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# Stalin's Collectivization: From an Idealistic View to a Defensive Stance, 1928-1934

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The first Five Year Plan was introduced in 1928 by Stalin, with this plan the country faced challenges that were unseen during its conception and struggled to cope with ever changing conditions. The plan was set forth to be the starting point of a rapid acceleration through an industrialization period so that the Soviet Union could progress toward an ideal classless society. One aspect of the Five Year Plan was the collectivization of the agricultural system, a way in which to combine private ownership farms into a large community farm. This collective farm system would supply the county with basic food needs as well as provide a much needed export for financial gain. This new collectivization of agriculture also aimed to rid the country of the peasant class, which accounted for eighty percent of the Soviet Union's population. More importantly the collectivization system was used to rid the country of the Kulak class. This class was made up of business owning and wage paying individuals. These capitalist ideals of the Kulaks went against all that the Bolsheviks' (head political party in Soviet Russia at the time) were promoting.

Stalin's views in the Five Year Plan initially appeared to be idealistic. He believed that the plan was the right step in making the society unlike any other. However, he does not appear to have anticipated the challenges that were to unravel once the system was set into place. Problems with resistance of farmers wanting to collectivize their land, diminishing support from party members within the Communist Party, and a famine in 1932 all caused Stalin to change his views in response to these factors. Stalin's views shifted from idealistic to defensive as collective farmers were not able to keep up with the goals set by Moscow and faced ever increasing tensions between Stalin, farm managers, and party planners. This shift in his views can be seen by analyzing letters, speeches, and other government documents written by Stalin on the subject of collectivization. Understanding and acknowledging Stalin's shift to a more

defensive stance by looking specifically at collectivization, can allow one to better comprehend a major factor that contributed to the start of the Purges in the late 1930's.

Much like the shift in Stalin's views from 1928 through 1934, there has been a shift in the way that western scholars have understood Stalin's power in the Soviet Union. These scholars looked at Stalin's power and analyzed who actually controlled the country. The ideas of these scholars can be broken down into three main time periods of thought. Many of the founding researchers of the topic (prior to 1976) looked at it from the point of view that Stalin was the center of power and he alone controlled every single aspect of the Soviet Union. These scholars also tried to understand Stalin's psychological makeup better so as to explain events in Soviet history. Others historians in this historiographical timeline (1976 through 2000) analyzed the power structure and found that Stalin was not the sole controlling factor. Party members, local authority, and the secret police all played their own part in the power structure of the USSR. This group of historians also found even the mental psyche could control people living in the country through fear of what could happen to them if they did not follow the status quo of what the Party expected of them. In the last time period of thought (2001 to the present) there begins to be a collaboration of all ideas that have come before. By sorting through all the research that had come before them and picking out that which still held truth, researchers are finding new ways to look at the Stalin and the Soviet Union. No matter what time period of scholars one may look at, they will find Stalin's influence to have played a part in everything that went on in the country whether it was directly or indirectly.

Robert Conquest was one historian in the first school of thought, who went greatly into depth on the "Great Terror", as he called it in his book *The Great Terror: Stalin's Purge of the Thirties*, published in 1968. The "Great Terror" as Conquest defines it happened between 1934

and 1941. In this “terror” many people from the Communist Party were removed from their seats and either exiled or assassinated. However, the “terror” did not target only the Communist Party and its members as there are many accounts of people in the country, even from the poorest of peasants, which experienced the wrath of it. Conquest emphasized the horrible conditions in which many people had to live in from day to day and took an in depth look at power structure in the Soviet Union. Stalin initiated this “terror” to not only to strengthen his hold on the population, but also to rid the Party of all members trying to take away any power from him. Conquest, like many others in the late 1960s period, argued that Stalin set up a centralized power system so that he could control everything from his master hub in Moscow. He also focused on Stalin and his overall psychological standing and physical stature during his rule. Conquest views Stalin as having a “Napoleon complex”<sup>1</sup> in some ways. He only hints at this “Napoleonic” way to Stalin in his book; quoting Nikolai Bukharin,

It even makes him miserable that he cannot convince everyone, including himself, that he is a taller man than everybody else. That is his misfortune; it may be his most human trait and perhaps his only human trait; reacted to his ‘misfortune’ is not human, it is almost devilish; he cannot help taking revenge for it on others, but especially those who are in some way better or more gifted than he is.<sup>2</sup>

Conquest’s belief in Stalin’s paranoia may be correct when looking at other researcher’s work. These researchers found that Stalin moved people around when he was General Secretary, in order to shift the tables of power in his favor. Stalin feared that once Lenin died others who had the possibility of taking control of the country would be preferred over him for the position. He favored keeping the people who supported him close and his enemies (though never out of sight) far from him. One example of this would be when Stalin removed a large group of party members from the Party while Lenin was in the hospital and unable to run government. This

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<sup>1</sup>Stalin stood at five foot three inches tall and scholars, like Conquest, believed that this physical stature caused him to over compensate, leaving him over controlling and pardoned that others were plotting against him. A “Napoleon complex” derives from Napoleon Bonaparte who was seen to be power hungry, waging wars and conquest on other nations, in part because of his physical stature.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Conquest, *The Great Terror: Stalin's Purge of the Thirties* (New York: Macmillan, 1968), 54.

argument of paranoia may simply have stemmed from that fact that the Bolsheviks had come to power through war, lies and overthrows such as the October Revolution in 1917 and Civil War that took place from 1917 to 1921. Conquest's entire conclusion came about through hard work and dedication in trying to find sources when the USSR greatly restricted the information that left the country. However, like many writing on a new topic in history, many obstacles had to be overcome and these obstacles can lead to some weaknesses.

One can find many weaknesses in Conquest's work; the most important ones being his limited amount and types of sources used (mainly memoirs) because of heavy censorship within the Soviet Union. These memoirs came from Stalin and party members but were unofficial and contained a great amount of bias in them. This bias can come from both ends of the political spectrum, be it a want to show Stalin in a bad light because of hate or a want to promote Stalin because of a sense of nationalism. Conquest also chose not to use certain documents available to him because his focus was on politics and therefore the sources he used were politically based. Either way one looks at it, the sources Conquest had access to limit his analysis. It should also be pointed out his lack of understanding that Stalin alone could not control the Soviet Union; therefore, there were other powers at work shows yet another weakness. It is also evident throughout his book that his understanding of how a communist society worked was immersed in 1950s American Red Scare ideals. Nonetheless one must take a hard look at Conquest's work in order to understand the starting point of this historiography and how a generation viewed Stalin. (For other scholars in this field)<sup>3</sup>

The next major shift in looking at the Soviet Union came in 1987 with J. Arch Getty's *Origins of the Great Purges*. This shift greatly changed the way historians perceive the "terror",

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<sup>3</sup> Barrington Moore Jr., "The Present Purge in the USSR" in *The Review of Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 1947) and Herbert S. Dinerstein, *Purges in the Soviet Union and in the Satellites* (Ft. Belvoir: Defense Technical Information Center 1953)

or as he referred to it as simply the “purges”, and who controlled the events around it. He referred to it as the “purges” because it focused mainly on clearing out the Communist Party and a “terror”, in Getty’s eyes, would be a focus on clearing out the citizens of the country. Getty had the advantage of using primary sources, which Conquest did not have access to or chose not to use, in order to produce his work. One of these primary sources Getty used was the Smolensk Archives. These Archives were retrieved in Bavaria by the US, during the Nazi retreat in 1943 and ended up in the US public realm during a later period around 1968. It was because of these sources that Getty was able to produce one of the largest shifts from the previous analysis. The archives were able to show how all the different levels of government were operated during Stalin’s rule and how the city level authorities used their power to their own advantage. He brought light to the fact that Stalin may not have been the all powerful ruler that many, such as Conquest, thought him to be. Getty discusses the fact that Soviet Russia is an incredible mass of land that had to be watched over by the Party. He also notes that the probability of one man (i.e. Stalin) being able to hold sole control over all the people within Soviet Russia was slim. Getty points out that Stalin, although powerful, was not able to be in more than one place at a time. Most of his time was spent in the capital (Moscow), which lay on the western side of the country, placing him far away from many people. He believes the government to be fragmented so much that even individuals within the Party were free to do things against the Party, such as enact their own local policy, as long as it did not get back to the central hub and Stalin. Getty argues that this actually draws power away from Stalin and places it in the hands of people in charge of the smaller districts. However, he does point out that people which were not part of the main power structure did not take this distance from the head “power” as a reason to run things the way they pleased, mainly because of their fear of being caught.

Historians, like Getty, began to try and discover where the true powers lie, in order to find out what really controlled the people. The historical argument that the secret police and the fear, which the police as well as other social structures instilled in the citizens, started to take solid ground and shine a new light on what was controlling the Soviet Union. Therefore, it can be said that the fear controlled the majority of the population. This very idea separates early historians like Conquest from the ones to come after him. With the possible chance of being purged for wrong doings many followed the system in a straight line. If people did not follow this straight line they also risked friends and even family telling the leading powers of their misdoings. Some individuals turned in relatives and friends to authorities in order to protect their own interest and not be prosecuted for protecting the guilty. It was not unheard of for children to turn in their own parents in a classroom because that is what the Party taught them was the right thing to do.

Getty also disputes the way in which past historians, such as Conquest, gathered their information (mainly from political memoirs written some time after an event happened); stating “The further personal written materials move from the form of the daily diary, the closer they approach to the figurative and the fictional.”<sup>4</sup> Getty also gives the impression that memoirs cannot give information that historians want, such as the (who, what, where, when, and why) of specific events. This in a way falsifies and discredits nearly everything Conquest reported in his study on the topic (seeing that most of his information was gathered by memoirs). However, possibly the more direct contradiction to past historians came in the way Getty disagrees with the focus on “psychological” or even “physical” traits being seen as the cause of the purges and not

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<sup>4</sup> J. Arch Getty, *Origins of the Great Purges: The Soviet Communist Party Reconsidered, 1933-1938* (Soviet and East European Studies. Cambridge [Cambridgeshire]: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 4.

greater underlying political factors.<sup>5</sup> This again is something Conquest does when hinting at Stalin's "Napoleonic complex". Getty believes all the events that happened in the Soviet Union during Stalin's rule cannot simply be summed up to Stalin's own statures. This critique on how previous historians perceived the purges in the 1930's show how Getty was a true innovator in the way he presented the fragmentation of the Soviet Union's political system but he was not the only one to add to this historiographical timeline.

Lynne Viola in her book *The Best Sons of the Fatherland* published in 1987 discusses a young group of people in 1928, known as the "25,000ers", who were recruited by the Party to come together in order to help collectivize areas and work in some of the country's already collectivized farm areas. This group was made up of industry workers as well as Party members. Viola moves away from the approach of researchers, such as Getty and Conquest, and instead focuses her look at volunteers within the Soviet Union, constantly questioning why they would go through so much in the name of the country. She explains once these "25,000ers" reached the farm level they faced much opposition from local committees as they tried to push Stalin's idealistic views of how to create classless society on to the farm managers and workers. Farm workers and managers resented the 25,000ers because of the fact that they were sent by the Party which had taken their land and crops. Some of these volunteers were even murdered while out on the farms trying to help. Most farm workers in the country, no matter what thoughts they had on the government, maintained an idealistic view of their own and believed that what they were doing was driving the world in a better direction than what it was currently in. They wished to create a world where all people were equal in social and monetary backing. They understood that the society which they currently lived in was not completely what they wanted it to ultimately be; however, if they had to have the different ranks of social standing during that time

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<sup>5</sup> Getty, 3.



to lead them to their goal it was well worth the hassle.<sup>6</sup> This look, at the construction and execution of the first Five Year Plan, enables one to better understand the mind set of many in the nation at the time; a whole new approach to looking at the broader topic. The strength of Viola's argument that the center was all power but helpless in controlling all matters, comes from the fact that she used official primary sources, much like Getty, which included first person account from people in the "25,000ers." Another strength is the fact that the time period she is researching is just before the purges began which can help show the mental development of people before and after the purges. All of these areas she focuses on help her develop further, pervious historian's ideas as well as shine new light on things they may have missed.

Following the ideas that power within the Soviet Union power structure was fragmented during this time, Roberta T. Manning wrote an article titled "The Soviet economic crisis of 1936-1940 and the Great Purges" which was published in 1993. Much like Viola, she emphasizes how the power was not solely in the hands of Stalin, if at all, but was scatted to individuals such as party planners and farm managers throughout the nation. She shows the purges happened from the bottom up (started with the peasants and worked its way to the top), which is completely contrary to many of the first researchers of this topic, such as Conquest, who analyzed from the top down (started with Stalin and worked its way to the peasants). Areas such as economics and rural populations were researched to reconstruct ways in which they could have fueled the purge into what it ultimately became. This is not to say that the bottom (the peasants) of the hierarchy structure caused the purges to begin but they had their part in keeping the fire burning, with things such as falsifying production numbers which led to tension in the Communist Party.

Manning also discusses how the growth rate of the Soviet Union had greatly diminished. This inability for the country to grow at a sustainable rate was brought on by pressures to

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<sup>6</sup> Lynne Viola, *The Best Sons of the Fatherland: Workers in the Vanguard of Soviet Collectivization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987)

produce larger crops faster, which higher sitting party members and party planners placed on the collectivized system. The USSR was going through a drought at the time; farmers were not able to produce the numbers which were demanded from them, even with all the equipment that had been given to them in order to help the process speed along.<sup>7</sup> Manning also argues that this decline in production led to a ripple effect that caused a food shortage epidemic, leaving many looking where to lay the blame for the misfortune. With all eyes on the actions of the nation's farm groups, many collectivized farm leaders were pressured by the Party to state false production numbers in their records. The false numbers deter any punishments to other farms that were not able to hide the fact that they were not producing what was demanded of them. So through Manning's research one can see that because the farmer could not produce the goods, it put a strain on the farm managers, which put a strain on the party planners, which in turn put a strain on the Party, which ultimately put a strain on Stalin himself. This showed the solid workings of a bottom up system within the Soviet Union. However, many were taken into custody by the secret police and sent off to the Gulag for conspiring against the Soviet Union. (For other scholars in this field)<sup>8</sup>

More recently, scholars such as O. V. Khlevniuk have presented interpretations that draw from both the earlier (Conquest) and later (Getty, Viola, Manning) schools of thought. In his book titled *The History of the Gulag: from Collectivization to the Great Terror* in 2004 he ties the Gulag with how it was used as a fear tactic inside the Great Terror to control people; going into great depth about the conditions and everyday life inside of the camps. He discusses how the camps expanded greatly because of the rise of the collectivized system. This expansion was

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<sup>7</sup> Roberta Thompson Manning, "The Soviet Economic Crisis of 1936-1940 and the Great Purges", in *Stalinist Terror: New Perspectives*, ed. J. Arch Getty and Roberta Thompson Manning, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 118.

<sup>8</sup> David L. Hoffman and Andrea Graziosi, "Peasant Metropolis: Social Identities in Moscow, 1929-1941", *Slavic Review* Vol.54 No.4 (1995): 1090. and Robert W. Thurston, "The Soviet Family during the Great Terror, 1935-1941", *Soviet Studies* Vol. 43 No.3 (1991): 553-574.

brought on by the Communist Party and their misunderstanding of why the collective farm system was failing. If people were found to not be supporting the new way of life they were simply shipped off to a Gulag. His work shows the ever evolving method of refining of the subject even to the most specific accounts, paying attention to every detail. The vast amount of historians today on the topic choose to attack one area at a time in greater detail in order to paint the picture of the large piece of work. This strength in attention to detail is useful to deeply surround one's self in the topic and better understand it. Khlevniuk does also extend his argument back to Conquest's way of thinking, evening having Conquest deliver the preface in the book to showing that the old way of thinking still holds some relevance today. Khlevniuk argues Stalin was the one who started the purges (like Conquest); however, he does remain in the thinking of how Stalin was not the sole power who controlled everything (like Getty, Viola, and Manning). This is a fusion of the grander historiography picture from start to finish, completing a whole circle and giving readers a well rounded development and understands of the purges that happened within the Soviet Union. Khlevniuk is a prime example of how the researchers have progressed to today and will most likely continue to move forward in for the next generation of historians. (For other scholars in this field)<sup>9</sup>

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 there was an opening of the archives which released many primary source materials from the Soviet Union that few had ever seen before. These are sources that all of the more recent scholars, since the 1990's, have had the privilege of using in their research. This analysis looks at many articles that were available before and after the collapse of the Soviet Union. It looks at Stalin's own works, which contains speeches, letters to Party members, and memoirs such as "Dizzy with Success" (1930) and

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<sup>9</sup> Matthew E. Lenoe, *Closer to the Masses Stalinist Culture, Social Revolution, and Soviet Newspapers*, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2004) and Vadim Zakharovich Rogovin, *Stalin's Terror of 1937-1938: Political Genocide in the USSR*, (Oak Park, MI: Mehring Books, 2009)

“Industrialization of the Country and the Right Deviation of the C.P.S.U.(B.)” (1928). The analysis also takes an important look at firsthand accounts (published in 1995) from Polish farmers working on the fields in the USSR between 1928 and 1934. These accounts go into great detail on what struggles collective farmers had to endure in a faulty system as well as how the government treated them throughout the period of collectivization. Also, a perspective from outside the Soviet Union was looked at by investigating the firsthand account of an American who went to Soviet Russia in 1932; which is helpful in understanding the Soviet Union from a different voice other than that of USSR farmer, party member, or party planner.

In order to better understand the years of Stalin’s rule leading up to the purges, it is important to understand some of the events which occurred prior to him taking office. To do this one must look at The New Economic Plan (NEP) which was a program put into effect by Lenin in 1921 in order to turn a dying economy around after the Russian Civil War. Before the NEP years (1918-1921), the Party had tried to instill a system that would allow farmers to trade harvested goods for factory produced goods. However, the wage earning factory workers rapidly moved out of the urban areas because currency within the Soviet Union had no value and all goods interaction were done with trade and bartering. The New Economic Plan encouraged entrepreneurs to open up their own business ventures to be able to gain profits; although, the Party would remain in control of larger businesses such as banking and factories.

The New Economic Plan created a new class of entrepreneurs in agriculture called Kulaks. The term Kulaks was not new to the NEP period but is defined as a social standing that allowed one to be able to own land and hire waged workers for whatever business venture they were taking part in. The Party hoped that this NEP plan would jump start an economy that could rapidly accelerate the Soviet Union back in the direction they wanted to be heading, which was

toward a socialist society. The rebirth of capitalism would help this facing in the right direction by preventing the USSR economy from collapsing and stopping the black market system that was immerging during this time. The Kulaks during the time period were seen to be helping out the country. They pushed forth their businesses not only to better their own lives but to better the lives of their countrymen. However, after Lenin's death and once Stalin had obtained leadership of the country, these NEP ideals eventually changed to a new plan.

The Five Year Plan was conceived by Stalin in order to assist the country in a surge forward from the New Economic Plan period to a classless society. It was introduced to the Party at the Plenum of the C.P.S.U.(B.) on November 19, 1928. This surge forward that was promoted by the plan and seen as a way to progress the Soviet Union forward past a capitalism system, which all of the world powers at the time were heavily involved in, to build a socialist society. A classless society was the ultimate goal for Soviet Union and was well founded in many ideals brought about by Lenin, who ran the USSR before Stalin. The main idea of the Five Year Plan was a massive industrialization of the country and combining of independently farms into a collective farm system. This new farm system was different from the old because it took land from the privately owned farms (Kulaks) and placed it in the hands of the Party. Once in the hands of the party the land would be set up so that a community of farmers could harvest food for the country without the nation having to buy it from private business owners.

Stalin emphasized within his Five Year Plan speech that it was imperative the country industrialize quickly so that their political system would survive. He felt that the Soviet Union was so far advanced from others based on its political system, however lagged behind in industries which were crucial for their own protection against other modern powers. Stalin states:

In order to secure the final victory of socialism in our country, we must also overtake and outstrip these countries technically and economically. Either we do this, or we shall be forced to the wall. This applies not only to the building of socialism. It applies also to upholding the independence of our country in the circumstances of the capitalist encirclement. The independence of our country cannot be upheld unless we have an adequate industrial basis for defense.<sup>10</sup>

The protection Stalin spoke of in this speech was not solely in reference to war, although the Soviet Union had been through many in the few years leading up to the introduction of this plan. It also served as protection economically because other industrialized nations in Europe had accumulated a great amount of wealth through their developments and Stalin was not willing to see them use that power to force capitalism on the USSR.

Aside from Stalin wanting to protect and advance the Soviet Union past other industrialized countries in the world, the underlying ideal was to achieve a classless society. This goal affected some people more than others. The kulak and peasant class were the targeted sectors of the social hierarchy which the controlling powers thought were most important to rid the country of first as they proceeded to move the society forward. The peasant class as stated in the beginning of this work accounted for eighty percent of the population within the Union. These people mainly lived in rural areas working on farms producing goods which allowed them to survive. The policy targeted to rid the country of both the Kulaks and peasants because the Kulaks were seen as capitalist and the peasants were viewed to be living an inefficient lifestyle on the farm. Due to the peasant class being the poorest of the classes, the policy encountered minimal opposition and where there was opposition often times force was used to push them into the new way of living. A society which held no hierarchical order allowed lower classes to improve their social standings and come out ahead of where they started economically when all was said and done. The peasant was thought of to be somewhat of a hero in the “eyes” of the Soviet Union for their hard work was making the changes to a better society, the Kulaks were not

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<sup>10</sup> Joseph Stalin, “Industrialization of the Country and the Right Deviation in C.P.S.U. (B.)”, in *J. Stalin Works 11*, (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1954), 258.

so lucky. Stalin stated “It is necessary, in the second place, to ensure that our Party workers in the countryside make a strict distinction in their practical work between the middle peasant and the kulak, do not lump them together and do not hit the middle peasant when it is the kulak that has to be struck at.”<sup>11</sup>

The kulak class was looked at by the Party as being capitalist which was against everything the Soviet Union’s system wished to achieve. They consisted of wealthy farmers, merchants, and other business owners. The Soviets, which imbedded its ideals in an anti-capitalist way of living and not wanting to follow the footsteps of other progressing countries, saw the kulaks as a threat and the only answer to solve this threat was to rid the country of them completely. Stalin set this tone throughout his speech showing his idealism for the country to be an example of a perfect country, which included a deconstruction of the class system.

Stalin’s tone throughout the speech is one of idealism. He wishes to see the country accomplish what no other country has ever done before. Stalin states: “We must do so without fail if we really want to overtake and outstrip the advanced capitalist countries. And only we Bolsheviks can do it.”<sup>12</sup> This is not simply to become the world’s number one power but Stalin, along with many others within the Bolshevik Party, believed that if they were able to reach goal of the perfect society then they could show the world how to reach it as well. The idealism is shown in the way Stalin truly believes that the country can take itself from being so far behind the already capitalized nations and progress well passed them to a society with no class boundaries. Many of Stalin’s beliefs, for example claim victory in the Five Year Plan or perish, were linked back to Lenin, who was the father of the Soviet way of life, preaching “bread, peace,

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<sup>11</sup> Joseph Stalin, *Works 11*, 274.

<sup>12</sup> Joseph Stalin, *Works 11*, 259.

and land” for everybody.<sup>13</sup> Stalin, though he had had his differences with Lenin, portrayed these ideals in his Five Year Plan; showing that he also wished to achieve a society which nobody had to struggle in.

The Five Year Plan was not limited to industrialization, in fact it can be said that more importantly within the plan was the goal of collectivizing the farm system. By collectivizing the farm system Stalin believed the country would be able to supply grain to everybody within the USSR. Stalin stated in his speech:

What ways and means are necessary to accelerate the rate of development of agriculture in general, and of grain farming in particular?

There are three such ways, or channels:

- a) by increasing crop yields and enlarging the area sown by the individual poor and middle peasants;
- b) by further development of collective farms;
- c) by enlarging the old and establishing new state farms.<sup>14</sup>

This collectivization was implemented in order to slowly combine all the privately owned farms inside the Soviet Union and provide them with the equipment needed to supply the nation with its food requirements. The farms would be worked by the previous owners as well as workers who had been paid by past owners. This was vital to the plan being able to succeed, it would allow for urban workers to not be concerned about where their food would come from day by day; rather they would simply focus on completing the jobs, which was assigned to them, at a rapid pace.

It was less than one year later that the discontent within the Party started to change the way in which Stalin addressed its members. At the Plenum of the C.P.S.U.(B.) in April 1929 Stalin, started to show the first signs of a defensive stance as he began to lash back at the party members who questioned his methods of progressing the country. One of Stalin’s main

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<sup>13</sup> V.I. Lenin, “The Tasks of the Proletariat in the Present Revolution (April Theses’),” in Ronald Grigor Suny, ed, *The Structure of Soviet History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 40.

<sup>14</sup> Joseph Stalin, *Works 11*, 272.



opponents was Nikolai Bukharin who had created his own theory of how a socialist society should reach its ultimate goal. One of Bukharin's main points was that on the path to a classless society there was really no need for a class struggle. He was a supporter of the old NEP ideals and believed that the classes would straighten themselves out and in theory become one. Stalin spoke out against Bukharin's topics such as class struggle, trade with other countries, the Five Year Plan, and better ways in which to produce grain.

Many members of the Party debated with Stalin that there was no need for a class struggle within the Soviet Union (like Bukharin stated) for it to come out a socialist country that all party members idealized. However Stalin's main focus for the country was to rid it of all classes rapidly and into a more pure classless society, which he believed must be done forcibly. In one instance at the Plenum he debated this point with a Party member by the name of Rosit and his following of the Bukharin socialist model:

*Rosit.* The whole point is that, according to Bukharin, the growing into [a classless society] presumes the class struggle.

*Stalin.* I see that Rosit has sworn to be of service to Bukharin. But his service is really like that of the bear in the fable; for in his eagerness to save Bukharin he is actually hugging him to death. It is not without reason that it is said, "An obliging fool is more dangerous than an enemy."<sup>15</sup>

Stalin was quick to call Rosit a dangerous fool and enemy as he spoke out against his theory of where the country should go and how it should arrive there. Stalin may have followed his own words too close and blindly for his own good. He saw there to be only one way of reaching the perfect society and that was his way, which was riding the country of kulaks as soon as possible.

Even through all of these complicating factors, and with discontent beginning from within the Party, Stalin wrote an article for the Pravda (the leading newspaper in the USSR) that would praise the successes of the first Five Year Plan before the scheduled date. In Stalin's article "Dizzy with Success" released on March 3, 1930, he addressed all citizens praising the

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<sup>15</sup> Joseph Stalin, "The Right Deviation in C.P.S.U. (B.)", in *J. Stalin Works 12*, (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1954), 33.

workers efforts for exceeding all expectations and producing more goods in two years then was expected to be produced in five. However, the consistent undertone in the article was that the collective farm system was actually failing. Stalin stated “They could have arisen only because some of our comrades have become dizzy with success and for the moment have lost clearness of mind and sobriety of vision.”<sup>16</sup> These undertones are because projected harvest output numbers were not met by the farms in reality. Collective farm managers who recorded how much yield crops were giving consistently recorded inflated numbers so that they would not be sent to the Gulag or killed by the higher powers of the nation for not running production at a better rate. Even though the collective farm system was failing this article was not Stalin’s way of calling an end to it, rather it was his way of telling the country they could do even better if they made sure to not cloud their minds and lose track of the ultimate goal.

By writing this article and allowing country men to believe that all their work was helping in strives to an ideal nation, Stalin can be seen to be suppressing thoughts of his removal by other party members. This is a noticeably defensive position that protects Stalin’s own good more than it protects the nations, a shift from where he first started in the introduction to the Five Year Plan. This increasing defense from Stalin does not slow as the collective farms continue to try and meet the goals set by the party planning committee.

The collective farm system during the Five Year Plan was set up by the removal of all privately owned land from the peasant and kulak classes by the government. The land was then grouped together and divided out among the people who were to work on it. This division depended on how many people were to live on each farm. The land was distributed in long narrow strips and each strip would be given to a family or small group of workers to farm together. For example if the lot was fifty acres by one hundred acres and it was going to be

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<sup>16</sup> Joseph Stalin, “Dizzy with Success”, in *J. Stalin Works 12*, (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1954), 205.

divided into twenty-five lots, then each lot would be two acres by one hundred acres. The Party believed that this layout of the land would make it easier for the farmers when using the community tractors (soon to be produced by the industrial sector) to attend to their crops; however, this layout did not help the farmer in reaching the countries goals. (For more information on the collectivization of farms within the Soviet Union see)<sup>17</sup>

Vladimir Pachamowicz was a peasant farmer around twenty years of age in 1929 and during this time he felt the full wrath of what collectivization had to offer. He was a polish immigrant living in the Soviet Union with his family. Shortly after the implementation of the Five Year Plan Pachamowicz's farther had been taken by authorities to a labor camp in order to help the country in ways which local authorities thought would better suit him. Left without a main provider of the family Pachamowicz became the head of the household. He, along with his family, was responsible for providing grain to the Soviet Union for rationing. However, when times became hard for his family after the robbery of their barn and lack of labor to produce goods faster, Pachamowicz and his family were faced with extreme circumstances. While encountering these circumstances Pachamowicz wrote a memoir giving detailed information about his daily life and his dealings with the local authorities. He also discusses his experiences within the labor camp that he was sent to for not meeting the demands of the party. While at this camp his memoir was taking from him by officers and delivered to the Communist Party. In it he writes:

After a week the delivery of 70 poods (1 pood = 40 pounds) of grain and 500 potatoes was imposed. [We] delivered it after some delay, but after 15 days again a member of the Sielsoviet brought a paper for the delivery of 120 poods of grain. "My dear friend, [...] you know yourself that we have no grain" [Because of the lack of grain the commission found need not deliver any more grain.] [...] but after three days the Sielsoviet sent down a paper calling for the payment of 600 roubles for not having delivered the grain. On the next day the same commission arrived to take the cattle as a fine.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 135-141.

<sup>18</sup> Leonard Leshuk, *Days of Famine, Nights of Terror* (Washington, DC: Europa University Press, 1995), 33.

This passage shows how local authorities were not willing to be lenient when farmers were not able to produce numbers set by the party planning committee. This unwillingness to help the farmers in a time of need was not simply because the local authorities had no feelings for the well being of the farmers. It also had to do with the fact that they were making sure to cover themselves so that they would not be sent off to a camp for not doing their job correctly.

Stalin's speeches suggest that he had knowledge of events, like Pachamowicz, and was aware that the collectivized farm system was not meeting the expectation of the country. This inability of the farm system to provide for the country as it was intended hindered the fulfillment of the Five Year Plan. It did this by not providing enough food needed to feed the workers in the factories and other citizens of the country. This in turn left question to why collectivization was being carried out in the first place. The questioning of Stalin's methods in carrying out his plan by party members, party planners, and farm managers led to tensions. These tensions can be seen in Stalin's speeches in the way he can acknowledge the farms inability to complete the task it was handed and yet his persistence for it to continue rage on. This defensive stance can be summed up as an over wiliness to create a country that Stalin sees as perfect and believes only his way will get it there. These tensions with the farms were not just created due to inability of the farmers to meet crop output number.

After these dealings with the commission around the late 1930s, Pachamowicz family was gathered up and sent off to a labor camp in the far north of the country. In this camp he worked with other collective farm workers and kulaks that had been gathered up and shipped off as well. During his time there, because of the horrible living conditions and many thinking that their life would end soon anyways, Pachamowicz witnessed revolt toward the Party and from this revolt the crushing hammer of authority. He writes of one revolt:

One of the deportees climbed on top of the roof of one of the barracks. “Comrades, you see the freedom we have obtained. We are dying and perishing from the hands of the Soviet authorities. We fought and died for them at the front and now here is the recompense!” But a loud volley interrupted his speech and several men together with the speaker rolled down the roof covered with blood. A detachment of soldiers appeared with machine guns and automatic guns and surrounded the crowd that had gathered.<sup>19</sup>

Out breaks such as this one were always suppressed as fast as possible. Since the peasant class made up of eighty percent of the Soviet Union population, if riots such as this were to spread to all regions then the Communist Party along with Stalin risked losing all their power. Local authorities knew of this risk as well and with self preservation in mind they made sure all that spoke out against the USSR were silenced quickly.

Once again Pachamowicz story sheds light on reasons Stalin shifted from idealistic to defensive. These uprisings within the labor camps not only showed the overall resistance of the people to the way they were being treated but the leadership of the country which Stalin stood to lose. The labor camps, being run by Moscow, reported what happened within the camps to their superiors. When reports like this outburst reach Moscow some party planners and members find the actions carried out to be unjust and unnecessary in order to reach the ultimate goal of a classless society. They do believe in the classless society but do not all think that Stalin’s way is the path that should be taken to get it there. These ideas, much like Bukharin’s that was discussed earlier in this work, fueled Stalin’s shift and continually increased his paranoia of others trying to take power from him. Pachamowicz is not the only account one can find of failing in the farm system that assist in Stalin’s shift.

Another complicating factor of the farms was the lack of knowledge of how to use or maintain the modern equipment, such as tractors, which the Party was supplying to them. John Scott was born in America in 1912. He had a decent upbringing and attended the University of Wisconsin where he graduated from in 1931. After school Scott found himself jobless during the

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<sup>19</sup> Leshuk, 48.

Great Depression. He had heard of a nation during these hard times that had no unemployment and it captured his interest. His parents pushed him to learn a trait that he could take with him to the Soviet Union in order help him along his way, so he learned how to weld and received all his certificates. After gaining his welding licenses Scott packed his bags and headed to the Soviet Union because he believed that they were on the right path to a better world. Upon arrival to the USSR Scott was placed as a welder at Magnitogorsk. In his writings he tells of all the difficulties sight managers had to face in order to produce, if they were lucky enough to, what is expected of them by the Party. Often times these trades consisted of giving up goods they were using for one job in order to finish another. While on a two week vacation from his position at Magnitogorsk Scott traveled to a collective farm and experienced another side of life unlike he had ever seen before. His journey shows that the idealism that many had in these hard times by even taking his vacation time and using it to better the country.

When on the collective farm Scott strongly emphasizes the improper treatment of the equipment supplied to them by the Communist Party. This improper treatment was not because of resistance to a newer way of farming, often times the equipment was just dropped off at the farms without any instruction on how to use it. His observations show us how the newly developed farm system failed to work properly. He stated:

Out of twelve tractors only three were working. The rest were in various stages of disintegration. Some had cracked blocks, stripped gears, burned- out bearings. Some were merely out of time, or the plugs were gummed up with carbon from the bad quality fuel. [...] They had never seen any kind of machinery or equipment before coming to the farm. They had been taught that when you pushed the pedal the tractor moved. That was the extent of their technical education.<sup>20</sup>

This observation is testament to the fact that this system of collectivization did not simply fail because farmers were apathetic in making the country better. It also had to do with the Party not taking the proper steps in making sure all the different levels of the new system were fully

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<sup>20</sup> John Scott, *Behind the Urals* (Cambridge, MA: The Riverside Press, 1942), 97-98.

educated in the new ways, including proper training. It is little missed details such as this that made the Party and normal citizens to increasingly stir with discontent.

One of the last speeches Stalin gave before starting the shift away from such a heavy focus on the Five Year plan was during his 1933 “Report to the Seventeenth Party Congress on the Work of the Central Committee of the C.P.S.U.(B.)”. During his talk about agriculture Stalin lays out all of the complication which has occurred because of the collectivization process. He also gives many reasons on why these difficulties have occurred stating:

Evidently, the enormous difficulties of uniting the scattered small peasant farms into collective farms, the difficult task of creating a large number of big grain and livestock farms, starting almost from nothing, and, in general, the period of reorganization, when individual agriculture was being remodeled and transferred to the new, collective farm basis, which required much time and considerable outlay—all these factors inevitably predetermined both the slow rate of progress of agriculture, and the relatively long period of decline in the number of livestock.<sup>21</sup>

Stalin, even through all these failings, still does not stop collectivization as a whole. He simply shifts away from it as stated before because he was receiving too much lash back and displeasure from within the Party and from other smaller run areas. All of the interaction Stalin faced with members of the Communist Party did not go forgotten however.

Stalin’s ultimate end to his defensive stance toward all that discontent within the Party and collective farm system was his move into the purges in 1934 beginning with the assassination of Sergej Kirov. The ones purged were the outspoken Party members along with those who were still seen as kulaks. Those who were purged were sent off to the Gulag prisons (mostly kulaks) or simply assassinated (mostly higher Party members) if that was seen to be the only way to get rid of the problem. Stalin actions within the purges lead one to believe he thought party members were planning his overthrow. Inside these camps prisoners went through harsh conditions such as lack of food, poor housing conditions, and many variations of extreme

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<sup>21</sup> Joseph Stalin, “Report to the Seventeenth Party Congress on the Work of the Central Committee of the C.P.S.U.(B.)”. in *J. Stalin Works 13*, (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1954), 324.

weather conditions. Often times these people would die in the camps due to these conditions, most estimates being in the millions. Some can even argue that the purges may have never happened if collectivization had been more of a success within the Soviet Union.

Conquest, along with other scholars, debates that Stalin controlled the country harshly because of psychological issues. These psychological issues were fueled by what others thought of him. Those who praised him were the ones who moved up rapidly through the Party. This assumption is simply not that easy of a conclusion to arrive to when looking at the evidence. For instance many of the Party members came of age in a time where people did not trust the government. Revolution, civil wars, and world wars all played their part in setting the tone of how the Soviet Union would be ruled in the years following the events. Even when Lenin, who was seen to be a great leader concerned primarily with the well being of the country, was in power many unjust acts occurred. Citizens and party members were still executed without trials, labor camps were in existence and well used, and people that spoke out against the Party were often times deported or killed. This list can go on to show support of these acts from many high leading Party members. It was never simply an act of doing what was best for the country. Survival was vital in the Soviet Union and if one did not deal with problems quickly they risked personal dangers as well as lose of power.

Stalin's role within the Soviet Union was even one of survival. He came into power with an idealistic view point that the country could reach a perfect socialist system through hard work and sacrifice. It must be pointed out however that Stalin was stubborn when it came to the way in which this goal was to be reached. He was not willing to compromise with people inside or outside of the Communist Party because he believed the rapid industrialization of the country and building of the collective farm system was the correct way in achieving a classless society.



Even if this had been so and Stalin's way was the perfect way of turning the USSR into a classless society, there were too many forces working against him.

Collective farm operations and the people managing them were run in order to benefit the locals more than the Soviet Union. This was not the plan Stalin set forth instead local authorities such as farm managers worried more about their own safety and interest than that of the country. This was not because workers and managers were not idealistic in bringing about a greater country. The fact is that the farmers were given all the right equipment and materials to complete a job but without the proper understanding of how to run that equipment within a new system, so they were bound to fail. These complications along with a drought only amplified the problems that lay before them.

The findings of this analysis show that the supply demanded from the collective farm system was set by the party planning committee. This is evident because though Stalin did set forth the Five Year Plan which contained collectivization he did not as a single living being have the ability to run every aspect of it. In order to run the different parts of the plan, committees were set up. Some committees were set up to deal with the industrial side of the plan and others to deal with the collective farm side of the plan. The collective farm committee appointed leaders to the farms, distributed equipment such as tractors, and imposed a certain quantity of harvest that the farm was to supply to the country annually. When these quantities were not met tensions increased between all sectors of the system.

These tensions that existed between the different sectors of the system were almost in a circle which saw not end. Farmers disliked managers because they were seen at the local level as being one of the powers forcing them into this way of life. Farm managers experienced tensions with the party planning committee for not being able to produce enough food for the country

therefore making the committee look bad to the Communist Party. Last Stalin had a great deal of tensions with the Party because they were unable to carry out the Five Year Plan as he had seen it fit. Also because in the process of carrying out this plan many questioned his role as leader which he felt made him lose face with the population as a whole (mainly peasants) because he did not deliver on his word.

Continuing on with these problems to the mid and late 1930s Stalin took the nation to the next extreme in a hope to possibly rid it of all the people who were against the Soviet dream and give one last final push to a classless society. The purges, like Conquest emphasizes, left many scared for their lives. At any moment the secret police could arrive and take you away to a labor camp or Gulag where most people never came back from. These fears were imbedded in people and perhaps ruled the people more than Stalin did at the time period. This way of living was brought about by a leader feeling like he must take the defensive stance because of being pushed into a corner.

Going forward and continuing on this historiographical timeline many questions are still left unanswered. What were the actual causes of Stalin's paranoia? Where they a result of physiological issues like Conquest concluded? Or where they caused by an outcome created by the bottom up like Getty, Viola, and Manning suggest? The findings within this research suggest that both played a part in Stalin's overall development through his period of rule. No matter the cause, be it collectivization, physiological, or other factors; the truth is that Stalin views shifted from idealistic to defensive which took his role as leader to an extreme that only few will ever understand.