pjotr Sauer, “Onboard grenade blast caused plane crash that killed Wagner boss, claims Putin,” *The Guardian*, October 5, 2023. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/oct/05/hand-grenade-explosion-caused-plane-crash-that-killed-wagner-boss-says-putin>

Whatever the outcome of the war or of Putin himself, what is clear is that the war myth will continue to endure and adapt. As much a part of the city of Volgograd as the apartment blocks that house its residents, its parks, stadiums, and theaters, the war myth is integral to the built environment of the city and the experience of life there. The events of the battle forever changed how life was lived in Stalingrad, but it was the choices made in the two decades that followed that continue to define the city Volgograd of today.

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