Lenin’s Revenge: Early Soviet Hidden Voices

written by Kevin Murphy | March 4, 2024

A century after Lenin’s death, scholars and leftists continue to discuss the life and legacy of the leader of the Russian Revolution. But a fundamental question remains largely unanswered. What did Soviet citizens themselves think of Lenin?

We get some sense of an answer to this question in the days after he died in January 1924. Some 3.5 million Russians queued for hours in the bitter cold over four days to file past his body in Moscow’s House of Trade Unions. The temperature on the day of Lenin’s funeral was 35 degrees below zero, yet over a million marched, some for several hours through the jammed streets of Moscow–as seen in this remarkable clip.

What accounts for this level of respect for Lenin? For a generation of Cold War historians, such as Harvard’s Richard Pipes–dubbed “the prosecutor of the Russian Revolution” for his hatred of Lenin–such an outpouring of admiration was apparently inexplicable and therefore went unmentioned.[1] Surely, the opinions on Lenin by those who lived through the early Soviet years can no longer be ignored.

Ironically, the preeminent Soviet Studies think tank during the Cold War, Harvard University, houses an expansive interview project of former Soviet citizens who commented on a wide variety of topics. The now digitized *Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System* includes some fifty volumes of detailed interviews with several hundred refugees in Berlin and New York from 1950 to 1953. The Harvard interviewers asked emigres probing questions, including their thoughts on Lenin, Stalin and other Soviet leaders. This amazing record is now easily accessible for scholars, students and people around the world.

These emigres chose to leave the Soviet Union for the West at the beginning of the Cold War. Moreover, as the transcripts describe, some of the emigres clearly understood with whom they were talking, “the respondent was very much concerned about making a good impression on the interviewer.”[2] Given this context, was it possible to find even remotely representative appraisals of Lenin? Despite these significant negative biases, many respondents expressed sympathy, and even open admiration for Lenin. This helps to explain why not a single scholar has bothered to examine this extraordinary source on Lenin. As one of my students summarized, “the majority of Soviet citizens saw him as a hero…the creator of the path that the Soviet Union should have followed, and would have followed if not for Stalin usurping and deviating from Lenin’s way.”

Utilizing *Harvard Project* interviews, archival scholarship and secret police reports to Stalin, this essay emphasizes Soviet citizens’ own voices. Many emigres associated Lenin with the New

Economic Policy (NEP, 1921 to 1928) the period after the Western backed White Armies had failed to overthrow the Soviet regime. For many emigres, the 1920s was considered the golden era of Soviet society, a time of freedom, tolerance and a better life. Significantly, they repeatedly associated Stalin with forced collectivization, coercion and terror.

When NEP "first began," recalled a lawyer, "I thought that the country was being reborn. Many people had faith in Lenin, and I was among them." A 50-year-old engineer believed that "Lenin created a real miracle. He also changed the currency. In a few months all of Russia was happy." When asked if life was better during NEP, a Ukrainian woman responded, "Of course, the people took heart under the NEP. Lenin made things easier for them then." A Ukrainian housewife believed that "Lenin was not so bad. In his times they gave land to the peasants. The NEP was a very good time. But when Lenin died and Stalin came to power, the collectivization policy was introduced."

Younger Soviets remembered NEP through the experiences and recollections of their parents and friends. A female student remarked that, "What I have heard from mama and papa and others" was that "NEP was many times better than our life." A soldier, said that he had heard "Lenin's five-year plans were not half as bad as Stalin's." and that in 1933 (during the famine), it was even worse." A Red Army officer posited Soviet life "would undoubtedly be better" had Lenin lived because "Lenin would not have taken such a sharp turn from NEP to socialism. The standard of living in the Soviet Union now is terribly low." A mechanic suggested that "Lenin would have done things much differently. Everybody had that confidence in Lenin." A 32-year-old newspaper photographer explained that "for a Russian, Lenin is a great name. And why not? He made the Revolution and then the NEP. Many things would have been much different had he lived." A laborer said that "Lenin died, but his work lives on…after he died things became worse." A lathe operator also suggested that the "NEP under Lenin, was very good; people were free. After NEP there began the Commune, and then the Collective Farm. It was a different life." A Ukrainian ballet dancer suggested that "One of the best things Lenin did was the NEP." Another respondent's friends told her that "If he had lived, things might have been a good deal better." A female lab technician asserted that "When the NEP years began everybody could live much better…Later on it was heard very frequently among the young people that if Lenin would have lived the conditions would not have deteriorated." A young teacher posited that if Lenin had lived, "It is possible that he would have done something else. After all, there is only one man like Lenin every hundred years." A factory worker posited that "the best period in the USSR was the period from 1921 to 1928. The NEP. That was the Lenin Program. Give the peasants freedom to live as they wanted…I don't remember it well as I was a child. But I know this."

Lenin's more tolerant NEP policies repeatedly contrasted with the respondents' complaints against Stalin's forced collectivization. A tractor driver recalled that "I know that the collective farm system was hell for the peasants. I have heard from the old people that the NEP was better than either the collective farm system or the Tsarist time." A 46-year-old machinist described conditions on the collective farms, of little school children "with hardly any clothes on their backs… standing each day and reciting, 'thank you comrade Stalin for a happy childhood.'" He then repeated a version of the old Russian adage "if the Tsar only knew", that "some people think that Stalin doesn't know in what bad conditions the people are living in, but I know that the NKVD (secret police) go around to all the collective farms and they know–and therefore Stalin certainly must know." A 35-year-old Russian journalist and author emphatically argued that "It was quite clear that Lenin was against collectivization and Stalin put it through despite Lenin. This is the opinion of the simple peasant and proletarian Russian. It is possible that educated people don't share this opinion but the majority of people think that."

Respondents took issue with both the pace and methods of collectivization as conflicting with Lenin's approach. A student argued that "Lenin did not want to force people into the collective

farms, but wanted to establish them on voluntary principles, creating only model collective farms…to encourage other people to join the collective farms out of their own desire." A 41-year-old supply worker suggested that "Lenin said the collective farms should be organized when there would be enough electricity and tractors. Stalin hurried things, jumped ahead and threw great burdens on the backs of the Soviet people." A young female collective farm worker stated that "before he died, Lenin told Stalin to give the people freedom, but Stalin did not give the people freedom. He gave them collective farms." A movie operator also argued, "Things would not have been done as hastily and with as much compulsion. In regard to collectivization, Lenin told Stalin that it must be a completely voluntary system. He said we must make exemplary collectivization, which would be so successful that everybody would want to join them." A young Russian commented that, "As many collective farmers say, most peasants were for Lenin. Maybe Lenin would have created the collective farms too, but he would have done it gradually, not suddenly by force." Similarly, a young Red Army officer also believed that "Lenin said the collective farms should be organized voluntarily" and that "peasants should not be touched for 20 or 30 years." A 35-year-old teacher remarked that "Lenin never wanted to beat all the peasants into joining the collective farms within one or two years." A factory worker also asserted that "Lenin would have done the collective farms differently. I think so, not like Stalin, because people did not want it and he took them in anyhow." A 38-year-old engineer posited that "if Stalin had not come to power, for example if Lenin had continued, it would have been a completely different picture… Lenin wrote that the peasants must not be forcefully taken into the collective farms, that they must go voluntarily and must have the right to leave…"

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This frequent theme of Stalin's coercive methods versus Lenin's persuasive approach touched on other issues. A young nurse suggested that Lenin's family background explained his approach, "He came from a good family and did not have to work in the Party in order to earn his livelihood as Stalin did. Lenin was not in the Party for his own personal gains. Lenin was intelligent, came to the people and won them to his side." A 62-year-old Byelorussian housewife, remarked that Lenin "had a different approach. He wanted the people themselves to change religion and other things. He thought they should change it themselves and not do it at once." Asked if Lenin had continued in power would the secret police be as strong, a young Byelorussian replied, "Oi! No. After the revolution Lenin let the people live freely; he did not interfere with the workers." A lawyer commented that "Many people think that conditions would have been better under Lenin because Lenin was gentler, and he thought of the people."

Lenin's honesty, intelligence and cultured demeanor contrasted with Stalin's brutishness and lack of intelligence. A young student commented, "You can see here the difference between Lenin and Stalin. Because of his honesty and his demand for honesty in achieving goals without using lies and false maneuvers." A female lab worker stated that "People considered Lenin flexible in politics, while Stalin barged ahead. When he wished to start collective farming, he barged right through, causing bloodshed all over the Ukraine." A former prisoner of war recalled, "I once heard a story that Stalin himself used to swear over the telephone. Lenin and Trotsky would never have done that." To a young male Russian writer, "Lenin was an altogether different man from Stalin; he was, above all, a man with some culture, Stalin has none." while another man claimed that Lenin was wise but "Stalin is only pseudo-wise." A student remarked that "Lenin was exceptionally wise and such cruelties as the people knew from Stalin were unknown to him." Another respondent remarked that Stalin "is not an intellectual like Rykov, Trotsky, Bukharin" while Stalin "is stupid and Lenin spoke of his stupidity a hundred times. Lenin himself wrote that Stalin is a cook who prepares very spicy dishes, and he should not be allowed in the kitchen."

Widespread references to Lenin's Testament from a variety of locations and age groups suggests that most Soviet citizens were aware of Lenin's negative opinion of Stalin that spread by word of

mouth. Many repeated Lenin's characterization of Stalin as a cook who would only "prepare spicy dishes." One respondent claimed that Lenin crossed out Stalin's name and wrote, "such a fool in power!" An office administrator said he would "like to quote Lenin" who said, "Keep Stalin far from power, because that cook likes to prepare dishes that are too sharp." A Ukrainian driver also stated that Lenin warned "If Stalin ever gets into the state kitchen, he will serve very bitter dishes." A lawyer noted that, "Lenin himself said that Stalin was too spicy a cook, and Lenin was against Stalin's coming to power." Some emigres learned of Lenin's Testament by reading illegal literature. A young mechanic said that he read in Trotsky that Lenin had "warned the people not to let Stalin get power in his hands. Stalin does not sympathize with the Russian people." A young Ukrainian mechanic said that "In 1929 I read a secret booklet where Lenin gave his evaluation. He said, "Don't believe that Stalin has been recommended by Lenin. Lenin recommended Rykov as his successor." Similarly, a young male lathe operator said both Trotsky and Lenin "did not want Stalin." An older landscape artist stated that "Lenin warned against Stalin in his will. I think it could have made a great deal of difference if someone else had come into power." One respondent learned about Lenin's Testament through a friend who "had learned from the Voice (of America)." A young Ukrainian recalled that Lenin had warned "after my death do not give power to the Caucasian cook.…because he will cook too sharp a stew. Lenin did not like nor approve of Stalin…Stalin was a very insignificant figure whom nobody knew until 1930." A young Ukrainian student recalled that "Many of my close friends, the ones with whom I could talk freely, were also dissatisfied. A colleague of mine in the cadet school told me that Lenin had said that he did not want Stalin to be a leader. I thought it could very well be true, because Stalin was not as intelligent and developed as Lenin in order to lead or govern a State." Many respondents also describe this prevailing sense of fear under Stalin and the small circle of family and friends with whom they could "talk freely." A young male Byelorussian school teacher commented that "Trotsky, Rykov and Bukharin "were against the terror and the collective farms. They were for democratic principles within the Party. But Stalin seized power, he didn't ask the population. When Lenin died, he warned the people against Stalin." A Ukrainian turner stated, "such a leader of genius as Vladimir Iliich did not recommend him. He recommended Rykov." The interviewer recorded that the respondent claimed Stalin poisoned Lenin.

Other emigres contended that many Soviet people believed that Stalin had murdered Lenin. A female Russian bookkeeper commented, "My friends believed that had not Lenin been killed by a poisonous bullet, life would have been more pleasant. Lenin was an educated person, gentle, and a democrat at heart." A peasant Russian housewife also remarked that "There are some people who say that it would have been better if he had stayed alive. But they murdered him." A young Russian man also claimed that "The older pre-revolutionary people say that Stalin killed Lenin and rewrote his work." A young female student also remarked that "Lenin said in his will that Stalin should not be admitted to power. Maybe if Lenin had not been killed, things would have been better to a degree."

Stalin's roughness was also reflected in his pre-revolutionary bank robberies. "I have heard that even Lenin did not want Stalin to come to power, because he considered Stalin to be a bandit," claimed an older Ukrainian mechanic. Similarly, a female school teacher declared that "I did know even then that Lenin hated Stalin. The latter is nothing but a bandit. He used to carry out armed robberies in the Caucasus to raise money for the party." Other emigres referenced Stalin's past, "After all, Stalin himself had literally been a bandit, robbing people and banks to support the Party…he robbed one in Rostov. Stalin is a Georgian and a bandit." A female Byelorussian commented, "After all, Lenin was an educated person, while Stalin is a bandit who robbed banks. I am sure that had Trotsky or Bukharin been in Stalin's place it would have been much better; they were cultured people." Yet another respondent emphasized Stalin robberies and complained, "Now a bandit is the head of the country, but he is of bandit origin." Stalin, according to another interviewee, "doesn't have any program. He is a hangman and bandit for whom the worms in the

ground have waited a long time already."

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For emigres who believed in the Revolution, Stalin evoked a profound sense of betrayal. A young Jewish doctor asserted that "Stalin is no longer a revolutionary, no longer a Marxist, he is now a reactionary and a counter-revolutionary. He has betrayed Lenin and the October Revolution." According to a young aviation mechanic, "No one will say anything bad about Lenin. Stalin turned Lenin's policy around 180 degrees." A young driver, arrested in 1937 as a teenager, described how he "met thousands of people who were in prison and who were absolutely innocent… I became conscious and I began to hate Stalin, not so much did I hate the regime as Stalin himself. In my soul I felt that the cause of Lenin had been betrayed completely…what Lenin had fought for and wanted just did not exist anymore." Both his parents came from working class families and they were "strong supporters of the Revolution and great admirers of Lenin, his plan and his actions." The interviewer recorded that "It is only when Stalin started eliminating the old Bolsheviks" that the respondent's family opposed Stalin whom they viewed had "destroyed all that Lenin had been trying to build." A student recounted that "from 1938 till 1940 I thought that Stalin had perverted the system" because "the people being purged were old collaborators of Lenin. Thus, I considered myself a Leninist Communist." According to a college-educated retiree, "Lenin's Party people were all shot, except some very small ones." A young female Estonian student remarked that "when Stalin came to the throne, there will still many friends of Lenin such as Trotsky, Rykov and Sverdlov," but because he "feared someone might overthrow him…all the old revolutionaries except Voroshilov and Molotov and Kalinin were destroyed. No one was left."

Other respondents situated Stalin's terror with his war on Soviet peasants during forced collectivization. A student claimed that during NEP "life became more plentiful…Lenin would not have given up his idealism" for collectivization but "would not have resorted to such terrorism…There would have been no mass annihilation of the people." A young electrician posited that "Lenin said collectivization should be introduced only when the peasants wanted it…in no less than 50 years. All this was Lenin's testament. I heard about this from my father and two other people. In 1937 all of Lenin's friends were destroyed." An older collective farmer suggested that Lenin wanted to wait a few years so that "people might accumulate reserves, and then voluntarily go on to collective life…Lenin would not have allowed the terror and the terrible life." One respondent generalized that with another ruler, "people would not have suffered these horrors of the concentration camps and the mass shootings" which can "be attributed only to the Stalinite dictatorship." An older female teacher blamed Lenin for starting "the whole business" although "it would have been better with Lenin…before his death there was not such a great network of espionage," and while there was terror, "it had seemed separate from the system. Stalin made the terror a part of everyone's everyday life…" A biologist stated that "there was some of this before Lenin's death" but that this was "in the first years of the Revolution, and was necessary." Another respondent explained, "Lenin's law about sabotage on the part of the intelligentsia which was, in a way, a very logical law, had less effect upon the doctors, than others in the professions…" A chorus singer recounted her version of Lenin's testament in which Lenin, when he was ill, told Stalin, "I would never give you power, as you are too cruel" and then she commented that "I need only repeat Lenin's words which is that Stalin is responsible with his cunning and deceit for having transformed Russia into a gigantic concentration camp

Others again contrasted Lenin's persuasion versus Stalin's coercive methods. An engineer said Stalin "has the instinct of a beast, and he is very strong. He uses slyness, terror and flattery. He bases all his politics on the darker side of human life. Lenin used to draw people in, Stalin pushes them…" Similarly, a female Armenian bookkeeper claimed that it was well known "that Lenin declared that Stalin was a cruel man. You never hear any kindly favorable stories about Stalin, but

you do occasionally hear nice things about Lenin." "People even see the difference in the way they dress. You can see right away that Lenin is a noble person" who wore a civilian suit and shoes, while Stalin "wears the coarse clothing of a soldier and wears boots. That is how people talk, Lenin would choose a cleaner road" and avoid puddles, while Stalin "goes straight ahead, through mud and everything." Other emigres mentioned this anecdote, that "Stalin wears boots because he walks straight into the mud" while Lenin, "walks around the puddles." A young engineer remarked that Stalin was to be feared. "If you want to tell a real party man, a Marxist, he would say: "Lenin is very good". But if you ask him about Stalin, he begins to be careful."

Emigres frequently mentioned Lenin listening to working people's grievances. One respondent's relatives had fought for the Whites during the Civil War, yet, during the NEP they supported Lenin's regime. To them "he'd been a good man and had made life easier for the poor." During collectivization the family were labeled kulaks and their land and belongings confiscated. A female Ukrainian itinerant worker said, "Lenin gave to the poor. People could live under his rule. He allowed the peasants to keep their cattle" while under Stalin, "It could not have been worse." A young Byelorussian ship stoker said, "In my village, where, during the Tsarist regime, almost everybody was short of land, people thought that Lenin really struggled for the welfare of the people." This changed in 1929, when "the government began to move out those families who were considered rich and everybody changed their minds." A young worker said that, "I also approve of the words of Lenin: 'Grab from those who have grabbed.'" because "these factories were made with the sweat of the workers." Similarly, a student commented, "If he stole from a rich man whose character was bad and gave the hide to a poor man who was deserving, I would approve." Another emigre recalled that his peasant friend was threatened with being fired so he traveled to Moscow, complained personally to Lenin, and stayed at his job. Asked if his friend had fabricated the story, he replied "I do not think so. I knew him and I knew that he was as anti-Soviet as anybody." A female school teacher noted that "At the time of the collectivization people said that Lenin would not have done this. But who knows? However, it was possible to get in to see Lenin because he was close to the people." A male Byelorussian dispatcher commented that, "Lenin was understood by the people, there was more of a connection between Lenin and the people." A young Red Army soldier believed that "Lenin was a person who worked with the masses, who loved all the people and only thanks to Lenin was the coup d'etat carried out."

Some emigres emphasized Lenin's modest lifestyle. One respondent who had visited Lenin's office in Smolny, in Leningrad, remarked that "Lenin was a genius, but he lived simply, he even ate sardines." Another commented that "Lenin was a modest man in his own life; he was not as bloodthirsty as Stalin, he was a sincere revolutionary." He recounted an article after Lenin's death in which a bookkeeper had attempted to increase Lenin's pay to four hundred rubles, "but Lenin crossed it out and went back to the old two hundred rubles." Another emigre commented, "Until 1928 the Party and government officials did not have housing which was a great deal better than the rest of the population. Lenin was against this sort of thing. He himself lived very modestly. I think he had two rooms."

Archival social histories convey similar popular attitudes about Lenin. Using secret police reports in *Popular Opinion in Stalin's Russia*, Sarah Davies comments that "the refrain 'If Lenin has been alive…' was common in the period" while "NEP was also perceived as a relatively golden age." Reports included complaints that "Stalin must be removed, he has left Lenin's path. Our country is regressing." One worker asserted that "Lenin led the country upwards, but today's leader is bringing it down" while another lamented that, "There was everything, and now there is no food, and when Lenin was alive everything was peaceful and good, everyone lived in a friendly collective." When Lenin died, "squabbles and splits started and the party became impure." Another asked "Why did Lenin wear overshoes and Stalin boots?" Because, "now that Stalin's at the top, there is a such a

marsh wherever you go, you get stuck. That's why he wears boots."[3]

Another book on the Stalinist era shows unpublished letters that also reference Lenin. One sent to *Pravda* during collectivization that stated, "You commit acts of violence against workers and peasants. You scribblers, you've enslaved us worse than the tsar and you write impudently, you lie that you are for us workers. It's time to drive you out, you creatures, so you won't enslave the peasants in Lenin's name." A collective farm widow in1936 wrote to *The Peasants Newspaper* "I often remember Lenin, how kind he was for us, for the peasants; he took the land away from the landowners. Gave it to the peasants…In those days everybody was well fed, nobody met hungry. Lenin died too early. Now things are worse for us, poor widows, than they were before the Revolution."[4]

In Smolensk, a top-secret OGPU (secret police) document reported on popular attitudes in Roslavl on dekulakization deportations in March 1931. Some workers complained that, "All this would not have happened if Lenin had been alive," they say. "Such things were unheard of in those times, people had enough to eat … But now it is impossible to understand what is going on." One of the workers, looking at Lenin's portrait, declared, "were Lenin alive, he would have allowed free trade and eased our lot; afterwards he would have instituted a shift towards collectivization–not by force, but by consent and persuasion."[5]

In Moscow's Hammer and Sickle Factory, workers repeatedly complained about rampant party corruption. A former female member asked, "Is the party a correctional institution? Why do they accept all kinds of garbage and keep those who do nasty things? Is this what Lenin willed?" An anonymous note passed to trade union leader Tomsky complained, "Please remember the words of Ilyich Lenin. Why are you not conducting a cleansing of party of elements who only take up positions while not doing what they are supposed to do, but instead walk around the shops and give orders and shout at the lower class?" A note at another meeting asked, "Lenin in his Testament said that Stalin was a cook who would only prepare spicy dishes and we should not trust the leadership of Stalin. Isn't the current situation such a spicy dish? So how can we not trust Lenin about leaving Stalin at his post of General Secretary of the party?"[6]

Some of the leaders of the spectacular 1932 Ivanovo rebellion cited Lenin. During a mass meeting during the Teikovo strike of 1932, a female worker Voinova asked, "How can our rulers not be ashamed of distributing such a small ration? Did Lenin really teach them to supply the workers so that they perished like fleas? Can we really survive on such a ration and fulfill the production quota that they give us?" In Shuia, workers complained that the "workers' labor is being reduced to forced labor" and that such measures would never have been implemented under Lenin or even the Tsar. At another textile workers' assembly a woman argued, "When Lenin was alive, he took care of us, but Stalin has reduced us to extreme poverty."[7]

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By early 1930, Stalin's class war against Soviet peasants and workers was in full force. Secret police (OGPU) summaries recorded the voices of resistance, including some who cited Lenin against the regime. "Anti-Soviet speeches" at a February meeting at Yartsev factory in Smolensk attended by both trust board members and workers included, "Our revolution is sick. Our revolution is worse than before the war. The workers are forcibly stretched but the cooperatives do not give enough food. Therefore, I ask the generals (pointing at the trust staff), they are generals, only without epaulets, to take measures before it is too late." Another worker argued that "Lenin and his teachings have gone to waste since his death. He did not say increase the amount of work for the workers and then leave them destitute." Leaflets distributed in Tomsk in March proclaimed, "You cannot build socialism on the bones and blood of your neighbors…now there is not a single peasant

hut, not a single working family, where it would not be said that we are heading for ruin. Prisons are overcrowded, places of exile, shootings are rampant and complete stagnation in industry" while "the entire peasant economy is falling and being exhausted every day…we have already experienced this during the period of war communism before the introduction of the NEP. This path to socialism Lenin recognized as "ruinous" so people should read "the true program of Bolshevism" and "Lenin's precepts." It argued for "peaceful construction" based on "an extraordinary All-Russian Congress of Soviets." A collective farmer sent a complaint to the Kerch Metalworks because dekulakization was incorrectly targeting "the poor in the villages and hamlets of our Crimea, although it is happening everywhere." He blamed this on "bourgeois elements sitting in the institutions who are trying to make a coup in our country…Comrade Lenin taught us how to carry out socialism, but we are not carrying it out in this way." In Sumy, an "anti-Soviet leaflet" found in the Frunze Factory said, "Comrade workers and peasants. 250,000,000 are starving thanks to oppression…. Did Lenin intend to build socialism so that workers and peasants would starve to death in the 13th year of the revolution? Honor and glory to Bukharin, Rykov, Tomsky. Down with Stalin!" A crowd of a thousand workers' wives at Odessa's "Slobodka" bazaar complained about poor-quality fish sold and agitated: "Go to the factories, get the workers out and together go with them to the executive committee to demand improvement in the food supply." The women carried a portrait of Lenin and a banner with the slogan: "Let us eat!" A report on Red Army attitudes towards collectivization and dekulakization reported a complaint, "When we had Lenin, we had everything, but now that Lenin is gone, we have nothing. We do not fulfill his commandments… We work hard, we compete, productivity increases, but it is all in vain. For our efforts we only see and hear about the five-year plan, but it's a lie, it's all for nothing…we will have to shed a lot more blood in the near future."[8]

By 1930, organized opposition currents had been crushed but the OGPU continued reporting on independent revolutionary circles, some of which were quite sophisticated. A September 1930 four-page manifesto criticized both the Trotskyists and Bukharinists for focusing on a "struggle for power" rather than fighting for the working class. "Every serious attempt at criticism is considered counter-revolutionary. Instead of workers' management of production, we have individual workers whom the bureaucracy feeds and promotes to economic-administrative posts." It compared the regime strategy to that of the Zubatov police movement at the turn of the century "in order to give an outlet to the discontent of the workers so that they would not go to the revolutionaries." It repeatedly quotes Lenin's *State and Revolution* to illustrate the hypocrisy of the regime, "In favor of electability and removability of all officials. Against high salaries, in favor of paying officials according to worker's rates. Let us organize large-scale production… Lenin said, we workers ourselves, drawing on our working experience, creating the strictest iron discipline supported by the state power of the armed workers, let us reduce state officials to the role of mere executors of our orders, responsible, replaceable, modestly paid…the bureaucratic government brutalizes every attempt at workers' struggle" meant that "the best proletarian communists are in exile and prison. But no one will succeed either in breaking the workers' movement or in deceiving the workers. You cannot deceive the class,'Lenin said." Recalling the strike waves of NEP, the manifesto optimistically claimed "now strikes are breaking out more and more frequently." It also called for practical tasks, such as "to fight today for a secret ballot that will eliminate pressure in elections." Repeating Lenin's organizational priorities from decades earlier, the manifesto implored its readers to "gather a circle of reliable comrades, explain and understand with them the true causes of the crisis, the bureaucratic nature of the Stalinist state, the inner-party struggle, the deceptive maneuvers of the government…to understand Marx's and Lenin's teachings on the state." It proclaimed that out of these "workers' circles and groups a new workers' communist party will be formed in the future" and that "the proletariat will regain its dictatorship." It finished with a warning that "the struggle is difficult" as the "GPU contains many spies" so it was necessary to work with the "utmost care" because "the working class does not need not martyrs but fighters."[9]

Less frequent reports continued in the early 1930s. In April, 1933 in Ivanova–a year after authorities had crushed the workers' rebellion–the OGPU arrested five members of an armed youth group that had distributed hand-written leaflets entitled, "Nine years without Lenin." The group called for an armed, broadly-based organization in the cities and countryside. In December 1934, after four million Ukrainians had already perished in Stalin's famine, leaflets posted at the Kharkov rail station said, "Comrades, seventeen years have passed since the sun of October illuminated our country with the bright light of freedom. Hundreds of thousands of the best sons of mankind selflessly gave their lives in the struggle for it…but after Lenin's death usurpers seized power" and "to settle historical scores with entire nationalities, they drive the country to the path of endless bloody terror." Similar leaflets called for workers to show up at a factory and "strike as one" and demanded "Give us bread and that is all."[10]

How do we explain the deep admiration for Lenin repeatedly expressed by Soviet emigres at the height of the Cold war? One respondent offered a simple and convincing explanation. "During the revolution there were thousands and millions of people who fought gladly for the Soviet regime, because they sincerely believed in its slogans." The video clip at the beginning of this essay illustrates that no hyperbole was added here–this was indeed how many millions of Russians felt.

The sharp contrast between their opinions of Lenin and Stalin was again firmly rooted in their own experiences. Not a single respondent talked admirably about Stalin the same way they did about Lenin. Stalin's rule was less associated with his much earlier maneuvering to control of the state and party apparatuses–a process known only by a small milieu of party functionaries–but rather with his later draconian social policies that came with rapid industrialization. Stalin's infamous speech to industrial managers in 1931 summarized his state capitalist strategy to compete and "catch up" with the West. This entailed forcing both workers and peasants to pay for rapid industrialization–a system that necessitated both state coercion and misery for the vast majority of Soviet people compared to earlier Soviet life. This contrast is shown repeatedly in the *Harvard Project* that offers an unprecedented view on what Soviet citizens themselves thought about their society. Socialists around the world should be thankful to Harvard for making these fascinating and informative interviews available to everyone.

Notes

[1] https://jacobin.com/2018/06/richard-pipes-cold-war-russian-revolution

[2] For all *Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System* full citations, search for the full string cited in this essay within https://library.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/static/collections/hpsss/index.html with double quotes in text box and click "Go".

[3] Sarah Davies, *Popular Opinion in Stalin's Russia*, p. 179.

[4] Lewis Siegelbaum, *Stalinism as a Way of Life,* pp. 46, 248.

[5] Merle Fainsod, *Smolensk Under Soviet Rule*, p. 248.

[6] Kevin Murphy, *Revolution and Counterrevolution*, pp. 89, 94, 176.

[7] Jeffrey Rossman, *Worker Resistance Under Stalin*, pp. 132, 161,179.

[8] *Sovershenno Sekretno: Lubianka Stalinu O Polozhenii V Strane: 1922-1934:* vol.8, pp. 118, 160, 163, 391.

[9] *Sovershenno Sekretno: Lubianka Stalinu O Polozhenii V Strane: 1922-1934:* vol.8, v.1, pp. 578-581.

[10] *Sovershenno Sekretno: Lubianka Stalinu O Polozhenii V Strane: 1922-1934:* vol.8, pp. 930, 938,1232; vol.10, part 1, p. 569; part 2, p. 652.