COMMUNIST UPBRINGING UNDER STALIN: THE POLITICAL SOCIALIZATION AND MILITARIZATION OF SOVIET YOUTH, 1934-1941

By

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
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Abstract:

In 1935 the Communist Youth League (Komsomol) embraced a policy called “communist upbringing” that changed the purpose of Soviet official youth culture. Founded in 1918, the Komsomol had been an organization of cultural proletarianization and economic mobilization. After the turmoil of Stalin’s revolution from above, Soviet leaders declared that the country had entered the period of socialism. Under the new conditions of socialism, including the threat of war with the capitalist world, “communist upbringing” transformed the youth league into an organization of mass socialization meant to mold youth in the shape of the regime.

The key goals of “communist upbringing” were to broaden the influence of Soviet political culture and to enforce a code of “cultured” behavior among youth. Youth leaders transformed the Komsomol from a league of young male workers into an organization that included more than a quarter of Soviet youth by 1941, incorporating more adolescents, women, and non-workers. Employing recreation, reward and disciplinary practices that blurred into repression, mass socialization in the Komsomol attempted to create a cohort of “Soviet” youth—sober, orderly, physically strong and politically loyal to Stalin’s regime.

The transformation of youth culture under Stalin reflected a general shift in Stalinist social policies in the mid-1930s. Historians have argued whether this turn was a conservative
retreat from Bolshevik ideals or the use of apolitical modern state practices in the service of socialism. This dissertation shows that while youth leaders were intensely interested in modern state practices, they made these practices into central elements of Soviet socialism. Through the Komsomol, youth became a resource for the state to guide along the uncertain and dangerous road to the future of communism. Reacting to domestic and international crises, Stalinist leaders created a system of state socialization for youth that would last until the fall of the Soviet Union.
Acknowledgements

This dissertation has been the product of an intellectual and physical journey that has been aided by many friends, colleagues and mentors. I cannot thank everyone who contributed as deeply as they deserve but I will try to give credit to those who influenced this dissertation the most.

Before anyone else, I express my deepest appreciation for Lynne Viola, who molded me as a historian and went beyond what anyone could have possibly expected in supporting my work. I could not ask for a better adviser. I counted on my committee members Doris Bergen and Thomas Lahusen for moral support and fresh perspectives. Finally, Alison Smith made my work better by consistently pinpointing its key contributions and weaknesses.

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Introduction

On February 24, 1940, Nina Kosterina received a special honor. Born in 1921, she joined the Communist Youth League (Komsomol) in 1936 at age fifteen. Through the Komsomol, Kosterina volunteered as a counselor in a Young Pioneer group at her school and remained active in the league after she enrolled at the Moscow Institute of Geology. As she put it, the “climax and reward” for her activism came when she was appointed company commander of her youth group during a militarized march on Red Army Day. Upon receiving orders, her company marched from Moscow to Skhodnia, on the outskirts of Moscow’s Khimki suburb, to Nakhabino, another suburb—a total distance of at least thirty kilometers. The march was a major trial, a “test of the defense preparedness of the Komsomol” meant to simulate mobilization at the start of a real war. As she had in other aspects of her life, Kosterina excelled here too; her company’s actions were “a complete success” and she received a personal citation from her youth group. Kosterina treated the march with great significance. In her diary entry for that day she concluded, “If war comes, I am ready for it.”¹

Kosterina was one of millions of young people whom the Komsomol molded in the 1930s. And more broadly, the interwar period saw the rise of radical mass youth organizations meant to shape youth throughout the world. Mass youth organizations had their lineage in associations for youth of the late nineteenth century. These associations were often formed along class lines by adults concerned that youth needed to be saved from delinquency and society from delinquent youth.² In authoritarian states like Stalin’s Soviet Union, the regime

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frequently took over such organizations, monopolized the right of political and public socialization and often eliminated all competing groups. These authoritarian youth leagues were based on the assumption that through them, the regime could mold and mobilize youth for its purposes. Above all, in the tense international atmosphere of the 1930s, youth leaders in the illiberal regimes of Europe wanted to indoctrinate young people with the worldview of the regime and to train them physically and mentally for a future of war. In the late 1930s, Stalinist youth culture evolved under the same understanding that youth was a resource that could be shaped for the regime.

This study examines Soviet official youth culture from 1934 to 1941 primarily through the Komsomol. Although the Komsomol of the 1930s bore many similarities to its European contemporaries, its origins during the Russian revolution also significantly influenced its later development. The Komsomol formed in 1918 in support of the new Bolshevik regime and was dominated by young factory workers. Its members were older than those in most youth organizations in Europe, between the ages of fourteen and twenty-three (fifteen to twenty-six after 1936). Another difference from its European counterparts was the Komsomol’s membership included both young men and women, although men dominated the league throughout the interwar period. Soviet youth leaders placed labor and political education at the center of its program and admission to its relatively exclusive ranks was largely based on pre-revolutionary social class (or that of a youth’s parents) and achievement in the workplace or at school. But perhaps the biggest dissimilarity was that unlike the members of other European youth organizations, rank-and-file Komsomol members of the 1920s played a large role in shaping the organization; out of it they made their own radical milieu. By the 1930s, its ranks outnumbered the party considerably, by two to four times at varying points during the decade.
As young adults with political authority, Komsomol members were often mobilized as the state’s plenipotentiaries in the countryside, at factories and in other areas where party members were few.

Some of the foundational differences between Soviet official youth culture and other authoritarian youth organizations never went away. During the late 1930s, though, the Komsomol took on significant characteristics of its European counterparts. The hallmark of authoritarian youth movements was mass membership—an attempt to influence more and more of the population. While Stalin’s Komsomol did not come close to the population saturation of the Hitler Youth, it grew noticeably as a proportion of the population in the late 1930s (see table 1). The transformation of the Komsomol into a mass youth league entailed more than expanding membership, though. Following the upheavals of the early 1930s, the regime sought to stabilize and discipline Soviet society. As Stalin declared that the country had entered the epoch of socialism, Komsomol officials embraced a set of practices and goals that they called “communist upbringing” (kommunistischesko vospitanie). In Russian the key word relating to socializing and educating youth is vospitanie, which translates roughly to “upbringing.” The word denotes methods of educating, socializing and generally molding people, usually the young. The imperatives of “communist upbringing” made youth leaders turn away from the class-based mobilization of youth and move toward the mass socialization of all Soviet youth. Political socialization in the Komsomol connected practices of behavioral disciplining both to

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3 A March 1939 law made membership in the Hitler Youth or the League of German Girls mandatory for all ethnic German youth and the large majority (Michael Kater cites a large figure of 98.1 percent) of age-eligible boys became members of the former. See Michael Kater, Hitler Youth (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 23.

4 Like many words in Russian, vospitanie defies singular translation. Its meaning varies by the vospitatel’ (“upbringer”—e.g., teacher, parent, mentor—even a group, like the Communist Party or the Komsomol) and by vospitanik (“upbringer”—e.g., pupil, child or protégé) and—important for this study—the historical context of vospitanie.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Organizations</th>
<th>Members**</th>
<th>% Ages 15-24</th>
<th>Total 15-24 (mil.)</th>
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<tr>
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<td>500,700</td>
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<td>223,508</td>
<td>4,375,604</td>
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<td>1939</td>
<td>286,908</td>
<td>7,296,135</td>
<td>24.6%</td>
<td>29.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>328,351</td>
<td>10,223,148</td>
<td>30.2%</td>
<td>33.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>343,256</td>
<td>10,387,852</td>
<td>29.6%</td>
<td>35.6</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Note that 1940 and 1941 figures include newly annexed territories.

**Figures include Komsomol members and candidates from all sections of the league, including sections separate from the civilian Komsomol in the administrations of the Red Army, the gulag and railroads.

political repression and to regime-approved forms of entertainment. These policies of discipline were increasingly tied linked to preparation for a seemingly inevitable future war. As the 1930s wore on, the connection between “communist upbringing” and militarizing practices became

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5 E.M. Andreev, L.E. Darskii, T.L. Khar’kova, *Naselenie Sovetskogo Soiuza, 1922-1991* (Moscow: Nauka, 1993), 121-126. RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 126, d. 393, II, 5-6, 11, 20. Soviet censuses broke the population into age groups of five years, as do the post-Soviet Russian demographers Andreev, Darskii and Khar’kova who extrapolate their year-by-year estimates from these censuses. It would have been difficult and only a guess if I had attempted to approximate the number of Soviet people who were exactly of the age when they could enter the Komsomol. Moreover, the age boundaries of admission did not mean that existing members who were older than these limits could not (and did not) remain in the youth league. Nonetheless, these statistics provide an accurate guide to the dynamics of Komsomol membership as part of the population and a rough estimate of the real proportion. Contemporary statistics that give Komsomol membership as a percentage of the age-eligible population suggest that the percentage was slightly lower than in this table. According to contemporary statistics from January 1939 and 1941 (not in the table) the percentage of Komsomol youth as part of the age-eligible population was 19.9 percent and 28.3 percent respectively.
stronger and stronger, blurring the line between shaping citizens and training soldiers for Stalin’s socialism.

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This dissertation is the first full-length study of Soviet youth culture in the 1930s and early 1940s. How a regime or society raises its youth shows the essence of its vision for the future. In this sense, changing conceptions of vospitanie in Stalin’s Komsomol from 1934 to 1941 show the development of Stalinism as a broader political system. The introduction of “communist upbringing” reflected the regime’s efforts to stabilize society and shape a loyal citizenry in the new socialist state. In the Stalin revolution, the regime had attempted to mobilize politically active youth for the benefit of the Soviet economy. Collectivization and rapid industrialization had thrown Soviet society into chaos. When Stalin declared the “victory of socialism,” he signaled a period of greater stability when the Soviet Union could reconstruct itself on the foundation of the new socialist epoch. “Communist upbringing” was a building block of socialism, one that made the main aim of Komsomol leaders the cultural socialization of Soviet youth. Youth activists were supposed to become character builders of the younger generation, spreading and enforcing “cultured” codes of behavior among youth. Through both coercive and unifying practices, youth leaders sought to stamp out older forms of radical activism. As part of this effort to recast youth activism, they attempted to recruit and reshape a

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generation of youth by bringing the best of these youth into the league’s ranks. Instead of providing an organization to raise, support and mobilize a smaller group of radical proletarian youth, the Komsomol became an organization of mass socialization. Although the goals of socialization in the Komsomol differed by gender and age, its main goals were to create a broad cohort of culturally Soviet youth.

As the perceived threat of a major war grew imminent, the Soviet culture that Stalinist youth leaders hoped to instill in youth became increasingly militarized. Historians Michael Geyer and John Gillis provide the conceptual framework for militarization. An important distinction they make is between militarism and militarization. The former, Gillis says, is “the dominance of the military over civilian authority, or…the prevalence of warlike values in a society.” In contrast, Geyer defines militarization as “the contradictory and tense social process in which civil society organizes itself for the production of violence.” Militarism is often easy to see in a society (especially if that society is not one’s own) but militarization can be a subtle process with political, economic, social and cultural aspects. Applying this definition of militarization to Stalinism requires some modification. The type of independent civil society that Geyer and Gillis have in mind did not exist in the Soviet Union, where civic life was wholly intertwined with the regime. However, in Stalin’s Soviet Union organizations like the Komsomol provided a regime-approved substitution for civil society. Particularly at the end of the decade, as the Soviet Union became embroiled in military conflicts, militarization in the Komsomol intensified previous military training activities for youth, making the preparation of youth for war a dominant goal. The Komsomol became an agent of militarization and “communist upbringing” grew to mean the inculcation of military-style discipline in youth.

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The history of “communist upbringing” in Stalin’s Komsomol combines social, political, cultural and military history. This study uses of a range of sources that provide the perspective of youth from multiple regions of the Soviet Union and from different hierarchical levels of the Komsomol, party and state administrations. Archival materials come both from central party, state and Komsomol archives and from the records of youth groups in Kiev, Moscow, Petrozavodsk, Riazan’ and Smolensk regions. These materials include stenographic records of meetings, bureaucratic correspondence, statistical records, summary reports, and letters and petitions from local youth. Sources used also include articles from the Soviet press and contemporary films about youth. Memoirs and diaries of young people provide examples of the experience of individuals under Stalin. Histories that use significant evidence from individual accounts or regional sources often face the choice of creating self-contained case studies or attempting to weave these materials more closely into a broader narrative. This dissertation opts for the latter, integrating the stories of individual, regional and central actors in Soviet youth culture into a wider account of Stalinism through the lens of youth.

This study contributes to a growing literature on youth in the Soviet Union and in modern societies more generally. During the Cold War, Soviet youth culture garnered considerable attention. Western Sovietologists were primarily concerned with the extent of party influence over politicized youth, seeking hints of youthful resistance to the Soviet regime. However, they found only what appeared to be slavish adherence to the party line. Contemporary historians in the Soviet Union agreed that youth followed the party’s directives completely but disagreed with their counterparts by arguing that young people’s adherence was willing, not slavish. Both sides made impressive contributions to empirical knowledge about Soviet youth, even making similar arguments. However, as Ronald Suny maintains of Cold War-era historiography in general,
authors on each side framed their findings as conflicting based on the prevailing ideological context. Neither view disputed that Komsomol youth fulfilled the wishes of the party, just whether young people were happy to do so.8

From the late 1980s and especially since 2000, there has been a surge of interest in Soviet and Russian youths.9 Isabel Tirado’s *Young Guard!* explores the formation of the Komsomol during the revolution. Examining youth movements in revolutionary Petrograd, Tirado shows how the Komsomol emerged amidst tensions over the nature of the revolution. Youth leaders

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9 Besides examining questions about Soviet youth (adolescents and young adults), historians since 1991 have paid increasing attention to children and schools. Catriona Kelly’s *Children’s World* is a sweeping look at Russian practices of raising children. Extremely useful as a source of information, it argues that, as in other modern states, parent-children dynamics in families became more prominent and relationships among siblings became less important as families became smaller. Ann Livschiz in her dissertation “Growing Up Soviet: Childhood in the Soviet Union, 1918-1958” (PhD diss., Stanford University, 2007), examines the negotiation of the regime with parents and children themselves. Kelly has also taken on the case of Pavlik Morozov in *Comrade Pavlik: The Rise and Fall of a Soviet Boy Hero* (London: Granta, 2005). Living in the Soviet countryside in the early 1930s, the boy denounced members of his family to authorities after they stole grain from the local collective farm. Pavlik’s myth came to represent the supposed Soviet ideal of breaking down traditional families to generate loyalty to the regime. Kelly argues that Pavlik, rather than acting out of loyalty to Soviet power, used the repressive mechanisms the regime offered to settle personal conflicts in his family. Moreover, in the immediate years after it occurred, Kelly argues that the case was played down in favor of patriotic, disciplined child heroes (e.g., Timur of Arkadii Gaidar’s *Timur and His Team*). For the traditional interpretation of Pavlik’s case, see Yuri Druzhnikov, *Informер 001: The Myth of Pavlik Morozov* (New York: Transaction, 1996).

The literature on Soviet education has also grown considerably. Michael David-Fox in his *Revolution of the Mind: Higher Learning among the Bolsheviks, 1918-1929* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997) argues that political debates in institutes of higher education set the scene for the cultural revolution of 1928-1931. Larry Holmes has written several books about primary and secondary education as policy and practice in the Soviet Union. His *Kremlin and the Schoolhouse: Reforming Education in Soviet Russia, 1917-1931* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1991) demonstrates the complex situation that faced early Soviet educational administrators as they came up against material and social opposition to revolutionary policies. In *Stalin’s School: Moscow’s Model School NO. 25, 1931-1937* (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh University Press, 1999), Holmes provides a case study of an elite school in the Soviet Union. E. Thomas Ewing has written on the teaching profession under Stalin in *Teachers of Stalinism: Policy, Practice and Power in Soviet Schools of the 1930s* (New York: Peter Lang, 2002). Ewing argues that teachers occupied a middle ground in society and were “agents, mediators and victims of the regime.”
and activists provided essential support for the new state but they clashed on the issues of the Komsomol’s autonomy from the Bolshevik party and whether it was a proletarian youth organization or a mass organization of all Soviet youth. Tirado asserts that the increased control of the party over youth organizations after 1917 followed the general pattern of stifling opposition (e.g., the Workers’ Opposition) as the regime solidified control over the country.10

Exploring youth and society in the NEP period, Anne Gorsuch’s *Youth in Revolutionary Russia* makes a case that anxieties about and among youth represented the tensions of society as a whole. The relatively pluralistic regime of the 1920s gave a space for youth subcultures to form inside and outside the Komsomol. Some young people became foxtrotters, passively resisting the wishes of the new regime with their embrace of “bourgeois” style. At the same time, the autonomy that some Komsomol groups enjoyed gave rise to radical youth organizers who viewed the NEP regime as alien to their notions of communism. In their own way, both groups presented challenges for the regime—a challenge that would be resolved with the rise of Stalin.11

Matthias Neumann’s *The Communist Youth League* looks at the Komsomol from 1918 to 1932. Neumann argues that the Komsomol of the 1920s was one element of a limited version of Soviet civil society (*obshchevstennost’*) in the early years of the regime. Although not internally monolithic, the Komsomol represented the interests of young, politically active society. Neumann asserts that at the end of the 1920s, the Komsomol became a “static organization”—part of the regime rather than a semi-autonomous element in society.12

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work on the Komsomol of the 1920s, examines the culture of the youth league. He asserts that the Komsomol underwent an “identity crisis” as radical league members contested the meaning of the revolution and the place of politicized youth in NEP society. Not merely reacting to state policies, Komsomol members in Guillory’s view had proactive agency in forming their identity, accepting and even welcoming the Stalin revolution as a resolution to the identity crisis.13

The common themes in these works on youth in the early Soviet Union are questions of agency, identity and party control over official youth culture. They continue and complicate the questions of Cold War-era scholarship about party control over youth and society. The sum of their contributions shows the NEP period as a time of uncertainty and anxiety. Scholars have asserted that the limited autonomy the regime allowed under NEP gave rise to a softer version of socialism. Yet these works on NEP-era youth show the space this autonomy also allowed in the Komsomol planted the seeds for elements of Stalinism.14 These scholars conclude that the Stalin revolution spelled the end of Komsomol radicalism even as this revolution itself fulfilled the wishes of young radicals. The regime’s wary toleration of competing discourses during NEP ended and independent associational life died away in the Komsomol and in other areas of social and cultural life.15 Yet works about NEP-era youth incorrectly suggest that the Stalin Revolution turned the Komsomol into a mass youth organization, placing Soviet youth culture on a

15 Vladimir Paperny argues that this shift reflected a basic dichotomy in Russian history, a difference between the more open and expansive culture one (NEP) and the hierarchical and bordered culture two (Stalinism). Paperny, Architecture in the Age of Stalin: Culture Two (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). Other works have focused on the ways that the culture of the 1920s contained elements of Stalinism. Katerina Clark’s Petersburg asserts that the cultural ecosystem of the 1920s supported various cultural outlooks and that Stalinism did not represent a departure from all of these outlooks but rather an elimination of many and the merging of others.
trajectory that would not change until the Soviet Union neared its end. Instead, the foundational moment of the Komsomol as a mass organization was in the mid-1930s as a reaction to the chaos of the Stalin Revolution. Hoping to discipline and militarize society, Komsomol leaders transformed the league into a program to socialize all Soviet youth.

Although historians have focused considerably on youth in the revolution and 1920s, scholars have largely skipped over the history of youth culture from the mid-1930s through the end of World War II. In contrast, the history of postwar youth has garnered a great deal of attention. Juliane Fürst’s *Stalin’s Last Generation* examines the impact of war on Soviet society and political culture through its youth. Fürst maintains that official Soviet youth culture after World War II changed from “a culture based on ideology to a culture shaped by consumption.” *Stalin’s Last Generation* shows that the devastation of the war and the socio-political changes that occurred in its aftermath undermined the regime’s emphasis on Marxist-Leninist political education for young people. The regime’s resources (material and human) were spread too thinly after the war to devote significant attention to political education for youth. Related factors caused the Komsomol to take on a younger, less experienced membership and an increasingly vertical hierarchy.  

The Khrushchev Thaw, more like the NEP era in its relative toleration of multiple discourses, presents an opportunity for scholars to examine how youth acted under this

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comparative freedom. In his work on youth during this period, Gleb Tsipursky maintains that young people spurred a revival of grassroots initiative in cultural life. He also mirrors Guillory’s portrayal of the Komsomol as a social ecosystem by asserting that the youth press used public censure as an alternative to state-led coercion.\(^\text{17}\) Brian Lapierre’s work on hooliganism asserts that through the Komsomol and other outlets, Khrushchev’s regime created an unprecedented network of activism meant to police moral behavior in society.\(^\text{18}\)

Works on the postwar period draw attention to the questions of recovery after the devastation of World War II and the reinvigoration of idealism under Khrushchev. Yet this scholarship overestimates the novelty of the postwar practices they examine. The demographic and ideological shifts of postwar official youth culture began before World War II as a reaction to the new conditions of socialism, including the potential for war. As it expanded in the late 1930s, the Komsomol ceased to be an exclusive organization and took up official censure as a major tool of molding youth. Local committees seized upon this tool to discipline “degeneracy” and “hooliganism” but often without excising youth from their ranks. These trends in official youth culture originated and solidified in the 1930s during the shift to Stalinist socialism and the developments of the postwar period constitute continuations and expansions.

The history of Soviet youth in the 1930s has clear parallels with youth culture in other modern states. In the popular imagination, Nazi Germany’s Hitler Youth is the most appropriate comparison.\(^\text{19}\) Michael Kater in his *Hitler Youth* asserts that militarizing youth and inculcating


\(^{19}\) The comparison between Stalin’s Soviet Union and Nazi Germany is a very old one. For a recent overview of the literature see Michael Geyer and Sheila Fitzpatrick, “After Totalitarianism—Stalinism and Nazism Compared,” in Fitzpatrick and Geyer eds., *Beyond Totalitarianism: Stalinism and Nazism Compared* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 1-40. The link between the youth organizations of these countries in popular culture is strong. In George Orwell’s novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1949) Winston Smith’s
them with the regime’s worldview (especially racial antisemitism) were the main goals of Germany’s youth leaders. The increasing emphasis on militarization in the Komsomol was an important way that Soviet youth organizations moved closer to their authoritarian counterparts beginning in the mid-1930s. The comparison of Soviet and Nazi German youth programs is especially compelling because Soviet officials borrowed paramilitary practices and a militarizing mindset from the youth organizations in other authoritarian states—above all from Germany. In membership policies, too, Soviet youth culture came to resemble authoritarian states. Hannah Arendt writes that the Nazi and Soviet regimes both limited the number of party members while expanding organizations of sympathizers like the Komsomol or Hitler Youth. Although the specific comparison does not hold entirely (the Communist Party expanded, too, during the 1930s, although not as rapidly as the Komsomol), the main point is that authoritarian states tended to embrace a larger portion of the population through youth organizations in order to influence the development of a greater number of their citizens. The key difference between Soviet youth organizations and those in Nazi Germany was that the former included a significant focus on social and educational advancement for young people. In contrast, the Hitler Youth had few pretensions of advancing youth’s career prospects beyond the military or police.

Because of its focus on citizenship and social advancement, a better comparison to Stalin’s Komsomol is perhaps the Anglo-American Boy Scouts. Of course, this comparison is

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neighbor Parsons, whose loyalty to the regime in Oceania is unquestionable, sends his children to the Junior Spies, Oceania’s stand in for the Young Pioneers or Hitler Youth. When Smith ends up in jail, he finds Parsons there, too: his children denounced him (wrongfully) for thoughtcrime.

20 Kater, *Hitler Youth*.
22 On the links between the Hitler Youth and Nazi policing, see Gerhard Rempel, *Hitler’s Children: The Hitler Youth and the SS* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990). The comparison also seems to be true of Italian Fascist youth organizations, where the emphasis was on control, loyalty and militarization rather than a system of advancement. Tracy Koon, *Believe, Obey, Fight: Political Socialization of Youth in Fascist Italy, 1922-1943* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985).
also problematic. Scholars typically have examined the history of the Boy Scouts in a different era (usually focusing on its origins before World War I), the scouts encompassed a different age group (boys under eighteen, often pre-teens) and the scouts were independent of political parties or state administrations. Yet there are three ways that the histories of these organizations overlap thematically. First, scouting leaders and Soviet youth organizers both reacted to anxieties about the moral degeneration of youth. In North America, the scouting movement grew out of a fear that middle-class boys were being emasculated by modern upbringing. Scouting leaders wanted to instill a vigorous, masculine upbringing but with the discipline they saw as lacking in lower-class boys. Komsomol leaders, too, attempted to control the league’s masculine subculture that manifested itself through drinking or violence, often by characterizing these acts as “degeneracy” or under the legal designation of “hooliganism.” The fight against the remnants of the Komsomol’s radical subculture was also a part of a larger recasting of youth leaders’ role as the monitoring and shaping of “cultured” behavior among Soviet youth.

Second, the exclusion of marginalized social strata was an element that helped to form identities in both the Soviet and Anglo-American contexts. In the American Boy Scouts, exclusion of African-Americans, Catholics and rural boys formed middle-class identity by opposition. Soviet official youth culture’s marginalization of non-proletarians and (to a large extent) women played an integral role in the construction of the Komsomol’s masculine proletarian identity in the 1920s and early 1930s. In the mid-1930s, though, leaders eased class restrictions on admission to the Komsomol, throwing the league’s class-based identity into flux.

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Third is the common theme of the juxtaposition of militarization and citizen formation in the Komsomol and Boy Scouts. Historians of the Boy Scouts disagree about whether that organization’s main purpose was to mold imperial citizens or train future soldiers. In contrast, in Stalin’s Soviet Union there was no way to separate those two goals; contributing to the country’s military preparation became an integral part of being a good young citizen.26

The assertion that Stalin’s Soviet Union was a militarized regime may not seem all that new. But despite the longstanding assertion of Soviet militarization in scholarship, historians have frequently blurred Soviet militarism (glorification of war and the army) with militarization (preparation for war). Research on the impact of the military in interwar Soviet society and culture has two major themes. The first is how the experience of the civil war affected political, economic and social life in the Soviet Union. Mark von Hagen argues that the experience of World War I and the civil war profoundly affected the attitudes of soldiers who returned, amounting to the “militarization of Bolshevik political culture.”27 Andrea Graziosi shows how Soviet leaders imported military practices into the factories in the first years after the revolution.28 These studies convincingly demonstrate the enormous influence the civil war experience had on the development of practices in political and industrial organization. What they do not show is whether these practices had any impact—intended or realized—on the country’s mobilizational capacity. The second theme in works on Soviet military influences is on militant attitudes among Soviet people. Works on Soviet youth in the NEP era stress the

ways that glorification of the civil war experience led young militants to adopt military dress or the harsh command style of the army.  

Although works on both themes often assert that they examine Soviet militarization, they fit better under Gillis’s definition of militaristic behavior—the glorification of war, but not necessarily preparation for it.  

Several studies do examine how Soviet leaders attempted to prepare the Soviet economy and society for war. The consensus among economic historians is that militarization of the Soviet economy began during the First Five-Year Plan in the late 1920s and early 1930s in response to Soviet leaders’ fear of war with the capitalist countries that encircled the USSR. Scholars continue to debate the timing and motivation of the militarization of the economy. The traditional view is that the specific Polish-British war scare in 1927-28 and capitalist encirclement more generally convinced Stalin and others to increase military-related industrial production. In contrast, David Stone persuasively argues that Soviet leaders did not see a Polish-British alliance in 1927-28 as a credible threat but instead escalated military production in response to fears of a war with Japan in 1929-31. 

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29 Of course, during the revolution and civil war, Komsomol leaders facilitated mobilization of youth into the Red Army and military production. And if the organization largely demobilized after the civil war, it continued to encourage youth to undertake military training. Tirado, *Young Guard!,* 89-93. Neumann, *The Communist Youth League*, 119-120. Isaev, V.I., “Voenizatsiia molodezhi i molodezhnyi ekstremizm v Sibiri (1920-e – nachalo 1930-kh gg.),” *Vestnik NGU* 1, no. 3 (2002): 63-70. On militaristic youth, see for example, Guillory, “We Shall Refashion Life on Earth!,” 332. Examining the memory of the First World War, Karen Petrone argues that its interpretation was mixed. The amount of literature on World War I paled in comparison to the revolution and civil war in the Soviet Union, but what literature existed stressed both militaristic and pacifist themes. Petrone, *The Great War in Russian Memory* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2011).

30 This is not to say that militarization and militarism are incompatible. War’s glorification and the penetration of military practices into civilian life can lead to higher rates of mobilization. However, this is not always the case. Writing about the shift from militarism to militarization in the interwar United States, Gillis asserts, “While it could be said that the old militarism glorified war but often failed to prepare for it, the emerging militarization process intensified the preparation while concealing its purposes and obscuring its consequences.” Gillis, “Introduction,” 7.


Historians usually subsume Stalinist militarization and the broader changes in social and cultural policies under the framework of the “Great Retreat.” The term, coined by sociologist Nicholas Timasheff in 1946, is shorthand for the conservative and populist shift Stalin’s regime undertook in the mid-1930s. The policies of this shift included support for traditional families in the form of harsher penalties for divorce and criminalization of abortion, the appropriation of parts of the Russian past and a general embrace of rigid, vertical hierarchies in society. The advent of “communist upbringing” fits well into the overall shift toward social discipline, firmer boundaries in social roles (e.g., gender, age, authority) and a growing focus on the need for military training among youth. Timasheff and Leon Trotsky took these changes to mean that Stalin’s regime repudiated revolutionary values for the pragmatic purposes of mobilizing society for war more effectively. More recently, historians like David Hoffmann, Stephen Kotkin and others rightly argue against the notion that Stalinist leaders cynically betrayed the ideals of the revolution. Citing the private discourse of Bolshevik leaders, they maintain that these leaders

Osoaviakhim’s 1927 defense campaign may have solidified support behind the party-state but it had little influence on increasing the defense capacity of the country, suggesting that leaders were less interested in the militarizing aspect of Osoaviakhim’s work than in promoting a general Soviet cultural framework. Kenneth D. Slepian, “The Limits of Mobilisation: Party, State and the 1927 Civil Defence Campaign,” Europe-Asia Studies 45, no. 5 (1993): 851-868.


David Brandenberger in National Bolshevism: Stalinist Mass Culture and the Formation of Modern Russian National Identity, 1931-1956 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002) asserts that the co-opting of Tsarist history by Stalinist leaders in the late 1930s was an attempt to mobilize the population in advance of a major war. Wendy Goldman asserts that many women themselves favored policies that strengthened marriages as a reaction to the tenuous situation many women faced in the 1920s because the relative ease of divorces. Goldman, Women, the State and Revolution: Soviet Family Policy and Social Life, 1917-1936 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).


envisioned the new policies as the continuation of the revolution. In this interpretation, the shift in social policies under Stalin was simply the incorporation of modern state practices in service of revolutionary ideals.  

Their contributions notwithstanding, these authors go too far in their insistence on the overall consistency of the Soviet project in the interwar period. It is true, to cite Terry Martin’s assertion, that defining elements of the Soviet regime—e.g., a planned economy and use of repression—continued under Stalin. More broadly, the main ideological foundation of the Soviet Union—the faith in inevitable progress toward socialism and communism, hastened by class-conscious agents—did not change. And of course, leaders in Stalin’s regime always asserted publicly and privately that their actions were in the service of socialism. Yet, to paraphrase Evgeny Dobrenko’s criticism of the proponents and detractors of the Great Retreat framework, the nature of socialism for the Bolsheviks was nebulous and constantly in flux; where was Stalin’s regime retreating from or what was it progressing toward?

In essence, scholars on both sides of the Great Retreat framework tend to overlook the extent to which the Soviet project was a work in progress. The Bolsheviks attempted to divine the road to socialism from the revolutionary canon, from the example of previous revolutions.

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38 Martin, for this reason, is reluctant to employ the term Great Retreat as more than a shorthand for the period as a whole. However, he asserts that in nationalities policy (and other areas of social regulation) the regime did make a sharp turn away from indigenization to a more russo-centric model. Terry Martin, Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 415.

39 Igal Halfin, From Darkness to Light: Class, Consciousness and Salvation in Revolutionary Russia, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000), 1-38.

40 Evgeny Dobrenko, “Socialism as Will and Representation, or What Legacy Are We Rejecting?” Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History 5, no. 4 (2004): 707.
and from more recent events.\textsuperscript{41} Yet there was no clear roadmap to communism. The path from the perspective of regime leaders was constantly changing, shaped by the experience of contemporary domestic and international crises. Part of what socialism became depended on how Soviet leaders reacted to such crises. Stalin and his supporters, including the leaders of the Komsomol, recalibrated policies based on experience and incorporated lessons they learned into the living doctrine of Soviet socialism. Stalinist leaders shifted their policies as a disciplinary reaction to the chaos that collectivization and the First Five-Year Plan had unleashed in the country. And at the end of the 1930s, they intensified militarizing practices in anticipation of a war they believed would be an apocalyptic conflict between socialism and the capitalist world. The unifying, coercive and militarizing policies of the 1930s were not just techniques adopted temporarily to defend socialism but they were folded into existing conceptions of what socialism should be.

This work explores the origins and development of “communist upbringing” as an element of Stalinist socialism. Chapter 1 reviews the history of Soviet youth culture from the October Revolution until the end of the Stalin Revolution. It shows how official youth culture contributed to an era of radicalism and mobilization in the regime and sets the scene for the advent of “communist upbringing.” Chapter 2 examines the creation of “communist upbringing” as the official doctrine of the Komsomol in 1935. Moving beyond the Stalin Revolution’s policies of mass economic mobilization, “communist upbringing” was a policy of mass socialization that gendered and militarized conceptions of “cultured” behavior among youth. In part, the advent of “communist upbringing” was also linked to Stalin’s declaration in 1934 that

\textsuperscript{41} This often meant looking back to the French revolution for inspiration. Perhaps the best-known example of this thinking was when the triumvirate of Stalin, Lev Kamenev and Grigorii Zinov’ev painted Trotsky, the well-known leader of the Red Army, as a potential Soviet Napoleon. See Isaac Deutscher, \textit{The Prophet Unarmed: Trotsky, 1921-1929} (London: Verso, 2003 [1959]), 78.
the era of socialism had arrived, signifying the impending disappearance of class antagonism. Chapter 3 shows how the anticipation of a classless society threw class categorization into flux in the Komsomol’s admissions and disciplinary practices. Even as classes were supposed to disappear, the continuation of class categories reinforced their power to define Soviet people. Chapter 4 examines the Great Terror among youth in 1937-38. At a time of massive repression, youth leaders and activists asserted that degenerates had infiltrated the league, using bad behavior to turn youth into enemies of the people. The campaign against these degenerates instrumentalized political crime to discipline the behavior of young people and combated the continuing elements of radicalism in the league.

The effects of the Great Terror are also the subject of Chapter 5. As repression against supposed enemies continued and even intensified in 1938-39, the Komsomol’s leadership paradoxically undertook a recruiting campaign that tripled its membership, cementing its new form as an organization of mass socialization. Chapter 6 picks up as the Komsomol emerged from the Great Terror. With its new mass membership, the league became increasingly bureaucratized. Its leaders sought to engender uncomplicated loyalty to the regime by simplifying political education and enabling social mobility through official youth culture. Chapter 7 addresses how Komsomol leaders and local groups monitored and attempted to prevent the unsavory and sometimes illegal activities of youth in 1939-40. As Soviet leaders enacted repressive anti-shirking and anti-hooligan laws, youth groups both supported and moderated these measures in an attempt to save youth from becoming criminals. Chapter 8 traces the development and implementation of paramilitary training for Soviet youth on the eve of World War II. Drawing on Soviet studies of foreign youth organizations, it shows how youth
and sports leaders adopted the militarizing outlook and practices they perceived in contemporary states.

Throughout the interwar period, Soviet leaders frequently referred to the USSR as a “young” state. “Communist upbringing” ushered in a new style of cultivating youth but it also can be seen as the way that Stalin’s regime brought up a youthful new country. As the Soviet Union matured from its adolescence to young adulthood it continued to evolve. Grappling with crisis after crisis, Stalinist leaders groped their way toward a future they believed was communism, imprinting their reactions to contemporary struggles on youth culture. In the process, they institutionalized practices born of these trials in the Komsomol and ingrained them in youth as they became adults. Long after the chaos of the 1930s, the threat of war and the war itself had passed, Stalinism’s era of crisis continued to affect the way the regime raised its youth.
Chapter 1: A Militant Union of Communist Youth: 
Origins and Development, 1918-1934

In October 1918, leaders of youth unions and organizations from various cities of Soviet Russia gathered in Moscow to form a new youth organization—one that would encompass the entirety of the new country. When they emerged from the convention, the groups had united into the Communist Union of Youth or Komsomol. The choice of name was not incidental. By calling themselves communists, the delegates meant to show the support of politicized youth for the Bolshevik state. As a union, they endorsed the leading role of the proletarian vanguard in the revolution as the basis for their organization. The new youth league was nominally an independent, non-party organization, but in practice its path was aligned with the young Bolshevik regime. Politically active youth mobilized in service of the new state and party leaders came to exert control over the youth organization. Yet the inextricability of the youth league from the party was more than an issue of party control. The tendentious issues within the Komsomol in its formative years mirrored the broader tensions in Soviet political culture, especially between militant revolutionaries and the more moderate state builders among the Bolsheviks.

The conflict between radicalism and pragmatism was a central story in party politics beginning in the civil war and intensifying during the New Economic Policy (NEP). Under NEP, Bolshevik leaders moderated their policies by introducing a semi-market economy and abandoning grain requisitions to appease the peasantry. From the perspective of radicals, it seemed that party leaders had abandoned their role as advocates of the working class and revolution—creating a conflict of identity Sheila Fitzpatrick has called “the Bolsheviks’
The relative pluralism of NEP allowed workers and activists in cities throughout the Soviet Union to radicalize in an “inner cultural revolution” (Michael David-Fox’s term) that preceded the external cultural revolution of the end of the decade.2

The radicalization of activists was not limited to those in the party apparatus. In the Komsomol, moderate leaders wanted to mold youth gradually through education and entertainment with a proletarian consciousness, a sense of workers’ solidarity. In contrast, young activists advocated a return to war communism and an exclusionary belief in the privileged place of industrial workers in the dictatorship of the proletariat. The Komsomol’s militant youth fostered a milieu that Sean Guillory terms “hyper-masculine,” forming their identity through the exclusion of women.3 Radicals were also concerned about the alleged infiltration of the Komsomol by non-proletarian elements. These elements included class aliens—young people whose parents belonged to social groups or occupations before the revolution that the regime’s leaders categorized as hostile to the Soviet order. But perhaps a greater anxiety was the dilution of the league by peasants and white-collar workers.4 At the same time, radicals’ identity was not only based on opposition. Young radicals glorified the civil war experience and many longed for the regime to abandon its gradualist approach and return to the policies of war communism.

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2 David-Fox differentiates the inner cultural revolution that occurred in party and Komsomol circles from the outer cultural revolution that began in 1928. In the inner cultural revolution, elements in the party and Komsomol radicalized while in the outer cultural revolution, these activists attempted to impose their vision upon the Soviet Union more broadly. Michael David-Fox, “What Is Cultural Revolution?” Russian Review 58, no. 2 (1999): 181-201. Drawing upon the Chinese cultural revolution occurring around the time of her research, Fitzpatrick first applied the term “cultural revolution” to describe the period of militant radicalism from 1928 to 1931. See Sheila Fitzpatrick, “Cultural Revolution as Class War” in Fitzpatrick ed. Cultural Revolution in Russia, 1928-1931 (Bloomington In.: Indiana University Press, 1978).
3 Sean Guillory, “We Shall Refashion Life on Earth!,” 41.
4 Sheila Fitzpatrick shows how the Bolsheviks ascribed people into groups based on their pre-revolutionary position. These categories were often couched in Marxist terms used originally to describe the relationship between classes but came to describe how these social groups interacted with the state itself. See Sheila Fitzpatrick, “Ascribing Class: The Construction of Social Identity in Soviet Russia,” Journal of Modern History 65, no. 4 (1993): 745-770.
Radical elements in the party and the Komsomol won out as the country embarked on the radical policies of the Socialist Offensive. From 1927 to 1929, Stalin and his leadership group abandoned moderation step by step. The reasons for this were multiple and overlapping: the perception of peasant obstructionism in grain production; a war scare in 1927-28; the perceived need to industrialize rapidly to increase military-industrial capabilities. Conveniently for Stalin’s political group, the radical turn cast erstwhile moderate allies like Nikolai Bukharin as anti-revolutionary opponents, discrediting these moderates as Stalin assumed exclusive control over the party and state. But another reason Stalin was willing and able to undertake these policies was that radical activists on the ground in the party and Komsomol longed to reignite the revolution. By the time Stalin declared that the “Year of the Great Turn” had come in November 1929, activists had already taken to the countryside to collectivize peasant farms and to the factory floor to organize the fulfillment of the First Five-Year Plan’s enormous production norms.

In addition to implementing the economic revolution of the First Five-Year Plan, radical activists and Soviet leaders desired a cultural revolution in the countryside. Fitzpatrick identifies the main goal of the cultural revolution as exclusionary class warfare while David-Fox argues that it also was a type of civilizing mission meant to spread urban proletarian culture to the

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5 In brief, the war scare convinced Soviet leaders that the country’s industrial capacity was not great enough to stand up to a major war and industrialization was only possible in their minds at the expense of the agricultural economy but was opposed by Stalin’s major partners (and potential rivals) in the leadership. See R.W. Davies, *The Socialist Offensive: The Collectivisation of Soviet Agriculture, 1929-1930* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), xv. Guillory, “The Shattered Self of Komsomol Memoirs.”

Although David-Fox sees these two strands as intertwined, in the Komsomol these two sides of the cultural revolution often clashed with one another. This conflict was especially visible in the youth league’s recruiting campaign, as its leaders attempted to “komsomolize” entire segments of the young population and channeled them into the Soviet economy. Despite leaders’ admonitions to recruit more and more youth, ordinary Komsomol activists in the cultural revolution continued to look upon new members, especially non-proletarians, with suspicion. Nonetheless, millions of young people joined the league and economic mobilization became the dominant form of youth activism, supplanting or combining with the educational goals of the league.

By 1932, the regime had largely achieved its economic goals and was content—or forced by peasant resistance and the realities of breakneck industrialization—to consolidate what Stalin would deem the “victory of socialism” in 1934. The effects of these policies were a human tragedy, resulting in massive upheaval and a disastrous famine in 1932-33 caused by extraordinary state grain requisitions. In the aftermath of the famine, Komsomol leaders blamed activists—not for the famine but for allegedly obstructing grain requisitions and throwing in their lot with class enemies. Mirroring the post-collectivization membership purge of the party, youth leaders in 1932-33 ended the league’s recruiting campaign and undertook a large-scale purge that targeted above all the areas hardest hit by the famine. The end of the Socialist Offense spelled the cessation of mass recruitment in the Komsomol, but the equation of youth activism with economic mobilization persisted. This continuing emphasis underlay a fundamental change in

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8 A related and logical development was the generation of political and technical leaders whom the party drafted from the work bench into party schools during this period. See Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Education and Social Mobility in the Soviet Union, 1921-1934* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 181-205.
the dynamic of the youth league. During NEP the Komsomol had been an organization that enjoyed a modicum of autonomy from the party—enough to support a radical subculture with a non-official agenda. In the course of Stalin’s revolution, the youth league had effectively become a state organization, an organ to mobilize youth for the regime.

**Moderates and Radicals: Youth Culture during the Civil War and NEP**

During the chaotic first years of Soviet power, politically active youth became one of the major bases of support for the new state and Bolshevik leaders played a role in shaping the Komsomol’s development from its outset. Yet the youth league’s origins were as a non-party organization of young workers. The independence (limited but real) of the league gave rise to continual debate over its role and relationship to the party during the civil war and NEP. Was the Komsomol an organization of youth who merely supported the regime or was it the official youth wing of the Communist Party? Would the league stay true to its roots as the youth organization of young industrial workers or become a more broad-based organization of all Soviet youth? Would the Komsomol be an organization for enlightenment or one of revolutionary action? The ambiguity of the Komsomol’s role divided its more moderate central leaders from radical activists.

Soviet youth activism grew out of the revolutionary atmosphere of Petrograd in 1917. Poor factory conditions and the continuation of Russia’s unsuccessful involvement in World War I led the capital’s workers to organize themselves in protest of the autocracy. Their demonstrations provided the spark that led to the abdication of Nicholas II in March 1917.\(^\text{10}\)

\(^{10}\) For a brief overview of social conditions during the revolution and civil war, see Koenker, Diane P., William G. Rosenberg, and Ronald Grigor Suny, eds., *Party, State and Society in the Russian Civil War* (Bloomington, In.: Indiana University Press, 1989), especially articles from Part II. The classic account of the revolution is still
Young people took part in these protests as members of broader factory labor groups. Although some of these groups had youth circles, no organization had formed primarily to lobby on behalf of young laborers. In May 1917, young workers from several factories organized Labor and Light (\textit{Trud i Svet}), the first workers’ organization whose main purpose was advocacy of youth issues. Labor and Light was neither a political party, nor did it support a comprehensive political program. Instead, it organized political education for young workers and supported policies that benefited young workers, like a six-hour working day for youth.\footnote{Tirado, \textit{Young Guard!}, 18-19.}

Young workers became more and more radical as the new government moved from crisis to crisis. The Provisional Government, supported by moderate socialists, continued to wage an unpopular war. Tiring of a government that was seemingly deaf to their protests, particularly after the disaster of the Russian army’s June offensive, workers increasingly turned to the persistently radical Bolshevik party. As the workers of Petrograd became more militant so did organizations for young workers. In July and August, Labor and Light came under attack from radical elements within. In August its most radical and committed organizers broke away (spelling the eventual end of Labor and Light) and founded a new group, the Socialist Union of Working Youth. The Socialist Union was more radical than its predecessor and supported the Bolshevik party. Its leaders also had direct ties to major Bolshevik figures like Nadezhda Krupskaiia, Lenin’s wife. However, the Socialist Union remained officially unaffiliated with the Bolsheviks. This independence was at least in part at the urging of Krupskaiia, who advised Socialist Union leaders early on to remain autonomous vis-à-vis the party. Thus, when the

Bolsheviks came to power in October 1917, the Socialist Union supported the new government but retained its formal independence.12

Youth groups in other cities were not exclusively made up of workers and many had formal affiliation with the Bolsheviks. When these groups called for the unification of all of Russia’s politicized youth, questions of autonomy and the worker identity of the would-be organization became central issues that divided activists. In July 1918, Moscow’s youth organizations (there were several, organized by neighborhood) called for a national meeting of youth groups. Moscow’s organizations differed from Petrograd’s Socialist Union of Youth. They often were youth fractions within a neighborhood party organization and some consisted primarily of students and young party organizers, with few if any workers as members.13 The differing social compositions of the various youth groups would be especially important at the founding congress of the Komsomol, held from October 28 to November 4, 1918. The representatives of the Socialist Union believed that a national youth league should not undertake mass recruiting but instead have a primarily proletarian character. For this reason, they proposed Communist League of Youth (abbreviated as Komsomol) as the name of the new organization. This name signaled not only the new league’s closeness to the Bolshevik party but also its rejection of a mass, non-proletarian character. While this outcome suited delegates from the most industrial regions in Russia, representatives from areas outside of the two capitals expressed concern that the name would alienate peasants, whom they perceived as the main group that they could recruit from in the future. Despite these objections, the delegates united to support the new regime as the Komsomol.14

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12 Ibid., 46-47. According to Tirado, Krupskaia feared that a more strictly Bolshevik-aligned organization would preclude a mass membership.
13 Ibid., 64-65. Less is known about youth organizations of cities other than Petrograd.
14 Ibid., 67-69.
The newly founded youth league contributed to the Soviet state’s ability to mobilize in its battles to control territory and the government bureaucracy. In October 1917, the Bolsheviks inherited a country in a state of turmoil. While the new regime soon ended Russia’s involvement in World War I, the Bolsheviks found themselves in control of a rump state beset on all sides by foreign-backed oppositions. The Bolshevik state desperately needed manpower, especially young men who could fight in the Red Army. Youth had been heavily involved in Red Guards in 1917 and continued to serve the Bolsheviks in arms after the revolution.¹⁵ The Komsomol sent as many as 60,000 young people into armed service during the civil war—a large portion of a total membership that was just under 100,000 at the start of 1919 and roughly 400,000 at the start of 1920.¹⁶

The problem of setting up a working government was just as large an issue for the Bolsheviks as the war. In a matter of weeks in October 1917, the party had turned from an opposition bent on tearing down the government to a regime that had to reconstruct the government for its own ends. The Komsomol funneled young people into the party apparatus, economic administration and the state bureaucracy. Not surprisingly, the league’s contribution to the larger state-building project turned its attention away from youth-specific issues. The desperate need of the Red Army for soldiers and of the party for administrators meant that Komsomol organizers were constantly drafted from youth work. Isabel Tirado asserts that this turnover in youth workers and the importance of war work meant that the Komsomol as a whole was unable to carve out a space for independent activity that would serve the specialized needs of youth. Instead, the exigencies of the civil war made it an integral part of staffing the new

¹⁵ Ibid., 48-49.
¹⁶ Tirado, 89; Fisher, A Pattern for Soviet Youth, 409.
Soviet state. The Komsomol’s goals appeared to be merging with the party, a trend that was leading to a larger clash between the league’s pro-party leaders and its radical activists.

The clash in the Komsomol was part of a broader conflict in Bolshevik political culture between the prerogatives of workers and state centralization. This conflict boiled over most openly during the Workers’ Opposition in 1921. At the Tenth Party Congress in March of 1921, several Bolshevik leaders, including Aleksandra Kollontai, confronted Lenin with radical workers’ demands. If the Soviet state was truly a dictatorship of the proletariat, they asked, then why did state-appointed managers control factories rather than workers themselves? Essentially arguing for syndicalism, the Workers’ Opposition stressed both the special place of workers in the regime and their demands for autonomy from the party. Lenin dismissed these demands and argued that the dictatorship of the proletariat worked in the interest of workers, not through their direct control. More than this, he asserted that with the advent of the retreat to NEP (put forward at the same congress) the Bolsheviks needed to show a united front. For both ideological and practical reasons, Lenin suppressed the Workers’ Opposition and public opposition in the party from then on.

In the Komsomol, the correlating conflict to the Workers’ Opposition was over its leadership’s persistent support for opening membership to youth who were not workers. In 1919 the Komsomol’s Central Committee approved a merger of sorts with the smaller Communist Student League. The merger was not wholesale; the student organization was absorbed into the Komsomol and its members assessed for admission on an individual basis rather than admitted en masse. Yet the inclusion of students and the threat of the Komsomol’s transformation into a

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17 Tirado, Young Guard!, 89, 93.
broad-based league posed a challenge to its proletarian identity and origins for many activists.\textsuperscript{19} A second issue was the question of the league’s relationship to the party. Central leaders like Oskar Ryvkin and Lazar’ Shatskin worked closely with the party and supported policies that brought the youth league closer under the watch of the Bolsheviks. One of the more important expressions of party control was a 1919 resolution that Shatskin introduced in a Komsomol Central Committee meeting, making cadres in the youth league officially subordinate to their corresponding party committees. Based on this new rule and the general encroachment of the party on youth issues, some youth leaders wondered how the league would work toward the special interests of young people if it was under the control of a party made up of adults.\textsuperscript{20} Much like Lenin would soon argue in the face of the Workers’ Opposition, advocates of party control in the Komsomol claimed that the party had the interests of young people in mind, even if youth itself would not control the agenda for activism.

These conflicts in the Komsomol foreshadowed the larger clash of the Workers’ Opposition. And like the Workers’ Opposition, the culmination of opposition in the Komsomol—the \textit{dunaevshchina} (Dunaevskii affair)—was about more than the proletarian identity and autonomy of the youth league; it was about the fate of open debate and opposition in Bolshevik political culture. Vladimir Dunaevskii was a Moscow-based youth leader who had consistently lobbied for the autonomy of the Komsomol and its role as an organization for young workers. In August 1920, just before the Third Komsomol Congress, Dunaevskii’s positions gained the support of a majority of mid-level Komsomol leaders (particularly those from the provinces). To the dismay of party leaders, Dunaevskii’s advocacy of workers’ control and decentralization was on the verge of taking over the Komsomol’s platform. Unable to control

\textsuperscript{19} Tirado, \textit{Young Guard!}, 103.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 180-181, 186-189.
Dunaevskii and his supporters, Ryvkin and Shatskin implored the party’s organizational bureau to intervene. Party leaders first removed Dunaevskii and his supporters from prominent positions in the league and, after Dunaevskii protested his removal in an open letter to Komsomol membership, expelled him from the party altogether. At the Komsomol congress that followed Dunaevskii’s removal, party leaders (including Nikolai Bukharin) exhorted youth organizers to support the disciplinary action against the Moscow youth leader. Falling in line, the delegates voted in favor of the disciplinary resolution, spelling the end of the dunaevshchina.\textsuperscript{21} The outcome of the affair effectively prohibited organized opposition in the youth league—the same effect that Lenin’s decision on factionalism in the party would have on party circles following the Workers’ Opposition.

The end of the Workers’ Opposition and the advent of NEP in 1921 brought in a gradualist approach toward achieving revolution. In addition to the reestablishment of a legal market economy, NEP ushered in an era of relative intellectual and cultural permissiveness. This permissiveness extended not only to those whom party leaders characterized as “bourgeois” but also to radicals whose militancy and desire to continue the revolution outstripped that of the NEP regime. Despite the unease that Soviet leaders might have felt with both the radical and “bourgeois” subcultures, regime leaders largely permitted both as they attempted to prepare society for the next stage of the revolution.\textsuperscript{22}

Komsomol leaders embraced this gradualist approach in their work. In the civil war, youth organizers had focused on political activism through theoretical lectures but during NEP, Komsomol leaders urged a greater focus on imparting a broader revolutionary worldview through entertainment. During the civil war, activities in the Komsomol had been too detached

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 189-194, 198.
\textsuperscript{22} Gorsuch, \textit{Youth in Revolutionary Russia}, 8-9.
from the interests of ordinary youth, who were often uninterested in going to stuffy political lectures. When Nikolai Chaplin became Komsomol General Secretary in 1924, he turned to more populist methods that would appeal to ordinary youth. These pragmatists encouraged activists to organize cultural events that would engage young people. Among the most popular activities of this sort were movies; since the medium was both entertaining and (sometimes) contained a revolutionary message, film often appealed to both radical organizers and less politicized youth. Other forms of popular culture used to attract young people proved more contentious. Dancing was especially controversial and radical activists often considered it a “bourgeois” practice (negatively coded as “feminine,” writes Gorsuch). Chaplin justified the use of entertainment in the Communist Youth League: “Why can’t a Komsomolet play the accordion? If we forbid it he will turn to hooliganism or drink.”

By drawing young people into the Komsomol, leaders wanted to persuade them to turn against religion, drinking and hooliganism. Instead, they hoped to promote rationalized lifestyle practices—including sanitary living conditions, a nutritionally sound diet and literacy. Most important, though, youth leaders hoped to spawn a revolutionary outlook that would simulate the class consciousness workers had developed in the face of oppression under the old regime.

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23 Ibid., 71-75 (cited quote on 72). Chaplin’s example of the accordion was likely a reference to the “accordion debate” that played out in the Soviet press of the mid to late-1920s. The youth press asserted that in the right hands the accordion—a popular musical instrument in the Soviet Union—could be a force to win over youth (especially peasants) to proletarian values. Skeptics argued that in the wrong hands the accordion would be a tool for reproducing petty-bourgeois life among the peasantry. For more on this debate, see Thomas Lahusen, Robin LaPasha and Tracy McDonald, “Das Akkordeon: Volkskultur als Klanggemeinschaft,” in Schrift und Macht: Zur sowjetischen Literatur der 1920er und 30er Jahre, ed. Tomáš Lipták and Jurij Murašov (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 2012), 221-257.

24 Hoffmann, Stalinist Values, 7-8. Hoffmann asserts that Soviet health experts of the interwar period used an environmental approach to hygiene, arguing that living conditions and lifestyle practices were the most important cause of disease. Hoffmann, Cultivating the Masses, 86-101.

Komsomol leaders’ commitment to molding youth with a proletarian identity brought it into conflict with the even more moderate administrators in the Commissariat of Enlightenment (Narkompros). Disagreements between the two organizations had begun during the civil war when each set up competing youth clubs. The Komsomol’s clubs had focused more on revolutionary propaganda and youth organizers accused the commissariat’s clubs of focusing on cultural matters (e.g., non-revolutionary literature) alone.26 These clashes did not stop after the civil war. In the 1920s, Komsomol educational liaisons advocated vocational education because, as Sheila Fitzpatrick explains, they believed in “the inherent value to the individual of contact with the industrial environment.”27 These educational activists argued that vocational work could partially replicate the plight of the working class before the revolution, creating working class solidarity among a cohort that would otherwise not experience the trials of the previous generation. In contrast, education officials in Narkompros tended to support general education. Its official curriculum provided for classes on “labor” but as a theoretical subject rather than one where students would work themselves.28 In the Great Turn of 1928-29, labor would become a practical subject as proposals for vocational education very much like those made in the Komsomol became official policy.29

The Komsomol’s leaders supported policies intended to foster a proletarian consciousness, and yet they were more moderate than many activists of the 1920s. Many workers were angry at urban unemployment that in January 1925 was as high as 20 percent. A large number of unemployed were demobilized Red Army soldiers who found themselves

26 Ultimately, Komsomol and Narkompros leaders divided responsibilities on this issue; the youth league became the source of political education for youth while Narkompros controlled the curriculum otherwise. See Tirado, Young Guard!, 130.
27 Sheila Fitzpatrick, Education and Social Mobility, 47-48.
28 Ibid., 22.
29 Ibid., 136-157.
without a job due to the budget-balancing policies (khozrachet) of NEP. They blamed the state for not protecting the proletariat and its ability to work. Other radicals decried the supposed decadence of Nepmen, businesspeople who took advantage of the semi-capitalist conditions at the time. The dictatorship of the proletariat was failing many of the expectations that workers had set for the regime. As Gorsuch asserts, the notion of socialism that radical workers and young activists entertained clashed with the relatively moderate policies of the time. The Komsomol was a particular hotbed of this radicalism, driven both by general disenchantment and youthful enthusiasm. A prominent example was the large bloc of student youth in the league who voted in support of Leon Trotsky’s leftist platform in 1923-24. But if Komsomol activists to some extent contested the NEP regime politically, the greater challenge they posed was social and cultural.

At the heart of young radicals’ protest was the same notion that had driven the dunaevshchina: the Komsomol should be an organization for young workers alone. For this reason, militant activists were aggrieved with the perception that non-workers—youth from white-collar backgrounds and peasants—were flooding the league. This flood was partially a misperception. It is true that a large number of youth of peasant origin joined the Komsomol from 1923 to 1927. However, the proportion of peasants in the league stayed roughly the same throughout that period. As an overall proportion of membership, the peasantry was essentially equal to the proportion of industrial workers from 1924 through 1927. (Both groups fluctuated

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32 Gorsuch, *Youth in Revolutionary Russia*, 85-86, 94-95.
between 40 and 47 percent.) The number of those who listed their social origin as “Other” (anyone who was not a worker or peasant—e.g., the child of an official) fell off in 1923-24 and continued to remain around 10 percent through 1927. For the same period, the proportion of youth whose parents were workers jumped from 1923 to 1924 and then remained steady through 1927. (See table 1.1) Industrial workers were not growing as a proportion of Komsomol youth but they also were not shrinking. While it may have seemed to young radicals that their league was being infiltrated, the demographic data suggests that they were projecting a broader dissatisfaction with the regime onto the membership politics of the Komsomol.

Radical youth who felt that their league was under attack coalesced into an activist subculture. Their milieu was dominated by men and masculine values—in particular the glorification of the revolutionary experience and the rough ways of industrial workers. These activists dressed and acted in ways that they believed reflected their proletarian consciousness. For example, militant youth wore simple workers’ clothes and addressed one another informally (the informal you, ty instead of the formal vy). They formed comradely communities called “bratishki” (little brothers), often made up of veterans who longed for the revolutionary past. And it was not coincidental that they were “brothers,” apparently without sisters; this sense of camaraderie derived from and contributed to the Komsomol’s hyper-masculine atmosphere in the 1920s. Part of this camaraderie formed in drinking bouts in mostly male Komsomol committees. Unable to participate in or continue what they believed was a genuine revolution, radical Komsomol members were filled with ennui. Bored and frustrated veterans reminisced with their comrades and non-veterans fantasized about their own revolutionary struggle.35

35 Guillory and Matthias Neumann also see suicide as an indicator of disillusionment with the regime. On the other hand, Gorsuch points out that Komsomol leaders and social scientists linked suicide to problems counterrevolutionary moods (and often to the figure of poet Sergei Esenin). Guillory, “We Shall Refashion Life on
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Party Members</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Industry Workers</th>
<th>Ag. Workers</th>
<th>Kolkhoz (sic)</th>
<th>White Collar</th>
<th>Small Farmer</th>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Worker</th>
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<td>164,697</td>
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<td>1924</td>
<td>406,660</td>
<td>38,380</td>
<td>63,846</td>
<td>125,263</td>
<td>10,166</td>
<td>147,200</td>
<td>124,031</td>
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<td>164,697</td>
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<td>1,640,107</td>
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<td>545,798</td>
<td>117,812</td>
<td>645,092</td>
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<td>172,009</td>
<td>418,865</td>
<td>583,403</td>
<td>141,431</td>
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<td>836,760</td>
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Table 1.1 Komsomol Membership by Social Origin and Occupation, 1923-1927\(^{36}\)

\(^{36}\) RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 126, d. 336, l. 18-23.
One of these “little brothers” was future Komsomol General Secretary Aleksandr Kosarev. In 1913 at the age of ten, Kosarev went to work in a Moscow factory. He participated in protests in 1917 and two years later, at age sixteen, joined a company of soldiers to fight the anti-Bolshevik forces of General Nikolai Iudenich outside of Petrograd. When Kosarev was wounded in battle, he returned to Moscow where he took courses on political education and then worked in the Komsomol’s Central Committee as a propagandist. Soon after, he became the head of the youth committee in Moscow’s Bauman municipal district, one of the more industrial areas in the country. In 1929 he became the youth league’s leader. He never left Komsomol work from 1918 until his arrest in 1938.\(^\text{37}\) In the 1930s, Kosarev would become the driving figure in official youth culture and, to a great extent, in sport and paramilitary training. His biography is not only important for understanding the origins of a figure who would dominate official youth culture for most of the 1930s but also to understand the undercurrent of radical proletarianism in the Komsomol of the 1920s. Kosarev was one of many workers and veterans who became radicalized in opposition to NEP policies that they refused to accept as the road to communism. As Stalin and his allies increasingly undertook a radical stance in the countryside and in industry, Kosarev’s generation of activists realized their wish for a new revolution.

**Youth in the Stalin Revolution**

Beginning in 1926, Stalin and his supporters in the party leadership faced crises that made them question the policies of NEP. Since 1924 Stalin had aligned himself with Nikolai Bukharin and other right-leaning Bolsheviks who favored a class alliance (*smychka*) between the proletariat and a semi-capitalist peasant class as the basis of the Soviet state. Under this alliance, the regime required peasants to sell part of their grain at below-market prices to the state, a system meant to

subsidize industrial development. To evade unfavorable prices, peasants hid, hoarded or sowed less grain, although this phenomenon was probably exaggerated in the minds of Bolshevik leaders. Two successive years of grain crises in 1926-27 and 1927-28 led Stalin to believe that peasants were engaging in class warfare by intentionally starving the cities.³⁸

Beginning in 1927, Stalin and his supporters increasingly endorsed two radical and intertwined solutions to the grain problem. The first was the collectivization of agriculture, seen both as more efficient and easier for the state to control. The second was the liquidation of kulaks (rich peasants) as a class. This policy demanded the economic displacement of the kulaks, the supposed opponents of collectivization, and increasingly leaders sought to do so through violent measures. Although the all-out collectivization drive began in 1930, efforts to persuade or coerce peasants to join collective farms had begun even earlier. In May 1928, at the Eighth Komsomol Congress, its leader Nikolai Chaplin called the organization of collective farms “the central task of the moment,” and exhorted activists to go to the countryside in support of the policy.³⁹ After the war scare with a British-backed Poland in 1927-28, collectivization seemed all the more necessary to end the apparent roadblock that peasant obstructionism set in the way of industrialization.⁴⁰ The threat of capitalist encirclement (in this particular instance and generally) was a powerful motivation to create an industrial economy that could support a military capable of defending the country.

The related issues of supposed peasant intransigence and the need for rapid industrialization led Stalin’s government to take extreme measures. The essence of the radical policies that came to be the Stalin Revolution was to fund industrialization through increasingly

⁴⁰ See note 5 above.
burdensome and coercive grain collection techniques—ultimately via the wholesale collectivization of agriculture.\textsuperscript{41} The First Five-Year Plan adopted in spring 1929 set enormous goals for the growth of Soviet heavy industry (made larger still by subsequent amendments in 1930) that would be financed by extracting grain from the countryside. Administrators resorted to intimidation in their seizure of grain (i.e., the “Ural-Siberian method” developed in 1928 and endorsed officially by the party in 1929). Meanwhile, activists had responded enthusiastically to exhortations to collectivize the countryside and their efforts appeared to be bearing fruit. In the summer of 1929, party leaders endorsed a plan to encourage peasants to join collective farms and effectively condoned coercion as a method of persuasion. Overall, the number of peasant households belonging to collectives nearly doubled that year from June to October (to roughly 7.5 percent of households) and data suggested to party leaders that they were more productive than non-collectivized farms. The total area sown for autumn 1929 in the country was 6.5 percent higher than in 1928 and party leaders attributed this increase to the growth of collective farms.\textsuperscript{42}

Responding both to the increasing resistance of peasants to these methods and to the apparent successes of collective farms, Stalin and his supporters called for the collectivization of the entire countryside at the November 1929 plenum of the party’s Central Committee. The next month, Stalin announced the “liquidation of the kulak as a class” as part of the collectivization campaign. Regime leaders, believing that wealthy peasants were the core of resistance to Soviet policies in the countryside, made class war against non-proletarians an essential part of their economic program. But if Stalin and his inner circle believed in these policies, they also were

\textsuperscript{41} In enacting these policies, Stalin effectively endorsed the policy of “primitive socialist accumulation” promoted by his erstwhile Left Opposition opponent Evgenii Preobrazhenskii (without acknowledging the similarities, of course).

\textsuperscript{42} Davies, \textit{Socialist Offensive}, 133-135.
undoubtedly willing to endorse extremism—and perhaps endorsed even more extreme methods—because activists had shown clear support for radical policies. As the regime undertook its revolution from above, it was certain of the ready and enthusiastic backing of a militant core of activists in the party and Komsomol. The thousands of activists who went to the countryside and became shock workers in factories became agents of the cultural revolution.⁴³

Although they went into the countryside in the name of the regime, the exclusionary, anti-religious cultural program of radical activists diverged from the comparatively inclusive rhetoric of the Soviet press. Articles in *Komsomol’skaia Pravda* urged activists not only to “remark borders” of farms into collectives but to “remake life” for the villages. Another article from February 28, 1930, urged activists to “plow the human soil,” remaking people as they might remake the agriculture of the Soviet countryside.⁴⁴ As part of this campaign, Komsomol activists gained a particular reputation for fighting religion, not only by creating alternative events like “Komsomol Easter,” but also for their desecration of local churches.⁴⁵

Radicals’ treatment of religion reflected a broader tension between the revolution’s constructive civilizing mission and its destructive exclusionary tendencies. The same types of activists who had believed during NEP that the Komsomol was for workers and was being drowned in a sea of non-proletarians were no more interested in including peasants in their milieu now. The clash of urban radical and peasant cultures and the ongoing campaign of forced collectivization of peasant villages sparked violent incidents in the countryside. These

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⁴³ Even before the dekulakization campaign, the regime had indicated that changes in its conciliatory stance were coming. In the Shakhty trial of 1928, state prosecutors accused pre-revolutionary technical specialists of sabotaging coal production as an intentional counterrevolutionary act. Much publicized in Soviet newspapers, the trial signaled to radical workers that party leaders would no longer stop their fight against so-called bourgeois specialists. Fitzpatrick, “Cultural Revolution as Class War,” 9-11.


“excesses,” brought on by the intensity of peasant resistance to collectivization and the equal intensity of activists, created conditions akin to a civil war. The ongoing catastrophe caused Stalin in his March 1930 “Dizzy with Success” article to denounce the most radical forms of “excesses” (singling out Komsomol organizers for special repudiation) and to decelerate the speed of forced collectivization.46 Yet the regime’s retreat was temporary and its mission to transform the economic and cultural landscape of the countryside continued.

An important part of this mission was to mobilize large numbers of Soviet citizens for state projects by recruiting them into the Komsomol and Communist Party or other state organizations.47 The recruiting campaign in the youth league began in 1930. In 1931, youth leaders intensified an already aggressive recruitment drive to make the Komsomol a “multi-million” member organization. The main targets of “komsomolization” were workers and poor peasants. By absorbing young people into Komsomol cells, leaders hoped not only to mobilize them for collectivization and industrialization but to assimilate them culturally. But as in the cultural revolution as a whole, this campaign was filled with conflict—particularly between youth leaders and activists. Youth leaders pushed strongly for the inclusion of new members. However, radical activists and rank and file were concerned with the proletarian composition of

46 I.V. Stalin, Sochinenie, vol. 12 (Moscow, 1949), 197-205.
47 On party recruiting in this period, see Rigby, Communist Party Membership, 183-190. The collectivization campaign in general ushered in a bigger-is-better policy among Bolshevik leaders—the more people who could be mobilized, the better. As part of this change, Matthew Lenoe writes of a general discursive shift in Soviet newspapers from articles of the NEP period to articles written after. The titles of NEP-era articles were more often informative whereas articles from the period of the First Five-Year Plan were written in the imperative and commanded action. Lenoe asserts that this marked a more general change in the goals of Soviet leaders from enlightenment to mobilization. See Lenoe, Closer to the Masses: Stalinist Culture, Social Revolution, and Soviet Newspapers (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004). Even organizations like the Soviet Chess Section were swept up in the mission to recruit as many people as possible, creating a “Five-Year Plan” for recruiting new members. For example, see “Pervyi plenum shakhmatno-shashechnogo sektora Vsesoiuznogo SFK,” Shakhmaty v SSSR, no. 20-21 (1930): 1-3.
the league. They often wanted more to root out “aliens” whose class credentials were lacking than to include new members.48

For local organizers, the recruiting campaign challenged the meaning of Komsomol membership and changed the dynamic of their work. In Ukraine, where membership had grown 50 percent faster than the already rapid pace of the youth league in the rest of the country, the problem was particularly acute. At a meeting of regional youth organizers in the republic, a Komsomol activist from a local group of young coal miners in the Donbas expressed confusion—or perhaps incredulity—about the current slogan “recruit 100 percent of worker youth”: “We usually admit…only workers who have two-three years of work experience, but here it was said that if the applicant is a poor kolkhoznik, who had worked six months in the mine, then we should admit him as a worker. So let Comrade Geiro [the visiting central youth leader] answer that question.”49 The activist’s statement reflected what seemed to be a common tension in Komsomol groups. As young peasants fled the countryside for work in the cities, they encountered longtime industrial workers whose workplace culture was not accepting of them and often not acceptable to them.50 How could a Komsomol group count a peasant as a worker without undermining the meaning of the league’s proletarian identity?

Other activists claimed that the recruiting campaign detracted from workplace discipline but were rebuffed by leaders who believed that membership could only increase economic productivity. At a plenum of the Ukrainian Komsomol Central Committee, convened expressly to discuss the recruiting campaign in the organization, Iosif Kraevskii, the second secretary of

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48 The dynamic of mass expansion and intense scrutiny meant to weed out class aliens catapulted youth from proletarian origins into leadership positions. Leaders with supposedly unreliable class backgrounds were removed and radicals assumed their positions. Neumann, The Communist Youth League, 149-173.
49 TsDAHO, f. 7, op. 1, spr. 655, ark. 11.
the republic’s youth league, quoted a protest letter from a factory group organizer about new members: “We knew [before admitting new members] that the Komsomol cell had firm discipline.” The organizer continued to say that these new members treated league activity so flippantly that disciplinary measures had no effect. Kraevskii then cited the case of another local youth organizer whose group had added sixty new members to a core of fifteen who had joined in 1924. The group leader asserted that these new members were in fact impeding production. Kraevskii called this an absolutely “incorrect opinion”; in his view, the growth of the Komsomol could only speed up the rate of production as committees organized youth in factories or on collective farms.\(^51\)

At a meeting of Ukraine’s youth leaders in October 1931, the Ukrainian Komsomol’s first secretary, Aleksandr Boichenko similarly argued that increasing Komsomol membership could only contribute to productivity. By increasing the proportion of Komsomol members on the factory floor, he asserted that the youth league could limit labor turnover, presumably by organizing, monitoring and integrating young workers in factories and mines. This role was especially important for the youth league’s work among recent migrants from the villages: “Out of people who often came from the village, who frequently skip work, who sometimes get drunk, the Komsomol will make conscious builders of the socialist society.”\(^52\) Although cultural goals played into Boichenko’s reasoning, they were mostly superseded by the prerogatives of economic mobilization in the recruiting campaign.

Facing sporadic peasant revolts and violence in the countryside, party leaders needed activists to organize collective farms, to enforce grain requisitions and to support local party leaders in their fight against supposed kulaks. In industry, they needed activists to organize

\(^{51}\) TsDAHO, f. 7, op 1., d. 1, spr. 617, ark. 133, 134.
\(^{52}\) Ibid., spr. 626, ark. 17-18.
shock work and to participate in “socialist competitions.” As Soviet efforts to fulfill plan goals became more desperate, the economic mobilization of Komsomol members became more and more common. Youth leaders expected their rank and file to become the leading activists in the countryside and in the factory. At the Ninth Komsomol Congress in January 1931, the youth league’s main report to the party Central Committee gave its first aims as “the mobilization of all energy and will of the Komsomol…toward the fulfillment of the Five-Year Plan in four years [and] the final suppression of class enemies hostile to the proletariat.”

Of the Young Pioneer organization (a Komsomol-run league for adolescents from ages ten to fifteen), the congress resolutions stated: “The fundamental line of the Komsomol in work among children must center all affairs of upbringing [vospitanie] on the basis of systematic participation of all children in the productive and social life of the factory, state farms, MTS [Machine-Tractor Stations] and kolkhoz.” The most important element in this resolution was the pairing of an “upbringing” in the Komsomol with productive life. As Wendy Goldman asserts about the mobilization of women in the economy, youth were also an economic resource in the First Five-Year Plan. The Komsomol was becoming a junior trade union, an organization meant to mobilize labor rather than mold youth. It was this promise of increasing economic output that fueled the Komsomol’s efforts to bring more and more youth into its ranks.

At the command of party and Komsomol leaders, activists recruited millions of Soviet youth into the league. This membership binge accompanied a similar recruitment phase in the

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53 Tovarishch Komsomol, 452.
54 IX Vsesoiuznyi s’ezd VLKSM: Stenograficheskii otchet (Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 1931), 427.
55 Goldman argues, “Party members and others maintained a lively interest in the transformation of byt throughout the first five-year plan but the Politburo, the highest level of the Party, decisively renounced its commitment to issues of byt with the liquidation of the Zhenotdel.” Goldman, “Industrial Politics: Peasant Rebellion and the Death of the Proletarian Women’s Movement in the USSR," Slavic Review 55, no. 1 (1996): 77.
56 Peter Gooderham argues that this change began as early as 1926, when youth committees in Leningrad started to shift the emphasis of youth work from acculturation to labor discipline. Gooderham, “The Komsomol and Worker Youth,” 513.
party. Between 1929 and 1933, membership in party and Komsomol organizations exploded. Party membership had been 1.5 million in 1929 and jumped to 3.5 million in 1933. The increase in Komsomol membership was just as dramatic, with the league’s membership doubling from 1930 to 1932. Over two million young people joined the league in 1931 alone, totaling more than five million youth before the end of the year (see table 1.2). By the end of 1932, though, the sheer number of new members caused party leaders to become alarmed that the recruiting campaign had allowed supposed enemies or unreliable hangers-on to join its ranks. Based on these fears, they initiated a membership verification to uncover illegitimate and unwanted members in 1933.

Among Komsomol leaders, similar anxieties about the makeup of new members accompanied or preceded those of party leaders. In December 1931, the Komsomol Central Committee abruptly announced a stop to their recruiting campaign just after it reached its apex but worries about new members had begun even earlier. The youth press had long urged vigilance with new members, asserting that subterfuge and misunderstanding on the part of activists were allowing class enemies to infiltrate its ranks. A June 1930 article in Komsomol’skaia Pravda had decried the tendency observed in some organizers to see recruiting to the Komsomol as a fix-all that could properly socialize a young person regardless of the recruit’s class background. The article was accompanied by a cartoon of a youth organizer dropping various anti-Soviet figures (kulaks, sectarians and hooligans) into a fountain marked

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57 Rigby, Communist Party Membership, 52.
59 RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 126, d. 30, l. 22.
The lack of statistical information in the last three quarters of 1932 likely is a result of the upheaval in membership numbers from purge that would occur that year.

In August 1931, with the recruiting campaign at its height, Ukraine’s youth leader Boichenko had admitted that his own wrongdoing had contributed to enemies’ joining the league. Previously he had announced that youth organizers needed to recruit 1.5 million new members—and this figure was for Ukraine alone! With a quote in hand, youth activists had rushed to fulfill it as they might attempt to complete production norms for pig iron. According to Boichenko, the quality of candidates had necessarily suffered and had even given rise to the heretical idea of “remolding kulaks [perevospitanie kulakov]” in the Komsomol. Boichenko loudly approved the ongoing recruiting campaign but he reflected a growing anxiety among leaders. In the sprint to “komsomolize”

Table 1.2: Quarterly Komsomol Membership 1930 – 1933

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quarter</th>
<th>Members</th>
<th>Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q1 1930</td>
<td>2,466,127</td>
<td>56,263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q2 1930</td>
<td>2,746,817</td>
<td>280,690</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q3 1930</td>
<td>2,885,697</td>
<td>138,880</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q4 1930</td>
<td>2,977,306</td>
<td>91,609</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q1 1931</td>
<td>3,094,620</td>
<td>117,314</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q2 1931</td>
<td>3,384,756</td>
<td>290,136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q3 1931</td>
<td>4,161,314</td>
<td>776,558</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q4 1931</td>
<td>5,124,771</td>
<td>963,457</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q1 1932</td>
<td>5,358,630</td>
<td>233,859</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q2 1932*</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q3 1932*</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q4 1932*</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q1 1933</td>
<td>4,547,186</td>
<td>-811,444</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The lack of statistical information in the last three quarters of 1932 likely is a result of the upheaval in membership numbers from purge that would occur that year.

“complete komsomolization [spolshnaia komsomolizatsia].” In August 1931, with the recruiting campaign at its height, Ukraine’s youth leader Boichenko had admitted that his own wrongdoing had contributed to enemies’ joining the league. Previously he had announced that youth organizers needed to recruit 1.5 million new members—and this figure was for Ukraine alone! With a quote in hand, youth activists had rushed to fulfill it as they might attempt to complete production norms for pig iron. According to Boichenko, the quality of candidates had necessarily suffered and had even given rise to the heretical idea of “remolding kulaks [perevospitanie kulakov]” in the Komsomol. Boichenko loudly approved the ongoing recruiting campaign but he reflected a growing anxiety among leaders. In the sprint to “komsomolize”

60 Ibid., d. 336, ll. 18-23.
61 “Spolshnaia...Komsomolizatsiia Vmesto Regulirovaniia rosta,” Komsomol’skaia Pravda, 18 June 1930, 3. An earlier article had called for Komsomol youth to treat children of kulaks with respect but not to allow them to join the youth league. “O molodom pokolenii likvidiruemogo klassa,” Komsomol’skaia Pravda, 5 April 1930, 1.
entire factories and collective farms, had youth organizers truly verified who was a class enemy?\textsuperscript{62}

These concerns about the supposed class enemies in the league’s ranks caused Komsomol leaders to undertake two related membership cleansing operations in 1932-33. The first was a “verification” (proverka) and was similar to the 1933 verification of party members. The party verification began in January of that year and according to J. Arch Getty, it was a means of pruning the swollen ranks of the party—rooting out non-active members and petty bureaucrats: “[T]raditional purge targets included careerists, bureaucrats, and crooks of various kinds.” Ideological enemies (including those who were accused of hindering collectivization and dekulakization) surely were targets but were not explicitly mentioned in purge instructions. Nearly a quarter of those removed from the party in the course of this verification were “passive” members who no longer contributed to the party. In total, 18 percent of party members lost their membership, a figure Getty concludes was in line with previous membership cleansing operations before the revolution from above.\textsuperscript{63} Similarly, the Komsomol’s verification was planned “not as a purge [chistka]” but also not as a “simple technical measure” according to league statisticians. The result was a de facto purge of unwanted elements. According to the unnamed author of the report, “In the process of the verification, class-alien elements who penetrated the league, Komsomol members who in practice helped the class enemy, those who

\textsuperscript{62} TsDAHO, f. 7, op. 1, spr. 619, ark. 113; spr. 654, ark. 13, 15, 16, 24; spr. 626, ark. 15, 17. At a youth conference in May 1931 the second secretary of the Ukrainian Komsomol, Kraevskii made similar comments but couched in the language of deviations from the Komsomol’s line. He denounced the “right” deviation of admitting children of class aliens. Yet he also supported the ongoing recruiting campaign, decrying the leftist deviation when organizers admitted only the children of proletarians; this deviation, he said, “gives the possibility for the class enemy …to create a parallel Komsomol organization.” TsDAHO, f. 7, op. 1, s. 617, ark. 116, 121, 125, 128. David Hoffmann suggests that Soviet official culture largely did not take hold among peasant migrants to the cities during the 1930s. Instead, migrants from the countryside largely replicated their previous life in an urban setting. The partial exception in his view was that young peasant migrants who joined the Komsomol often did become Sovietized to some extent. See Hoffmann, Peasant Metropolis, 162-63.

violated class discipline, were unmasked and run out [of the Komsomol].” At the same time, some cells and even whole districts saw 30 to 40 percent of membership disappear because of clerical errors (e.g., when a member moved away and never was removed from the rolls). The report’s author estimated the number expelled from the youth league in the document verification as one million, roughly 20 percent of its membership—a figure on par with the party’s verification. 64

But in addition to this routine sweep of membership, Komsomol members in grain-surplus regions were the target of a large membership “purge” [chistka] that can only be seen as part of the disaster in the Soviet countryside. During collectivization, with incentives to grow larger quantities of grain minimized, peasants reacted to these policies by producing less grain. At the same time, party-state leaders had expected to collect the same or increased amounts of grain from newly collectivized farms and incorporated this assumption into plan figures. In 1931 increasing grain requisition targets incited anger among peasants, causing party leaders to back away from overly ambitious figures. They scapegoated activists, accusing them of committing “excesses,” even though these “excesses” were often demanded by leaders themselves. For the 1932 requisitions, though, party leaders changed course, prodding plenipotentiaries to extract increasingly large amounts of grain from peasants. Spurred on by (misleading) police reports that peasants were hiding grain, party leaders demanded that activists carry out requisitions in large quantities. The quantities were so large that peasants often risked starvation by acceding to them. But they also risked arrest, exile or even execution if they resisted. 65 The state’s grain requisition policies led to a widespread famine in regions in Ukraine, the North Caucasus and

64 RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 126, d. 310, ll. 15-25.
Kazakhstan in 1932-33. In the catastrophe that unfolded, the best estimates are that between 5.5 and 6.5 million people perished from starvation and related effects.\textsuperscript{66}

Komsomol youth, as politically active members of a village or as sent-down organizers, were frequently those responsible for carrying out the requisitions on the local level. Komsomol members were far more numerous in the countryside than party members. At the start of 1933 there were 1,655,000 Komsomol members in the countryside (36 percent of total membership) but only 790,000 rural party members (22 percent of total membership).\textsuperscript{67} Their numbers alone gave Komsomol members an enormous presence in the countryside. When the 1932-33 grain requisition campaign resulted in the under-fulfillment of norms, it seems that leaders blamed local activists. They initiated a purge of youth activists in the traditional grain surplus regions that were among the hardest-hit areas in the famine. The targets of this purge were supposed class aliens, especially kulaks, and their alleged abettors who had infiltrated the youth league. Although the targets of the purge were supposedly kulaks from wealthy peasant families, the real motivation for their removal from the league was not their wealth. As Moshe Lewin and Lynne Viola have shown, the term kulak transformed under Soviet rule. What had been an economic classification (albeit a porous one) of wealthy peasants became a term to be brandished against all those who appeared to oppose the party’s demands for collectivization.\textsuperscript{68} It seems that the true misdeed of many young activists, now branded as kulaks or their lackeys, was a failure to fulfill catastrophic grain requisitions, either by intent or inability.

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\textsuperscript{67} Komsomol statistics do not list a simple rural/urban metric. I consider youth placed in official categories of small-holding farmers (edinolichniki), collective farmers or agricultural workers (state farm and MTS workers) as rural. Industrial workers, white-collar workers, students and other I consider urban. If anything, I suspect this underestimates the number of Komsomol youth in the countryside, given that many chaired village councils or were students in rural locations. Komsomol figures from RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 126, d. 336, ll. 18-23. Party figures from Rigby, \textit{Communist Party Membership}, 491.

\textsuperscript{68} The accusation was also appropriated by some communities to denounce marginal people. See Lewin, \textit{The Making of the Soviet System}, 121-141; Viola, \textit{Peasant Rebels under Stalin}, 29-38.
How was the Komsomol’s purge carried out? In Ukraine in late 1932, the republic’s youth committee created commissions at the district level to investigate the activity of local cells. The commission sent to Velikaia Lepetikha district in Dnepropetrovsk province reported to central youth leaders that class aliens had penetrated the Komsomol. In its findings, the committee alleged that class aliens had allowed various unsavory elements (“kulaks, sons of officers, sons of gendarmes, thieves, careerists, criminals”) not only to join the league but even to penetrate local leadership positions in it. The commission placed the blame for this infiltration squarely on the shoulders of the former district youth secretary whom it also accused of undermining the purge. When the commission finished its work, it had removed 174 members (seventy-nine as class-aliens, fifty-three as kulaks, forty-two for degeneracy) accounting for roughly 32 percent of the 536 members in the district organization.

The Ukrainian Central Committee of the Komsomol received a similar report about the purge in five other districts. In these areas, purge commissions expelled 1,341 members of a total of 4,369, about 31 percent. Here, too, the main reason for expulsion was the accusation of having connections with class enemies or for being one. The author of the report, a worker from the Central Committee of the republic’s Komsomol, reported that the most dangerous revelation from the purge was that “the ‘best’ kulak youth were admitted for ‘re-education.’”\(^\text{69}\) In Kozeletskii district of Chernigov province, the Komsomol sent a party worker to investigate the aftermath of the purge. According to his findings, the former district youth secretary was the son of a spy from the White Army and it was therefore unsurprising that he had abetted local youth leaders during the grain requisitions. One youth cell secretary apparently had gone unpunished.

\(^{69}\) TsDAHO, f. 7, op. 1, spr. 668, ark. 1, 7, 12.
after he told the district youth committee, “There is no grain in the village and therefore no need for a Komsomol meeting [to organize grain requisitions].”

To the east of Ukraine, the Kuban’ region of the North Caucasus was another major target in the Komsomol’s purge. The region had been particularly volatile in 1932. Moshe Lewin reports that at that time it was a major site where police rounded up peasant dissenters for deportation as dekulakized special settlers. Similarly, the Komsomol’s purge in the Kuban’ resulted in a very high rate of expulsion—56.3 percent of the region’s members by mid-1933. More than half of those removed were accused of being class-aliens or having connections with kulaks (22 percent and 42 percent respectively). In the purge of Ukraine, the Kuban’ and other grain surplus regions, a large number of those expelled had been in local leadership positions. Among them were 573 secretaries of local Komsomol cells and 1,778 members of cell committees.

Youth leaders took these reports of widespread kulak opposition in the Komsomol at face value. In order to explain this opposition, they maintained that mass mobilization and the stress of class war had caused activists to lower their guard. Sergei Andreev, Boichenko’s successor as head of the Ukrainian Komsomol, indicted the unverified cadres whom the league had sent as organizers to the countryside, “We need to say directly that the decision to send the ‘5,000’ [Ukrainian Komsomol workers mobilized to the countryside from factories] to the village was a mistake. After all, we were not in a condition to send 5,000 true fighters… It’s no coincidence that individuals among those sent returned and turned out to be alien elements.” Andreev reflected a common view among political leaders: the failure to fulfill grain quotas was only

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70 Ibid., spr. 818, ark. 44, 49.
71 Lewin, Making of the Soviet System, 155.
72 RGASPI, f. 1м, op. 126, d. 310, ll. 15-25.
73 TsDAHO, f. 7, op. 1, spr. 872, ark. 36.
possible because disloyal activists had resisted requisitions and collectivization, thus revealing themselves to be class enemies. The accusation that a large number of Komsomol activists resisted requisitions is questionable, and it is even more doubtful that youth who failed to fulfill grain norms did so as an conscious protest against the regime. Sparse evidence from the archives at local levels does not give many clues as to how Komsomol activists responded to the famine as a whole. In one case from an MTS Komsomol group, a denunciatory letter by a colleague accused a former Komsomol worker of drunkenly exclaiming, “In the village they [peasants] are starving, they are eating people.” The worker was expelled from the youth league under the official category of “degeneracy” (because he had been drunk) but not on the grounds of being a class alien or having strayed from the party line.74 This case had a political element but the bulk of the evidence points to the non-political character of Komsomol workers’ failure to fulfill grain requisition norms. Komsomol activists (like other activists from the cities) often found themselves unprepared or unable to fulfill grain norms and to grapple with peasant resistance.75 Novogruskii, a worker mobilized in August 1933 as the leader of the Komsomol cell in Dikanskii district of Khar’kov province, organized an inspection of guards who were supposed to watch over the harvest. Finding them asleep on the job, he docked the guards five days wages. Villagers apparently retaliated by depriving Novogruskii of food. “I am basically starving,” he said, “I haven’t eaten for two-three days.”76

Komsomol purge commissions asserted that many youth organizers had resisted grain requisitions but the petitions of youth activists to superiors rarely reflected opposition to state

74 Ibid., spr. 913, ark. 36, 37-38.
75 See Viola, Best Sons of the Fatherland, 181-186.
76 TsDAHO, f. 7, op. 1, spr. 818, ark. 90-98. In spite of the supposed failure of the mobilization of the “5,000” and the onset of the purge in Ukraine’s Komsomol, mass mobilizations continued well into 1933. Novogruskii’s mobilization was part of a larger campaign that sent many youth workers to the countryside as Komsomol organizers. In Chernigov province by May 13, 1933, a total of 1,013 people were sent out to work in the regions for various durations of time while 300 were sent as secretaries for kolkhoz youth cells. TsDAHO, f. 7, op. 1, spr. 818, ark. 99.
seizures of grain. More often they revealed a desire to leave the countryside. Some youth refused to accept mobilization to the countryside in the first place. In February 1933, the new youth organizer of an MTS wrote to the Ukrainian Komsomol Central Committee to ask to be sent back to his job at a mine where, according to him, he would be of more use to the party. Gapeev, second secretary of the Ukrainian Komsomol, explained, “We are now sending thousands of people to the village, many of whom are unfamiliar with the village but who have great experience in industry and, if they desire to, work well.” Many others refused to go to the village or left their posts without giving notice and were expelled from the organization. These expulsions reflected Komsomol leaders’ interpretation of organizers’ reluctance to work in the countryside and their inability to fulfill grain requisitions under the cruel conditions of famine. Rather than simple preferences or reactions to hardships, leaders asserted these actions were the conscious machinations of class enemies.

The extraordinary vigilance shown against those who had supposedly undermined requisitions in grain-growing regions bled over into the youth league’s practices in other provinces. An article in Izvestiia TsK Komsomola, the journal for youth organizers, explained that despite the end of dekulakization, class enemies were still lurking and Komsomol groups had to uncover them in their midst: “The enemy has begun his dirty work against the kolkhoz though ‘quiet sapping,’ capturing the leadership in some kolkhozes…organizing the sale of collective, socialist property, especially grain.” In Lopasne district (Moscow province), youth leaders at a December 1932 meeting applauded the expulsions of those Komsomol members who were accused of under-fulfilling potato requisitions: “The plenum confirms the decision of cells about expulsion… [of those Komsomol members] who during the moment of tense class war for

77 TsDAHO. f. 7, op. 1, spr. 913, ark. 62-64.
78 Ibid., ark. 24, 34.
potato requisitions…became the mouthpiece of the kulak in the Komsomol.”

For Komsomol leaders at all levels, political reliability became conflated with the ability to organize agricultural requisitions. Those whom Komsomol administrators accused of failing to meet quotas were deemed unreliable at best and branded as class enemies at worst.

What became of youth expelled from the league? Very few seem to have appealed their decisions to Komsomol Conflict Commissions, boards organized to hear appeals of expulsions and official reprimands. Available records of the commission at the republic-level youth committee in Ukraine show that of twenty-eight appeals cases in 1933, the commission only reinstated three members. Not only was the percentage of reinstatements small, the number of youth who appealed was minuscule compared to the number who could have attempted to re-enter the league. Some youth may have been arrested or exiled but it is unclear how often expulsion from the Komsomol sent youth into the jaws of the Soviet penal system or how many were expelled after they had already been arrested. It is safe to assume that some former Komsomol youth died in the famine, although no records exist that would suggest how many young people perished that way. Some, perhaps fearing further punishment if youth league investigators opened their case for appeal, may have simply disappeared into non-political life. Others, even those branded as class aliens, would later appeal their expulsions with more success after 1935 when the Komsomol’s disciplinary policies became more forgiving. For many, though, apathy or disillusionment seems to have spelled the end of their tenure in the youth league. Although what happened to youth expelled in 1932-33 is unclear, it is apparent that youth leaders were little concerned about former Komsomol members. After they announced the closing of the recruiting campaign at the end of 1931, Komsomol leaders’ overwhelming concern

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80 TsAOPIM, f. 648p, op. 1, d. 1, ll. 69-70.
81 TsDAHO, f. 7, op. 1, spr. 924, passim.
was ensuring that potential enemies were removed from the youth league, not that youth had the opportunity to return to its ranks.

In an effort to defend the purity of the Komsomol, recruiting slowed or even stopped in some regions. As Komsomol organizers and purge commissions expelled hundreds of thousands of youth from the league, the press accused organizers of continuing to allow unwanted new members into its ranks. Articles in *Izvestiia TsK Komsomola* from 1933 complained that too many unreliable people were joining the league. Youth leaders singled out the grain surplus regions—the same regions targeted in its purge and that suffered the most during the famine—for the most restrictive policies. In Stavropol’ district (in the North Caucasus), 72 percent of the new members admitted in the first three months of 1933 had been either white-collar workers or students. Other districts in that troubled region had followed similar trends. The author asked, “Can we see this as anything other than a misunderstanding of the class-political line of the Komsomol in the question of growth and regulation—as the loss of class feeling?” If that statement was not explicit enough, the article continued in bold lettering, “The line of the Komsomol in growth is currently that organizations limit admission to the Komsomol, all the way to refusing further admission to the ranks of the [Komsomol] in a number of places and districts.”

An article entitled “Deviations in Growth in the Komsomol” admonished committees for admitting, alongside class aliens, too many teens: “It is understood that we cannot and should not refuse admission…to adolescents. But it is incorrect to concentrate all work on adolescents.” In line with this policy, the Karelian province youth committee blocked all fourteen and some fifteen-year-olds from joining the organization through 1934 at least. When reviewing these cases, the provincial youth committee suggested these premature entries

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remain in the Pioneer organization longer.\textsuperscript{84} Not only did youth leaders want to eliminate adolescents and kulaks in their ranks but they were wary of all groups who were not workers. And not surprisingly, Komsomol leaders lamented the low numbers of laborers at factories and Machine-Tractor Stations who were joining the organization.\textsuperscript{85} Unlike in the party, where a moratorium on new members was announced in 1933, Komsomol leaders never cut off membership entirely.\textsuperscript{86} Yet these stringent standards for new Komsomol members meant net losses in membership in 1933, 1934 and 1935.

The expansionist membership policies of the Socialist Offensive ended in 1932 in the Komsomol but the emphasis on economic mobilization among youth continued and even grew stronger. In 1933 central leaders reorganized local cells on the “production principle.” This reorganization meant that Komsomol cells were supposed to form at factories, collective farms and institutes of education rather than by geography (e.g., organized in a village). Although the main purpose behind this policy was probably to exclude those youth whose families had not joined a collective farm, the policy also implied that work in the Soviet economy was the most important task of the organization. In line with this organizational principle, conferences in Lopsasne’s Komsomol focused almost entirely on how to increase agricultural production. Rather than political education or recruiting, local youth secretaries gave speeches on their efforts to increase dairy yields.\textsuperscript{87} Similarly, when a Komsomol instructor from the district center visited a youth committee meeting in the village Borki in Riazan’ district (Moscow province), his speech focused exclusively on the ways that the group had succeeded and failed in improving the local collective farm’s productivity. Writing up a testimonial about the committee’s work, he

\textsuperscript{84} NARK, f. 779, op. 17, d. 14, ll. 36, 43.
\textsuperscript{85} See, for example, TsDAHO, f. 7, op. 1, spr. 1056, ark. 55; spr. 1069; ark. 57; “Ne dopuskat’ izvrashchenii linii soiuza v roste,” Izvestiia TsK Komsomola, no. 14 (1933): 1-4.
\textsuperscript{86} Rigby, Communist Party Membership, 196.
\textsuperscript{87} TsAOPIM, f. 648p, op. 1, d. 1, l. 3.
merely listed the occupations of its members and specified that they had all completed their production norms.\(^8^8\) Sergei Andreev, the head of Ukraine’s Komsomol, dedicated an entire plenary meeting to the spring sowing season in 1934, saying, “We are bringing up [vospityvaem] Komsomol members in the spirit of responsibility…for fulfilling these tasks [of the sowing season].”\(^8^9\)

Andreev referred specifically to the task of fulfilling grain requisitions but in factories, too, Komsomol groups placed an emphasis on their members’ role as norm-fulfillers. In 1933 Stalin declared that the First Five-Year Plan had been completed in only four years (and three months) but neither its original goals set in 1929 nor its outrageously ambitious amended targets from 1930 were fulfilled. Stalinist leaders had counted on an increase in labor productivity as the plan progressed and capital investment bore dividends. However, during the First Five-Year Plan labor productivity fell, a product both of the large number of inexperienced workers from the countryside and of the decline in real wages.\(^9^0\) Eschewing wage leveling from 1931 onward, party leaders attempted to increase productivity through wage incentives.\(^9^1\) Yet party and Komsomol leaders also continued to assert that economic mobilization in associations like the youth league was an important way of increasing productivity. Failing to fulfill obligations at the factory became a failure to fulfill league obligations and consequently youth committees punished those who neglected their norms. For example, in March 1933 Molodoi Bol’shevik (a journal for Komsomol organizers) published a reprimand that Moscow’s provincial Komsomol committee had given to a district-level youth secretary. His main fault was the failure to provide

\(^8^8\) GARO, f. 489, op. 12, d. 91, ll. 1-2.
\(^8^9\) TsDAHO, f. 7, op. 1, spr. 872, ark. 24.
\(^9^0\) R.W. Davies argues that heavy industry grew but Soviet claims of fulfilling the plan in other sectors (especially light industry and consumer goods) were unfounded. While Soviet leaders claimed that industrial production grew by 102 percent, Davies cites figures between 41 and 72 percent. Davies, Crisis and Progress in the Soviet Economy, 1931-1933 (London: Macmillan, 1996), 238-239.
\(^9^1\) Ibid., 468-469.
secretaries for Komsomol cells at a local factory. The provincial committee alleged that as a consequence, “Workshop cells were in a ruinous state where there was no assistance shown to shock work brigades [groups of exemplary laborers tasked with especially urgent and demanding work] and as a result some of them fell apart.” The problem was not that political or cultural education in those groups had fallen apart but that shock work had suffered, thereby hurting productivity. The reprimand reflected the broader mission of the youth league in 1933. The civilizing mission of the Komsomol had fallen by the wayside. The “cultural marches” of the late 1920s had disappeared from official publications and the internal life of Komsomol. The primary burden that Komsomol leaders placed on youth activists was to contribute to agriculture and industry rather than to ensure the quality or presence of cultural activities.

**Conclusion:**

The difference between the Komsomol of the 1920s and that of the 1930s could be summarized in one word—enthusiasm. On the eve of the collectivization campaign, Vladimir Mayakovsky, the radical poet whom the Komsomol had adopted as its own, wrote a poem entitled “Perekop Enthusiasm!” In it various Soviet citizens scold young comrades for their revolutionary enthusiasm with the phrase, “You are not yet eighteen-years-old.” Alluding to the battle that gave the Red Army victory over Wrangel’s forces in Crimea, Mayakovsky urges these youngsters to let loose their enthusiasm, “Use your energy to storm the barricades even in the little things, infuse the construction site with Perekop enthusiasm.” Enthusiasm was the watchword of radical Komsomol members in the 1920s and early 1930s—an enthusiasm for a new revolution that would be theirs.

92 S.D., “Resheniia nado vypolnit’,” *Molodoi Bol’shevik*, no. 3 (1933), 32.
In the Great Turn, Stalin’s regime unleashed the forces of enthusiasm. Radical activists went to the countryside to transform economic, cultural and social life. Youth leaders believed that they could simply “komsomolize” elements of young society—equating admission to the league with transformation into exemplary, enthusiastic workers. In the process, millions of young people joined its ranks between 1929 and 1932. Yet in the face of the immense demands of the ongoing economic transformation, the cultural and social aspects of the cultural revolution gave way and Komsomol leaders increasingly emphasized the necessity of mobilizing as many youth as possible in service of the Soviet economy. The fate of Komsomol activism represents the broader fate of the cultural revolution, its energy devoured by the strains of economic mobilization and increasing political repression. In a sense, the Komsomol’s place in the Stalin Revolution bore similarities to the period of the civil war. Between 1918 and 1921, the youth league had eschewed its special place among youth and acted as an agent of military and administrative mobilization for the party. During the Socialist Offensive, Komsomol organizers were made into state plenipotentiaries, mobilized for the party’s enormous targets in the economy rather than for work among youth themselves.

The boundless goals of the regime confronted peasant resistance in the countryside and economic realities in industry. And when these goals were not met, especially in famine-stricken villages, party and youth leaders branded many organizers class enemies who had refused to undertake the necessary actions to fulfill the party’s demands. Komsomol leaders reversed their position on recruiting, asserting that they could not transform everyone into exemplary workers through political membership. The expansion of membership ended in 1932 as Komsomol leaders initiated a massive purge. However, dekulakization and the purge of the Komsomol also reinforced elements of the Stalin revolution. First, the expulsion of so many members as
supposed class enemies strengthened the notion that the class enemy was working against the party and doing so through the Komsomol itself. It justified class radicalism among leaders and the rank and file, making them wary of all potential members whose proletarian background was not pristine. Second, the assertion that economic intransigence (especially failure to fulfill grain norms) was a political crime reinforced the equation of the Komsomol’s political activism with economic activism. For those youth organizers who were not expelled from the league during the subsequent purge in 1932-33, economic mobilization continued to be the core of youth activism.

What was lost in the chaos and desperation of the Socialist Offensive was the radical civilizing mission of the cultural revolution—the enthusiasm from below for creating a new society based on the radical ideals of the revolution. As the country emerged from Stalin’s revolution, there was no space for cultural autonomy that would allow a radical youth subculture to develop, as the conditions of NEP had allowed. And Komsomol leaders did not return to the goals of bringing radical proletarian culture to Soviet youth as a whole. Yet their mission to create a new Soviet society among youth continued. As the regime sought to stabilize a country reeling from the consequences of a virtual civil war, the Komsomol’s leaders embarked on a different kind of cultural revolution—one aimed at civilizing young radical proletarians along with the rest of the country—termed “communist upbringing.”
Chapter 2: Cultural Revolution from Above:  
The Development of “Communist Upbringing”

Nineteen thirty-four was a year of major change. At the Seventeenth Party Congress in January of that year, Stalin declared the victory of socialism against the forces of counterrevolution. The state had largely succeeded in collectivizing agriculture, defeating supposed class enemies that had struggled against the policy. Stalin repeated assertions that in industry the First Five-Year Plan had catapulted the Soviet Union forward as a modern industrial power.¹ Amid these declarations of success, Soviet leaders also worried about the social upheaval that collectivization and rapid industrialization had unleashed on the country. In the countryside, regime leaders had hoped to impose the cultural norms of Soviet urban life on peasants but were rebuffed as the country descended into a virtual civil war.² Even in cities, where the regime could celebrate the growth of heavy industry, Soviet leaders acknowledged that the country had a dearth of capable, educated and “cultured” cadres. The problem for Stalin’s regime was no longer just mobilizing people for the economy but increasingly to shape those people into good, stable citizens. At a meeting of workers from metallurgical factories on December 29, 1934, Stalin said, “If before we one-sidedly placed an emphasis on technology, on machines, we now need [to place an emphasis] on people who wield technology… We need to cultivate [people] carefully and attentively, as a gardener cultivates his beloved fruit tree.”³

¹ Davies, Crisis and Progress, 466-468.  
Building on this notion, Stalin soon after unveiled the slogan, “cadres decide everything.” It would be people, not just technology, that would define socialism’s success.

Stalin’s emphasis on cultivating people was at the core of “communist upbringing” in the Komsomol. While the party was tasked with taking greater care in selecting and promoting cadres, it was the duty of Komsomol leaders and organizers to become character builders for the next generation. Prompted in late 1934 by Stalin himself, the advent of “communist upbringing” had broad implications for the work of youth activists and the makeup of the league. The main location of youth activism began to shift from the workplace to schools, and the league began to target adolescents and young women as new members. Above all, and over the objections of some organizers, Komsomol leaders asserted that youth activism was no longer about economic mobilization or forming a proletarian consciousness among young people. Instead, youth activism meant molding youth into a “cultured” Soviet citizenry.

Official appeals for Soviet citizens to adhere to kul’turnost’, a broad set of behavioral norms denoting good taste and etiquette, were not new. Indeed, the term kul’turnyi (“cultured”) appeared in pre-revolutionary etiquette guides and some of these aspects of “cultured” living carried over into the Soviet period. Yet what exactly “cultured” living meant changed markedly in the mid-1930s. In the 1920s, multiple definitions of kul’turnost’ existed. Lenin, in spite of his radical political beliefs, was rather staid in his understanding of culture. He promoted good hygiene, cleanliness and a classical education—what Catriona Kelly argues formed the mainstream of advice literature in the 1920s. At the same time, radicals contradicted this understanding of cultured behavior. The poet Mayakovsky asserted that worries about cleanliness and grooming were signals of “bourgeois” living—an assertion that found broad

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4 Ibid., 95-96.
5 Catriona Kelly, Refining Russia: Advice Literature, Polite Culture, and Gender from Catherine to Yeltsin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 192.
support among activists in the Komsomol.\textsuperscript{6} Through the Stalin Revolution, conceptions of cultured behavior divided along these lines. But as a new elite emerged from the party’s policies of hereditary workers, Sheila Fitzpatrick asserts that these upwardly mobile promotees (\textit{vydvizhentsy}) latched onto a changed conception of \textit{kul’turnost’}. They asserted their newfound status by appropriating consumer goods, Russian literary classics (most prominently Pushkin) and other niceties of middle-class society in pre-Soviet Russia.\textsuperscript{7} Assessing the role of gender in “cultured” living under Stalin, Fitzpatrick asserts that “women were indisputably more closely linked to \textit{kul’turnost’} than men were.” Yet alongside these demands from below, Soviet social and cultural institutions played a major role in fostering conservative notions of cultured behavior. The Komsomol’s focus on “communist upbringing” was part of this shift. The objects of the Komsomol’s efforts to shape the cultural norms of this generation were not only women but also men. “Communist upbringing” brought in a new understanding of “\textit{kul’turnost’},” one that was more explicitly gendered and, for men, increasingly included militarizing facets.

“Communist upbringing” was part of a cultural revolution in the mid-1930s—one more in line with Lenin’s view that the regime had a role to play in civilizing society. In the Komsomol, leaders’ insistence on activists’ adherence to cultured behavior had the opposite effect of the radical inner cultural revolution that Michael David-Fox sees in the 1920s.\textsuperscript{8} Youth leaders repudiated the culture of radical proletarianism, impressing upon activists that the days of

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{6} Ibid., 253
\item \textsuperscript{8} David-Fox, “What Is Cultural Revolution?,” 181, 182-3, 187.
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the unkempt organizer who scoffed at formal education were over. Now, activists had to be exemplars of cultured behavior—clean, educated, articulate—in their work as mentors for younger members, school-age adolescents and children. It is possible to see this shift as a feminization of the youth activism, drawing on Catriona Kelly’s assertion that vospitanie carried a feminine connotation in Russia, while discipline (distsiplina) was its masculine counterpart.\(^9\)

However, Komsomol leaders did not intend for “communist upbringing” to emasculate boys and young men. Instead, youth leaders viewed their mission as creating a controlled, disciplined masculinity—one that combined education and military practices. At the same time that Komsomol General Secretary Aleksandr Kosarev unveiled “communist upbringing,” he also spearheaded several large-scale paramilitary training operations for activists and the rank and file. These campaigns impressed upon Komsomol youth that being a “cultured” young man meant knowledge of military practices and the ability to impart these practices to younger charges.

For both men and women, “communist upbringing” strengthened notions of gender difference. As Komsomol leaders attempted to attract more women to the league, they asserted that youth activism among women was different than among men. They believed that women more than men were attracted to the outer trappings of “cultured” life. These same outward manifestations radical organizers had derided in the past as “bourgeois.” Embracing these formerly bourgeois practices forced some youth to wonder where the boundary between philistinism and culture lay. Yet Komsomol leaders wanted to influence the development of strong Soviet families and conceived of women as the gatekeepers to the family. They gave tacit approval to dancing, sewing classes and other initiatives—under the league’s auspices—in the hopes that “cultured” entertainment would allow them to bring women into the Komsomol. By

offering the aspects of cultured living they believed women wanted, Komsomol leaders attempted to extend the cultural reach of official youth culture to women and, by extension, young families. In this sense, the Komsomol’s turn toward mass socialization for young men and women had a common purpose. Through “communist upbringing,” youth leaders hoped to promote normative behavioral codes among young Soviet people.

“Not coal but people”: Komsomol Reforms in 1935

In December 1934, Stalin called Komsomol General Secretary Aleksandr Kosarev and his top lieutenants to his office. The meeting was unofficial and its record was not preserved in Soviet archives but the Komsomol press continued to commemorate it for more than a decade later.10 In mid-1935 the Komsomol head described the meeting as the central moment of a shift that fundamentally changed the basic purpose of the youth league. In Kosarev’s account Stalin asked a series of Socratic questions. Over the course of the interview, Stalin’s prodding led the Komsomol’s leadership to understand that the youth league was needlessly duplicating the work of other political and economic organizations while neglecting its own special role in socializing youth. Upon learning that the Komsomol had an agricultural department [sel’skokhoziaistvennyi otdel], Stalin asked, “Why agricultural? Does the Komsomol finance or run agriculture?” The question was in part one of semantics; the agricultural department looked after youth issues in the countryside generally and its mandate was not to run agriculture. Yet since the Great Turn, the Komsomol had effectively served as junior version of a Soviet trade union that mobilized young people in the economy. The question pointedly cast doubt on the correctness of economic mobilization as the core of Komsomol work. What Stalin implied was that the league needed to

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10 The June 1945 issue of Komsomol’skii rabotnik retold the story in an article called “A Conversation with Stalin.” Of course, Kosarev, whom the NKVD arrested and executed following his removal from the Komsomol in November 1938, was not present in the story.
turn away from organizing labor and turn toward youth itself—to become an organization for molding young people with the regime’s values.\textsuperscript{11}

Stalin’s direct intervention in official youth culture occurred after a year of uncertainty. At the Seventeenth Party Congress, Soviet leaders announced the new era of Soviet socialism had begun. For adherents of Marxism, constructing socialism was a serious achievement, ushering in a new epoch where life as they knew it would change substantially. Anticipating these changes, Komsomol leaders announced a “reconstruction” (perestroika) of youth work at the March 1934 plenum of its Central Committee following the party congress. However, this reconstruction of the Komsomol was largely a matter of words. Komsomol cells [\textit{iacheiki}] became local organizations [\textit{pervychnye organizatsii}] but organizers and leaders did not seem to comprehend what the substance of the reconstruction was. For instance, at a meeting of the Ukrainian Komsomol’s Central Committee, Vasilii Muskin (head of the Donets province youth committee) was giving a speech on the reconstruction when a voice from the crowd interrupted, “I haven’t heard of anything new in the reconstruction.” Muskin replied broadly, “What is new in the reconstruction is that we are fulfilling the [recent] decisions of the party.” Yet the voice from the crowd reflected a common opinion. The Komsomol had not reformulated its mission so much as it had rebranded its departments.\textsuperscript{12}

Even before his meeting with Stalin, Kosarev signaled the upcoming change in the work of youth organizers. At a November 1934 meeting of provincial youth leaders, Kosarev demanded that youth organizers embrace “cultured living.” The Komsomol’s leader skewered young workers who still adhered to the proletarian coarseness they had taken up in opposition to the “bourgeois” foppishness of the NEP period. He chided them for “idiotically” boasting of

\textsuperscript{12} TsDAHO, f. 7 op. 1 spr. 1031, ark. 8.
their lack of refinement. Referring to the Komsomol as a “people’s commissariat [narkomat] of cultured relaxation,” he suggested a major aspect of the organization’s work was to provide young people with party-approved entertainment. Without cultured relaxation, youth would turn to unsavory means of entertaining themselves, hooliganism. Although the term was vague and variable, hooliganism encompassed acts of drunkenness, assault and general disorderly public behavior, often involving young people. In 1935 hooliganism became a crime in the Soviet legal code.\textsuperscript{13} According to the Komsomol leader, the “active core” of hooligans had an anti-Soviet political program and aimed to recruit followers by providing anti-Soviet entertainment (e.g., drinking parties) and faux romanticism. To combat hooliganism, Kosarev said that it was imperative for the Komsomol to provide a respectable alternative—cultured entertainment.\textsuperscript{14}

In a sense, this focus on cultured entertainment was a return to the policies of NEP, when youth organizers mobilized entertainment in the service of molding youth into regime-approved citizens. Yet two factors differentiated the earlier policy from what would become “communist upbringing.” The first was that under NEP, Komsomol leaders had sought to give youth a proletarian consciousness—an understanding of the conditions that had caused the working class to radicalize in advance of the October Revolution. In contrast, Kosarev stressed that youth organizers were molding “Soviet” youth, a social category that superseded class boundaries. This new understanding was a development of the socialist era, when Marxist theory asserted that class difference would disappear. The second difference in the Komsomol’s policies of vospitanie from NEP was a consequence of the shifting power dynamics in the youth league. In


\textsuperscript{14} RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 5 d. 27 ll. 66-68.
the 1920s the Komsomol had been a community that radical organizers and the rank and file had played a significant role in constructing. These organizers had successfully opposed the more moderate policies of youth leaders, creating a milieu imbued with radical values. During the Stalin Revolution, the structure of the Komsomol became more hierarchical and centralized, reflecting a change in associational life in the Soviet Union generally. Initially, this centralization of authority had infused the entire youth league with the values of radicals who catapulted into the leadership of the Komsomol. However, Kosarev and other former radicals from late 1934 onward would use the hierarchical, centralized Komsomol apparatus that emerged in the Stalin revolution to advocate a cultural revolution from above, one that aimed to turn youth into “cultured” Soviets.

The focus on engendering “cultured” behavioral norms among young people became a major part of reforms to the Komsomol in 1935. After the December 1934 meeting with Stalin, Komsomol and party leaders began to work on formal changes to the organization. Kosarev sent down preliminary signals to local organizations almost immediately. In mid-December the Komsomol leader circulated a letter to the leaders of provincial and republican youth organizations where he claimed that 1935 would herald major changes, refocusing the league’s work from economic mobilization to “genuine Bolshevik leadership over the vospitanie of youth.” The process of formally introducing changes began in early 1935. At a Politburo meeting on February 22, Stalin and Kosarev delivered speeches (unfortunately not preserved) on the current work of the Komsomol and the need to reform institutions for socializing youth. The meeting formed a commission with a number of high ranking party, state and Komsomol leaders: chairing was Lazar Kaganovich, head of the railways commissariat and a major patron of the

15 Mally, Revolution acts, 182-183; Neumann, The Communist Youth League, 217; Papenyn, Architecture in the Age of Stalin, 82-104.
16 TsDAHO, f. 7, op. 1, spr. 1068, ark. 152.
Komsomol, and in attendance were Stalin, Leningrad party secretary Andrei Zhdanov, then party control commissioner Nikolai Ezhov, Narkompros head Andrei Bubnov, Nadezhda Krupskaia and other party figures, plus ten Komsomol leaders.\(^\text{17}\)

The product of this commission was an April 1 party Central Committee resolution, “On the Apparatus of the Central Youth Committee [Tsekakomola],” signed by Kosarev and distributed to all republican and province-level youth committees. The resolution iterated Stalin’s main criticism from his December 1934 meeting with youth leaders: The Komsomol had mechanically copied the work of the party and trade unions while ignoring what was supposed to be its primary focus, the upbringing of youth. It faulted the youth league with ignoring large parts of the population, particularly women and schoolchildren. The Politburo reorganized the Komsomol apparatus based on the goal of socializing youth as distinct segments of the population. Responding to Stalin’s questions about the appropriateness of a Komsomol agricultural department, the commission renamed it the department of rural youth. The Komsomol also created a secretarial position for work among young women.\(^\text{18}\) It might seem that the Komsomol’s focus on women amounted to a partial reestablishment of the Zhenotdel (Women’s Department), the party section for women that existed until January 1930. But the Zhenotdel had been an association of and for women that advocated in the interests of politically active women. In contrast, the women’s section in the Komsomol was charged with organizing young women on the behalf of the regime.\(^\text{19}\) The establishment of a secretary for women (in the person of Komsomol worker Tat’iana Vasil’eva) reflected party and Komsomol leaders’ view of young women as a distinctive category of the population. Women demanded a different

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\(\text{17}\) RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 959, l. 4.  
\(\text{18}\) RGASPI, f. 17, op. 120, d. 114, ll. 32-36.  
\(\text{19}\) Local Zhenotdel cells had also been a venue for “bab’i bunt’y” (peasant women’s protests) against collectivization. These protests led party leaders, already skeptical the role of women’s activism in the state, to eliminate the organization. Goldman, “Industrial Politics,” 60-61.
approach to *vospitanie*, just as the different approaches to rural and urban youth demanded two separate departments. Yet the common motivation behind all the changes to the Komsomol apparatus was that the league’s goal had shifted from mobilizing youth labor to transforming the behavior of young people.

Immediately after Kosarev released the resolution to lower-level youth organizations, the Komsomol Central Committee called a meeting of provincial and republican youth leaders to clarify its meaning. Kosarev framed its significance in terms of the league’s past and its future, “During the First and [ongoing] Second Five-Year Plans [the Komsomol] was an apparatus, above all, to help party, soviet and trade union organizations in the resolution of general, and in some cases practical, tasks of economic-political work.” In contrast, the new goal of *vospitanie* meant that there needed to be a new kind of Komsomol worker. Not every current worker, he said, was cut out for the kind of organization the Komsomol was becoming, “We need to assess every active worker from the point of view of ability for leadership work in the Komsomol… That is, what kind of help they can bring to the central task of bringing up youth and children… We are talking here about the creation in the Komsomol of a type of professional for the upbringing of youth and children.” Kosarev asserted that Komsomol workers as character builders [*vospitateli*] for children would have skill sets that were different from the activists who had organized youth for economic mobilization. He declared that Komsomol activists would need to retool or leave the organization.

Even before the release of the Politburo decision, word about the changes to the Komsomol had already begun to circulate in some places. Sergei Andreev, the head of the Ukrainian Komsomol, had been a member of the Politburo commission on the Komsomol and it seems that early on he told Ukrainian youth workers about the turn to “communist upbringing.”

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20 RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 5, d. 28b, ll. 1, 2-3.
For example, a March 19 report from Andreev’s office on the Komsomol organization of a factory in the town of Nikolaev (Odessa province) chastised the local group with needlessly duplicating the tasks of the local party organization: “It has reached the point that Komsomol groups, using the example of economic, party and trade union organizations have set up night watches…to eliminate problems in production… That the policy of the league had turned toward…the upbringing of youth has not been understood here.”

In spring issues of *Komsomol’skaia Pravda* and *Izvestiia TsK Komsomola*, the youth press published articles like “Upbringing—the decisive calling of the Komsomol,” signaling to local organizers a shift in the league’s work.

Not until June 1935, though, did the Komsomol leadership reveal the full scope of the changes. The June 1935 plenum of the Komsomol Central Committee marked the first major public announcement of the youth league’s new mission. In his opening speech, Kosarev leaned on the authority of Stalin, revealing the Soviet leader’s complaints that the Komsomol had focused too little on socialization of youth. He declared that the new starting point for youth cadres was *kul’turnost’,* “Retraining—that is the task—the outer appearance [oblik] of secretaries of district and regional committees should change, to stop being like a provincial lad and become cultured people.” A voice from the crowd shouted, “We’ve already seen strong growth [in this area].” Kosarev broke from his speech and replied to the crowd, “I don’t see anything in particular so far.”

The typical Komsomol organizer of the Stalin Revolution, an unrefined, radical worker who climbed up the youth organization by organizing shock work, was to give way to a different type of Komsomol organizer. In order to mold young people appropriately, organizers had themselves to become worthy examples in appearance and deed. This imperative

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21 TsDAHO, f. 7, op. 1, spr. 1076, ark. 96.
23 RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 2, d. 115, l. 62.
was especially true in the league’s work with adolescents. Kosarev stressed that the Komsomol workers had done a poor job of including adolescents in the league and exerting an influence in schools. He claimed that the need to “take care of schools” was no less than a directive from the party Central Committee itself. Youth activists needed to recruit younger members, especially those who “proved themselves with [good] behavior.”

Another issue raised at the plenum was the place of young women in the Komsomol. Tat’iana Vasil’eva, the secretary for women’s issues, cited the example of the Kursk provincial youth committee for its excellent work among women. According to Vasil’eva, that committee understood that improving work with women meant to “increase mass-political work, games, dances and so on.” The Komsomol women’s secretary stressed that these activities were necessary to ensure that the league attracted young women in the first place and then retained and promoted them through the organization. But besides citing these inclusive developments, Vasil’eva pointed to other cases that reflected the continuation of the youth league’s exclusionary masculine identity. She cited examples of Komsomol committees that expelled young mothers who had missed meetings while busy with children, illness or during childbirth itself. Vasil’eva implied that these expulsions were the result of carelessness and ignorance—a failure to understand what women required—and insisted that youth committees do a better job of accommodating young mothers. Her main suggestion for improving work was for committees to send a “strong comrade” [sil’nyi tovarishch] to update mothers periodically while they took care of their infants.

Kosarev and Vasil’eva offered some concrete proposals for what the turn toward socialization in the Komsomol would mean, yet other youth leaders wondered still at the end of

24 Ibid., l. 69.
25 RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 2, d. 116, 157, 162.
the plenum what the changes meant for practical work. During the speech of party Central Committee secretary Andrei Andreev (who provided the main party oversight for the Komsomol through the end of the 1930s), Sergei Saltanov, the Komsomol’s secretary in charge of educational affairs, interrupted to demand clarification on the implications of the new focus on upbringing: “But in effect? You say the program needs to be changed, but can you share some details?” Andreev answered, “If we raised economic questions before, now we will put forward questions like how to lead a meeting, we will educate guys [rebiata] on how the district committee should work according to the wishes of comrade Stalin.” Economic mobilization had provided youth leaders and activists with quantifiable goals for their work. Now activists would be responsible for the less tangible work of vospitanie. What this task entailed was less clear and so were the measures of its success or failure. Fulfilling or exceeding production norms and grain requisitions was one thing, but how could an activist assess how well a lower-level organizer ran a meeting or worked according to Stalin’s wishes?

As provincial youth leaders disseminated the decision of the plenum, they fought against the persistent urge among youth organizers to measure Komsomol work though production norms. After the plenum, meetings on the prerogative of youth socialization began among activists first in provincial or regional capitals and then those activists went to lower-level organizations to discuss the decision. At the Ukrainian Komsomol plenum that July, Sergei Andreev rebuked activists who continued to equate work at the factory with work as a youth organizer: “Don’t let our activists sleep; it’s no secret that a segment of our activists are living in their glorious past [of radical activism in agriculture].” Some activists continued to organize economic mobilization out of what Andreev suggested was nostalgia but others genuinely feared the consequences of withdrawing from economic work. “A few [activists] will say, ‘How can it

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26 RGASPI, f. 73, op. 1, d. 133, l. 135.
be? The economy will sink.’ The economy won’t sink,” Andreev assured his audience. While some organizers took Andreev’s words to heart, others did not entirely. At the meeting, Prokushchenko, a Komsomol worker from the Donbas began to talk about the production of coal when he was interrupted, “We know the decisive meaning coal has in the Donbas. (noise, voices: ‘Not coal but people.’)” Another activist, Afanas’ev, said that local party committees were undermining the recent decision of the Komsomol’s Central Committee. Party administrators did not understand that youth organizers were now charged with socializing youth people and continued to insist that youth activists handle “economic issues.”

Leaders in the Komsomol insisted that the league’s goals should shift from fulfilling production figures to the less tangible aim of molding youth. Yet some lower-level activists, whether set in their ways or pressured by superiors, continued to promote production over education.

Another reason some youth organizers continued to equate economic activism with youth work was that they considered the turn toward “communist upbringing” a demotion for the youth league and for themselves—a characterization Komsomol leaders fought. At the Tenth Komsomol Congress in April 1936, almost a year after “communist upbringing” was unveiled, Kosarev rejected the notion that economic activism was the pathway to promotion in the Komsomol, “The foundation of this unwillingness [of activists to embrace their role as character builders] is a deep and dangerous error of some comrades who are convinced that if they look after economic work they will probably be rewarded… They think, if I begin to look after schools no one will notice, I won’t be rewarded. This is an absolutely false opinion!” At the same congress, Evgenii Fainberg, the Komsomol secretary in charge of the youth press,

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27 TsDAHO, f. 7, op. 1, spr. 1208, ark. 4, 55, 104, 212. In June 1935, the Ukrainian Komsomol’s cadres secretary, Iakov Geiro, made similar comments about the need for youth organizers to assess workers on their handling of vospitanie instead of the harvest, “We will have the grain harvest [soon]... Every secretary of a city or district [youth committee] will assign credit to himself for its successes... But now we will not measure the work of the Komsomol by grain requisions, we will measure by intra-league work.” TsDAHO, f. 7, op 1., spr. 671, ark. 95.
described his reaction to rumors of activists who believed the recent changes undermined the youth league’s standing, “Those who think that are deeply mistaken… Now before us stands the gigantic task of working in the school. Could this be a depreciation of the role of the Komsomol?”

Kosarev and Fainberg were reacting to genuine anxiety among young activists. For several years, the main task of youth activism had been to organize the fulfillment of production norms. Now leaders asked activists to conduct new tasks as educators, jobs that must have seemed less important than organizing shock work in grandiose state projects. But in many ways, Fainberg was correct. “Communist upbringing” changed the purpose of Komsomol activism but it did not lessen its impact. The Komsomol was to be a primary vehicle for promoting and enforcing officially approved behavioral norms among youth. And this new mission, although it limited the Komsomol’s direct impact on the country’s economic life, opened a range of new positions for activists in schools and recreation.

**Schools, Sports and Military Training**

Since its founding, the Komsomol had a competitive and sometimes acrimonious relationship with the Commissariat of Enlightenment and the system of traditional education in schools. In broad terms, Komsomol leaders of the 1920s and early 1930s had favored industrial vocational training for adolescents while their counterparts in Narkompros advocated general education. During the Stalin Revolution, the Komsomol educational policies won out and vocational education became the norm in secondary education, primarily run through state economic

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28 RGASPI, f. 6m, op. 10, d. 1, l. 13; d. 6, l. 35.

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commissariats. However, by 1931 the regime began to return general education to secondary schools, including the emphasis in traditional education on discipline. In 1935, as part of “communist upbringing,” youth organizers were asked to partner with Narkompros and they assumed new roles in schools as mediums of moral and cultural upbringing. This focus on molding social behavior, especially the goal of creating a military style of order among youth, brought the Komsomol into close contact with organizations in civil defense and sports as well. From 1934 to 1936, Kosarev and his subordinates would assume key positions in these organizations, placing the Komsomol at the center of a bureaucratic network of recreational and educational organizations.

As Komsomol officials attempted to exert increasing influence over schools, the relationship between leaders in the youth league and Narkompros remained tendentious. Where would general education end and “communist upbringing” begin? Talks to hammer out this issue began in early 1935. On January 8, 1935, the Komsomol Central Committee bureau hosted a particularly hostile meeting with Narkompros leaders. Komsomol leaders were concerned that school administrators were involving themselves too much in the workings of the Komsomol and Pioneer brigades. The fight over the Pioneers in particular had a long history but one that was made more urgent now that the Komsomol was competing with Narkompros for the mantle of the moral guide of youth and children. The immediate spark for the conflict was a recent incident involving Narkompros’s head, Bubnov. The Narkompros chief released a resolution

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30 Fitzpatrick, Education and Social Mobility, 209-10, 221-225.
31 This fight over administrative jurisdiction was the continuation of a debate that had begun at the inception of the Pioneers. The Pioneer movement had started in 1922 as an answer to the Boy Scout movement. From the outset it was affiliated with the Komsomol and was largely separate from schools. Yet in the late 1920s based on the “school principles,” groups became extracurricular offshoots of class groups. The shift in responsibility for the Pioneers became a reason for protest among Komsomol leaders. For example, the resolutions of the Ninth Congress of the Komsomol in 1931 repudiated “the ‘theory’ of moving the brigades to schools, essentially limiting the political role of the Pioneer organization in the framework of school work.” Instead, the congress had favored placing the Pioneer “base” under the supervision of an enterprise (e.g., a factory), a policy that also meshed well with the desire at the time to mobilize Pioneers in the service of the economy. IX Vsesoiuznyi s’ezd VLKSM, 429.
and insisted it be read in Pioneer groups and even some Komsomol organizations. Kosarev and other Komsomol leaders asserted that this act reflected a broader trend of school administrators’ meddling in the affairs of the Komsomol organization. According to Kosarev, this interference erased the boundary between the role of the Komsomol (“self-governance” among youth) and that of the schools (formal education). This development was particularly dangerous because, according to youth leaders, it led to misunderstandings of political events in schools. Kosarev alleged, “It all speaks to intolerable methods of upbringing... How many clear examples are there when the appearance of the class enemy does not always summon the necessary reaction and mobilization?” Kosarev considered the current incident dangerous politically, yet it also constituted a continuation of the broader battle between Narkompros and the Komsomol over the responsibility for vospitanie. Ultimately, Kosarev made the mutually satisfactory proposal that the two organizations collaborate to create a Komsomol position in schools in major cities.32

A month later the committee tasked with creating this position made three recommendations to Kosarev at a Komsomol Central Committee meeting. First, provincial Komsomol committees should conduct personal interviews with existing secretaries at youth organizations in schools to ensure that they were capable and trustworthy organizers. Second, it called for two thousand Komsomol teachers (i.e., teachers who belonged to the league—eventually the Komsomol Central Committee halved this number) to become Pioneer counselors [vozhatyi]; this measure attempted to build the ranks of Pioneer counselors—a job that was neither well paid nor prestigious and was therefore difficult to staff. Finally, the report suggested that 1,500 Komsomol workers become “assistants to directors of schools for political-upbringing work” in Kharkov, Kiev, Leningrad and Moscow. Because the title seemed to suggest that the Komsomol organizer in the school would be the direct assistant of the school

32 RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 3, d. 131, ll. 73-122.
director, Kosarev renamed the position *komsorg* (an abbreviation of “Komsomol organizer”). He explained the logic of the change and the role of the position, “These *komsorgs* must conduct their work and never interfere in administrative and budgetary questions—that is the responsibility of the school director. The *komsorg* leads political, cultural-upbringing and extracurricular work among students.” The Komsomol Central Committee asserted direct control over these positions as *nomenklatura* (meaning that the Central Committee itself had to review and approve each appointee). *Komsorgs* were supposed to have experience effectively equivalent to the leader of a district youth committee: no less than five years’ experience in the youth league and party membership or candidacy. Although the *komsorgs* were initially only in four cities—and posts expanded to other cities soon after—the new position and the increasing importance of Pioneer counselors were major ventures for the youth organization into the everyday life of schools.33

*Komsorgs* had a major impact on the schools where they worked. However, their work was not to provide theoretical political training or economic mobilization. Instead, these youth activists were supposed to shape the social behavior of pupils, to affect whom they interacted with, to explain how they should dress and what media they should consume. Oleg Krasovsky was an adolescent in the 1930s and he later wrote a short memoir about his Komsomol years. In his account, he described how a *komsorg* named Vorobev heavily influenced his education at a Moscow school. Vorobev arrived at the school during the 1934-35 academic year, before a Komsomol organization even existed at the school. Decades after he graduated, Krasovsky still reverently described Vorobev as a figure of authority whom the Komsomol’s Central Committee

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33 RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 3, d. 133, ll. 14-15, 22; d. 135, 99-104. The uneasy collaboration of Narkompros and the Komsomol at the leadership level translated to schools when *komsorgs* arrived. According to several reports to party secretary Andrei Andreev, the arrival of the *komsorgs* often disrupted power dynamics within the school. A common theme was that the new Komsomol organizer was “too commanding,” creating tensions with Pioneer counselors and school administrators. RGASPI, f. 17, op. 120, d. 237, ll. 1-5, 6-23; d. 238, ll. 51-59.
had appointed: “He often came to our class and talked about sports and new movies. He was an ardent hunter and would sometimes spend an entire half-hour recess telling us hunting stories. Occasionally he would start a conversation about the Komsomol.” Later, Vorobev restarted both the student council and the Komsomol committee at the school. He urged Krasovsky to join because of his exceptional grades. As a member of the student council, Krasovsky got to meet Komsomol Central Committee secretary Sergei Saltanov. When recounting the meeting Krasovsky did not recall the speech Saltanov made but instead commented on his cultured appearance: “I literally devoured him with my eyes. I can remember his smooth, pink, clean-shaven cheeks which proclaimed good health and good living… Saltanov was smoking long aromatic cigarettes; he smelt of fine scent and he said very little.”

What is striking about Krasovsky’s descriptions of Vorobev and Saltanov is the lack of overt political content. Krasovsky did not recall discussions about Marx, Lenin or even Stalin, but instead recounted these youth organizers’ social influence and cultured trappings. Saltanov impressed the adolescent with his refined appearance and scent. Likewise, Vorobev was not memorable for political lectures but for his stories about hunting and how he interacted with students. Vorobev got to know Krasovsky and created friendships with the schoolchildren by organizing social events and treating them as chums (addressing them formally as тв rather than as вы, as a teacher would). When Vorobev later reprimanded Krasovsky and other members of the school’s Komsomol for the misstep of creating an inappropriate satirical newspaper, Krasovsky noted how odd it seemed, “One could feel that Vorobev was repeating somebody else’s words and not expressing his own views.” Vorobev upbraided them in the language of party politics and Krasovsky registered this as odd because кomsorgs’ role was not usually one

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of overt political indoctrination and control. *Komsorgs* focused on disciplining behavior and performance rather than thought—goals that characterized the Komsomol’s efforts in education more generally.\(^{35}\)

Like *komsorgs*, Pioneer counselors were mentors within the school but officially outside of the academic process. And also like *komsorgs* the youth organization appointed and monitored Pioneer counselors independent of local departments of education. In theory every school with a Pioneer organization needed a counselor but in practice many brigades were largely unsupervised or even unofficial in 1935.\(^{36}\) Local Komsomol organizations frequently assigned junior activists to unpaid positions as counselors. At larger schools the district Komsomol committee appointed Pioneer counselors or even senior counselors who headed a staff of counselors at a school. Like a junior version of *komsorgs*, Pioneer counselors organized extracurricular activities and social life outside the confines of the classroom.

According to official publications, the goals of the Pioneer organization and schools were effectively the same—to provide a cultured upbringing. Schoolteachers were responsible for formal learning while Pioneer counselors were to teach youth about social behavior. In early 1935, the Central Committee of the Komsomol released a resolution criticizing Pioneer counselors for their inappropriate appearance and use of slang: “In many Pioneer brigades, counselors go to the brigade and to school with an unkempt appearance—with dirty shoes and smoking around the children. Talking with Pioneers, they use non-literary phrases (instead of

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\(^{35}\) Ibid., 145.

\(^{36}\) For example, amazingly intense scholarly scrutiny has been applied to the question of whether or not Pioneer-martyr Pavlik Morozov was an official member of the Pioneer organization. Iurii Druzhnikov asserts that he was not, citing gaps in documentation as evidence of a conspiracy to cover up Pavlik’s not having been a member of the Pioneers. Catriona Kelly responds to this theory by showing that documentation of the entire case was shoddy not because of a vast conspiracy but because the investigators were semi-literate and negligent. Kelly maintains that Morozov was probably a Pioneer but the informality of his Pioneer affiliation leaves the question open to interpretation. Kelly argues that rules in the Pioneer organization solidified in 1935 and after, only then giving the organization “hard and fast procedures for enrolment.” Druzhnikov, *Informer 001*, 76. Kelly, *Comrade Pavlik*, 237.
saying ‘good’ they say ‘thumbs up’ and instead of ‘to go’ they say ‘to tromp’ (топать).

The emphasis of this resolution was not about the content of lessons for Pioneers but about how counselors, as character builders, were teaching young people to act through their example. If counselors would not act in a cultured manner, how would children behave?

To some the difference in the responsibilities of counselors and ordinary teachers was hard to distinguish. In the “League Consultation” question and answer section of Izvestiia TsK Komsomola, a counselor asked, “Is there a difference between the Pioneer organization and the school?” The answer stressed that there was a difference in membership; the schools were open to everyone whereas membership in the Pioneer organization was an achievement for children with excellent grades. Yet both school and Pioneers were to ensure “communist upbringing.” Because the difference in the goals of the school and the Pioneers had been largely erased, it perhaps is not surprising that the main qualification for Pioneer counselors was not their experience in the Komsomol but their educational qualifications. Another article in Izvestiia TsK Komsomola lauded the 1936 cohort of counselors, the large majority of whom had seven years of formal schooling or more. At the same time, the article’s author expressed discomfort with the relative youth of counselors, 82.4 percent of whom were between the ages of seventeen and twenty-two.

As organizers of recreation for children, Pioneer counselors had to create games, field trips and other activities that would both attract children and help mold them. Increasingly, these activities took on a military character. Part of the militarization of Pioneer activities derived from changes in the personnel of the organization in 1935. During the broader bureaucratic reconstruction of the Komsomol apparatus that year, the Central Committee named Vasiliy

37 “О неправильном поведении воззатых пионерских отрядов,” Komsomol’skaia Pravda, 5 January 1935, 1.
Muskin, former secretary of the Donets province youth committee, as the new Soviet Pioneer leader. In Ukraine Muskin was known for his eloquence and his activity in paramilitary work. During the Military-Technical Examination of 1934-1935, he acted both as organizer and participant, completing extensive pilot training for which he received several military awards. Muskin brought his experience organizing youth military activity to the Pioneers.

Muskin’s appointment was indicative of a wider influx of military values into the Pioneers, including extensive use of military-themed games and training. Vozhatyi, a journal for Pioneer counselors, frequently promoted militarized games and training. Calls for military training for adolescents and older youth often were especially vigorous around the celebration of Red Army Day (February 23). Komsomol and Pioneer leaders expected youth to make a ceremonial gift of their training to the armed forces. In the February 1936 edition, dedicated entirely to Red Army Day, regular military contributor M. Zanegin published an article called “Brigade in formation.” Its intention was to teach new counselors how to train Pioneers for military style marches and featured illustrations of how these marches should look, including pictures of Pioneers in gas masks and crawling on the ground with rifles. Zanegin wrote, “The very understanding of the words ‘brigade’ [otriad] and ‘squad’ [zveno] is that these are organized and disciplined collectives.” Although this article was specifically for Red Army Day, the journal published ideas for military games and bibliographies with further reading throughout the year. The stress on discipline was especially strong in activities that had military content, yet it extended into Pioneer life generally. Reader responses from the April edition stated that

39 TsDAHO, f. 7, op. 1, spr. 654, ark. 59; spr. 1004, ark. 36.
40 The ceremonial gift had a symbolic meaning that reinforced the legitimacy of the Soviet order as well as promoting themes (like militarization) within that system. On the symbolic value of gifts to the motherland, see Jeffrey Brooks, Thank You Comrade Stalin: Soviet Public Culture from Revolution to Cold War (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 83-105. On the use of parades and public holidays to legitimate the Soviet regime, see Malte Rolf, Sovetskie massovye prazdniki (Moscow: Rosspen, 2009).
Pioneers could only give the Pioneer salute to someone who was wearing the emblematic red kerchief; an undisciplined Pioneer who was not in uniform was not worthy of the salute. Pioneer work was supposed to be fun, yet through these activities Pioneers were also supposed to learn discipline and the rudiments of military organization.  

The Pioneers were not the only aspect of the Komsomol’s work that was being imbued with a military tenor. Military and disciplinary training was also part of debates at the time over the official curriculum. The military itself attempted to increase its role in training for young people. Commissar of Defense Kliment Voroshilov wrote to Viacheslav Molotov asking for more funding for the complicated system of military courses at schools and higher education institutions. Depending on their institution and age, educational programs required adolescents and young adults to do military training. The training included general fitness, military skills (e.g., marching, shooting, grenade throwing) and education about military history and the contemporary army. According to military statistics, Narkompros—in charge of general education programs and some technical education—was able to capture a much larger section of the conscription age youth population at its institutions than other commissariats charged with education; approximately half of the 400,000 youth in grades eight through ten conducted some military training. The defense commissariat’s report stressed the importance of the training for young people: “[Its main goal is] training in each of them character of will and physique needed for a future warrior of the RKKA—discipline, endurance, dexterity and bravery, the elementary skills and knowledge of military affairs.” The constant problem for these programs was a lack of qualified personnel. Military administrators faulted school military leaders (voenruki) with failing to keep up with current military technology. Voroshilov’s administration proposed increasing the number of military workers, especially in higher education, while simultaneously

constructing new facilities like firing ranges and preparing a current textbook for courses. Although it appears that these changes did not occur, the proposals show that the military increasingly conceived of schools and higher education—particularly the network of Narkompros schools—as a partner in military training.⁴²

As the military became involved in the regular curriculum, Komsomol leaders and their allies began to occupy key posts in spots and paramilitary organizations. In January 1935, members of the Komsomol Central Committee gained control over the Soviet sports committee, a bureaucracy where administrators from the Komsomol had previously clashed for control with leaders from the Trade Unions.⁴³ Kosarev nominated youth leader Ivan Kharchenko to join the state sports committee (VKFKiS) as “responsible secretary.” A year after Kharchenko moved to the sports administration, Kosarev asked Stalin to make Kharchenko its chairman and take with him Elena Knopova, another former Komsomol Central Committee worker, as assistant chair. For a second assistant, Kosarev suggested B.A. Kal’pus.⁴⁴

These moves both infused the sports administration with personnel intimately familiar with military work and tied the sports administration tightly to the Komsomol. Until 1933 Kharchenko headed the Komsomol’s military department, responsible for overseeing the youth organization’s physical and military training, as well as its connections with the Red Army. In 1934 Kosarev promoted him to become the head of the semi-autonomous Komsomol organization for railroad workers; under his auspices this section of the youth organization

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⁴² RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 23, d. 1134, ll. 20-25.  
⁴⁴ RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 23, d. 1155, l. 11. Connections between the physical culture administration and the Komsomol solidified at nearly every level. For example, Ukrainian Komsomol head Sergei Andreev around this time took on the additional responsibility of chairman of the Ukrainian sports committee.
conducted large-scale and apparently effective policing activities along the railroad. In the early 1920s, Kal’pus had been the secretary of Vsevobuch (short for Vseobshchee voenoe obuchenie—Universal military training), the Red Army’s civilian paramilitary training program at the time. Although these cadres no longer worked for Kosarev directly, the work of the youth league and the sports administration was intertwined. At a January 1936 meeting of sports administration workers, Kharchenko claimed, “I hardly need to mention that we are tied organically on a daily basis to the C[entral] C[ommittee] of the Komsomol and in particular to the Komsomol’s secretary, comrade Kosarev… If he works eight hours in a day, roughly five hours are taken up with questions of physical culture.”

Meanwhile, Kosarev and his leadership group also established authority over the civil defense organization Osoaviakhim. Osoaviakhim was responsible for a wide range of functions related to civil defense. These functions included pre-conscription training for young men, civilian firearm training, air and chemical defense as well as roles in commerce as manufacturer and vender of defense products (e.g., gas masks) and as pest exterminators. A series of problems within Osoaviakhim brought the organization closer to the Komsomol. On August 8, 1935, the Council of People’s Commissars (Sovnarkom) and the party Central Committee released a critical resolution about the work of Osoaviakhim. Faulting the organization with “needlessly expending attention and resources on too many tasks” it called for Osoaviakhim to focus first and foremost on pre-conscription training. Other troubles arose in 1935 including the spread of illicit membership cards and embezzlement scandals on the commercial side of the

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45 RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 23, d. 1072, ll. 92-96, 97-98. Kharchenko was responsible for organizing the kind of civilian collaboration with police that Paul Hagenloh has examined. See Hagenloh, “Chekist in Essence, Chekist in Spirit”: Regular and Political Police in the 1930s,” Cahiers du monde russe 42, no. 2 (2001): 447-475.
46 GARF, f. 7576, op. 4, d. 6, l. 168.
47 GARF, f. 8355, op. 1, d. 102, ll. 203-210.
organization. Facing this barrage of problems, longtime Osoaviakhim leader Robert Eideman submitted his resignation to Commissar of Defense Kliment Voroshilov in November 1935. Voroshilov apparently rejected the resignation. In response to these developments, though, Komsomol leaders, especially Kosarev, exerted an increasing influence over Osoaviakhim.

The Komsomol’s involvement in Osoaviakhim was more than a reaction to issues in the defense organization; it was also a natural outgrowth in the development of both administrations. In Osoaviakhim, the party’s directive to pay more attention to pre-conscription training was likely a consequence of the mass expansion of the army from the mid-1930s onward. Working with a growing number of new conscripts whom Osoaviakhim was charged with giving more intensive training naturally meant that the civil defense and youth affairs would become entangled. Moreover, the sheer numerical increase in trainees meant that Osoaviakhim had to look somewhere for cadres. Thus, Osoaviakhim found itself reliant on the Komsomol to mobilize youth to undergo pre-conscription training and to provide the cadres who would conduct this training. Another step in the increasing bureaucratic entanglement of these organizations came when Komsomol secretary for military affairs Pavel Gorshenin proposed at a 1934 Osoaviakhim conference that the civil defense league create an assistant chair for work among youth at every hierarchical level from the district up. Although this position was technically under the auspices of Osoaviakhim, it was co-appointed and supervised by corresponding youth committees. At the upper levels of the administration, Kosarev and Gorshenin became the

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49 RGASPI, f. 74, op. 2, d. 107, ll. 89-92.
50 This mass expansion put strains on Osoaviakhim as well as the Red Army itself. For example, at the end of 1937 the Red Army had a shortage of nearly forty thousand officers. Roger Reese, Stalin’s Reluctant Soldiers: A Social History of the Red Army, 1925-1941 (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1996), 147.
51 GARF, f. 8355, op. 1, d. 89, l. 92.
leaders of its network of civil aviation clubs and even renamed Moscow’s Central Air Club in honor of Kosarev. Although air clubs were technically for civilians, they served as an important feeder program for the Red Army’s air force. Highly valuing their role as civilian aviation leaders and the militarized atmosphere it created in the youth league, Kosarev and Gorshenin wore air force uniforms at the Tenth Komsomol Congress in 1936, symbolizing the increasingly militarized nature of upbringing in the youth league. After Eideman was arrested in the spring of 1937 as part of the broader purge of the military, Gorshenin became the head of Osoaviakhim.

In their attempts to provide a “communist upbringing,” Komsomol leaders created new organizational networks in Soviet education, sports and civil defense administrations. At the ground level, activists cemented these networks by becoming komsorgs, Osoaviakhim instructors and by taking up other positions. The main goal behind these new institutional links was to exert an influence over the social and personal behavior of youth and children. And the entanglement of the Komsomol and Young Pioneers with sports and paramilitary organizations reflected the increasing centrality of military discipline as a part the Komsomol’s code of “cultured” behavior for adolescent boys and young men. As war appeared to loom closer and closer in the mid-1930s, the league spent increasing amounts of resources organizing military training for its organizers and rank-and-file members.

**Paramilitary Training for Youth, 1934-1935**

Military training and collaboration with the armed forces had always been a part of Soviet youth culture. The experience of the civil war gave Soviet political culture a militaristic tone, justified by a persistent fear of “capitalist encirclement.” This militarism was especially pronounced in the Komsomol. The youth league had served as the navy’s patron (its shef), a practice that

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52 RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 23, d. 1193, ll. 28-31.
mostly involved financial support through bond subscriptions and other collections. From the 1920s onward, the Komsomol also played a role in the military by nominating youth for admission to army, navy and air force schools and it provided oversight (especially for the class origin of youth) at military recruiting stations. Perhaps the most visible aspect of Komsomol militarism was the core of Komsomol activists in the 1920s and early 1930s who held militant beliefs of revolutionary struggle and reverence for the civil war experience. Yet their militant beliefs did not reflect a commitment to military training in the league. After the civil war, the Komsomol was a militaristic strong supporter of the armed forces rather than a militarized organization meant to prepare the country for war.

The increasingly militarized nature of the Komsomol evolved from the late 1920s. This change accompanied broader shifts in the militarization of the Soviet state. David Stone shows that by 1930, Soviet leaders came to believe that a major military conflict with Japan in the Far East was imminent. The need to create an industrial base capable of withstanding this kind of war shaped the First Five-Year Plan and placed the Soviet economy on a military footing from 1931 onward. That same year, and most likely as a response to this same threat, the Komsomol spurred the development of the Ready for Labor and Defense (GTO) program—a physical fitness program that would continue until the end of the Soviet Union. The initial GTO program came from an era when “technology decided everything.” The central notion behind it was that physical fitness would lead to more productive laborers who by increasing industrial output would shore up the defense of the country. GTO also grew out of the belief in self-

54 Local youth leaders would serve as members of the military recruiting board. In the early to mid-1930s, their role was usually to track who was attempting to join the Red Army and ensure that class aliens did not somehow penetrate its ranks. See, for one of many examples, RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 23, d. 1057, ll. 21-22.
55 Guillery, “We Shall Refashion Life on Earth!,” 332.
56 Stone, Hammer and Rifle, 209.
57 RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 23, d. 1005, l. 17. On GTO, see Grant, Physical Culture and Sport in Soviet Society, 37-41.
fashioning—the idea that people could remake themselves into idealized subjects of the regime, explored most notably in Jochen Hellbeck’s study of Stalin-era diaries.\(^{58}\) As Susan Grant asserts, the body, too, could be fashioned into a Stalinist shape and Soviet programs in physical culture aimed to provide a guide to forging the physical self.\(^{59}\)

Increasing fears that a major war was imminent began to alter how Soviet leaders conceived of military and physical training for youth. War with Japan did not materialize in 1931 but the threat of war grew even greater. James Harris shows that in 1934, Stalin and his inner circle were alarmed at the prospect of a two-front war with Japan in the east and with a coalition of European powers led by Germany and Poland in the west.\(^{60}\) The perceived imminence of war combined with the Komsomol’s new focus on training people rather than mobilizing workers. The product of these factors was the development of new paramilitary training campaigns for ordinary youth and for activists. The notion of self-fashioning was largely absent from discussions in these programs. Instead of encouraging citizens who would work to fashion themselves into Soviet selves, these programs attempted to produce a normalized, top-down military discipline among youth—the ability to take orders and perform the basic duties of a soldier. Two programs that the Komsomol spearheaded with these goals in mind were the Military-Technical Examination of 1934-35 and a secret campaign to train mid-level Komsomol leaders in 1935. Both programs increased the scope and intensity of military training in the youth league. More important than the size of the programs, though, was that they blurred the lines between youth activism and paramilitary activity, conflating the goal of militarization with vospitanie in the Komsomol.


\(^{59}\) Grant, *Physical Culture and Sport in Soviet Society*, 144-146.

The Military-Technical Examination grew out of sporadic military training activities that accompanied military holidays. In February 1934, Komsomol leaders organized the Voroshilov Festival [*estafeta*], a series of military training events honoring the Red Army’s jubilee that attempted to garner interest in military affairs among youth. Inspired by the festival, youth activists of Dzerzhinskii municipal district in Odessa conceived of an examination for their district’s young people. Their examination was to be a continuation of the festival that would end in youth becoming “master of one type of military technology.” Upon learning of the initiative of Dzerzhinskii district’s youth organizers, Ukraine’s Komsomol leaders expanded the project as a yearlong military training program for the youth of the entire republic, the “Military-Technical Examination.”

At the outset of planning for the examination, divisions appeared among Ukrainian youth leaders over the appropriate level of difficulty and goals. All agreed that the examination would involve at least passing the GTO program plus a set of shooting qualifications. Youth leaders directly involved in paramilitary training (e.g., Osoaviakhim workers) tended to support a more strenuous examination and one that would divide the population by occupation and gender. For example, the tests for former soldiers and current students would have higher standards than for industrial laborers or peasants. Additionally, they often wanted to give young men combat-related training while young women would complete alternative norms in nursing. Youth leaders who worked primarily on civilian issues disagreed with their colleagues and pressed for a more basic program. One objected that “the minimum [for military training] should be the very minimum” so that the maximum number of youth would be drawn in to some form of paramilitary training. In essence, the debate was whether the examination’s purpose was to mobilize more youth or to conduct intensive training with a more select number of youth.

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61 TsDAHO, f. 7, op. 1, spr. 1046, ark. 2, 3, 8.
Ukraine’s youth leader, Sergei Andreev postponed deciding between these two factions by creating a commission of Osoaviakhim, Komsomol and military workers. Apparently, before this commission could decide the content of the examination, central Komsomol leadership in Moscow further expanded the program to include the youth of the entire Soviet Union.\(^\text{62}\)

Soon central Komsomol and Osoaviakhim leaders arrived upon an ambitious program that combined strenuous training while attempting to mobilize large numbers of youth. The public announcement of the examination came in late April 1934 in *Komsomol’skaia Pravda* but youth leaders seem to have disseminated the program earlier. The press release asserted that it was the duty of every Komsomol member to know a minimum about military practices but that non-affiliated youth should also take the examination. The complete examination itself was far from basic, requiring hundreds of hours of training. The core of the exam was the combination of the physical training through the GTO program and firearms training in the Voroshilov Shooter program. In addition, the examination included a test on topography and required four parachute jumps from towers, proficiency with a hang-glider or, in areas where this kind of equipment was unavailable, horseback riding training. After these tests the examination was divided by gender. To complete the examination, young men had to take a 280-hour course of automobile or tractor driving with Avtodor, the Soviet organization for automobile enthusiasts. For young women, the corresponding test was for the Red Cross and Crescent’s first aid program Ready for Sanitation Defense (GSO). The official resolution called for lower-level committees to finish planning in mid-May, conduct preliminary tests through July and conclude the examination campaign by October, presumably on the eve of the anniversary of the October Revolution.\(^\text{63}\)

Komsomol military secretary Gorshenin asserted in June that a million youth

\(^{62}\) Ibid., spr. 1194, ark. 3, 4, 10, 13, 16, 24, 28.

\(^{63}\) *Komsomol’skaia Pravda*, 28 April 1934, 2.
league members would complete the examination by the end of that summer. In conducting the examination, Komsomol leaders used the same methods they used to encourage factory norms, urging lower-level committees to run the examination as a socialist competition that would reward the individuals and regional organizations with the best results.

While the Military-Technical Examination spread to the entire Komsomol, its originators in Ukraine remained among the most fervent about the endeavor. Avram Zinger, the leader of the department of youth in Ukraine’s Osoaviakhim, was the main organizational force behind the initiative in the republic. Zinger and Komsomol leaders disseminated quotas of youth who should complete the examination to lower-level youth committees in May. But if Zinger and central leaders supported the Military-Technical Examination strongly, lower-level youth committees were not as well organized. On June 11 in the early morning (after 1:00AM), Zinger took to the radio to propagandize the examination. The radio show consisted of Zinger speaking to youth activists in charge of military training throughout Ukraine. His first guest was the head of the Komsomol’s military training in Odessa province, who—much to the dismay of Zinger—was not aware of the quotas that Zinger had established for his province. As a thinly concealed threat, Zinger cited the case of another worker whose negligence toward the examination had led Sergei Andreev to threaten his expulsion from the party. In other places negligence was not an issue but lack of equipment—especially towers for parachute jumping—was a consistent problem. Komsomol workers could not fix these problems alone. Whereas youth groups existed in all districts, the other administrations involved in the examination were frequently absent at the district level, not to mention in small towns or villages. Avtodor and the Red Cross had a notoriously thin, poorly organized presence for training activities. The problems of equipment

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and partner organizations became the main bottlenecks for the examination in Ukraine and elsewhere.\textsuperscript{65}

With or without material support, many lower-level youth committees attempted to organize the examination, with mixed results. On April 20, the Anan’ev district (Odessa province) youth committee enthusiastically began to organize a “military march” for May 6. On the day of the march, 675 young people arrived at 8:30AM and began the eighteen kilometer march at 9:00AM. The committee noted that there were no cases of laggards but there were five cases of “sore legs.” During the march, instructors gave lessons on proper movement of legs and at the march’s conclusion they certified the participants as successfully completing the marching portion of GTO.\textsuperscript{66} In the Commissariat of Defense’s Komsomol organization, a July 1934 check showed mixed results for the examination. Many members had completed the parachuting requirements but attendance at nursing classes had been poor.\textsuperscript{67} The youth committee of Lopasne district (Moscow province) encountered even more difficulty in conducting the examination. There, district youth leaders claimed that they had not been able to conduct any work on the examination because of negligence on the part of local Osoaviakhim administrators. Faced with the civil defense organization’s unresponsiveness, the Komsomol committee requested the intervention of the district party organization and could only begin work on the examination in November.\textsuperscript{68} These three examples show the range of success committees had in undertaking the examination. Rural committees were particularly hard pressed to find the resources and personnel for the examination. The problems youth committees faced in fulfilling their quotas for the examination seems to have contributed to the decision to push back the end-

\textsuperscript{65} TsDAHO, f. 7, op. 1, spr. 1193, ark. 2, 10, 18, 20, 22.
\textsuperscript{66} Ibid., spr. 1190, ark. 5.
\textsuperscript{67} RGVA, f. 9, op. 30, d. 5, l. 8.
\textsuperscript{68} TsAOPIM, f. 648p, op. 1, d. 3, l. 44.
date of the campaign first to November, then to January and finally to February—conveniently approaching Red Army Day. 69

Sergei Andreev and his fellow youth leaders in Ukraine were determined to beat other Komsomol organizations in the Military-Technical Examination. In October, when early results of the examination began to come in, Andreev was shocked that in a Komsomol initiative, only 30 percent of those who were participating were actually members of the youth league. Sergienko, the Komsomol military leader of Ukraine, pointed out that participation rates for the examination were much higher among industrial workers than among students. 70 Toward the end of 1934 Andreev found himself disappointed with the current results of the examination: less than 60 percent of the prescribed 202,000 had completed the Voroshilov Shooter program or the topography test; just 40 percent of 214,500 had done the vehicle training; only 21 percent of 166,000 had completed the parachuting norms. 71 In the next month, regular reports to Andreev showed that these figures increased steadily. For Andreev, though, fulfillment was not enough. Ten days before the examination’s end, Andreev sent a telegraph to all provincial youth leaders: “I am giving a warning that first prize in the competition will not be taken for fulfillment but for overfulfillment of the control figures for M[ilitary] T[echnical] E[xamination].” He demanded that a Komsomol or Osoaviakhim activist be attached to every parachute jump point to ensure that the maximum number of youth league members completed the exam. 72

At the end of the examination, Ukraine’s Komsomol organization finished behind the Moscow and Leningrad organizations. Across the USSR, 676,939 “shock workers of defense” had completed the GTO norms, 1,207,666 had completed the parachuting requirements, 486,445

69 GARF, f. 8355, op. 1, d. 94, l. 147.
70 TsDAHO, f. 7, op. 1, spr. 1193, ark. 29, 35, 54
71 TsDAHO, f. 7, op. 1, spr. 1055, ark. 99. The control figures cited are from November of that year but it seems unlikely that they would have been lowered. TsDAHO f. 7, op. 1, spr. 1181, ark. 14.
72 TsDAHO, f. 7, op. 12, spr. 649, ark. 371.
young women (the report specified by sex) completed the nursing program, 787,719 had completed a thirty-hour program (less ambitious than the initially prescribed program) on automobile mechanics, 242,326 had done horseback riding training and 910,207 completed a course of topography. These statistics do not reveal how many youth completed the entire program, although it was likely considerably fewer than those who completed just one or more tests. Nonetheless, these figures indicate that youth doing one or another examination included some 1.2 million youth at a minimum—a sizable group of Soviet youth.73

Analyzing the Military-Technical Examination, youth leaders found some shortcomings, especially in the assistance proffered by institutional affiliates. Although most affiliates were criticized, youth leaders singled out Avtodor for special reproach. This scorn perhaps indicated less the negligence of Avtodor in this specific case and more the tenuous position of the organization on the whole. Lewis Siegelbaum has suggested that the work of Avtodor was not sufficiently militarized for the Soviet Union of the mid to late 1930s. The automotive organization’s lackluster role in the Military-Technical Examination corroborates this point; it seems Avtodor’s administrators were uninterested in using vehicle training as military training, or unable to achieve the desired results in this area. Soon after the examination, and perhaps related to it in a broad sense, it was dissolved and its functions became part of the sports administration and Osoaviakhim.74

Outside of the shortcomings of its allies, youth leaders’ comments were triumphant and pointed to the Military-Technical Examination’s achievements in building, literally and figuratively, the USSR’s military capacity. During the campaign, Komsomol organizers had focused primarily on mobilizing people to fulfill norms toward the examination. Yet, S.F.

Erokhin, head of Dnepropetrovsk’s Komsomol (where takers of the examination had been especially numerous), asserted that a major consequence of the examination was “the material growth of the technical base [for military training].” In other words, the number of participants had necessitated the Komsomol and its affiliates to construct firing ranges, parachute jumping points and other facilities. Of course, in asserting the success of the examination, youth leaders’ main focus was on the number of people who had completed the examination. Besides pointing to the large number of exam takers, the report from Dnepropetrovsk’s provincial Komsomol claimed that several near-hooligans were turned away from their wicked ways by the alternative the exam presented. But Komsomol leaders’ main assertion was that an intangible “military enthusiasm” had swept over young people.75

This “military enthusiasm” was not the same revolutionary enthusiasm of the radical Komsomol youth in the 1920s. Instead, what Komsomol leaders wanted to instill in youth was a culture of discipline and order. On September 15, 1935, a young Komsomol member and factory worker from Ukraine named Serikov sent a letter to Sergei Andreev with his plan for military training. The letter is remarkable for its tremendous enthusiasm and terrible grammar. Serikov began his entreaty to Andreev, “We have already spend alot of time in the Komsomol and have tried to do the very, very, very most, but there still is no kind of Komsomol exercise, to exercise the fighting spirit, the fighting preparedness of our Leninist Komsomol.” What Serikov had in mind to stoke this fighting spirit was a “Komsomol signal” that would indicate to all young communists that they should gather at a predetermined location: “That would be our Komsomol exercise and we would see how our Komsomol during a hot moment would act on the front etc.” Serikov finished by saying that it would be best if the Komsomol signal was kept secret for the right moment. The young man was undoubtably well-meaning but his plan resembled a secret

75 TsDAHO, f. 7, op. 1, spr. 1198, ark 37.
uprising of young enthusiasts more than the disciplined, structured training in the Military-
Technical Examination. In his response to the letter, Andreev dismissed the idea of a
“Komsomol signal” and instead pushed Serikov to organize military training through official
channels: “We need to organize the study of military affairs better, that’s the most important.
That’s what we need so there are more parachutists, shooters, pilots.”  What Andreev and
others wanted from youth was not an enthusiasm for schemes but an enthusiasm for regular
military training. The Military-Technical Examination in 1934-35 had attempted to fulfill the
mission of giving youth culture a controlled, military-style discipline. And in the eyes of youth
leaders, it had largely succeeded.

Based on the perceived success of the Military-Technical Exam, Moscow-based youth
leaders planned for a “second tour” of the examination. The 1935-36 examination was supposed
to draw in yet more youth and offer a second, intensified level of training for those who had
participated in the previous year. For reasons that are unclear, the 1935-36 campaign received
much less attention from youth leaders than in the previous year and the number of exam takers
was far fewer than in the first tour.  The youth press ignored its progress and results. But the
youth league did not drop the examination entirely. Internal documents show that results were
the strongest in locations that were the most likely theaters of combat. For example, the
Komsomol of Vinnitsa, a Ukrainian province on the border with Poland, had a relatively strong
turnout for the second tour because the region was perceived as susceptible to foreign attack.

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76 TsDAHO. f. 7, op. 12, spr. 658, ark. 11, 12.
77 For example, in Ukraine only one province’s youth committee came close to meeting its control figures while
most of the others achieved less than half of their quotas. TsDAHO. f. 7, op. 1, spr. 1251, ark. 69-76
78 Paramilitary training in Vinnitsa and other border regions was a continuing focus of the Ukrainian Komsomol.
Throughout the early 1930s, anxiety over border districts led Komsomol leaders to organize meetings of youth
organizers from these regions and commissions to investigate Komsomol work on the border. In both youth leaders
emphasized the special importance of military training in these regions. See TsDAHO. f. 7, op. 1, spr. 797, passim; 
spr. 907, passim; spr. 1081, passim. In November 1934, Sergei Andreev convened a meeting of district-level youth
leaders from border regions, where he gave special importance to military work on the border. He revealed that the
Anxieties about foreign attack seem to have fueled another Komsomol military training campaign beginning in early 1935. Unlike the Military-Technical Examination, this campaign focused on youth cadres rather than the rank and file. An undated resolution, probably from early February 1935, initiated plans for all leaders of Komsomol committees in rural districts and the heads of Marxist-Leninist education in the same committees to receive forty-five days of military training in special Osoaviakhim camps. Osoaviakhim’s leader Eideman and Komsomol military secretary Gorshenin soon confirmed the training program in a joint resolution. The courses included 300 total study hours. Of these, 225 hours would be spent on organizational and political training while seventy-five hours were for strictly military matters. The plan divided youth organizers into squadrons of ten to twelve participants led by a reserve commander from Osoaviakhim and an instructor of Marxist-Leninism from the Komsomol. Most important, the program insisted, was that “the life of the unit should be militarized completely from start to finish (including political courses led by a civilian teacher).”

The courses, initially scheduled for the early summer, ran into difficulties. Ukraine’s Komsomol leaders had begun planning for the militarized camps in March 1935, preparing four locations for training. By June 1935, Erofitskii, the head of the Azov-Chernomorsk region’s youth committee complained that the militarized course could not proceed for lack of funding. He had already made arrangements with Osoaviakhim and now had to break them because the youth league had considered tentative plans to divide Vinnitsa province’s youth into military-style units so that they would be able to mobilize more quickly in the event of war. Additionally, Andreev asserted that military training could contribute to taming the class enemy in the region. Here, Andreev pointed to the continuing instability of the countryside, where the fight (often violent) was against political opponents within villages (and perhaps against illegal border-crossers), who were both a problem in their own right and a force that magnified the threat of potential interventionists. An earlier Komsomol report from August 1931 had also linked military training not only to a military threat but to the struggle in the countryside against alleged kulaks.

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79 RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 23, d. 1133, l. 9.
80 Ibid. ll. 11-13.
81 TsDAHO, f. 7, op. 1, spr. 1056, ark. 213.

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courses had not been ready on their scheduled start date of June 1. At the same time, he lauded the idea of the courses: “We need to educate secretaries of the district committees so they know their work… It is necessary that every secretary of a district committee and regional [krai] committee not only himself does physical activities but can show youth how to do them.”

Komsomol leaders agreed on the necessity of these courses and arranged for funding to arrive by the late summer, albeit in a somewhat diminished form. Rather than forty-five days, the training would occur over thirty days. According to the plan from Voronezh province, shortening the course meant that political and organizational training would be cut but that the program would include roughly the same amount of military training. Now, the courses would include seventy-four hours of “military discipline”, 104 hours of party history, twenty hours of geography, twenty hours related to Komsomol (organizational) work and six hours devoted to work on in agriculture. In Ukraine, the first camp included 250 district secretaries and a second camp was planned (records do show whether it occurred or not).

As the camps opened, Komsomol leaders found that some district leaders balked at the role they were asked to play as would-be military leaders. A report from the Voronezh military preparation camp spoke of an “unhealthy mood” among even the leaders of the camp. In the wake of several participants’ expulsion for drinking and anti-Soviet conversations, the head of the party committee in the camp explained, “Discipline in the RKKA [Red Army] is one thing, but it’s another in Osoaviakhim.” Undoubtedly, this assertion was correct and the atmosphere in Osoaviakhim was much less disciplined and hierarchical than in the Red Army. Yet the party leader’s complacent acknowledgement of this relatively relaxed atmosphere undermined the purpose of the camps—the militarization of Osoaviakhim and the Komsomol, if only

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82 RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 2, d. 116, ll. 77, 79.
83 RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 23, d. 1133, l. 59
84 TsDAHO, f. 7, op. 1, spr. 1218, ark. 22-24.
temporarily, to a level equal to the Red Army. Komsomol leaders’ hopes of the short-term militarization of youth organizers came up against not only indifference but pacifism in the camps as well. At one training center in the Far East, a school teacher and Komsomol organizer said, “The camp forces teachers to learn military affairs. They talk about the politics of peace but at the same time they teach military affairs from childhood until old age.” At a Moscow-area camp, a potential participant asked to be freed of the responsibility as a pacifist: “I am against war, I will not fight and am going nowhere. Brother, this fratricidal war is not necessary for us.” The local Osoaviakhim committee indeed released him from this responsibility—but also forwarded his information to the NKVD as a “counterrevolutionary.”

These glimpses from the training camps are fragmentary but reveal the intent of Komsomol leaders to militarize youth culture. Their hope was that local youth organizers would take their military training home with them, fostering both paramilitary training and a more pervasive military culture in their local committees. A particularly revealing aspect of these camps was that they included the district Komsomol heads of Marxist-Leninist education. This position was often held by the de facto assistant secretary of the district’s youth committee. Yet the position’s title also implied a key role in promoting the values of Soviet political culture. Part of this role meant disseminating Marxist-Leninist theory but it mainly meant knowing the recent policies of the party and current events. The inclusion of these cadres reflects how a militarized understanding was forming in Marxist-Leninism education as part of vospitanie in the Komsomol. And this understanding was different even from the Military-Technical Examination

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85 RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 23, d. 1133, ll. 55-58. Similarly, in Karelia, a youth organizer who fled from an allegedly deranged gunman at his university was expelled from the organization as a “coward.” NARK, f. 779, op. 18, d. 16, l. 8; “Trus iskluuchen iz komsomola,” Komsomolets Karelii, 30 July 1935, 3. Karen Petrone asserts that early Bolshevik responses to pacifism in the wake of World War I were relatively understanding, as the regime’s leaders attempted to gain the support of pacifist opponents of the old regime. However, in the mid-1930s, pacifist views were excised from works on the war as Stalinist leaders hoped to militarize society for war. See Petrone, The Great War in Russian Memory, 134-38, 251-52.
of the previous year, although the fear of imminent war motivated both. The examination attempted to mobilize millions of youth and to fulfill and overfulfill quotas of exam takers. Although it focused on people, not technology, how it mobilized youth bore similarities to the methods of the First Five-Year Plan. In contrast, the activist training camps were a program in line with the contemporaneous development of “communist upbringing”—a top-down attempt to change the culture of youth activism. Kosarev demanded that Komsomol workers stop being “provincial lads” and become cultured young men. Increasingly, Komsomol leaders also demanded that male activists act with military discipline, not enthusiasm.

Dancing with Komsomol Mothers: Work with Women in the Komsomol
As youth leaders promoted “communist upbringing” they did not speak explicitly about the “cultured” male activist but instead spoke of the normative Komsomol organizer. In contrast, youth leaders openly discussed female Komsomol members in a way that set women apart from men in the league. In 1935 the youth league created new positions in a section for women’s work, including a union-level secretary. In this section and in the Komsomol at large, organizers called for groups to cater to what they saw as the natural interests of women like dancing and fashion. The discourse about women’s affinity for “cultured” trappings was not universal. As Elena Shulman and Anna Krylova show, Stalinist public culture allowed alternative gender portrayals for women—from the adventurous Khetagurovite settlers going to the Far East to the female enthusiasts for paramilitary training in Osoaviakhim. And in the Komsomol, too, leaders called for young women to enter positions of authority, above all in Central Asia, where

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they were supposed to act as a “surrogate proletariat.” However, alongside these alternative discourses of women as adventurers and leaders, the discussion in the internal circles of mostly male Komsomol leaders envisioned women as consumers of culture and future mothers.

This gendered treatment youth activism in the mid-1930s was not entirely new. In the 1920s, youth leaders had used supposedly feminine forms of entertainment that they believed would appease women while attempting to forge a proletarian consciousness that they hoped would lead young people to reject these trappings. Similarly, Komsomol leaders in the 1930s appropriated entertainment that they perceived as the natural demands of women. But in contrast to the Komsomol of the NEP era, youth organizers in the 1930s did not portray this appropriation as a retreat into bourgeois culture. Rather, they argued that dancing and fashion were parts of “cultured” Soviet life and means of drawing young women into the youth league.

This attempt to extend regime-approved ways of behaving to women went hand in hand with the regime’s broader efforts to shore up the traditional family and increase birth rates, including the criminalization of abortion and enactment of significant barriers to divorce. As Kosarev stated in 1934, “The stronger and more harmonious a family is, the better it serves the

87 The status of women in non-Slavic areas of the Soviet Union was a major focus of the women’s section in the Komsomol and the youth organization more broadly. The decision to mobilize women as a political force also made aspects of the campaign a focal point of anti-Soviet resistance. For example, the Soviet campaign of unveiling women paradoxically strengthened the practice of using the veil, which previously had been practiced among some groups. See Douglas Northrop, Veiled Empire: Gender and Power in Stalinist Central Asia (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004).

88 More broadly, gendered expectations about how women behaved (or should behave) did not simply arise in the mid-1930s. In the 1920s and early 1930s, Soviet discourse about gender presented two competing views. Doctors researching sex glands asserted the primacy of biology in gender; switching male and female sex organs in experiments they asserted that males of all species became feminized and females became masculinized. Soviet administrators accepted, to some extent, that biology determined gender difference. However, many administrators asserted the fundamental equality of men and women. Frances Bernstein, The Dictatorship of Sex: Advice Lifestyle Advice for the Soviet Masses (DeKalb II: Northern Illinois University Press, 2007).

89 Party leaders enacted these policies, yet many women themselves were in favor of gaining the state’s backing for stronger families. During the 1920s, the ease of divorce and difficulty arranging alimony had often meant that women were left with children as their husbands disappeared. Women’s groups advocated policies that might make men more responsible for their families. Ultimately, Stalinist pronatal policy did support traditional marriage but placed the dual burden of taking care of their families and work in Soviet economy upon women. Goldman, Women, the State, and Revolution, 342-343.
common cause…We are for serious, stable marriages and large families. In short, we need a new generation that is healthy both physically and morally.”90 But Komsomol leaders did not consider men and women equally responsible for the success of stable marriages and large families. Youth leaders believed that families’ fates were primarily in the hands of young women. By offering dances and other elements of culture youth leaders believed young women craved, they hoped to extend the social influence of the Komsomol over women and therefore over families.

The Komsomol had not been a welcoming place for women in the 1920s. Radical activists denounced women who maintained a feminine appearance, or showed interest in dancing or fashion as “bourgeois.” At the same time male Komsomol members were uncomfortable with the “leveling of gender differences.” Women could make themselves appear more masculine and face “exclusion, ostracism, and alienation” or they could keep their feminine appearance and risk accusations of bourgeois desires. Komsomol women found themselves in a no-win situation.91 As a proportion of the Komsomol’s membership, women were a relatively small part until the end of the 1920s, when more young women entered the youth league as large numbers began to work in factories (see table 2.1). At the same time, Soviet leaders curtailed efforts to represent politically active women. The party dissolved the Zhenotdel in 1930 as activism for women, like activism for youth in the Komsomol, came to mean contributing to the Soviet economy.

When Komsomol leaders introduced new positions for women’s issues, it was not attempting to revive aspects of the Zhenotdel. Wendy Goldman argues that with the dissolution

91 Gorsuch, Youth in Revolutionary Russia, 114; Guillory, “We Shall Refashion Life on Earth!,” 32.
of the Zhenotdel, the party renounced the promotion of the “interests of women as a group” and instead focused on promoting individual women through party and state organizations. A similar pattern emerged in the Komsomol, where youth administrators were interested in leveraging women as administrators from an underdeveloped section of the population. In July 1935 the Ukrainian Komsomol’s Central Committee created training courses for young women to become organizers. The first round included seventy-five women who were to become district-level youth secretaries. Simultaneously, Ukraine’s Komsomol introduced a similar program for ethnic Ukrainians to be trained and promoted as youth activists. While both programs attempted to promote underrepresented populations in the youth league, there was no indication these new recruits were meant to advocate in the interest of the populations they would represent.

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**Table 2.1: Women in Komsomol Membership, 1924-1936**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year*</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>% of total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1924</td>
<td>63,846</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1925</td>
<td>164,036</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1926</td>
<td>323,811</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1927</td>
<td>418,865</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1928</td>
<td>433,396</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1929</td>
<td>512,007</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>606,846</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>877,039</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1932</td>
<td>1,624,570</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1933</td>
<td>1,456,433</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1934</td>
<td>1,206,318</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1935</td>
<td>1,091,355</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1936</td>
<td>1,101,395</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*All figures from January 1

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92 RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 126, d. 336, ll. 18-23.
93 Goldman, “Industrial Politics,” 75-76.
94 TsDAHO, f. 7, op. 1, spr. 1218, ark. 62, 78; spr. 1219, ark. 166-168.
Efforts to promote women were often stymied by the persistent male-dominated culture of the Komsomol. In Ukraine, programs to recruit women as youth administrators were only partially successful. While many of the women from the Komsomol’s training program subsequently went to work as district-level leaders, others were drafted into the Pioneer organization. At a June 1935 conference of youth leaders responsible for cadre management in Ukraine, Iakov Geiro, the head of cadre management for the youth league in the republic, was dismayed that women were only being promoted into positions in the Pioneer organization and not into more significant positions in cadre management. “Are there really no women [to become district heads of cadre management]?” A Komsomol administrator named Gorianov answered, “No. In Kherson a comrade came to look over appropriate candidates of women for department heads and it was impossible to find any.” Another administrator later suggested that women themselves preferred to stay in the Pioneer administration, where their pedagogical education might be more useful. It is possible that this lack of appropriate candidates spurred the subsequent training program for female activists. Yet in other cases, female administrators faced clear obstacles from their male counterparts after being promoted. In the Far East, a young woman named Ol’ga Mel’nikova met resistance after she went to work as a district-level Komsomol secretary. The conflict between Mel’nikova and male administrators in the district went so far that NKVD officers arrested Mel’nikova’s detractors. Few cases were that extreme but it appears that there were significant obstacles to promotion for young women in the Komsomol, even as youth leaders exhorted subordinates to recruit more female administrators.

In paramilitary training, both activists and Komsomol leaders voiced open skepticism about women’s participation. During an experimental flight in August 1935 of an all-female

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95 TsDAHO, f. 7, op. 12, spr. 671, ark. 62, 66.
96 Shulman, *Stalinism on the Frontier of Empire*, 199.
flight team from Leningrad to Moscow (to see if women could endure high altitudes), the plane experienced mechanical difficulties and had to make an emergency landing. Although the team eventually completed the flight unharmed, Komsomol leaders—in their supervisory capacity over civil aviation—reacted with hostility toward the experiment. Kosarev and Eideman cancelled further experiments and demanded that future research be vetted through the Komsomol. The leader of the flight team, Pavel Grokhovskii wrote to Voroshilov, and then to Stalin himself, to ask for another chance to conduct the trial: “The girls also ask you to come to the aerodrome and see that they fly planes not one bit worse than male pilots.” Stalin called Kosarev into a meeting with Grokhovskii, the outcome of which is unclear. At a later meeting of Osoaviakhim’s central council, Kosarev claimed that he had opposed the flights because the Komsomol would have been held responsible had any harm come to the young women.

Of course, young men died frequently in airplane training exercises and Kosarev received reports on these accidents, too. But Kosarev’s reaction to the Grokhovskii incident reflected a perception that conducting this kind of experiment with women was an unnecessary risk. After all, Kosarev and his associates in Osoaviakhim did not believe that women would become military pilots. At a meeting of Osoaviakhim’s aviation department in December 1936, a worker asked the chair, Nikolai Uvarov about work with women. Uvarov answered, “When we are talking about creating some kind of reserve, first we must work with the men and take girls in a limited number for work as instructors... Of course, they will not go to a fighter plane and it is not necessary to burden oneself unnecessarily with that work.”

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97 RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 23, d. 1136, ll. 141-143, 151-152. GARF, f. 8355, op. 1, d. 98, l. 188. According to Nikolai Uvarov, Osoaviakhim’s head for aviation, there were twenty-three air accidents in 1935 and eleven in 1936, but they were a continuing source of concern for civil aviation administrators. RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 23, d. 1190, ll. 93. Later, and undoubtedly as revenge against Grokhovskii, Gorshenin forwarded Gosplan head, Valerian Kuibyshev a set of denunciations by workers at the experimental flight institute that accused Grokhovskii of stealing ideas and “using” (i.e., sexually) female workers who were as young as sixteen. RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 23, d. 1154, ll. 75-79, 80-81.
98 RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 23, d. 1190, l. 65.
displayed the conflict of Kosarev’s pragmatism versus the idealism of Grokhovskii and the female crew at the experimental flight station. Increasingly, the pragmatic view of women as, at best, a reserve force in the military would win out in Komsomol leadership circles.

In physical culture, researchers and administrators argued that biological difference dictated a different approach to work among women. Speaking at the All-Ukraine meeting of women Komsomol workers in October 1934, Vladimir Bliakh, the head of the Ukrainian Institute of Physical Culture claimed that many sports that demanded strength and endurance (including soccer and weightlifting) were unsuitable for “the particularities of the female body.” Moreover, he suggested that in some activities, like gymnastics, “after several years of training in this sport [the woman] will lose her female particularities and will to some degree begin to turn into a mannish type [muzhepodobnyi tip].” Bliakh also believed that the number of women in sport in the West was considerably lower than in the Soviet Union because physical culture there was conducted “with the aim of militarization, fascistization of the population.”\(^99\) What he meant was that only a country bent on peace would invest in women’s sport rather than use the resources on those who would fight in the war—men.

Bliakh was ultimately in support of sport for women, albeit of a feminine sort, but other Komsomol organizers expressed opposition to women in sport. At the Komsomol’s June 1935 plenum, an organizer named Lisogurskaia cited occasions when men in the Komsomol stopped women from participating in sport and military training. Lisogurskaia described a typical case, where a group of girls asked the local Komsomol organizer to arrange a shooting contest. In response, the organizer said, “It looks like a baba wants to become a Voroshilov Shooter. What kind of Voroshilov Shooter would you be?” Lisogurskaia’s young women cited their right to

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\(^99\) TsDAHO, f. 7, op. 1, spr. 1263, ark. 419, 420. For more Soviet views of the ideal female form in the 1920s, see Grant, *Physical Culture and Sport in Soviet Society*, 73-79.
equal access to sports: “You play volleyball, you shoot, you do the norms for GTO, why can’t we?” The response was that physical culture was “not for women” [ne zhenskoe delo].

The treatment of women in physical culture and paramilitary training in the Komsomol corroborate Susan Grant’s conclusion that although the Soviet press promoted the participation of women in sport, their ability to take part in real life was far more limited.

If sport was “not for women,” as some organizers thought, what was? Youth leaders in 1935 embarked on policies they believed would appeal to the natural interests and capabilities of young women. Ukrainian Komsomol head Sergei Andreev at a plenary meeting of the Ukrainian Komsomol Central Committee lambasted organizers for their mistreatment of young women. An organization in Kiev province expelled a young woman who was “impossible to mold in a communist spirit.” In response, Andreev assured the audience of Komsomol organizers that “girls have a number of particularities” that required a different kind of vospitanie. This approach involved employing “cultured entertainment” laced with politics. In a report on young women, Kosarev informed Politburo member Andrei Andreev about the Komsomol’s attempts to respond to the “demands” [zaprosy] of women. Apparently these demands included sewing circles and other groups that Komsomol organizers would infuse with political content.

At a later meeting of Komsomol leaders in 1937, Kosarev would claim, “Even though I am not a woman, I know a little something about women (laughter from the crowd).” Drawing on his expertise, Kosarev explained that political work among women was too serious and that a pregnant woman did not want to hear about Marx’s Capital but rather wanted to look after her

100 RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 2, d. 116, l. 117.
101 Grant, Physical Culture and Sport in Soviet Society, 96.
102 TsDAHO, f. 7, op. 1, spr. 1208, ark. 49.
103 RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 23, d. 1096, ll. 66-76.
own health. His statement revealed a belief that women were naturally less interested in politics than men and more concerned with family life.

The Ukrainian Komsomol followed Kosarev’s thinking in its attempts to include women in the organization, holding several conferences of female youth activists in the summer of 1935. Male Komsomol leaders typically presided over the meetings and shaped the agenda. In Ukraine the main figure involved was Pavel Kravchenko, a youth league administrator who seems to have been the Ukrainian Komsomol’s main instructor for issues related to women and families. In his job, he promoted strong families in ways big and small. In an official telegram to the youth leader of Zhitomir, whose wife had just given birth, Kravchenko wrote, “I share the joy of parenting with you—raise a healthy generation for our socialist motherland.”

As chair of a meeting of Kiev’s female activists in June 1935, Kravchenko emphasized the need to remove “remnants of bourgeois culture” among women. But what was bourgeois culture? A worker at a clothing factory in Kiev said, “Many girls use lipstick [and] are interested only in dances, the foxtrot, manicures and nothing else. Girls who come from the provinces do not properly understand culture, only the outer appearance of culture.” The clothing factory activist’s statement recalled the norms of radical activism. Yet other organizers were interested in appealing to what they believed were women’s demands: dances and fashion. When an activist suggested women wanted to dance, Kravchenko responded that the local Komsomol should organize a dancing circle. Krakovskaia, the head of the department of student youth in Kiev city (and thus one of the higher ranking female Komsomol leaders in Ukraine) was even

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104 RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 5, d. 52, l. 53.
105 TsDAHO, f. 7, op. 1, spr. 654, ark. 44.
more explicit, “Girls don’t want to be out of fashion. We are not meeting youth halfway on this… We ourselves do not know the border between being bourgeois and being cultured.”

Kravchenko had some ideas about where that border was. Religion was certainly against the Komsomol’s code. When a Komsomol organizer mentioned that her organization had not punished one young woman who baptized her child, Kravchenko demanded that the mother be expelled from the organization. Kravchenko also maintained that dances were part of culture, but not its main part, “The danger arises that among some youth the body will move forward but the mind stays behind.” And of course not all forms of dancing were equal. A manual from 1939 on how to organize a promenade at a carnival described in minute detail how the youth dancing circle should participate: “The dancing circle’s column should constantly change its step: joining hands, [the dancers] do three steps to the right, on the fourth a light hop, three steps to the left and a light hop, one step forward, hop (on the same foot) turn in place and begin again from the first step.” After the initial number, they would do the Pas de Quatre, the Vengerka or the Pas de Partner. For obvious reasons, the fox trot and other bourgeois dances were not among the approved repertoire. Komsomol leaders wanted to interest women in the organization but also to ensure that entertainment was both cultured and went hand in hand with politics. Above all, though, they wanted to use cultured trappings to entice women into official culture so that they could shape them as mothers.

At the same meeting of Ukrainian women organizers, the participants paid special attention to the issue of Komsomol mothers. Kravchenko asserted that unlike men, women in

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106 TsDAHO, f. 7 op. 1, spr. 1238, ark 5, 17.
107 Ibid., 26.
108 Kravchenko also suggested that dances should not be held before Komsomol meetings, “Otherwise when everyone leaves they don’t discuss what they heard at the meeting…but only talk about how so-and-so danced.” Ibid., 37.
109 Detskii karnaval: Letnyi prazdnik dlia detei srednego vozrasta (Moscow: Tsentral’nyi dom vospitaniia detei, 1939), 2.
the league bore an extra burden. Besides their duty to be active in the Komsomol and on the job, they had the extra task of being “an exemplary, cultured mother.” In turn, Kravchenko implied that it was the Komsomol’s duty to help women become exemplary and cultured. One woman expressed relief that her work as a mother was now being recognized. Before, she said, Komsomol members accused her of being selfish: “No one thinks about the fact that you are raising your child for socialist society and by doing so are fulfilling the task of molding youth.”

Kravchenko and Krakovskaia approved of “discounts,” literal and figurative, for Komsomol mothers. In one case, a Komsomol organizer allowed a Komsomol-mother in financial trouble not to pay membership dues. Krakovskaia argued that as the Komsomol promoted women, it should not give them a discount on their “[political] literacy” but mothers were a different case. “We need to make a discount on the particularities of Komsomol women: a discount on her as a mother or a pregnant woman.”

The consensus among these workers was that mothers needed special treatment. Kravchenko implied that motherhood was a special burden that supplanted the political and cultural activity of other Komsomol activists. But because youth leaders expected that the duties of motherhood would supplant other forms of activity in the league, they sought a means of keeping young mothers involved before they withdrew into family life. The most widespread practice was assigning a Komsomol member to visit and update the mother on goings-on in the organization, a practice that had gained support in the Komsomol Central Committee. More broadly, Komsomol leaders hoped that by offering programs that met women’s desires and by retaining young women in the league as they started families, they could shape young women and families into “cultured” subjects.

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110 TsDAHO, f. 7 op. 1, spr. 1238, ark. 6, 7, 11, 15, 18.
Related to the goal of fostering healthy Soviet families was the aim of policing young people’s sexuality. A major scandal in the Commissariat of Defense Komsomol organization occurred over the “distribution of parnography [sic]” by several young women. In the cafeteria of the commissariat, a former worker produced what the committee described as a “letter” (probably erotica or a limerick, unfortunately not preserved) and her notebook was passed from hand to hand. Several young people, including Komsomol members, read it aloud in the dormitory. Eventually, the letter got to a non-Komsomol worker who had access to a printing machine and spread it through the dormitory. Most of the readers were women and those who appeared before the committee were all komsomolki. They claimed to know little about the letter, but Podmarev, a member of the Komsomol bureau, said these excuses were insufficient. “These are all literate people, they know what they are bringing into the dormitory.” As a result, five Komsomol members, all young women, faced varying levels of discipline—at least one was fired from her job. The commissariat’s Komsomol circulated a resolution about the case to lower-level committees, demanding that the groups “mercilessly excise obscene and ugly jokes that still spread among individual komsomol’tsy and komsomolki of our organization.” But if the organization insisted that men and women were spreading obscene materials, it is telling that the case focused on women. During the disciplinary hearing, one member of the Komsomol committee remarked, “It’s bad that this case happened among girls.” The unfortunate nature of the case was not only because it involved reprinting lurid materials but specifically because those involved were women.\[^{111}\]

The Ukrainian Komsomol was also interested in monitoring unwanted sexual activity among women. Odessa, with its reputation as an unseemly city, was the subject of a 1935 report on women’s work that placed a disproportionate emphasis on women’s sexuality. In particular,

\[^{111}\] RGVA, f. 9, op., 30, d. 8, ll. 56-57; d. 9, ll. 128, 129.
its author lamented the “widespread opinion [in Odessa] that elements of sexual degeneracy are normal.” According to Odessa’s venereal disease institute, cases of young women (age 15-24) with gonorrhea or “sores” numbered 1556 for 1933, 1934 and the first eight months of 1935. At the Dzhutova Factory, where 95 percent of workers were women, fifty-five of the ninety-nine married komsomolki had been divorced twice or more and they had procured a combined 118 abortions; one woman alone had eight abortions and two others had five each. The report blamed the sexual depravity of Odessa’s young women on material conditions.\textsuperscript{112} Sergei Andreev found the report so shocking that he forwarded it to Ukrainian party secretary Pavel Postyshev. He explained that the popular opinion was that venereal disease was the product of prostitution, itself the product of foreigners coming through the port town. Andreev did not fully discredit this reasoning—it would have been convenient to believe that foreigners were to blame for venereal disease—but he did fault the local youth committee with not fighting against prostitution as well as divorce. The most interesting subtext of these reports, though, was the implicit blame they placed on women for sexual degeneracy rather than men.\textsuperscript{113}

Accusations against male sexual impropriety tended to draw a lesser response and typically arose when men’s action threatened to break up a marriage or reflected abuses of power. Elena Shulman documents in great detail the case of a group of administrators in the Far East who took advantage of vacancies at their offices to exploit young women in need of work.\textsuperscript{114} At a meeting of young women activists in 1935 in Ukraine, a speaker denounced a Kiev province youth organizer who divorced his wife and had four women on the side, “He thinks that in these questions his party face isn’t visible, that these are questions of a private

\textsuperscript{112} TsDAHO, f. 7, op. 1, spr. 1241, ark. 30-39.
\textsuperscript{113} Ibid., 50-53.
\textsuperscript{114} Shulman, \textit{Stalinism on the Frontier of Empire}, 184.
character.” At an October 1935 meeting of Ukrainian women activists, an organizer named Lakhtereva, the secretary from a youth committee of a group of miners from Donetsk, gave a lively speech about her experiences as a female youth leader. In one story she told, a hospital worker whose husband was away in the army became the target of harassment for the new head of the hospital. At midnight he would come to her apartment for “surprise checks.” At first she said nothing but eventually went to the Komsomol group organizer. Lakhtereva and another young woman “pressed” the hospital chief until he admitted what he had done. The hospital removed him from his position and the Komsomol organization gave him a warning that he would be expelled for further missteps. This action against male sexual behavior was too much for Kravchenko, who was chairing the meeting: “You are pressing guys there.” What Kravchenko meant was that Lakhtereva’s actions against the hospital chief had been too extreme. He had harassed his subordinate and needed to be stopped, but the damage had been limited and there was no need to “press” the hospital chief. Lakhtereva replied that she had fulfilled the mandate of the Komsomol Central Committee as she had understood it.

Underlying this exchange and the others was a gendered understanding of sexual impropriety. Sexual promiscuity was undesirable for both sexes; the Komsomol’s goal was to encourage and shape strong, Soviet-loyal families. As Shulman asserts, youth leaders believed that transient sexual relationships of any kind undermined this goal. Youth leaders sometimes admonished male activists for promiscuity, but the reasons for the blame were different. The supposed fault of these activists was that they had disrupted marriages or abused authority. When promiscuity did happen, it was women who were more often accused of impropriety as the

115 TsDAHO, f. 7 op. 1, spr. 1238, ark. 30.
116 Ibid., spr. 1239, ark. 108-111.
117 Shulman, Stalinism on the Frontier of Empire, 161. Along these lines, Shulman finds that marriages that dissolved quickly (and especially those that ultimately resulted in single mothers) were just as undesirable as other passing sexual liaisons.
gatekeepers of sexuality. This understanding implied that male urges were a given and that female promiscuity was the real source of social instability and threats to public health. The treatment of women as the primary responsible party for morality in family and sexual life lay behind the impetus behind Komsomol leaders’ attempts to exert control over women. The same desire to exert influence over family life also drove the cultural norms the Komsomol promoted for women as part of “communist upbringing.” By appropriating formerly bourgeois practices as the lifestyle of “cultured” young women, the Komsomol hoped to entice women into the league and to influence and strengthen young families.

Conclusion:
Unlike many modern youth organizations, Komsomol groups included both men and women. However, youth leaders believed that different desires existed among men and women and demanded corresponding responsibilities, benefits and practices. Speaking of the normative (and implicitly male) activist, Komsomol leaders insisted that the grizzled, radical factory organizers become “cultured”—literate, groomed and well-spoken. The “cultured” male activists they envisioned and the kind of young boys they wanted to raise would have a controlled masculinity and military training. This conception led youth leaders to tie their conceptions of a “cultured” upbringing increasingly, though not exclusively, to paramilitary training. Among women, their idea of kul’turnost’ was different. Even as they attempted to recruit women into leadership positions, Komsomol leaders’ normative vision of women was as the center of family life. Youth leaders endeavored to extend the Komsomol’s reach to increasing numbers of women by employing fashion, dancing and other forms of entertainment they believed that women naturally
desired. Appropriating these practices, they re-drew the borders of what was “cultured” and what was “bourgeois” in order to gain a foothold in families.

What “communist upbringing” meant was different for men and women but for all youth it reflected a turn inward in the Komsomol—an attempt to impose a moral code of behavior on youth. In the Komsomol, the imperative to mold and monitor young Soviet citizens’ into “cultured” men and women became its primary goal. This aim began to extend to new social groups—even to class groups beyond the Komsomol’s primary constituency of industrial workers. As Komsomol leaders and activists uneasily considered incorporating young people of non-proletarian backgrounds, their disciplinary practices transformed from a means of excising class enemies to a tool for molding youth.
Chapter 3: Class Dismissed?
Class Categories and Membership Discipline in the Komsomol, 1934-1936

When socialism emerged victorious in the USSR, as Stalin claimed in 1934, Soviet leaders believed this epoch would herald not only a new form of economic organization but a new type of society. As the country moved toward communism, class antagonisms—classes themselves—would fade away. As part of this change, the Soviet constitution adopted in 1936 (the Stalin constitution) guaranteed voting rights to all groups regardless of social origin. The two-and-a-half classes of Soviet people that leaders claimed remained (workers, peasants and a stratum of intelligentsia) would enjoy equal privileges and equal civic burdens.\(^1\) Measures to create class equality in the constitution supposedly made it the “most democratic in the world.”\(^2\)

Yet this assertion of class reconciliation clashed with the precedent of years of class antagonism from the beginning of Soviet power. Could Soviet leaders’ proclamations of class peace end—or did they even intend to end—the practices of class war in Soviet political culture?

The paradox of class categorization in an age where class was supposed to be dying away was a central issue in the Komsomol. In the 1920s and early 1930s, class had been the most important factor in deciding whether young people could be admitted to the league. But in the mid-1930s, Komsomol leaders began to signal changes that would remove obstacles previously hindering a broader section of Soviet youth from entering the organization. The same drive to include different parts of Soviet youth in the league caused Komsomol leaders to re-envision activists’ roles as character builders. They came to view disciplinary action (reprimands and


expulsion) not as a permanent means of removing dangerous youth but as a tool for molding good Soviet citizens.\(^3\) The effects of the changing purpose of discipline even permitted some young people who had hidden their class origin to reenter the organization. Nonetheless, class continued to cast a long shadow over membership policies in the Komsomol. It remained easier to join and remain in the organization for the children of workers than for the children of class aliens. While they publicly voiced support for class reconciliation, central youth leaders and local organizers privately expressed concerns about how conciliatory they could be with class aliens.

The use of class categories was a hallmark of the first years of Soviet rule. When they came into power, Bolshevik leaders used Marxist class categories to distinguish their enemies from their allies in society. But where Marx had defined classes by their relation to other classes, Sheila Fitzpatrick argues that the Bolsheviks created a set of categories that defined these groups’ relationship to the party-state. In a sense, the system resembled an inversion of Tsarist sosloviia. The Bolsheviks supported groups they believed had been disadvantaged under the Imperial state, while opposing groups they believed had been privileged and therefore ill-disposed towards the new regime.\(^4\) In addition, Bolshevik policies created new social-legal categories like special settlers (dekulakized peasants and other groups exiled to distant

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\(^3\) In 1933 the youth league also formalized a procedure for committees to issue discipline and for youth to appeal these measures. The Komsomol had a tiered system of reprimands (vyzyskanie). Local Komsomol committees could, in order of seriousness, warn (postavit’ na vid), admonish (ukazat’) or give members a verbal reprimand (vygovor) for their misdeeds. These reprimands entered the meeting notes but not members’ personal file. For more serious misbehavior, youth committees could give members, in order of seriousness, a formal reprimand (vygovor), a strong reprimand (strogii vygovor) or a reprimand with the threat of expulsion for any more lapses (vygovor s preduprezhdeniem). For the most serious transgressions, committees could expel members. Formal reprimands and expulsions entered both the meeting notes and Komsomol members personal files and were approved by the district-level youth committee or equivalent. Komsomol members could then appeal the disciplinary measure to the district-level organization or another higher ranking committee.

settlements). The Bolshevik state initially ascribed people into classes, but these categories became social realities, central elements of people’s social and legal identity.\(^5\) Young people who were too young to work before 1917 inherited their parents’ class, in spite of what their current position was. Under the new conditions of socialism in the mid-1930s, would young people escape their hereditary, ascribed class?

Few studies have examined class categories in detail after the formative 1920s and early 1930s. Tat’iana Smirnova, looking at youth in the early 1930s, suggests that for Soviet leaders class categories were becoming less meaningful relative to the current political position of the individual (e.g., loyalty to Stalin).\(^6\) Amir Weiner, examining Soviet population politics from the 1930s onward, asserts that Soviet ethnic categories became conflated with class categories and eventually superseded them as the primary factor in repression carried out against segments of the population.\(^7\) Yet these historians falsely equate the increasing importance of ethnic categories and the decreasing importance of class categories for admission into the Soviet body politic with the leveling of class categories overall.

The example of the Komsomol shows the contradictions—but overall continuation—of class categorization in social relations and state policy. Although youth leaders and activists often declared that class differences were disappearing, confusion and conflict reigned over what this change meant in practice. In the Komsomol, public discourse about class reconciliation placed previous conceptions of class into flux but it did not make class disappear as a factor in

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membership politics. In fact, this uncertainty created significant tensions between stated policies and discriminatory practices, reconfiguring but reinforcing class categorization.

Class in the Komsomol

Class discrimination in the membership politics of the Komsomol occurred in the league’s regulations and its practices from its founding. Children of class aliens faced almost insurmountable obstacles to admission, particularly during the cultural revolution. Yet the anxiety that motivated class discrimination was not only, or even mostly, concerning youth from marginal backgrounds. Applicants from non-proletarian class origins (e.g., the children of white-collar workers or peasants) were a major cause of apprehension among radical activists because they represented sizeable, non-marginal populations of youth who could threaten the proletarian composition of the league. The continuing obsession with class in the Komsomol was apparent in the public discourse and internal meetings in the league in the mid-1930s. In May 1934, the Komsomol’s Central Committee released a resolution condemning local committees that admitted young people from white-collar families on an equal footing with proletarians or peasants. In a meeting in April 1935, Komsomol General Secretary Aleksandr Kosarev displayed outrage with the way that provincial and district committees failed to regulate their membership by admitting too many non-proletarian youth. He cited his own experience as the former youth secretary of Bauman municipal district in Moscow and in Penza province. “If in my province… the percent of ‘other’ [i.e., members who were not workers or peasants] rose by 4

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8 Formal discrimination existed even during the relatively open period of NEP. According to the regulations of the organization put in place in 1926, workers and poor peasants could join the Komsomol without a period of candidacy. White-collar workers and intelligentsia could join as candidate members (who could not vote or run for office in Komsomol elections) and then become full members later. Komsomol organizations were not supposed to admit youth from any other categories. Tovarishch Komsomol, vol. 1, 248. After this relatively inclusive period, membership policies during the following Stalin Revolution were based heavily on class considerations. The purge and document verification that Komsomol leaders initiated in 1932-33 targeted supposed class aliens above all.

9 RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 23, d. 1000, ll. 20-21.
percent, that raised troubling questions for me.” Kosarev even claimed that if the youth cell at the Putilov factory in Bauman district had admitted thirty white-collar workers, “the affair may have gone to a discussion [before Kosarev] at the district committee.” The Komsomol leader stressed not only that provincial leaders needed to monitor lower-level membership closely but that class was the most important factor in assessing membership work overall.

At the local level, cases of otherwise outstanding youth from undesirable class origins complicated admissions policies. The case of a young man named Bystritskii, a cultural worker from the Administrative-Economic Department of the Commissariat of Defense, is telling. Bystritskii, a shock worker, had previously applied for admission through two different local cells of the Komsomol but because his father was a priest, the commissariat’s Komsomol bureau (who interviewed and gave final approval for new members) had effectively rejected his application by tabling it indefinitely both times. In January 1935, he applied for a third time through yet another cell. This cell approved him nearly unanimously, except for one Konovalov who said, “If Bystritskii is admitted to the organization, then I will turn in my Komsomol card because his social origin makes him a class alien to us.” Konovalov indeed lost his membership card soon after at a disciplinary hearing where the commissariat’s Komsomol bureau expelled him for his outburst.

Yet Konovalov’s expulsion did not mean that the committee would admit Bystritskii. At the next meeting, the youth bureau discussed Bystritskii’s candidacy. Committee members were careful to ask him about his connections to his priest father, whom he claimed he had not seen since he was eighteen. The decision was difficult; Bystritskii was the child of class alien elements but he was also an excellent worker who desperately wanted to be a komsomolets. The committee found a way out of the dilemma: Bystritskii had recently turned twenty-four and

\[10\] RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 3, d. 136, l. 88.
could not join the Komsomol because its age limit for new members was twenty-three. Bystritskii was at a loss and understood his rejection as based on class, “Why can I not be a Komsomol member? I have worked since I was sixteen years old. I was raised among worker youth… Where can I go now that I cannot be a Komsomol member?” The head of the Komsomol bureau suggested that Bystritskii apply for party membership. The suggestion was likely little solace; not only had the party placed a moratorium on new members since the end of 1932 but given Bystritskii’s experience with the Komsomol, could he expect the party’s doors to open for someone with his class background?\footnote{RGVA, f. 9, op. 30, d. 5, ll. 34-37; d. 6, ll. 1-12, 16-24.}

The case reveals three reactions to class aliens’ applications to the Komsomol. First, most of the members of the local youth groups seem to have had little trouble approving Bystritskii’s applications; he was an outstanding worker (perhaps even their supervisor) who claimed to have no contact with his class-alien parents. Second, Konovalov’s violent opposition to Bystritskii’s admission to the organization represented a segment of Komsomol members who still voiced intense, radical convictions. Third, the commissariat’s Komsomol bureau, though it rejected Bystritskii on the technical grounds that he exceeded the league’s age limit, in all likelihood rejected his application because of his class origin, having previously put off making a decision indefinitely. Bystritskii appeared to be everything a politically active youth was supposed to be—except a proletarian. Postponing and then throwing out his application for formal reasons was means of avoiding making a tough decision about whether a class alien could be in the organization.

Bystritskii and other children of class aliens who attempted to join the Komsomol were aware of the precariousness of their situation. Grade school student Oleg Krasovsky’s father was arrested as an alleged spy in February 1934. After his father went to a Siberian labor camp,
Krasovsky moved to Moscow with relatives. In Moscow, Krasovsky’s school komsorg, Vorobev asked the young man to join the Komsomol in the spring of 1935 because of his excellent grades. Krasovsky was not opposed to joining out of principle but he stalled because he feared that authorities would find out his father was in a labor camp. When he could no longer avoid submitting an application, Krasovsky lied on the form, saying that his father’s whereabouts were unknown. His lie was never found out—and he was fortunate.12 Stepan Podlubny, whose diary Jochen Hellbeck has examined in depth, faced a similar situation. His father was a dekulakized peasant but the perception that Soviet political culture was becoming more forgiving of class aliens and Podlubny’s own ambition led him to join the Komsomol. He hid his father’s identity but eventually his local youth organization found out and expelled him as a class alien, contributing to a personal disaster in his life.13

Youth leaders categorically denied admission to the Komsomol for youth from some social groups—particularly edinolichniki (independent farmers). After collectivization few independent farmers remained in the country but some edinolichniki and their children attempted to join the Komsomol organization. Local organizations roundly rejected applicants who were independent farmers or whose peasant parents were still not in a kolkhoz. In cases where the young edinolichniki were otherwise good candidates for membership, Komsomol organizations demanded that they join the collective farm and then could be considered. In one case from Karelia in February 1936, a local committee rejected a young woman’s application because her

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12 Krasovsky, “Early Years,” 134-135, 137, 139.
parents were *edinolichniki*. The committee’s report summarized that she was a good worker but could join the youth organization only when her parents joined the local kolkhoz.\(^{14}\)

While the Komsomol discriminated against some groups, worker youth received disproportionate advantages in the organization. Part of this favor was institutional. The Komsomol regulations in place from 1926 to 1936 mandated that a local committee wishing to expel any worker or peasant from the organization needed confirmation from the provincial youth committee (whose leaders were usually on the Komsomol’s Central Committee); a district committee’s confirmation sufficed for youth of all other classes.\(^{15}\) Workers also received the benefit of the doubt in disciplinary cases. In July 1935, the Komsomol committee of the Administrative-Mobilization Bureau in the Commissariat of Defense expelled a young worker named Dovgaliuk from the Komsomol for embezzling money at his current job and from the kolkhoz where he had worked previously. Yet the Komsomol leaders who confirmed his expulsion left the door open to his readmission: “Dovgaliuk by his origin is one of us, his brothers are fine people of our motherland.” Even though the committee claimed he deserved permanent expulsion, it offered him the chance to appeal if he could prove himself at his workplace.\(^{16}\) At the June 1935 Komsomol plenum, Leningrad youth secretary Iosif Vaishlia suggested that social promotion for proletariat youth and limitations for youth of less desirable social origins were still necessary. Explaining how his committee handled a recruiting campaign for air force schools, Vaishlia said that they removed candidates when the commission had no information about their parents from 1930 to 1935: “We rejected them, for example, because they have a grandfather living abroad. He can be in the Komsomol, but we won’t send him to

\(^{14}\) NARK, f. 779p, op. 17, d. 14, l. 103; f. 781p, op. 1, d. 672, l. 30.

\(^{15}\) *Tovarisheh Komsomol*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 1969), 248.

\(^{16}\) RGVA, f. 9, op. 30, d. 7, l. 15.
the VVS [air force school].” Someone whose class background was not so suspect, he implied, would have been sent forward.  

Discrimination was implied in the membership policies of the Komsomol, but youth leaders set no firm rule about the class origin of new members. In lieu of definite resolutions on the question of class in admissions, they disseminated rough guidelines in the press. Beginning in April 1935, *Izvestiia TsK Komsomola* published cases from the Central Committee’s appeals commission—a group of Central Committee workers who heard petitions for reinstatement into the Komsomol. One case involved a young man who denied being a kulak until legal records showed the large extent of his family’s former holdings; the appeals commission confirmed his expulsion. In two other cases the commission overturned the rulings, finding that lower-level organizations had made false accusations of class-alien origin against innocent people. These cases suggested that class origin was a legitimate reason to expel someone from the league.

Although class discrimination persisted into 1935, party leaders at the same time were moving toward a conception of political culture that was more inclusive of non-proletarians. In February 1935, Stalin initiated the rewriting of the Soviet constitution and a Constitutional Commission comprised of party leaders created multiple drafts over the course of 1935 and early 1936. The evolution of these drafts revealed the easing of class restrictions in political life. In the first version of the section on elections, those Soviet people disenfranchised in the old constitution because of their class origin remained unable to vote. However, the Constitutional Commission, chaired by Stalin himself, revised this draft into a version that granted universal votes to all citizens in 1936.

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17 RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 2, d. 116, l. 42.  
18 The formal title of this commission was the Appeals Troika. Previously it had been called the Conflict Commission. Later, it was renamed the Appeals Commission and then the Commission for Appeals and Expulsion. It existed at the provincial, republican and union levels. For the sake of simplicity, I refer to these commissions as appeals commissions, as they performed the same function of answering appeals in spite of the name changes.  
suffrage, asserting that even former class aliens had the right to vote.\textsuperscript{20} The changes in the electorate reflected a broader leveling of class difference in the new constitution. While the constitution would not be published for public debate until June 1936, party leaders had made other pronouncements that indicated an easing of class struggle in the Soviet Union. Most famously, Stalin declared in late 1935 that “a son does not answer for his father” in response to an exemplary worker who had asked why he faced continuing discrimination for his father’s being a kulak.\textsuperscript{21}

As party leaders signaled changes in the status of class aliens and other non-proletarian groups, their position in the classless society was unclear. This uncertainty was reflected in Abram Room film, \textit{The Stern Young Man} (Strogii iunosha), produced between 1934 and 1936. The film’s eponymous character is Grisha Fokin, a young engineer, athlete and ideal Komsomol member. Grisha falls in love with Masha Stepanov, the young wife of a renowned physician. Yet while Grisha fights with Doctor Stepanov over Masha, the real conflict is for Doctor Stepanov himself. The future clearly belongs to Grisha and the younger generation but will Doctor Stepanov and the old intelligentsia have a place, too? Ultimately, Doctor Stepanov shows his willingness to work toward the Soviet future, using his brilliant techniques to save the life of a seemingly fatally ill Komsomol Central Committee member. Although the original conflict over Masha goes unresolved, Professor Stepanov drives away his odious hanger-on (the embodiment of bourgeois indolence) and throws in his lot with the new generation, showing that the intelligentsia—even the prerevolutionary bourgeois—could have a place in Soviet society.

When the film was initially commissioned, it had been hotly anticipated; in addition to its large budget (the biggest of 1936), the key figures in its production were high profile

\textsuperscript{21} For this statement and a broader discussion of class in the mid-1930s, see Fitzpatrick, \textit{Everyday Stalinism}, 130-132.
intellectuals like Room and writer Iurii Olesha, who wrote the original play and the screen adaptation. Despite (or perhaps because) of the expectations for the film, Ukrainfilm banned it upon its completion in 1936, citing several ideological problems in the portrayals of its characters. The young people in the film were stiff, humorless and pretentious; Grisha was never shown working and was thus divorced from the realities of Soviet young people.²² Perhaps the greatest problem, though, was that the head of Ukrainfilm called Doctor Stepanov “an arrogant and boastful man, alien to Soviet reality.”²³ How could the conceited representative of the bourgeois intelligentsia have a place, and an honored place at that, in the classless future that the Komsomol represented? The film’s fate revealed how the ambiguous and treacherous the task of envisioning a classless society would be. Yet the film’s attempt to reconcile the classless future with current realities of class also highlighted the significance of the class issue and association with question of youth.

The Komsomol’s first attempts toward building a classless society in their own ranks began when league leaders tentatively raised the possibility of leveling standards for admissions for youth from non-proletarian or peasant backgrounds. At the June 1935 plenum of the Komsomol Central Committee, Kosarev declared that the league was for the “best youth of the country.” But the emphasis on “best youth” did not mean the end of class distinction. In the first edition of a reader response section in Izvestiia TsK Komsomola from October 1935, the first question asked, “How can we correctly organize admission to the Komsomol?” The reply explained that organizers needed to record young people’s social origin in detail: “They write: ‘peasant.’ What kind of peasant? There are well-off peasants, middle, poor. It needs to be

²² Milena Mishalski argues that Room was perhaps satirizing the overly serious youth of the Komsomol at the time, portraying Grisha as a caricature of the code of ethics in the Komsomol. Michalski, “Promises Broken, Promise Fulfilled: The Critical Failings and Creative Success of Abram Room’s ‘Strogii iunosha,’” The Slavonic and East European Review 82, no. 4 (2004): 835.
²³ Ibid., 836.
shown.”

The article countered ideas that admissions for “the best” youth meant a softening of class vigilance. Moreover, it revealed that class remained an important element of the identity of an applicant to the league. Although the league was becoming more open to different classes (except class aliens), youth leaders demanded that social origin be precisely recorded because they believed in the continuing and real distinction between these categories.

A shift in public treatment of class in the Komsomol occurred at its Tenth Congress in April 1936. Creating a new set of regulations was a major purpose of the congress, the only body with the right to approve these changes. Although the Komsomol’s regulations mandated at least one congress per year, the 1936 congress was the first since 1931. The infrequency of congresses meant that they were about more than individual policies. Instead, they were supposed to inaugurate major changes in the league’s mission. For the Tenth Komsomol Congress, youth leaders asserted that the new conditions accompanying the victory of socialism, including the development of “communist upbringing,” demanded a new course for the youth league.

The drafting of the new Komsomol regulations coincided with and reflected the same concerns as the new Soviet constitution. And in the youth league’s regulations, Stalin’s role was key for the youth league’s treatment of class. The first draft of the new regulations (written by Komsomol leaders) based admission to the organization on principles similar to those of the 1926 regulations. The draft divided youth in two groups: children of workers and peasants, and all others. Youth from the first group could join the Komsomol with two recommendations and a six-month candidacy. Those from the second category could join the organization with three recommendations and a yearlong candidacy. This draft reveals that Komsomol leaders still believed that they needed to promote the interests of workers and peasants and guard the

organization against youth of other classes. Kosarev sent this draft to party leaders, including Stalin, who edited the draft himself. Stalin’s revision focused primarily on the Komsomol’s admissions policies—and particularly those related to class. The Soviet leader changed the first draft, replacing the divisions between worker-peasant youth and all others with a policy that admitted all youth on equal footing. In the first draft (and in the Komsomol more generally until 1936), youth committees used the candidate rank in the Komsomol for non-proletarians waiting to enter as full members. In Stalin’s draft, the Komsomol would use it for increasing youth’s political literacy rather than guarding against youth of non-proletarian class origin.

Prior to the congress, in March 1936, the Komsomol press published Stalin’s draft of the regulations (with reference to Stalin’s participation) for discussion in youth committees and publications. Some youth protested the new regulations’ lack of class radicalism. In Komsomol’skaia Pravda, Ivan Sapozhnikov, the secretary of a youth group from a railroad station complained that the new regulations would allow an influx of white-collar workers: “How will we regulate the growth of white-collar workers if admission will be considered only by the political literacy of young people? It seems to me that white-collar workers are much more literate than worker and kolkhoz youth.” Internal reports reflect similar concerns. A Komsomol worker named Manaev sent a report to Kosarev summarizing suggestions and questions from various provincial youth organizations. Organizers from Western province wanted to know why there would be no difference between youth of different social origin in the new regulations. Similarly, youth activists in the Azov-Chernomor region questioned why a factory worker with five or more years of experience would now have no more privilege than a

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25 RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 23, d. 1153, ll. 49-50.
26 Ibid., d. 1157, passim.
27 “Regulirovat’ priem v Komsomol,” Komsomol’skaia Pravda, 22 March 1936, 3.
white-collar worker.\textsuperscript{28} These statements contained barely muted protest of new policies that seemed to give non-proletarian youth better access to membership in the Komsomol. However, Komsomol committees at lower levels largely ratified the new regulations pro forma or with minor suggestions for changes.\textsuperscript{29}

The Tenth Komsomol Congress (April 11-21, 1936) itself was an extravaganza. Stalin and most major political leaders attended, as did Soviet heroes like arctic explorer Otto Schmidt, soccer impresario Nikolai Starostin and USSR chess champion Mikhail Botvinnik. The congress inspired hundreds of preparatory activities in local groups and in affiliated organizations in sport and civil defense. Most often committees would pledge a “gift” in honor of the congress; very frequently this gift was preparing a certain number of youth for the GTO or Voroshilov Shooters programs, although factories also pledged to overfulfill workplace norms. Youth also marked the congress with marches [\textit{pokhody}] through the streets of Moscow. These events were surely meant to be a spectacle and were laden with meaning and associations. The marches and promises of defense training demonstrated the link between Komsomol and a more militarized Soviet youth, showing how the priorities of the youth organization were shifting toward the priority of militarized discipline among youth. The pageantry of the congress also lent weight to the new rules that it would codify.

\textsuperscript{28} RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 23, d. 1159, ll. 43-48. Other provincial youth leaders demanded that the full name of the Komsomol, the All-Union Leninist Communist League of Youth, be modified during the upcoming congress to include Stalin’s name as well (i.e., as the All-Union Leninist-Stalinist Communist League of Youth). Similar (apparently unsolicited) demands came from local organizations. RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 23, d. 1159, l. 58.

\textsuperscript{29} For example, the Komsomol group in the town Velikaia Guba in Karelia province “fully agreed” with the program with the suggestion that the section on military training in the Komsomol should mention the role of Osoaviakhim in civilian military training. NARK, f. 4070p, op. 1, d. 30, l. 17. Press discussions of the constitution’s draft, which began around the same time as the Komsomol’s press discussion of its new regulations, were also mixed. Sarah Davies shows that Soviet workers, adhering to class principles, asserted that the constitution went too far in offering equal rights to non-proletarians. Other people took the constitution at its word, using the rights apparently granted (e.g., free speech) in ways that amounted to a “misinterpretation of the regime’s intentions” according to Davies. Still other people were skeptical that the freedoms offered in the constitution would be realized in real life. Davies, \textit{Popular Opinion in Stalin’s Russia}, 102-108.
Opening the congress, Kosarev declared that the times had changed—particularly with regard to class relations in the USSR. The new conditions of socialism had caused class barriers to fall and they would continue to fall as the country approached communism. Consequently, new criteria were needed for admissions to the Komsomol: “The Komsomol is becoming a broader Soviet organization, I emphasize, of Soviet youth, in contrast to an organization of worker-peasant youth, which it was in the past.” Kosarev was not just speaking about students or white-collar workers and their offspring but also class alien children. He continued later, “Comrade Stalin’s statement… ‘a son does not answer for his father,’ [and] the state resolution on admission to higher education without social restrictions guide the work of the Leninist Komsomol among youth who come from alien classes… The best of them, those verified and loyal to Soviet power can be admitted to the Komsomol in individual cases.”

Central Committee secretary Andrei Andreev was the only major party figure to speak at the Tenth Congress and he explained authoritatively: “What is the meaning of these changes…? The Komsomol must become a broader organization than it is now. There is no reason to limit admission to the Komsomol like admission to the party is limited.” Of course, Andreev said, new members needed to be “verified” and have basic knowledge of current politics. However, Andreev—citing the wishes of Stalin explicitly—insisted that the organization should incorporate a more diverse cross section of society and stop discriminating against well-meaning youth.

Kosarev and Andreev both called for the Komsomol to open its doors to different

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30 RGASPI, f. 6m, op. 10, d. 1, ll. 103, 105-106. Kosarev referred to a resolution of the Council of People’s Commissars from late December 1935 that eliminated class-based quotas for admission to higher education. As Fitzpatrick says, though, “If all classes and strata were now equal in educational opportunity, some were inevitably more equal than others.” Fitzpatrick refers specifically to the disproportionately high number of children of industrial and white-collar workers who had access to higher education, versus the disproportionately small number of peasant youth. Fitzpatrick, Education and Social Mobility, 235-236.

31 RGASPI, f. 6m, op. 10, d. 4, ll. 222-225.
people but their statements used vague terms. What made a young person part of the “best” youth? Could the child of a kulak ever be “verified?” Or was this verification based on class?

As they assessed the effects of the Tenth Congress, Komsomol leaders demonstrated their continuing unease with class aliens as members of the youth league. In the months after the congress, Komsomol Central Committee workers went out to the provinces to investigate how local committees were fulfilling its decisions. The investigation found reasons for youth leaders to react both positively and negatively. Pioneer leader Vasilii Muskin found in Belarus that youth committees had begun to accept more school and university students in the organization. In one case, Muskin discovered that an exceedingly well-read tenth grader (who had read more books than the district youth secretary himself) was only able to join the Komsomol after the congress. Muskin cited this example as a sign that Belarusian committees were now using the right criteria for membership decisions—including the level of culture as measured by literacy. In other organizations, though, Central Committee workers faulted youth organizers with having only admitted a few new members and failing to understand that membership was now more open. The investigators were particularly concerned when youth groups continued to place limitations on admissions for students and youth from white-collar backgrounds.\(^\text{32}\)

Students and white-collar youth were now welcome, yet youth committees were too lenient with class alien elements. Abramov, the Komsomol Central Committee instructor sent to Omsk discovered that a new league member had parents who were deprived of voting rights and had been exiled. When Abramov questioned the local organizers about the young man, they admitted that he had only come to the factory five months ago, that no one really knew him and, not surprisingly, no one could remember recommending him for admission. Another Komsomol leader who went to the Azov-Chernomor region found similar reason for concern: “One girl

\(^{32}\) RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 5, d. 32, l. 9.
(from a kulak family) read Comrade Kosarev’s speech, went to the Komsomol organization and announced that she has the right to be in the Komsomol… The cell was flustered because they [the local youth organizers] themselves had not managed to read the speech as closely as they should.” Of course, as likely a scenario was that these local organizers had read and understood Kosarev’s speech but were unsure how to reconcile the public backing of class peace with the continuing conception of class enemies as a reality. The instructor suggested that Kosarev issue a directive that would clarify the Komsomol’s position on class alien youth and ensure that incidents like that with the young kulak woman would not occur.33

The Komsomol Central Committee did indeed release a resolution “About violations of regulations during admission to the Komsomol.” The resolution charged some committees with admitting all applicants and others with needlessly turning away youth from white-collar backgrounds and students. Paraphrasing Kosarev’s speech at the Tenth Congress, it called for youth committees to admit “the best” youth.34 Although this resolution, like previous official statements on admission, was vague on what kinds of youth were not right for the league, the local youth press elaborated on the resolution. In Karelia the head of the province’s appeals commission, Kirilov made the policies more explicit in its Komsomol newspaper. Some cases he wrote of involved youth who were too politically illiterate to join but other cases involved class aliens. In two cases he cited, young people incorrectly were able to join the Komsomol despite their kulak parents, with whom they supposedly maintained current contact.35

Public discourse continued to portray class aliens as responsible for bad behavior among young people. In the February 1936 issue of Vozhatyi, Pioneer counselor Ian Chelakidi wrote

33 Ibid., II. 15, 41, 79.
34 See the explanatory article “Ob oshibakh pri prieme uchashchikhsia v komsomole,” Izvestiia TsK Komsomola, no. 13 (1936): 18-19.
about a recent experience with wayward adolescents. A veteran counselor of ten years in the Azov-Chernomor region, Chelakidi overheard some of the older Pioneers talking about “malinki.” Not knowing what this word meant, he found out that it was slang for a secret place where boys and girls went to hang out: “They stay at these malinki ten or eleven hours. The entertainment: cards, flirting and sometimes even drinking.” Chelakidi investigated around the school in order to find out where the children got the idea for these parties: “As I should have expected, it was a class enemy: a kulak who had escaped from exile.” Only by separating the children from this kulak and by offering alternate forms of recreation did Chelakidi prevail in ending the parties.\footnote{Ian Chelakidi, “Moia radost’,” Vozhatyi, no. 4 (1936): 37.} In this story, not only was the kulak responsible for these hangouts but Chelakidi chided himself for not knowing it would be a class alien in the first place. The public stigma of being a class alien continued even as official political culture became more accepting of non-proletarians.

Komsomol and party leaders wanted youth activists to embrace a broader membership. However, leaders’ concerned reactions to “incorrect understandings” of this policy and the continuing emphasis on recording class among new members reveal that class origin was still a major factor for admission. The new policies of inclusiveness benefitted primarily children of white-collar workers and students, who were now able to join the organization effectively on equal terms with proletarians. However, children of class aliens still faced considerable obstacles to joining the Komsomol.

**Discipline or punish?**

Changing conceptions of class affected not only how youth leaders dealt with admissions but also how they would treat league members who violated its rules. During the purge of
Komsomol membership in 1932-33, the league had expelled large numbers of youth who had supposedly betrayed the league’s code. Purge commissions accused youth of failing to fulfill grain requisitions, not mobilizing to the countryside or of being or enabling class aliens; very often youth faced a combination of these charges. The main goal of removing these young people was to protect the Komsomol from infiltration, above all by class enemies or their followers. Effectively, youth leaders wanted to punish wayward youth—to excise them permanently without a chance of successful appeal.

Changes in the youth league’s disciplinary practices had begun in 1935. At the June 1935 Komsomol Central Committee plenum, Kosarev called for “fewer reprimands, more explanations”: “[To expel someone from the Komsomol] is not difficult but to bring someone up, to make him an exemplar of discipline is more difficult.” Rather than using discipline as a way of improving young people, he accused local committees of expelling youth and forgetting about them. For the sake of molding youth into good Soviet citizens, Kosarev and other Komsomol leaders demanded that discipline—especially expulsion—be used more sparingly and with constructive goals.37 After the Tenth Komsomol Congress, central signals about increasing leniency in disciplinary policies became more explicit. In June 1936, Izvestiia TsK Komsomola printed several articles suggesting that disciplinary measures should be curtailed. In one the journal criticized a provincial committee for expelling a young man who had failed to pay membership dues for several months. Another article entitled “Easier to expel than to mold” discussed the case of one Salganik, who accidentally forgot to remove himself from the rolls of his old organization when he moved. The youth committee at his new location expelled Salganik for this error but the central appeals commission reversed the decision, chastising the local

37 RGASPI f. 1m, op. 2, d. 116, ll. 131, 133; d. 115, l. 71.
Articles like these signaled that activists should use discipline to teach rather than solely to punish.

Exhortations to limit or reverse expulsions made headway in the practices of youth committees. When youth felt that they had been wrongly disciplined, or that they had transgressed but deserved reconsideration, they could appeal their expulsion to Komsomol appeals commissions at the district, provincial, republican or union level. The commission would decide whether to reinstate the appellant (often with a lesser punishment than expulsion) or, if the commission confirmed the expulsion, the appellant could take the case to the next hierarchical level (see figure 3.1).

In the republican appeals commission of the Ukrainian Komsomol, the number of successful appeals grew considerably after the start of 1935. From January 1934 through March 1935, the appeals commission confirmed the expulsions of 75 percent of the cases that it saw. In the year that followed, the appeals commission confirmed just 48 percent of those cases it saw—a drop of 27 percent (table 3.1). Going beyond the total figures for appeals, the number of expulsions by class origin shows that some groups benefitted disproportionately. Youth from white-collar origins—the new stratum of Soviet intelligentsia—were the primary beneficiaries. Although the rate of expulsion dropped by 27 percent overall, the rate of expulsion for children of white-collar workers dropped by 37 percent. Moreover, the total number of cases involving

39 The total number of cases dropped slightly as well but this drop could have two plausible explanations. First, the Ukrainian Komsomol expelled a very large number of youth in 1932-1934 and comparatively large number of cases from 1934 and early 1935 may be the result of these expulsions. Once this pool of potential appellants dried up, the league would have received fewer appeals. The second explanation is that provincial and district-level organizations may also have understood that harsh discipline was no longer necessary and reversed expulsions before the appeals could go to the Ukrainian Central Committee. Fewer appeals reached the higher appeals commission not because there were fewer appeals overall but because they were being decided in the appellants’ favor at the lower levels. A mix of these two factors probably accounted for this drop.
Figure 3.1 Appeals process in the Komsomol
offspring of white-collar workers dropped precipitously, suggesting that they may have appealed successfully at the lower levels. The expulsion rate for youth of all other groups fell at roughly the same rate, around 30 percent. The important exception is children of supposedly hostile classes, whose expulsion rate fell by only 16 percent. This discrepancy indicates that class alien elements who were unmasked in the Komsomol had a marginally better chance of remaining in the organization after March 1935, likely the effect of the new emphasis on including the “best” Soviet youth. The main beneficiaries, though, of more lenient disciplinary policies were those categorized as children of white-collar workers, middle and poor peasants and proletarians.

The decisions of the Ukrainian appeals commission for the first three months of 1936 show some change in discipline based on class. While the overall percentage of confirmed expulsions fell from the previously year by 19 percent, the expulsions for class alien social origin fell by 23 percent (table 3.2). In cases where those who hid their hostile social origin were let back into the organization, the committee usually noted the good work and contrition of these youth. Often they still received a reprimand for their social origin or their attempt to deceive the organization. The leniency in these cases was not incidental. The bureau of the Ukrainian Komsomol’s Central Committee always reviewed the appeals commission’s decisions, but typically before 1936 had rubber stamped these decisions. In early 1936, though, three Ukrainian Komsomol leaders, including secretary Sergei Andreev, eschewed pro forma approval and sat in on several of the commission’s sessions. In one case where Andreev was present, the commission had expelled the son of a “Tsarist guard” for his class origin. When Andreev reviewed the case, he maintained that the young man had performed well at work and thus
Table 3.1. Decisions of Appeals to Ukrainian Komsomol by Social Origin, 1934-1936

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Origin*</th>
<th>January 1934-March 1935</th>
<th>April 1935-March 1936</th>
<th>% Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Expel/Total</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Expel/Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Alien</td>
<td>117/120</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>49/60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artisan</td>
<td>13/19</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>13/23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Peasant</td>
<td>36/49</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>16/38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor Peasant</td>
<td>65/98</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>30/81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White-Collar Worker</td>
<td>25/39</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>3/11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worker</td>
<td>46/76</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>19/58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1/1</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>1/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>302/401</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>130/271</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The class alien category includes youth defined in records as children of merchants, White Army soldiers, bandits, clergy and kulaks. All other categories are direct translations.

deserved only a reprimand for hiding his social origin. In this case and others, Andreev displayed a changed understanding of discipline that was more lenient than a year before. He asserted that good behavior mattered and that these reprimands were not meant to punish, but to encourage young people to improve themselves as they worked toward appealing reprimands. Good work and Soviet loyalty could earn a modicum of acceptance in Soviet political culture, even for some children of class aliens.

The Ukrainian Komsomol seems to have been an early adopter of more accepting class policies. Most likely Andreev’s own place in the Komsomol leadership played an important role in this shift. On February 25, 1936, a seventeen-year old petitioned Andreev after the local youth committee expelled him for his father’s kulak status. Citing Stalin’s phrase (translated into Ukrainian) that “a son does not answer for his father,” he asked for Andreev for help. Andreev personally responded to the letter, opening an investigation with the district. As it

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40 I aggregated and quantified the information from several years of appeals files. TsDAHO, f. 7, op. 1, spr. 816, ark. 12; spr. 924, passim; spr. 1052, ark. 132-133, 134-135; spr. 1053, ark. 46-48, 49-51, 52-58, 122-126, 137-141; spr. 1054, ark. 134-141, 142-151; spr. 1056 ark. 91-96, 97-100, 101-104, 270-276, 277-283; spr. 1217, ark. 77-80, 81-84; spr. 1220, ark. 89-119, 274-293; spr. 1221, ark. 127-139, 144-174, 207-255; spr. 1270, ark. 1-2, 3-7; op. 12, spr. 547, passim.

41 TsDAHO, f. 7, op. 1, spr. 1221, ark. 143, 222, 224, 226, 232, 234, 237.
Table 3.2. Decisions of Appeals to Ukrainian Komsomol by Reason for Expulsion, 1934-1936

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason for Expulsion**</th>
<th>1934</th>
<th>1935</th>
<th>1936*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Expel/Total</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Expel/Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abandoned Work</td>
<td>20/24</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>2/9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavioral Problems</td>
<td>8/12</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>9/17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection to Enemy</td>
<td>18/26</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>20/27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counterrevolutionary Act or Speech</td>
<td>28/41</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>23/39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Komsomol Discipline</td>
<td>4/5</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>7/12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Class Vigilance</td>
<td>1/5</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>0/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mechanically Removed</td>
<td>0/1</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No reason given</td>
<td>1/1</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>0/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refused Komsomol Mobilization</td>
<td>28/39</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>4/19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Origin</td>
<td>86/95</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>78/94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workplace Discipline/Corruption</td>
<td>35/51</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>23/61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appeal Period Expired</td>
<td>0/0</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>0/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>228/300</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>166/279</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Through March 1936

**The committee described, but did not categorize, the main reason for expulsion. These aggregate categories are based on my interpretation. In cases there were multiple reasons for expulsion, I chose the category that appeared to be the main factor in the case.

turned out, the district youth committee also accused the teenager of “bad behavior.” However, the case suggests that if the district committee had not found supplementary reasons for excluding him, being the child of a kulak alone was not enough to keep someone out of the Komsomol. In March 1936, the Ukrainian Komsomol received a letter from a young woman who wanted to join the Komsomol but was refused admission because of her social origin. Born in 1919 and raised an orphan, she was unsure who her grandfather was and unable to provide a certificate confirming he was not from an alien class. She argued, “I was born in the socialist epoch and was raised in its spirit. I love my motherland and could it be that because of a stupid certificate I cannot live and grow in the Komsomol?” In response, Andreev sent a letter to all district committees in Ukraine, “The Central Committee [of the Ukrainian Komsomol] demands that district committees explain to the secretaries of committees and all the aktiv that the

42 Ibid.
43 Ibid., spr. 1348, ark. 231-232.
Komsomol can admit advanced Soviet youth and not only worker and kolkhoz youth, but also white-collar workers, students and even youth verified and loyal to Soviet power whose parents are from non-worker elements.\textsuperscript{44}

Not all local organizations understood the changes that were occurring in the Komsomol organization. When Andreev held a meeting for youth secretaries of ethnic German Komsomol organizations on March 13-14, 1936, the discussion turned to membership policies. One of the local secretaries spoke about an expelled teacher whose class origin was questionable. Andreev interrupted to make the official line of the Komsomol explicit, “Now the issue stands like this: if the father of a certain Komsomol member was a kulak, you cannot always look at social origin… If he is an honest and loyal guy, why expel him? Call him [to the committee] and explain to him that he doesn’t need to hide his social origin, there’s no need to deceive the organization, if you are an honest guy, you’ll just tell us.” The local secretary had read the programmatic speeches of Komsomol leaders and was incredulous: “And leave him in the Komsomol?” Andreev: “Leave him. If he is an enemy and he came to use the Komsomol [i.e., as a careerist or an enemy] and the kolkhoz works poorly, if he is a bad teacher he should be expelled. We need to bring youth closer to us, even children of alien backgrounds. We need to make all youth, their social background notwithstanding, our Soviet youth.” The local leaders who spoke first at the meeting were skeptical about the shift. However, those who spoke last had figured out which way the winds were blowing and when Andreev asked about how they would handle class aliens, they answered appropriately; they would take into account each person’s class origin surely, but they would weigh it against their behavior.\textsuperscript{45}

\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., spr. 1075, ark. 220, 222.
\textsuperscript{45} TsDAHO, f. 7, op. 1, spr. 1344, ark. 8-9.
Moscow-based youth leaders were also concerned with using discipline to mold youth but they were less lenient than their Ukrainian colleagues. V. Ezhov (apparently not related to NKVD commissar Nikolai Ezhov), the head of the central Komsomol appeals commission, reported to youth leaders in early 1936 on its work in 1935. The commission had received 782 appeals that year. Of those, they reversed 324 and confirmed 458 expulsions. In cases where the commission reinstated the appellant, the majority (263) received some kind of reprimand—a confirmation that disciplinary measures had been warranted but were too harsh, or that the Komsomol member had since shown his or her worth. Those members appealing expulsion for passivity, degeneracy, breaking Komsomol discipline and loss of vigilance were reinstated disproportionately. Yet those charged with moving away from the party line, being class aliens and committing a state crime were removed disproportionately. In the report, Ezhov addressed cases of incorrect expulsion where paperwork had been bungled or youth were judged too harshly, but he did not address cases of accused class aliens who attempted to reenter the league, effectively approving of these expulsions with the omission. Komsomol members, especially lower-level activists, might earn their way back into the organization for minor infractions like drinking or passivity but other matters were more serious. Expulsions for hiding class origin were still permitted in the organization into 1936.\textsuperscript{46}

For the entire Komsomol, the number of expulsions fell each year from 1933 to 1936 (table 3.3)—most dramatically after 1933, the year of a major purge and document verification. For the first three quarters of 1936 the number of expulsions dropped significantly from the previous year; when extrapolated to an entire year they fell by about 40,000, a third of the total expulsions for 1935. The overall statistics suggest that ordinary organizers understood that their mission was no longer to excise unworthy members from the league but to apply pressure on

\textsuperscript{46} RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 23, d. 1178, ll. 91-97.
transgressing youth so that they improved themselves. But what about the number of expulsions of “class alien elements” and those connected with those elements? Public discourse about class aliens at the time suggests that this category of expulsion should have decreased as a proportion of total expulsions. Yet if the total number of expulsion cases for being or knowing a class alien fell, these cases made up an equal or larger proportion of the total as before.

In spite of public declarations to the contrary, the idea of class aliens and of class categories in general continued to hold currency in Soviet political practice. Class was still a factor in every membership decision, and it mattered even more when young people decided to hide their origins. To join the collective openly, children of class aliens had to unmask themselves and to disavow their parents. For thousands of young people, the stigma of being a class alien and fear of reprisals led them to hide their class origins. But within the Komsomol itself, treatment of class categories was not monolithic. Some activists and youth leaders continued to consider class origin a non-negotiable factor for entry or expulsion in the league. Yet other Komsomol leaders—Sergei Andreev of Ukraine was perhaps the most prominent example—were willing to give the best of these young people a chance and encouraged underlings to do so as well. If young people hid their class origin but were otherwise good Soviet youth, Andreev saw this as grounds for discipline but not expulsion. Even for Andreev, though, distinctions between youth from different class origins did not disappear. Youth leaders who argued for limited inclusion were forced to meditate perhaps even more on class difference as they engaged with the concept of the “best” Soviet youth.
### Table 3.3. Expulsions from the Komsomol, 1933-1936

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Violation</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1933</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breaking from the Party Line</td>
<td>20,570</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violation of Workplace Discipline</td>
<td>50,622</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unfulfilled Komsomol Obligations</td>
<td>55,206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Alien Element or Connection with the Class Enemy</td>
<td>61,026</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavioral Problems (Bytovye prostory)</td>
<td>18,461</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criminal (Ugolovnie) Acts</td>
<td>24,124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Acts</td>
<td>2,266</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Expulsions</td>
<td>249,306</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*First three quarters only.

### Conclusion:

The way the Komsomol treated class in its membership policies changed in the 1930s. League leaders and activists became more inclusive of youth from classes they had previously not favored or had outright excluded from its ranks. How Komsomol leaders defined these groups shifted in ways that allowed increased admissions to the league; children of white-collar workers were welcomed in the Komsomol while children of class aliens were cautiously accepted in small numbers. However, the increasing class base of official youth culture did not lessen the power of Soviet class categorization. In fact, Komsomol officials’ use of class categories bore similarities to the national hierarchy of the “friendship of the peoples.” Although the “friendship

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47 RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 126, d. 310, l. 29; d. 314, ll. 21, 22; d. 326, ll. 33-44; d. 336, ll. 25, 26, 28, 29-34, 35-40. On March 25, 1936, Kosarev received a report on crime among Komsomol members for 1935. In the second half of the year 402 members were arrested for murder or burglary, twenty for revenge killings (apparently this crime applied mostly to Central Asian and Caucasian republics). 2,652 for hooliganism, 1,636 for theft, 3,058 for embezzlement and speculation for a total of 7,768. RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 23, d. 1193, ll. 96-97.
of the peoples” supposedly conceived of the USSR as a union of equal but distinct ethnic groups, in practice it created a hierarchy of nations where the state-bearing Russians were preeminent.\(^{48}\) Similarly, Komsomol officials called for the best youth to enter the league regardless of class, but still saw these classes as distinct and meaningful. In practice, this friendship of the classes continued to give hereditary workers privilege and treat class aliens with suspicion and hostility.

Class categorization still mattered in the Komsomol, yet youth leaders envisioned the youth league as a school of discipline for a broader swathe of Soviet society and not an elite organization of proletarian youth. Increasingly, discipline became a means for molding young people into “cultured” Soviet citizens rather than punishing their transgressions. Class played a role here, because the scrutiny Komsomol activists and leaders paid to class aliens was especially intense. This scrutiny represented the persistence of the regime’s obsession with class on the whole. The most significant example of this fixation on class origin was the NKVD’s order no. 00447, the so-called “mass operation” that targeted dekulakized peasants among other “socially harmful elements.”\(^{49}\) Yet even for those young people with “good” class origins, entering the Komsomol in the late 1930s meant increased exposure of their work life and, increasingly, personal life to the inspection of local youth groups. Komsomol leaders and activists, too, fell under suspicion for their continued adherence to old ways of behaving and not to the “cultured”

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\(^{49}\) Police included in “socially harmful elements” supposedly hostile class groups as well former political oppositionists and recidivist criminals. See Paul Hagenloh, “‘Socially Harmful Elements’ and the Great Terror,” in Stalinism: New Directions, ed. Sheila Fitzpatrick (London: Routledge, 2000), 286-308. On the creation and classification of “socially harmful elements,” see Shearer, Policing Stalin’s Socialism, 57-63.
lives of idealized Soviet youth. In the Great Terror, their private behavior and that of rank-and-file members became a matter of public discipline.
In August 1937, the Komsomol’s Central Committee convened one of its regular plenary meetings. But this was no ordinary meeting. Over the last two months, nearly all of the highest ranking Komsomol leaders, save General Secretary Aleksandr Kosarev and a handful of others, had been removed from their positions and most arrested soon after. The purge of the Komsomol’s Central Committee occurred at the height of the Great Terror, and the youth league was not the only organization supposedly infested with secret enemies. However, what distinguished the purge in the Komsomol was its prominent public emphasis on disgraced leaders’ drinking, philandering and other displays of undesirable social behavior. At the plenum, Kosarev gave the main speech, spinning a booze-soaked web of conspiracy. Amid lurid tales of “Trotskyist drinking” he summarized, “Through drinking bouts [p’ianki] they broke down the weak-willed, they worked over and recruited followers for their efforts… We didn’t see anything suspicious in this—lifestyle is one thing and work is another. This is a fundamentally anti-party point of view. Lifestyle cannot be separate from politics—lifestyle, especially of leading Komsomol workers, is entirely political.”

The Komsomol’s purge was inseparable from the larger phenomenon of the Great Terror in 1937-38. As in the broader purge, the major purpose from the viewpoint of the Stalinist leadership was to eliminate perceived political and social enemies in an effort to enhance central

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1 RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 2, d. 133, l. 81.
2 The exact number is impossible to know. Certainly, a large number of youth was arrested during 1937-38. Among Gulag prisoners, people aged 25-29 (at the upper range of Komsomol members) made up a proportion three times the size of their proportion in society as a whole while those people aged 19-24 in the gulag made up a group whose proportions were roughly equal to that age group in the population at large. However, their Komsomol or party status is not given in the data. J. Arch Getty, Gábor T. Rittersporn and Viktor N. Zemskov, “Victims of the Soviet Penal System in the Pre-War Years: A First Approach on the Basis on Archival Evidence,” *The American Historical Review* 98, no. 4 (1993): 1025.
authority over state and social institutions. Komsomol leaders and paid organizers fell as part of regional cliques and as members of administrative patronage groups within the Komsomol. And as in the party’s purge, the charge of having a connection with an enemy of the people was the leading cause of expulsion among Komsomol activists and the rank and file. But when news of the purge appeared in the youth press and at lower-level meetings, the narrative also focused heavily on another aspect: degeneracy.

What was degeneracy? The most commonly used term in Russian was bytovoe razlozhenie (literally, “everyday corruption”) and it meant acts that included domestic violence and adultery, but above all it meant drinking. Drinking had never been exactly welcome according to the league’s official cultural norms, although it was tolerated at many levels and encouraged in some circles. In the 1920s, some local youth committees attempted to fight drinking and philandering but Sean Guillory argues their concern was with social, not political, deviance. In the party, too, alcohol abuse was an allegation leveled at members and leaders during the campaign of repression in 1937-38, as well as in previous campaigns. However, party members accused of degeneracy were removed as ballast in these purges; they were supposed scoundrels, potentially dangerous because of information they could reveal to enemies and

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4 Expulsion from the Komsomol for personal behavior was relatively rare in the early 1920s but became a more important factor in membership politics as the Komsomol set up Conflict Commissions to oversee expulsion and reinstatement. Guillory, “We Shall Refashion Life on Earth!,” 268.
because their behavior was symptomatic of bigger abuses of power. However, their degenerate behavior was not in itself considered a form of political opposition. Until the summer of 1937, Komsomol leaders handled degeneracy in the same apolitical manner as in the party. But beginning that summer, the narrative of the purge in the Komsomol came to emphasize improper behavior as politically motivated “Trotskyist degeneracy.” As J. Arch Getty writes, “Labels—really tropes—like Trotskyist were filled and refilled with content by different people at different times and used to ascribe meanings to various operations and events.” In the Komsomol of 1937, Trotskyism came to encompass drinking and other forms of degeneracy. Why at this time were supposed deviants lumped into the broader pantheon of anti-Soviet enemies in the youth league?

The politicization of degeneracy in the Komsomol’s purge was tied to the tensions created by the ongoing transformation of the league into an organization for “communist upbringing.” Although youth leaders had proclaimed in 1935 that the Komsomol would increasingly be an organization devoted to shaping the social behavior of adolescents, its ranks were still filled with “old Komsomols” or pererostki (literally those who are overgrown). As time passed, youth leaders saw a cultural disconnect between the old activists’ rough mannerisms and attitudes, and the (idealized) new Soviet youth’s adherence to “cultured” behavior. While Komsomol leaders did not target pererostki as a cohort in the purge, the campaign against “Trotskyist degeneracy” attempted to combat the cultural norms of these old activists. Local meetings and articles in the youth press about the purges cited the bad examples of youth leaders to show that alcohol abuse and other elements of degeneracy were politically charged offenses, fundamentally at odds with “communist upbringing.”

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6 Getty and Naumov, *The Road to Terror*, xiii.
From Personal Faults to Trotskyite Sabotage

The Komsomol’s purge, like the Great Purge on the whole, developed from two aspects in Soviet political life: periodic cleansing or verification [chistka or proverka] of party and Komsomol membership from 1919 onward and the party-state’s increasing use of repression following the 1934 murder of Leningrad party leader Sergei Kirov. Getty describes early party purges as “designed to weed the party of hangers-on, nonparticipants, drunken officials, and people with false identification papers.”\(^7\) The intent of party leaders was to expel members who were poor workers, were too passive or who had stolen their cards, as well as to find and root out political enemies. The motivations for party purges began to change in 1932. Although Stalin had already consolidated power and eliminated credible political opponents, he and his immediate subordinates were fearful of support among rank-and-file party members for potential oppositionists. This fear was particularly relevant because the party had from 1929 to 1933 embarked on a major membership drive, admitting members en masse whose credentials and loyalty party leaders suspected. In response to perceived support for enemies in the countryside and opposition groups in the party, its Central Committee initiated a purge of local committees in 1933. Nonetheless, this purge did not result in mass arrests or executions, and the composition of those expelled was roughly equal to previous purges of the 1920s.\(^8\) Even for Old Bolshevik oppositionists like Martemian Riutin, punishment was limited to arrest.\(^9\)

Attempting to explain the Great Terror, Evgenia Ginzburg famously said that the infamous year 1937 began in 1934 with the murder of Kirov.\(^10\) Contrary to rumors popularized under Khrushchev, Stalin almost certainly did not engineer the assassination of the Leningrad

\(^7\) Getty, Origins of the Great Purges, 38.
\(^8\) Ibid., 56.
\(^9\) Getty and Naumov, The Road to Terror, 72-73.
party chief; disgruntled former party member Leonid Nikolaev carried out the December 1
shooting after gaining access to Kirov’s office with his expired party card.\footnote{The latest scholarly work on the murder is a comprehensive document collection edited by Matthew Lenoe, *The Kirov Murder and Soviet History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010). Lenoe finds that Stalin did not engineer the murder, citing the party leadership’s uncoordinated response to the assassination and the account of a defector who had been close to the case as an NKVD worker. As Hiroki Kuromiya notes in his review of Lenoe’s work, inaccessible secret police archives would give a definitive answer but it seems all but certain that the Kirov murder was not Stalin’s conspiracy. See Kuromiya’s review in *Slavic Review* 70, no. 3 (2011): 699-700.} However, Stalin used the murder of the party leader—a crime that was soon classified by a Politburo decree as “terrorism”—to justify the use of repression against former political enemies and the population as a whole. The accusation of complicity in the Kirov murder would become one of the main charges in show trials of Stalin’s political foes like Zinov’ev and Kamenev. This campaign of repression also coincided with a previously planned verification of party documents.\footnote{According to J. Arch Getty, the assassin’s use of an expired party card to gain access to Kirov did not directly increase the importance or magnitude of the 1935 verification. Getty, *Origins of the Great Purges*, 63.} In the Komsomol, too, party and youth leaders ordered a check of documents.\footnote{Initially scheduled for 1935, Stalin pushed back the youth league’s verification to early 1936, citing the need for youth cadres to assist with the party document verification. RGASPI, f. 558, op. 11, d. 88, ll. 139-141. (Cited in R. W. Davies, Oleg Khlevniuk, E. A. Rees, Liudmila P. Kosheleva, and Larisa A. Rogovaya eds., *The Stalin-Kaganovich Correspondence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 301-302.)}

In a number of ways, the Kirov assassination and document verifications brought intense scrutiny on youth from outside their Komsomol groups and from within. Reports to the Party Control Commission on political deviance in higher education in the wake of the assassination show that party leaders doubted the political loyalty of students.\footnote{Lewis Siegelbaum and Andrei Sokolov, *Stalinism as a Way of Life: A Narrative in Documents* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 107-114.} Youth league meetings to verify documents and to discuss the show trials of oppositionists were moments where committees and peers scrutinized Komsomol youth. In early 1935, Komsomol committees at every level received a closed letter about the Kirov assassination. A report from Smolensk province from March 1935 claimed that more than 90 percent of Komsomol youth participated in meetings where the letter was read. After listening to the letter, youth organizers were invited to
speak and many used the opportunity to denounce their peers. Dozens of youth were expelled from their groups in the proceedings in Smolensk alone. The report cited several cases where young people declared their agreement with the secret letter only to be expelled when other members revealed them as having class-alien backgrounds. In other cases, young people came clean about their class-alien origin only to be thrown out of the organization. In still other cases, the provincial committee found “counterrevolutionary speeches, largely in the form of slander against party chiefs.” Provincial youth leaders did not limit their surveillance to the Komsomol itself; on one kolkhoz, they found that youth were spreading a counterrevolutionary song: “When Kirov was shot, they gave out a pood [approximately 36 pounds] of salt, when Stalin gets shot, they’ll give us two.”

Later that year when the Politburo had already made accusations against Zinov’yev and Kamenev, one youth activist working in the Commissariat of Defense said, “I don’t understand the connection between…Nikolaev and Kamenev. Maybe Nikolaev is just an idiot.” Called before the commissariat’s Komsomol bureau, he retracted the statement but the bureau expelled him; its members asserted he was politically literate and therefore his speech was “not an accident.” In August 1936, the Komsomol had a rash of expulsions from its mid-level cadres in connection to the first Moscow show trial of Zinov’yev and Kamenev. The Komsomol Central Committee demanded that all lower-level committees discuss the trials and cast out enemies who

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15 Smolensk Archive, WKP 415, 1-6. Sheila Fitzpatrick asserts that the letter about Kirov’s assassination radicalized both support and dissent for the regime, serving “as an amplifier for all the antiregime songs and rumors that had been making the rounds.” Fitzpatrick also asserts that in the countryside the letter had a special antiregime resonance because so many villagers were former Komsomol and party member who had been expelled in the 1932-33 verification and purge. Fitzpatrick, Stalin’s Peasants: Resistance and Survival in the Russian Village After Collectivization (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 292-293.  
16 RGVA, f. 9, op. 30, d. 6, ll. 1-12.
might be lurking in the organization. Activists at these meetings unmasked and expelled youth organizers of several provincial committees for their connections with enemies of the people.17

Although the Kirov assassination and its fallout dominated expulsions from the Komsomol in 1935-36, problems with drinking in provincial committees had also come to the attention of the league’s leaders in late 1936. In August, an instructor from the Komsomol Central Committee investigated the Voronezh provincial organization and discovered that its secretary, Mikhail Grubman, and various other youth leaders were organizing drunken parties. The Komsomol’s initial punishment was a strong reprimand and threat of removal should the debauchery continue. Only in October of that same year did Kosarev order the removal of Grubman and his entourage from their positions. In removing Grubman, though, the main charge was that he had cultivated a political family that had a stranglehold on the province’s youth affairs. The drunken parties were troubling but mostly because they were symptomatic of a political offense—“familyness” and abuse of power.18 The accusation of “familyness” was not limited to the Komsomol and, Arch Getty asserts, it had become a major basis for purges in the party, especially as central leaders began to attack provincial political families.19

Komsomol leaders became embroiled in the broader party purge as central party leaders turned their attention from former Bolshevik leaders to political cliques in the provinces. NKVD chairman Nikolai Ezhov first targeted the leaders of the Azov-Chernomor region’s party. A number of leaders in the region were removed and then arrested, including youth secretary Konstantin Erofitskii, whom the Komsomol Central Committee removed in November 1936 for “connections with enemies of the people.” As Gerald Easter asserts, this purge was the first

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17 RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 23, d. 1172, ll. 1-7.
18 “Ser’eznoe preduprezhdenie,” Izvestiia TsK VLKSM, no. 18 (1936): 12-14; RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 23, d. 1172, ll. 18-50.
move in a wider campaign by Stalin’s Moscow leadership group to dismantle regional political families. Erofitskii belonged to the Rostov-based political family of Azov-Chernomor party chief Boris Sheboldaev. Although Ezhov did not yet level charges at Sheboldaev himself, the arrest of his bureaucratic network undercut the latter’s ability to defend against removal and eventual arrest in future party meetings.\textsuperscript{20} The purge of Sheboldaev’s clients had far-reaching consequences because each of these administrators was a patron of their own bureaucratic sub-family. When Erofitskii came under suspicion in the “Rostov affair,” the Komsomol Central Committee dismantled his network of youth organizers in the province.

At the April-May 1937 plenum of the Komsomol Central Committee, youth leaders discussed the supposed infiltration of their organization with enemies and the Erofitskii case in particular. Some Komsomol leaders wondered aloud who else might be connected with Erofitskii. The head of the Far East region’s youth committee, Cherniavskii, recalled that initially Erofitskii had been part of Komsomol secretary Sergei Saltanov’s administrative circle: “Comrade Saltanov had [Erofitskii] right in front of him—his sense of vigilance failed.” He hinted that Saltanov, present at the meeting, might be suspect. Yet Cherniavskii also wondered more broadly where the trail of enemies would end, “If I promote a secretary of a district committee who turns out to be an enemy, they will criticize me for that, especially with today’s criticism. If you send an enemy to the district committee to be secretary, you will be criticized.”\textsuperscript{21} Vigilance in the Rostov case and elsewhere led Komsomol leaders to press their underlings to find out exactly who were enemies. Iakov Geiro, the new secretary of the Dnepropetrovsk provincial committee, came under fire for suggesting that these demands and the resulting removals were causing a panic.

\textsuperscript{20} Sheboldaev was later arrested in short succession with other regional leaders in June 1937. He was executed on October 30, 1937. See Easter, \textit{Reconstructing the State}, 156
\textsuperscript{21} RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 2, d. 126, l. 108.
Geiro: [Petr] Vershkov [Komsomol secretary for organizational issues] helped us a great deal in Dnepropetrovsk from the point of view of self-criticism, but we don’t need to create unnecessary panic… The telephone rings on the third day after I started the position… Comrade Vershkov comes on the receiver: How many [district-level workers] did you let go [osvobodili]? I inform him, eleven people for the following reasons. The next day again a call…again, how many did you let go? The same number that I told you yesterday. This isn’t the way to work…

Vershkov: Not how many but whom.

Geiro: Pozdniakov [another youth leader in Dnepropetrovsk] was there, I gave him the receiver to talk to Comrade Vershkov and tell him how work is going with us. “We need to work further on unmasking Trotskyite elements.”

Kosarev: Where is the panic here?

Geiro: Comrade Kosarev, doesn’t it seem like panic when we get a call every day asking how many?

Kosarev: Is that the case…? Well we must excuse ourselves that you are so nervous… There is no panic. And panic is beside the matter. Your speech is incorrect… Each Komsomol member should be raised in the spirit of intolerance toward un-Soviet elements [k ne sovetskim elementam] and every hour, every day be wary of this matter. Where is the panic, have you lost your mind?  

Komsomol leaders’ demands for vigilance were so extreme that they had begun to cause panic among underlings. However, the search for enemies was based on alleged connections to

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22 Ibid., d. 130, l. 68.
other disgraced figures, not on inappropriate social behavior. During the April-May 1937 plenum, Kosarev, perhaps to give an idea of the kinds of workers who should be removed, profiled some of Erofitskii’s fallen subordinates. One of these activists received special attention. This organizer’s notorious sexual exploits earned him the nickname “the Pulverizer” [pul’virizator]. Like the arch villain of an Agatha Christie novel, Kosarev said the Pulverizer was “frighteningly smart” but “in a fog of degeneracy.” He had lived with eleven different women at various times and even caused one to attempt suicide. He also had a venereal disease and had “infected many.” After Kosarev described his misdeeds, the Komsomol chief claimed that the Azov-Chernomor youth committee had removed him for his poor work and sexual behavior: “We removed for the following: for hostile methods of leadership, for the disintegration of the [district] organization and for sexual debauchery.”

Erofitskii’s replacement as secretary of the Azov-Chernomor youth committee secretary disputed these charges. As he recalled, the Komsomol and party removed the Pulverizer initially for degeneracy and then he was arrested for being an enemy of the people as one of Erofitskii’s collaborators. At the next session of the plenum Kosarev revealed that the Pulverizer had also been the son of a prerevolutionary gendarme. For rank-and-file members, this revelation would have made it difficult (but possible) for them to remain in the league; however, as a district youth leader, the Pulverizer’s deception was a serious offense. As in the earlier case of Voronezh leader Grubman’s alcohol abuse, Komsomol leaders certainly frowned upon the Pulverizer’s sexual deviance but they treated it as a social transgression, not an act of political opposition like his connection to Erofitskii or his origin. In short, Komsomol leaders and organizers in the initial stages of the Great Purge inhabited the same realm of political discourse as other

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23 Ibid., d. 126, l.39; d. 127, l. 6.
administrators. They faced intense scrutiny but it centered primarily on their political connections.

Later during the April-May 1937 plenum, party Central Committee secretary Andrei Andreev gave youth leaders a mixed message on vigilance. At once he urged Komsomol leaders to find more enemies among Komsomol cadres but also to show understanding with the rank and file. He cited the number of enemies already uncovered in the organization (forty in district organizations alone) as proof that more must be lurking. However, he urged Komsomol leaders to expel fewer rank-and-file members. He claimed that the figure from 1936 for expulsions (by Andreev’s calculation, approximately 80,000) was too large and that this even was probably an incomplete figure. Kosarev interrupted to say that some of the expulsions were surely of members who were removed “mechanically”—automatically based on their inactivity or age. Dismissing this explanation, Andreev replied, “Things are, I think, very bad with expulsions.” The party secretary went on to say that expulsion was meant to be an “extreme measure” and that lesser forms of discipline (like reprimands) should be used to mold youth. Andreev reiterated an important facet of the Komsomol’s turn inward—that discipline was to mold and not to punish. Moreover, his statement was important as a reminder that even when “mercilessly” searching for enemies in the organization, rank-and-file offenders were not the primary targets.²⁴

In the spring and summer of 1937, Stalin’s leadership group expanded its targets among bureaucratic cliques in the party and state bureaucracy. The NKVD arrested prominent Red Army leaders in May and many provincial party heads in the early summer. The first major wave of arrests among Komsomol leaders and cadres came in July. Stalin seems to have initiated the expulsion and arrest of Komsomol Central Committee figures. Among others they included: Dmitrii Lukianov (second secretary), Sergei Saltanov (secretary for education), Sergei

²⁴ RGASPI, f. 73, op. 2, d. 40, ll. 32-34.
Andreev (secretary and Ukrainian youth leader), Evegenii Fainberg (secretary for the youth press), plus Vasiliii Chemodanov (head of the Soviet delegation to the Communist International of Youth), Vladimir Bubekin (editor of Komsomol’skaia Pravda) and Ivan Kharchenko (chair of the Soviet sports committee and member of the Komsomol Central Committee). Tatiana Vasil’eva (secretary for women’s affairs) was also soon removed from her post, though apparently not arrested. Kosarev, Vershkov and Valentina Pikina (secretary for internal discipline) were the only Komsomol secretaries not removed.

In connection with these arrests, on July 17 Kosarev sent Ezhov and Stalin a list of eleven additional high-ranking Komsomol central and provincial workers, including Pioneer leader Vasiliii Muskin. He accused these youth organizers of maintaining relationships with enemies of the people, primarily Saltanov and Bubekin.\(^{25}\) Apparently the list was too short. In an article on Kosarev published after 1991, Pikina recalled that Stalin summoned the three remaining secretaries plus newly-appointed Osoaviakhim head Pavel Gorshenin (former Komsomol secretary for military affairs, a friend and ally of Kosarev) to discuss the search for enemies. Kosarev claimed that he had no materials to show that other youth leaders were enemies of the people. Stalin countered that Kosarev was simply unwilling to denounce underlings and insisted that the Komsomol leadership unmask more enemies. Pikina described Kosarev’s bleak reaction to the meeting, “He told us that he could hardly understand how such a number of enemies suddenly appeared in our country.”\(^{26}\) Nonetheless, Kosarev suppressed whatever private doubts he may have held and called for an intensification of vigilance in the Komsomol.

In August 1937, Kosarev made a public announcement on the purge of his colleagues where he introduced the phrase “lifestyle cannot be separate from politics.” There, unlike the

\(^{25}\) RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 23, d. 1211, ll. 70-71.
discussions of the Erofitskii or Grubman cases, the justification for the purge of Komsomol leaders was not only their connections with enemies of the people but their alcohol abuse. Saltanov was the supposed leader of the Komsomol’s Trotskyites. According to Kosarev, he had been recruited into the “united Trotskyite-Zinov’evite rightist organization” by former Komsomol leader Lazar Shatskin. Like many of the accusations in the Great Terror, inevitably the alleged conspiracy led back to major figures like Trotsky, Zinov’ev and Kamenev.\(^\text{27}\) The main charge in the youth organization purge, though, was that enemies used alcohol as their weapon of choice. Saltanov recruited co-conspirators in the Komsomol at drunken parties in their apartments where alcohol served as a lubricant for anti-Soviet discussions. New recruits used the same tactic and the opposition group flourished.\(^\text{28}\) Kosarev, a product of the radical proletarian Komsomol of the 1920s, had something of a reputation as a drinker and defended himself in a speech at the plenum entitled, “My Drinking Bouts” [\textit{Moi vypivki}]. His speech is available today in outline form only but presumably he explained his own history of drinking, particularly with enemies of the people; the outline of this speech was a mere list of seven names—all recently purged Komsomol and party figures.\(^\text{29}\)

As Kosarev examined the problem of “Trotskyite degeneracy,” he characterized it not only as an issue of degenerate and sober youth, but of old and new cadres. He contrasted older, amoral cadres with good, “cultured” youth, “We have a number of young, healthy people, brought up by Soviet power, people living normal lives, people whose heads spin after a shot [of vodka] when they fall into the wrong company, but there are also those old men like Chemodanov who you couldn’t satisfy with a whole barrel.”\(^\text{30}\) This cultural divide was not only

\(^{27}\) RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 2, d. 133, l. 79
\(^{28}\) Ibid., l. 81.
\(^{29}\) Ibid., l. 94.
\(^{30}\) Ibid., ll. 55-56.
a matter of debauchery. The young rank and file that Kosarev envisioned had little in common with the adult organizers in the youth league. Instead of attending “clubs, theaters, sporting facilities” and generally leading “the life that young people live,” he claimed that many older organizers had become distant from the ordinary youth, “The wives of the leading workers are like sanovniks [a term for high-ranking Imperial officials], who do not consort with rank-and-file Komsomol members, and if they deign to make an appearance, then they are grand dames.”

While some organizers had become political enemies, others had simply failed to become the kind of organizers that could implement “communist upbringing” in schools and in the daily lives of youth.

The accusation of “Trotskyite degeneracy” represented a politicization of what was before undesirable but apolitical behavior. And it was more than a trumped-up accusation, a charge amongst dozens of other allegations as was common in the Great Purge; the charge of degeneracy, especially of excessive drinking, was at the center of the Komsomol’s purge. However, the issue of supposed degeneracy also reflected the changing dynamics of work among youth, intensified by the search for enemies in the Great Purge. The allegation of degenerate practices among youth leaders mirrored a broader disconnect between the old style of Komsomol activism and the idealized youth league of “communist upbringing.” Radical activists in the 1920s had adhered to a rougher, hyper-masculine set of behavioral norms; then, as Sean Guillory writes, an “ethical” league member’s drinking was “somewhere in the middle between teetotaler and drunkard.”

The Komsomol’s purge had turned this element of the culture of activism into a political crime. And this conflict was not just a symbolic question of old and new culture. The

31 RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 2, d. 133, ll. 53.
32 Guillory, “We Shall Refashion Life on Earth!,” 24.
old activist culture within the Komsomol coincided with the actual aging of activists, the so-called pererostki.

“Age Has a Political Meaning”: Pererostki and the Culture of Youth Activism

Immediately after the August 1937 Komsomol purge plenum, Kosarev held a closed meeting for provincial youth secretaries. In the wake of mass repression, dozens of organizers would soon assume new positions in provincial youth committees and, beneath them, hundreds would take up new posts in district and municipal youth committees. Addressing the issue of promotion, Kosarev said, “Age [vozrast] has a political meaning, but our task is to fulfill our function—the preparation of cadres for administering various sectors of our country. We need to promote new and young people more boldly… We must uncork the stoppage that we have now in the question of cadres.” Kosarev’s statement reflected a tension in the league that had existed since 1935. Youth organizers—blocked from promotion into the party—were becoming older and older in the Komsomol. They themselves blocked junior colleagues from gaining new positions. But more than this, pererostki represented a culture of rough, proletarian activism that was no longer current in the Komsomol. At the same time, experience still mattered; older organizers were valuable assets, often heroes of the Stalin revolution. Age had a political meaning, but not the one that Kosarev meant. As pererostki grew as a cohort, their presence in the youth league became more noticeable, more out of place with the culture of youth activism and more problematic for Kosarev and other youth leaders.

Since 1933 the Komsomol had steadily aged. In youth organizations, like any age-defined association, the average age of members should stay relatively stable from year to year; as new, young cohorts of members come in, the oldest cohorts leave. But if, for example, no

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33 RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 5, d. 41, l. 26.
members left an organization and no new members joined, after a year the average age would increase by one year through the natural aging of its members. Although this example represents an extreme, something like this had begun to happen in the Komsomol in 1933. Then, promotion into the party had been effectively cut off. Like the Komsomol, the party in 1933 had removed a large number of members in purges and document checks. Accompanying these document checks was a moratorium on admission of new members, meaning that older Komsomol members from 1933 onward had enjoyed little or no chance of joining the party. With no way of graduating into the party, these pererostki had little reason to give up advantages that membership in the youth organization provided. The presence of pererostki and limitations on adolescent admissions meant that the average age of youth league members rose steadily.  

By 1935 the mean age of members had advanced more than a full year from two years before (see table 4.1). Besides rank-and-file members, local youth leaders had aged. In rural youth committees the vast majority of secretaries—possibly more than 90 percent—had exceeded the Komsomol age of twenty-three (see table 4.2). Among youth leaders with voting rights at the Tenth Komsomol Congress in 1936, only 14.5 percent were younger than twenty-three. By way of contrast, 42.7 percent of the voting delegates at the Ninth Komsomol Congress in 1931 had been younger than twenty-three. It is possible that when Komsomol leaders increased the maximum age for new members to twenty-six in 1936, they did so to reflect the reality that many members were well over the previous age limit of twenty-three. At all levels, the Komsomol had become older as the senior cohort remained in the organization.

35 In the Komsomol the age limits were 14-23 until the Tenth Komsomol Congress in 1936 and 15-26 after. Members over the age limit could remain in the organization as elected leaders (with a vote) or in an advisory capacity (without a vote).
Table 4.1: Average Age of Komsomol Membership

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Est. avg</th>
<th>Old avg</th>
<th>Young avg</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1933</td>
<td>4,547,186</td>
<td>19.36</td>
<td>20.20</td>
<td>17.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1934</td>
<td>3,750,975</td>
<td>20.00</td>
<td>20.80</td>
<td>18.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1935</td>
<td>3,531,893</td>
<td>20.60</td>
<td>21.35</td>
<td>19.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1937</td>
<td>3,873,072</td>
<td>21.75</td>
<td>23.88</td>
<td>21.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1938</td>
<td>4,375,604</td>
<td>21.71</td>
<td>24.07</td>
<td>20.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1939</td>
<td>7,296,135</td>
<td>20.80</td>
<td>22.95</td>
<td>20.03</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*All on January 1

Table 4.2: Secretaries of Rural Komsomol District Committees, September 1935

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of Birth (age)</th>
<th>Year of Joining Komsomol</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1904 (30-31)</td>
<td>1919</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1905-1907 (27-30)</td>
<td>1920-1923</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1908-1909 (25-27)</td>
<td>1924-1926</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910-1912 (22-25)</td>
<td>1929-1930</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1913-1914 (20-22)</td>
<td>1931</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The decision to stay in the youth organization had not been a happy one for some *pererostki*. Those who wanted to leave the organization often felt they had nowhere else to go. In October 1934 *Komsomol’skaia Pravda* printed a letter from Petr Meleshko, a Komsomol organizer who wrote that he was too old to be in the Komsomol but with too little experience or connections outside the organization to do anything else. To make matters worse, leaders from regional party and Komsomol organizations had pigeonholed him as a Komsomol worker to whom they could assign only tasks related to youth. He complained, “At thirty years old it is very, very difficult for me to be a Komsomol organizer…Give me a chance either to get

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37 The youth organization gathered data about the age of its members based on groupings (e.g., seventeen and younger) making it difficult to estimate an average age for each group. This problem is particularly troublesome for the group “twenty-three and older” (1933-1936) and “twenty-six and older” as a sizeable group of members stayed in the organization well into their thirties. I compiled an estimate by averaging the age categories (e.g., 22-23 became 22.5) and making a reasonable guess about the average age for members over twenty-six (twenty-eight years old). The oldest and youngest averages use the oldest and youngest age, respectively, of each category. RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 126, d. 336, ll. 6, 18-23; d. 344, ll. 16-17; d. 358, ll. 42-43.

38 RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 126, d. 326.
Meleshko’s problem was not only a lack of opportunity but an unwillingness to do the tasks the Komsomol required. A picture accompanying Meleshko’s letter featured the “old man” of the Komsomol—a caricature of an activist as the biblical Moses who carried the commandments “do not stroll; do not play; do not dance.” These commandments were in line with the austere, radical activism of the late 1920s but not the conception of vospitanie that emerged in the mid-1930s. In the newspaper’s discussion that followed the article in the succeeding weeks, an Aleksandr Frenkel’ from Kharkov wrote “to confirm that those like Petr Meleshko are more than a few.” Another Komsomol worker, V. Dubtsov wrote to say that Meleshko was wrong in thinking that a Komsomol worker should not be thirty years old. However, if these older activists were unwilling to work with young people, he said, that was a problem indeed. Age itself was not always the issue. Rather it was the ability of older organizers to adapt themselves to the changing landscape of youth activism. Pererostki had experienced vospitanie in the radical milieu of the Komsomol, on the factory floor and as activists in the Stalin revolution. Now that they were asked to mold “cultured” Soviet citizens, many pererostki were ready to move out of the league.

Komsomol organizers themselves had become worried about the prospects of the pererostki as early as 1935. At a meeting of Ukrainian Komsomol secretaries in higher education in April of that year, the youth secretary of the Odessa Medical Institute expressed concern about the growing disillusionment among pererostki. Because they could not join the party, he claimed

39 “‘Nedorazumenie istorii,’” Komsomol’skaia Pravda, 3 October 1934, 3.
40 The image is also remarkable for its depicting the Komsomol organizer as a Jew. In part, this depiction shows that, like Moses, the cartoon organizer carries tablets with commandments. However, the cartoon also owes something to the heritage of antisemitic caricatures in the Imperial Russian and Soviet press. As Robert Weinberg writes in his article on the images of Jews in the early Soviet press that the depiction was different from anti-religious imagery overall: “The depictions of observant Jews and their god, however, make one wonder whether the artists believed that ordinary Soviet Jews were redeemable.” Here, too, the image of a Jew-as-Komsomol-organizer showed the pererostki Komsomol organizer to be set and unchangeable in his ways. Robert Weinberg, “Demonizing Judaism in the Soviet Union during the 1920s,” Slavic Review 77, no. 1 (2008): 149.
41 “‘Komsomol’skie starichki’ ili starye komsomol’tsy,” Komsomol’skaia Pravda, 15 October 1934, 5.
that the ninety or more pererostki at the institute were “literally without prospects.” At the Tenth Komsomol Congress in 1936, Aleksandr Bubnov, head of Russia’s Narkompros, had expressed concern over those he termed “eternal counselors”—pioneer workers who never left their jobs because of lack of opportunities. Pressure from below was enough that Nikolai Ezhov, then chair of the Party Control Commission, had been forced to address the issue in a December 1935 speech: “[It is] incorrect when some party and Komsomol organizations raise the question of mass admission to the party of Komsomol members, connected with the presence of a large number of so-called pererostki in the Komsomol.” For many Komsomol members, party membership seemed like the next natural step in their development as Soviet citizens and in their careers. Ezhov maintained that this opinion created the unrealistic expectation that every Komsomol member would eventually get into the party. This expectation had in turn created disillusionment among Komsomol members who felt that their political life had sputtered out. For some aging youth members, it seemed as though they faced a dead end.

By 1937 the issue of pererostki had become a pressing and embarrassing problem for youth leaders. In January of that year, the average age of its members was 21.8 years old, more than two years older than the average from 1933 (see table 4.1). The demographic and cultural challenge pererostki posed made them a contentious issue at Komsomol Central Committee’s April-May 1937 plenum. For provincial youth leaders, the divide between pererostki and younger members had begun to present practical problems for youth work. A provincial youth secretary named Legorenko claimed that nearly a third of his organization was older than twenty-six: “The Central Committee [of the Komsomol] needs to resolve this question so that they [pererostki] don’t stop our work, because some youth look at pererostki and don’t want to join

42 TsDAHO, f. 7, op. 1, spr. 1247, ark. 131.
43 RGASPI, f. 6m, op. 10, d. 9, ll. 55, 57.
us. There are some cases where the divide in the organization is from fifteen to thirty-three years old, no less a divide than between a mother and daughter.” Legorenko’s hypothetical situation pointed out vividly the kind of separation that could exist between two members. Would young people want to join a Komsomol group if its oldest members were the contemporaries of their parents? Iosif Vaishlia, the head of the Leningrad Komsomol, raised other concerns. He maintained that older members were a particularly large problem in factory committees where many pererostki were casting ballots in Komsomol elections despite regulations that only allowed them to have an advisory role.

Kosarev, too, was worried about the aging of the Komsomol. He laid out a case against pererostki activists at the plenum:

There are a number of secretaries in district and municipal committees who are approximately thirty-two years old and have been in the district organization five to seven years… They have become a stoppage [probka] of sorts. (Voice: Correct) And therefore in connection with the upcoming elections, we need to take measures to uncork the stoppage [probku dolzhny otkuborit’], to move a whole range of people in order to promote a new, young aktiv, politically reliable and loyal to our party. We must do this. I have become aware of a number of occasions when these secretaries, “young greybeards” [molodye starichki], if we can call them that, they have lost their connection with Komsomol members. They have stopped looking after Komsomol members and have joined the circle of the chair of the district executive committee, the secretary of the district party, economic administrators…We need to uncork the stoppage, especially because

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45 RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 2, d. 130, l. 24.
46 Ibid., d. 129, ll. 129.
we have many new people growing, young people who are verified and energetic.\textsuperscript{47}

Here, Kosarev seemed to call for the reassignment—or potentially the forced removal—of *pererostki*. Yet he was not addressing the question of rank-and-file *pererostki* but of lower-level youth leaders. In part, the problem with these *pererostki* activists was the same as all entrenched bureaucrats; they had become members of bureaucratic families whose stranglehold on local power Stalinist leaders hoped to end in the purge. But Kosarev was also addressing the cultural disconnect between these youth organizers and their constituency among youth. Kosarev argued that these local leaders had to go because they had become alienated from ordinary members. As they left, Kosarev asserted that the vacuum would in turn allow younger cadres to take their place.

Komsomol leaders saw *pererostki* as a problem, but there was no quick solution. Kosarev associated *pererostki* activists with local bureaucratic families but he was ambivalent about—and even defended—the aging rank and file. In contrast, provincial leaders saw rank-and-file *pererostki* as a major problem for local committees in their regions. Just after the April-May 1937 plenum, provincial secretaries asked Kosarev for a definitive policy on *pererostki* but he defensively refused to issue a resolution. When Leningrad’s youth leader Vaishlia continued to pursue Kosarev on the matter of *pererostki* the general secretary snapped, “We don’t have *pererostki* because the Komsomol keeps them in its ranks… Why don’t they leave? It is hard to get into the party, and many of them will not be admitted… The Komsomol gives them the opportunity to live a political life, a party life.”\textsuperscript{48}

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., ll. 183-184.
\textsuperscript{48} RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 5, d. 38, l. 55.
To the chagrin of provincial Komsomol leaders, Kosarev would continue to defend older members. In September 1938, Komsomol leaders met to discuss the ongoing exchange of Komsomol cards. Like all Soviet document verifications and exchanges, this exchange was not only a bureaucratic operation but a means of checking on current members and removing them in some cases. One provincial secretary, Katkov, the youth secretary from Kuibyshev province, wanted to know what to do with older members. Could older Komsomol members give up their membership? Kosarev interpreted the question to mean that Katkov wanted to remove pererostki or allow local committees to do so as part of the document exchange. He replied in the negative, “Politically it is incorrect.” Later in the meeting Kosarev returned to the question, “I have to warn you that the desire to get rid of pererostki exists primarily among the leading activists and secretaries in the districts. But we are not talking about individuals, but rather about 876,000. Therefore the C[entral] C[ommittee] categorically warns against any attempt to remove pererostki.”

Kosarev and provincial youth leaders both viewed pererostki as a demographic problem for the Komsomol. For provincial leaders, the large numbers of aging rank-and-file members was an obstacle for the daily workings of the committees they oversaw. How could they make adolescents and adults coexist in local organizations? Central statistics of expulsions from the Komsomol show that pererostki were disproportionately among those removed in 1937-38 (see table 4.3). Members who were twenty-four or older made up roughly 30 percent of the Komsomol throughout 1937-38, yet in those years they accounted for nearly half of all expulsions. Pererostki and the older cohort of Komsomol members were the leading groups facing repression in the youth league. But why was this age cohort the target of the purge?

49 RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 2, d. 147, ll. 32, 33, 36.
Table 4.3 Expulsion of Komsomol Members Age Twenty-Four and Older\textsuperscript{50}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>1937</th>
<th>1938</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Q1</td>
<td>Q2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Expulsions</td>
<td>21,219</td>
<td>13,743</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expulsions: &gt;25 years old</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expelled</td>
<td>4,912</td>
<td>3,224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of total expelled</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Membership: &gt;26 years old</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>548,300</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expelled over proportion</td>
<td>164%</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expulsions: 24-25 years old</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expelled</td>
<td>4,222</td>
<td>2,644</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of total expelled</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Membership 24-26 years old</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>627,900</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expelled over proportion</td>
<td>123%</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Larger proportions of *pererostki* were expelled than other age groups, but it was not because Kosarev and central Komsomol leaders demanded their removal as a cohort. Kosarev’s policy on over-age Komsomol members was ambiguous, reflecting the unclear position of *pererostki* in the league. He recognized the problem that *pererostki* presence created, yet he defended them against provincial secretaries who wanted to push out the large numbers of old Komsomol members.\(^5^1\) Kosarev gave only hints in speeches as to why he protected *pererostki*. It appears he was primarily motivated by the belief and hope that this cohort would soon have the chance to be promoted into the party. *Pererostki* were old for the Komsomol but they were still young among the adult population. The moratorium on admission of new party members had lifted officially in November 1936, and it seemed that older Komsomol members might soon join the party. Indeed, older Komsomol members represented excellent candidates to become the junior cohort of party administrators.

Kosarev perhaps thought that the Komsomol’s age problem would take care of itself; if *pererostki* could have a “political life” outside of the Komsomol, they would probably stop participating actively in the league or even leave its ranks. Moreover, the group of the late 1920s and early 1930s was his cohort of Komsomol youth. After all, Kosarev was a thirty-four-year-old in the Komsomol and was technically one of the *pererostki* himself. The older cohort of Komsomol members was a major pillar of support for Kosarev—both now and perhaps later as it graduated into the party. *Pererostki* were problematic in the immediate term but were valuable to Kosarev and to the regime for their potential as young elites. For these reasons, Kosarev insisted that age alone was not a reason to remove someone from the league.

It seems that the problem of *pererostki* was not primarily the demographic quandary they posed but the related cultural challenge they embodied. Not only was the age difference between

\(^{51}\) RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 126, d. 358, ll. 25-26.
a young and old Komsomol member large, but the lifestyle of those two cohorts was different. *Pererostki* represented an older type of activist culture, one tied to the rough and radical proletarian milieu of the cultural revolution. When Kosarev attacked aging youth activists who were a “cork” in the bottle of promoting junior organizers, he first referred to their place in bureaucratic families; the age and experience of *pererostki* in general made them more likely to hold responsible positions in the Komsomol and elsewhere, to be members of bureaucratic cliques and therefore to be targets in the purge more generally. However, as Kosarev critiqued older activists for “familiness,” he also cited the perceived cultural rift of these activists from ordinary youth (or the regime’s aspirations for these youth). The anti-degeneracy campaign in the Komsomol’s Great Purge and many of the anxieties about *pererostki* arose from the same broader concerns about the culture of youth activism. When youth groups removed *pererostki* in local organizations, the pretext for expulsion was never their age. Instead, as youth groups conducted meetings meant to root out enemies, they made the drinking and rough manners characteristic of the *pererostki* cohort (but not exclusive to older activists) a matter of public debate.

**Drunks or Degenerates? Reactions from Below**

After the Komsomol Central Committee’s purge plenum in August 1937, the work of ordinary youth groups was consumed by discussions about the disgraced youth leaders. Activists looked to the press and to superiors in the league for signals for how to handle the topic. In meetings dedicated to the plenum, talk centered on the need to unmask hidden enemies who lurked in the league. Typically it was in the course of these meetings that supposed enemies were unmasked, often in the person of paid Komsomol organizers. In local youth committees, the discussions
about enemies often shifted to the ways that degeneracy, especially alcoholism, could lead people to become compromised and knowingly or unknowingly aid enemies. Echoing central leaders’ denunciations of degeneracy as a form of political opposition, they also emphasized that excessive drinking, spousal abuse and promiscuity were elements of the old culture of Komsomol activism. Yet when the attention of youth groups turned toward wayward individuals in their midst, they alleged frequently that these young people were not actual enemies but were simply weak or bored. Rather than excising youth from the league, lower-level activists and ordinary youth more often used the purge of so-called “Trotskyist degenerates” as a way to reform their transgressing peers.

These meetings built on existing disciplinary practices in the Komsomol. Even before August 1937, youth committees had begun to insert themselves into the home lives of youth through membership discipline. The youth committees of the Commissariat of Defense were particularly vigilant in monitoring drinking and womanizing. In one case from November 1936, a group organizer and his roommate, also a league member, came home late after a night of drinking and began to sing loudly, waking up the neighbors. A few days later, a member of the commissariat’s youth bureau went to their apartment personally and spoke to the neighbors, who said that the two were debauched and that the swearing from the apartment was so loud that they had to hide the children. Additionally, the neighbors claimed that the two drank with women, one of whom was the wife of a former Red Army commander who had been recently removed as an enemy. The second young man dismissed the charges as a private dispute with the neighbors: “I didn’t want to get married to my neighbor’s relative and now they are accusing me of a bunch of misdeeds.” A member of the bureau disagreed, saying, “Now you are being accused of drinking and debauchery, not of an aversion to getting married to someone.” In the end, though,
the youth bureau only removed the organizer from his post and gave both young men reprimands but did not expel either.52

In another case from late 1936, the bureau interviewed a man who had “in a drunken state at the train station, behaved unlike a Komsomol member.” After he drank four mugs of beer, he got into an argument with railroad security that escalated until Moscow police arrested him. It was not the first time the Komsomol had punished him for drinking, either. On previous occasions he had promised to mend his ways. His local organization wanted to expel him, one activist saying, “Comrade R. promised…to be a disciplined komsomolets. He did not meet this promise and deceived the Komsomol organization.” Yet Comrade R. asked for leniency, citing his excellent work record and the youth bureau agreed, reducing his punishment to a reprimand.53

The Commissariat of Defense youth organization also intervened in the sexual and family lives of its members. One young man was summoned to the youth bureau in October 1936 because he “live[d] with many girls, telling each he would marry them and lying to all.” One of the young women testified against him but the young man claimed that she entrapped him and that, in any case, he had just gotten married. A week later the committee checked his marital status, revealing that the young man had lied: “He never proposed to anyone and he has different women each day.” For degeneracy and deception, they removed him from the Komsomol.54

The same youth bureau in December 1936 took on a case of spousal abuse by a Comrade F., a lower-level organizer. Earlier his wife came to see the Komsomol: “[She was] all bruised up and said that [he] bullies her, beats her, comes home late and doesn’t help with anything at

52 RGVA, f. 9, op. 30, d. 8, ll. 19-21; d. 81, ll. 261-262.
53 Ibid., ll. 7-10; d. 9, ll. 32-33, 34. In cases that involve accusations of behavioral misconduct that were not on public record, I have opted to conceal the person’s name. The pseudonym I am using for each person is internally consistent—that is, Comrade R. is the same throughout the dissertation.
54 Ibid., ll. 8-18, 19-22.
home, although she has been sick since she gave birth.” Zhuravleva, a member of the youth bureau, checked out the home and reported that living conditions were not good. Comrade F.’s wife could not improve things at home because she and her child were constantly ill. She had threatened to kill herself and the child if things did not get better. Comrade F.’s direct Komsomol superior, Zlotin vouched for him based on his record at work and in the Komsomol, but lamented, “It turns out that at home he does not behave like a Komsomol member.” Comrade F. defended himself by arguing that his wife nagged him constantly and believed he was having an affair, although he said he was working late on Komsomol business. “More than that,” he said, “at [Komsomol] meetings we raise political questions but we do not study living people. I asked Zlotin to raise the question of learning about living people, at least about me, but nothing came of it.” The members of the bureau came to the conclusion that Comrade F. could no longer be a youth organizer but needed to be in the Komsomol all the more so it could help him and his family. He was relieved of his post but not of membership in the league.55

All four cases demonstrate that even before 1937, youth organizers believed their role was to intervene in the lives of youth. In all the cases, the offender escaped expulsion if he confessed to the misdeed, had proved himself as a worker or organizer and promised to improve his behavior in the future. Youth officials implied that expelling redeemable young people who were guilty of wrongs was irresponsible because they would then be beyond of the corrective measures of the Komsomol. Only in the case of the womanizer who refused to come forward about his relationships did the organization expel the young man. Most notable in these cases, though, was that the committees attempted to correct social rather than political deviance. They accused wayward young people of not acting like a Komsomol member but did not accuse them of consciously attempting to undermine Soviet rule.

55 RGVA, f. 9, op. 30, d. 8, l. 4.
After the August purge plenum, drinking and other forms of degeneracy took on a new, politically charged meaning. Central youth leaders made a concerted effort to ensure degeneracy would be discussed in lower-level youth committees. The resolution from the plenum, entitled “On the work of enemies in the Komsomol,” was to set the agenda for meetings in local Komsomol groups. Before the youth press published the final version, party secretaries Andreev and Andrei Zhdanov (who alongside Lazar Kaganovich and Georgii Malenkov had attended the plenum) received copies to edit. Zhdanov made a special note beside the item in the resolution addressing questions of degeneracy in the Komsomol, writing that it was “weak.” The note implied that Zhdanov considered degeneracy to be an important aspect of the public presentation of the youth organization’s purge and that it needed to be forcefully written into the resolution.56

Just after the August plenum, the Komsomol Central Committee sent instructors to the provinces to lead meetings about the purge. Before they left, Kosarev held an instructional session where he underlined the importance of the anti-degeneracy message in these meetings: “We will lead or prepare conferences and there will again be a danger that [activists will say] those drinking bouts happen in Saratov, but in Orenburg there is no drinking. There was drinking and degeneracy in the Central Committee but we don’t have that [in Orenburg], especially because I myself [i.e., the hypothetical Orenburg activist] don’t drink.”57 According to Kosarev, degenerate youth organizers would hide but they were there and had to be uprooted.

Like any discussion of important changes to youth league policies, the meetings of regional and local youth committees after the August 1937 purge proceeded in a hierarchical fashion. Provincial youth committees convened local activists, and an instructor from the Komsomol Central Committee attended. An authority figure, often someone from the local party

56 RGASPI, f. 73, op. 3, d. 16, l. 8.
57 RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 5, d. 41, l. 12.
apparatus, gave a speech on the meaning of the recent resolution. The gatherings then repeated at lower levels of the youth organization. Unlike other youth committee meetings, though, the order of the day at these meetings was to eliminate enemies of the people from the youth organization. Many of the gatherings resembled those in factory party committees that Wendy Goldman describes, where accusations of political disloyalty or connections with enemies came to dominate the proceedings.\textsuperscript{58} And just as in those party meetings, youth leaders invoked democracy as a justification that would allow more people to criticize higher ups. In Komsomol groups, though, the lesson of the August purge was not just to avoid and root out Trotskyists, but to recognize these enemies through their drinking habits and sexual behavior.

When Komsomol Central Committee instructors arrived in the provinces, they encouraged local activists to attack superiors in provincial and district committees. The goal was to unmask supposed enemies—very often the province’s youth leader. In the reports sent to the Komsomol Central Committee, instructors barely concealed their frustration as they wrote that lower-level activists participated in the denunciations only with considerable prodding. The charges provincial administrators faced were mostly in connection to their relationships with enemies of the people, an arrested patron in the party apparatus or a recently purged Komsomol leader. Yet other youth leaders encountered lengthy questioning on their behavior. For example Berezin, the youth secretary from Kirov province—who had formally confessed to problems with drinking in his organization to Kosarev in January 1937—answered questions about his personal drinking habits for forty minutes.\textsuperscript{59} As these enemies were unmasked, their removal from positions of authority would reverberate in discussions in the districts and local groups, and in the youth press.

\textsuperscript{58} Goldman, \textit{Terror and Democracy}, 186-191.
\textsuperscript{59} RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 23, d. 1213, ll. 4-12; d. 1210, ll.47-52.
Youth newspapers made degeneracy—often that of named individuals—a major theme in their discussions of the Komsomol purge. In Karelia the purge of regional youth leaders primarily involved accusations of hostile Karelian nationalism but degenerate behavior was also a major touchstone. An article from *Komsomolets Karelii*, called “The ‘private life’ of two Komsomol members,” detailed the sordid affairs of two secret enemies. The first, Aleksandr Kobzar’ was an activist from Khar’kov who had recently moved to Karelia. Despite his respectable appearance, it turned out that he had left his pregnant wife and child in Khar’kov while she was in the hospital, absconding with all their valuables. The second case was about Andrei Lisunov, an organizer who, though he was married, had earned the nickname Don Juan through “light and serious flirting, joking and real affairs.” Eventually he wrote a letter to his wife asking for a divorce and when she demanded an explanation in person, he verbally abused her. “How can we entrust these types,” the author asked in conclusion, “with the upbringing of our younger generation?”

Another article from the Karelian youth paper on a conference at the province’s youth committee linked nationalism, Trotskyism and degeneracy in one stroke. At the meeting, a group of new youth leaders was elected after the previous leadership group was removed as enemies of the people. The article urged youth to be vigilant: “Enemies of the people, Trotskyite-Bukharinite fascist agents and bourgeois nationalists made their way into the Komsomol and attempted to defile it with degeneracy.” In the youth press, political beliefs merged with everyday behavior, and the enemy could come in the form of a drunk or womanizer as easily as a saboteur.

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60 V. Volokitina “‘Chastnaia zhizn’ dvukh komsomol’tsev,” *Komsomolets Karelii*, 18 November 1937, 3.
In district and local committees, early rumors may have spread about the fate of the purged Komsomol leaders even before the August plenum, influencing their treatment of accused youth. In the summer of 1937 in Moscow, two members of the Komsomol organization of the Central School for Staff Commander Preparation (part of the Commissariat of Defense) had been drinking near Red Square and then stopped for more drinks on their way home. While drinking they beat a man severely, resulting in a police investigation and a disciplinary hearing. Particularly damning for the accused men was that they supposedly had access to military secrets. One member of the disciplinary committee remarked, “When he is drunk he could fall into the trap of the enemy and give away a military secret. The enemy recruits just these kinds of people, who are already corrupted by systematic drinking.”

The assertion that drinking could lead to the disclosure of national secrets was not unique to the military but instead reflected an obsession among party elites with perceived foreign conspiracies. Fear of these plots would influence the Great Terror as a whole. Recent events had ominous implications for Soviet leaders. Germany had remilitarized in 1935 and allied with Italy and Japan against the Soviet Union in 1936. In the Spanish Civil War that began in 1936, German and Italian forces aided the Fascist and conservative forces against the Soviet-backed Spanish Republic. Yet Soviet leaders came to understand the Spanish conflict as more than a battle between the capitalist-fascist and socialist forces. In the non-Communist Spanish left, Soviet leaders feared a Trotskyist fifth column ready to betray the republican side to fascists for its narrow interest, a concern that seemed to prove founded when the anarcho-syndicalist Partido Obrero de Unificacion Marxista rebelled in May 1937.

62 RGVA, f. 9, op. 30, d. 81, ll. 339-340.
disunity in Spain was applicable to the broader struggle of the Soviet Union with the capitalist world. Accusations of major Bolshevik leaders in the Moscow show trials all involved foreign-backed conspiracies to overthrow the Soviet government. In the provinces, party leaders asserted that “anti-Soviet elements” constituted a ready-made rebellion waiting to aid a foreign army. In the NKVD’s “mass operations,” these anti-Soviet elements formed the main contingent of those repressed in 1937-38 alongside ethnic Germans, Poles, Finns and other national groups whose foreign connections (or foreign names alone) marked them as conspirators against Soviet power. The same conspiratorial logic that allowed NKVD agents to treat foreignness as a sign of disloyalty, allowed Komsomol groups to see degeneracy as a precursor to divulging classified information to spies.

For Komsomol groups, degeneracy not only a way that an enemy could extract information surreptitiously or even recruit new conspirators, but was an end in itself—an attack on kul’turnost’. In Lopasne district (Moscow province) a plenary meeting occurring in August, just before the Komsomol’s purge plenum, paid particular attention to degeneracy. The committee attributed seven of the district’s twenty-two expulsions in the past year to degeneracy. (The other fifteen were for being or having connections with an enemy of the people (ten) or a lack of Komsomol discipline (five).) In diagnosing the problem of degeneracy, the committee came close to Kosarev’s formulation from the purge plenum later that month: “We cannot skate around facts of drinking bouts and degeneracy or explain them as ‘coincidences.’ Our mission is to unmask infections [zarazi], to show the political meaning of this behavior.”

65 Shearer, Policing Stalin’s Socialism, 299-302.

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drinking, hooligan activity like singing crude songs, swearing and telling crude jokes was also part of “anti-people [protivonarodnyi] influence.” Yet the main problem was drinking, where the committee asserted “we must see the hand of the class enemy.” The district youth committee considered the possibility that a lack of culture was the cause of drinking but dismissed this possibility because “in Moscow there is culture but there is degeneracy.” This report and the case of the drunken beating in the Commissariat of Defense organization show that even before the plenum some local committees anticipated or perhaps even had prior knowledge of the reasons for the purge of Komsomol leaders; drinking and sexual misconduct had become signs of political opposition rather than mere personal matters.

As local youth committees discussed the Komsomol’s purge plenum itself, degeneracy was a major focus. In Lukhovitsy district (Moscow province), activists wavered between characterizing alcohol abuse as “enemy work” and as merely an unsavory alternative to better forms of entertainment. “Drinking and degeneracy—that is clear from the main speech [on the August plenum]—are the enemies’ methods of work,” said Kozlov, a local youth secretary from the district center. He then moderated his statement, “A few of them [Komsomol members] began to drink because leisure time is not organized.” Several other youth leaders echoed these remarks, suggesting a strong connection between drinking and boredom rather than Trotskyism.

Outside of meetings directly related to the August 1937 purge, Komsomol organizations in the Commissariat of Defense began to cite the purge plenum in their disciplinary cases. In September 1937, Comrade W., a young man from the Central House of the Red Army (TsDKA, the army’s cultural wing) was accused of having “inappropriate relations” with a young woman,

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67 TsAOPIM, f. 648p, op. 1, d. 6, l. 9.
68 TsAOPIM, f. 648p, op. 1, d. 7, l. 31.
ultimately resulting in an abortion. Pronina, the head of the youth organization tied the case to the plenum: “Comrade W., even after the resolution of the IV [August] plenum of the Central Committee of the Komsomol, has not been able to correctly understand and assess his misdeed… [He] to this day believes that his personal life is not the affair of the Komsomol organization.” Having already given him a reprimand for drinking in 1935, the leaders in the organization voted to expel him. The regulations of the youth organization demanded that a general meeting of all the members confirm the expulsion. In front of this general audience, Comrade W. argued that the August plenum had shown him the light: “Until the decision of the plenum… I couldn’t put together behavior and politics.” Countering his testimony, a friend of the woman denounced him, calling him vulgar and blaming him for the abortion. The organization’s leaders continued to proclaim that Comrade W. had not truly understood his offense and deserved expulsion. Nonetheless, the group’s membership voted twenty-eight to eight to give him the strongest reprimand possible without expulsion—warning him that any further misdeeds would result in removal.69

The leniency shown was perhaps motivated by gendered notions of misbehavior. It appears that the group was mostly made up of men and may have considered the burden of promiscuity to rest with the woman. Nonetheless, the group’s organizers understood Comrade W.’s action as a moral transgression and the purge plenum as a mandate to prosecute those transgressions. But if the group’s leaders used the purge plenum for this purpose, even they did not accuse Comrade W. of being a Trotskyist for his misdeeds. These interpretations suggest that if organizers and the rank and file understood the intended message of the purge plenum, at times Komsomol youth may have quietly moderated its implementation in their organizations.

69 RGVA, f. 9, op. 30, d. 81, ll. 56-57, 58-60.
Even as the scale of repression subsided in 1938, discussions of degeneracy would continue into 1938 and beyond. A year later in TsDKA, Comrade W.’s organization, the politicization of behavior continued. At a general meeting, its new secretary Bernmenson asserted that Komsomol organizers were leaving the rank and file to their own devices in dormitories, and another organizer said that “in our dorms people drink and are debauched, there are fights.” In a specific case involving Comrade J., who had been caught drinking and stealing, Bernmenson insisted that the young man was in political danger, “Comrade J. is skating along the edge of the swamp of degeneracy. The contemptible enemies of the people, the Trotskyite-Bukharinite bandits attempted with their chief method—degeneracy of youth, [and] in the first place through drinking bouts, to break apart the harmonious life of the Komsomol.” In spite of these problems, Bernmenson argued that Comrade J. should receive a reprimand but stay in the league. The group adopted this proposal over the dissent of several members. At a December 1938 meeting of the Komsomol group in the Commissariat of Defense’s clerical office, members took turns criticizing the behavior of individuals. One said, “A Komsomol member should be an exemplar not only in production but in behavior. It needs to be said that not all of us are exemplars in behavior, like Comrade X. (He wanted to divorce his wife.)” Another speaker chose a different target, “What kind of example could a Komsomol member like Comrade Z. be when he gets drunk and ends up at the police station.”

In late 1938, in the nine-member strong youth organization of the newspaper Boeavaia podgotovka (Battle Preparation), a party organizer gave a speech on the purges that largely focused on the Komsomol’s failure to unmask enemies. However, the speaker mentioned degeneracy briefly, and the secretary of the Komsomol organization, Comrade Y. asked what

70 RGVA, f. 9, op. 30, d. 177, ll. 46-47, 125.
71 Ibid., ll. 64, 65.
exactly this meant. A fellow member of the organization answered, “Everyone should think to himself—are there elements of degeneracy in me? You see, degeneracy starts with small things. Today a person has one extra drink, tomorrow a little more and so on. And enemies catch on to this, study the weak side of people and play on that.” When Comrade Y. stepped in to put his spin on the purge and how it applied to his small organization, he was interrupted by another member, “Comrade Y. asked what degeneracy is. Degeneracy—that is the behavior of Comrade Y. himself. He has more than once fought with his wife. Once I saw he had blood on his shoulder. He breaks glass at home. As for me, once I was hit by a car when I was drunk. That is also degeneracy.”

Public reprimands and potential expulsion were only some of the consequences of being accused of degeneracy. It could also be a black mark that would limit the possibility for benefits and social promotion. In the Komsomol organization of the Administration of Military Preparation in April 1939, members held a meeting where its leaders chastised Comrade U. for his indecent relationships with young women. The organization’s five other members took offense when Comrade U. became engaged to a young woman, applied for an apartment as an engaged couple and immediately broke off the relationship once he received the new apartment. To the other members, it seemed that he had cheated both the young woman and the administration of their umbrella organization, the Commissariat of Defense. Comrade U. defended himself: “It’s not true that I deceived the girl…I made no promises to her. We got along well but there wasn’t anything there.” A month later, Comrade U. requested his group’s recommendation for party membership. The debate over whether he deserved a recommendation turned on his recent behavior. The secretary of the organization assessed Comrade U. as a decent worker but noted, “There are shortcomings in his personal behavior. He sees a lot of

72 Ibid., l. 29.
...girls... He tricked the head of the infantry and the party organizer, used deception to receive an apartment.” Even though he had good references from work, these references were not, in the secretary’s mind, enough to merit a recommendation for party candidacy given his personal conduct. The majority voted against a recommendation.

Party membership was virtually impossible for Komsomol members to attain without the recommendation of their local youth group. But becoming a party member was important to Comrade U. and he was not going to give up just yet. Instead, he wrote on May 22 to Suslov, an instructor of the Political Administration of the Red Army charged with overseeing the Komsomol in the commissariat. Comrade U. explained that his previous living conditions in a dormitory had been deplorable and he had been turned down several times for an apartment. He claimed that he met a girl and decided to marry her when she said that she was pregnant. A happy result of the union-to-be was that Comrade U. successfully applied for a new apartment. Later, he said, “My relationship with that girl changed. She also was mistaken about the signs of pregnancy.” He believed that his circumstances had justified his actions and he asked Suslov to reconsider the recommendation. From the marginalia on the letter, it appears that a party instructor did look into the case: “Investigated myself, recommendation refusal correct.” Comrade U.’s bad behavior ruined his shot at party membership for the foreseeable future. Over the next year, he remained a member of the youth group but was noticeably absent from meetings—perhaps a sign that the now-impossible party membership had been a major reason for continuing affiliation with the Komsomol.

Another case illustrates how drinking, while not always grounds for removal, could impact youth organizers’ professional lives. A conference of Komsomol activists in Kesten’ga district (Karelia) in December 1938 convened to elect participants in the upcoming provincial

73 RGVA, f. 9, op. 30, d. 178, ll. 69-74, 83-85; d. 248, l. 223.
youth meeting. The activists discussed each candidate, questioning some more than others before allowing them to remain on the voting list or removing them. One young man was removed from the list after the organizers learned that his father-in-law was arrested as an enemy of the people. However, the most controversial case involved Comrade H., a twenty-five-year-old organizer who had joined the Komsomol in 1931:

Question: How are things with your drinking?
Answer: I drink about 200 grams [of vodka] with lunch and no more. But that is my own affair. Who of you doesn’t drink? Everyone drinks.

Tabunov: Some may have doubts after such an answer that Comrade H. is a drunk. But no one has ever seen him drunk.

Martysheva: Insisting on 200 grams seems like the old way of doing things.

Nikolaev: Comrade H. approaches the question incorrectly. Two-hundred grams is incompatible with his position as a member of the plenum of the district committee. Drinking cannot be seen as a private affair.

Riutikov: Comrade H. still does not want to understand the decisions of the IV [August 1937] plenum, that drinking is still his personal affair. Comrade H., the Komsomol does not work like this.

As in earlier cases of alleged degeneracy, the silent majority outvoted the vocal minority that believed Comrade H.’s behavior was inappropriate; he remained on the list of candidates by a slim margin. In the main vote to decide who would represent the district, though, Comrade H. placed second to last, just ahead of a candidate who had previously been convicted of misappropriation of funds in the army. The comments and the final vote are telling. Comrade H.
seemed like an older kind of Komsomol organizer to his colleagues. He had joined during the period of proletarian radicalism and was brought up in the atmosphere of a Komsomol where socialization was often dependent on drinking. For organizers like Comrade H., drinking may not have been a mere private affair but an important means of cementing collegial bonds. Official youth culture, armed with the implied threat of the purge, made drinking bouts no longer acceptable.  

In local Komsomol organizations, the purge posed a dilemma to ordinary youth activists: Where did social deviance like drinking or womanizing end and the political crime of degeneracy begin? For most lower-level organizers, it seemed that rank-and-file members and local activists had weaknesses that needed be worked upon and corrected—sometimes even through expulsion—but that ultimately they were not degenerates. The purge of “Trotskyist degenerates” in the Komsomol made the fight against these moral failings more urgent as activists learned that enemies could play on the weaknesses of young people and eventually turn them into enemies, too. But beyond this asserted political danger, the campaign against degeneracy represented a fight against the “old way” of doing things, as a critic of Comrade H. said. Old Komsomol members were not the specific targets of this campaign, yet the culture of youth activism among the generation of *pererostki* was. The Komsomol’s purge illustrated in startling ways what could happen to activists who continued to adhere to the old practices of youth activism.

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74 NARK, f. 779, op. 21, l. 33, d. 19, 27.
75 My thanks go to Sean Guillory for suggesting this framework of drunkenness and degeneracy.
Conclusion:

What were the results of the purge? The search for enemies in the ranks of the Komsomol led to large numbers of expulsions from the league. Leading activists were particularly hard hit. Reports from August 1937 show that 147 organizers at the district level or higher had been removed—forty-nine for Trotskyism, fifty-five for connections with Trotskyists and forty-three for “liberalism.” A set of records from August 16 that tracked high-ranking Komsomol cadres (e.g., secretaries of provincial committees) who had been removed listed seventy-seven names. Of those, at least twenty had been arrested by that time, eighteen were recorded as “removed,” one committed suicide and the remainder’s fate was undesignated (but presumably these cadres had at least been removed from their positions). By January 1938, a total of 560 youth workers were removed as enemies of the people and another 830 were removed as having connections with enemies. Records from investigatory commissions under Khrushchev found that in 1937-38, fifty of ninety-three members of the Komsomol’s Central Committee and twelve of its thirty-five candidate members were arrested.

Of the hundreds of organizers removed, it is unclear exactly how many went to forced labor camps or were executed; it appears, as in the purge more generally, that higher-ranking cadres were more likely to face arrest or execution and that female youth leaders seem to have received more lenient treatment than men. However, even among high-ranking administrators removed from the Komsomol, not all faced execution or even arrest. A Komsomol Central Committee worker named N. Ia. Il’in was removed from the league in October 1938 for his

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76 RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 23, d. 1246, ll. 1-17, 18, 42-66, 73-97.
alleged “bureaucratism and callousness in work.” A year later, working as a cadres inspector in the state bureaucracy and having apparently not been arrested, Il’in petitioned the Komsomol’s Central Committee Bureau to revise its verdict on him. The bureau agreed to reword Il’in’s removal as the neutral formulation “freed…from work in the apparatus of the C[entral] C[ommitee] VLKSM [Komsomol] in connection with moving to other work.” Not only had Il’in remained free after his removal from the Komsomol, it seems he was largely able to rehabilitate himself politically. 

In another case, a Leningrad provincial youth secretary named Utkin was removed and arrested in 1937 only to be released in 1938. However, Kosarev met with Utkin and the latter allegedly claimed that his NKVD testimony was falsified. In turn Kosarev denounced Utkin to NKVD head Nikolai Ezhov as “an enemy that has not laid down his arms.” When the NKVD arrested Utkin this time, he spent sixteen years in a forced labor camp. Despite this unhappy ending for Utkin, his story shows that not every removal of a Komsomol worker led immediately and inevitably to execution or the gulag.

Komsomol cadres were more likely to be targets for repression, but suspicion also fell on local activists and the rank and file. In the second half of 1937, nearly 100,000 young people were expelled from the Komsomol whereas roughly 35,000 were expelled in the previous six months (see table 4.4). The exact reason for these expulsions is difficult to ascertain because the five categories youth organizers could use were broad and overlapping. Komsomol organizers at the time complained that the reasons for expulsion did not cover all the possible motivations for

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80 RGASPI, f. 1м, op. 3, d. 223, ll. 1, 7-8.
removal, or that some incidents fell into several categories. Nonetheless, the majority of youth expelled was accused of being “hostile elements” or of maintaining connections with such people, suggesting that the main reason for expulsion was often similar to that of the party and in the Great Terror generally. Personal and professional connections became the basis for fictional conspiracies against Soviet power and even those who were not arrested themselves could face scrutiny for an arrested relative, co-worker or friend. At the same time, the second largest group of expellees was accused of degeneracy and this category grew considerably after the August 1937 purge plenum. Additionally, because the plenum coupled degeneracy and hostile political behavior, it is likely that other cases categorized under different categories had aspects that could have been classified under “degeneracy.”

“Lifestyle cannot be separate from politics” would endure as a slogan in the Komsomol until the beginning of World War II. And it was not only a slogan; it was a true reflection of the

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82 RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 126, d. 336, ll. 4, 41, 42; d. 344, ll. 28, 29, 32, 33, 36, 37, 40, 41.
83 RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 5, d. 53, l. 36. Take the hypothetical case of a youth organizer who failed to denounce a disgraced party higher-up with whom he had drank. Would this fault be considered the work of a “hostile element,” a “violation of Komsomol discipline,” “degeneracy,” “careerism” or “other”? Some cases fell under all categories.
84 For more on the NKVD’s “family method” of finding victims see Vatlin, Terror raionnogo mashtaba, 169-174.
Komsomol’s commitment to molding the social behavior of youth. Were the supposed “Trotskyist degenerates” in the Komsomol leadership really purged for their moral-political failings? Probably not. As ranking party figures, they belonged to bureaucratic families that fell under Stalin’s axe in 1937-38. But unlike other party figures, a prominent part of the public narrative of their purge was that degeneracy (primarily drinking) was not only a trait of bad administration but of enemy activity meant ultimately to bring down the regime. In local youth organizations, activists understood this message and acted upon it, albeit with some moderation. The anti-degeneracy message was not powerful because it was new. Rather, for youth the slogan represented the hard line that the organization was taking on the old ways of Komsomol activism, represented by youth leaders who were arrested and executed supposedly for degeneracy.

Soviet repressive campaigns meant to discipline the behavior of citizens continued and even expanded after the Great Terror. As the cohort of youth in the 1930s turned into adults, they would become the party members whose alcohol abuse and marital fidelity was the subject of intense party scrutiny after World War II.85 And under Khrushchev a broader legal campaign against “domestic hooliganism” expanded the ability of the police to intervene in the home lives of ordinary citizens.86 Yet the interest party members and officials had in policing the personal lives of peers and citizens may have stemmed from their political socialization in the 1930s, including during the Great Terror. The cohort of Komsomol members in the late 1930s, those who survived World War II, experienced “communist upbringing” as a guide for how politically active adults should behave. In the Great Terror, many youth leaders were removed from their

85 In his work on post-1945 party discipline, Edward Cohn argues that the party’s politicization of its members’ personal behavior was a new development, one that derived from the atmosphere of the postwar period. Cohn, “Disciplining the Party: The Expulsion and Censure in the Post-War Soviet Union, 1945-1961” (Phd diss., University of Chicago, 2007).
86 LaPierre, Hooligans in Khrushchev’s Russia, 59-95.
posts, arrested, even executed. However, the vast majority of Komsomol youth seem to have watched on during this process, experiencing it as a moment of fear and extreme disciplining. They took from it the lesson of what might happen to those who strayed too far from official norms of social behavior. While youth organizers at the local level anxiously searched for enemies, they also used the purge to expel or threaten youth whom they believed were not yet enemies but were on the path from the social malady of drunkenness to the political crime of degeneracy.

But in the feverish search for enemies in 1937, Komsomol organizers had begun to violate key dictates of “communist upbringing.” Instead of disciplining youth, they were excising large numbers of members from the league’s ranks. During the last three months of 1937, Komsomol committees expelled members at a rate that had been matched only during the massive post-collectivization membership purge in 1932-33. At the beginning of 1938, even as they continued to call for merciless repression against supposed enemies, Komsomol leaders asserted that “mistakes” were being made in the expulsion of ordinary members. But how could basically good if wayward youth be distinguished from enemies? This dilemma confronted Komsomol leaders as they embarked on a program of mass rehabilitation in 1938.
Chapter 5: Rehabilitating Youth:  
The End of the Terror in the Komsomol

At the end of 1937, reports of mass, uncontrolled expulsions reached party leaders. At the lower levels of the party apparatus, organizers and rank-and-file members were denouncing anyone who might conceivably be unmasked as an enemy later, fearing that they themselves would otherwise be accused of collaboration in anti-Soviet conspiracies. Suspicion was tearing the Bolshevik political culture apart. Responding to the spike in expulsions, party leaders convened a plenary meeting of the Central Committee in January 1938 to discuss “mistakes” made in the purge of enemies. The specific impetus behind the meeting was the case of Kuibyshev province, where party secretary Pavel Postyshev had disbanded district committees and was unable to restock them with new cadres, so filled with supposed enemies was the provincial party apparatus. Behind closed doors, party leaders upbraided Postyshev for damaging the party’s legitimacy (and eventually Postyshev would be arrested).

Based on Stalin’s insistence, the Central Committee made public the meeting’s resolution “On the mistakes of the party organization during expulsion of communists from the party.” In the resolution, party leaders acknowledged that many of those being expelled from the party’s ranks did not deserve such harsh treatment. Yet if the resolution emphasized that many rank and file were innocent, it also reaffirmed the reality of enemies within the party.\(^1\) Moreover, NKVD operatives continued the so-called mass operations to search out and arrest or execute hundreds of thousands of supposed enemies.\(^2\) With real enemies still lurking, how could a party leader distinguish masked infiltrators from valuable cadres? And how would the party recover from the damage the purge was inflicting on its legitimacy?

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\(^1\) Getty and Naumov, *The Road to Terror*, 501-512.

\(^2\) Getty and Naumov, *The Road to Terror*, 520-522; Shearer, *Policing Stalin’s Socialism*, 367.
The Komsomol played a large role as the party attempted to recover from the purge. The Great Purge had not only discredited individual party leaders, members and organizations but had undermined the system of party membership, including the recruiting of new members from the Komsomol into the party. As party membership reopened at the end of 1936, youth leaders had tried to push pererostki from the league into the party. However, the atmosphere of mistrust often prevented their promotion from the Komsomol. Only in 1938, as political leaders attempted to cauterize the party’s wounds, could the party and Komsomol begin to rebuild Soviet political culture. The admission of “mistakes” in the purge was a way of stopping the bleeding and the Komsomol offered a transfusion through a wave of new party members.

Of course, the party was not the only organization that had made “mistakes.” While Komsomol leaders attempted to infuse the party with new members, they also began the process of rehabilitating the league’s own membership after the purge. As in the party, youth leaders asserted that the atmosphere of fear had encouraged “overinsuring”—that organizers had exercised excessive vigilance against mostly good youth. And also like the party, the rebuilding process in the Komsomol in 1938 included the initiation of a recruiting campaign into the league. In contrast to the party, though, the Komsomol’s rehabilitation and recruiting campaigns were much larger. Leaders pressured organizers to show leniency toward youth who appealed expulsions and millions of new members joined the league in 1938 and 1939. Underlying both campaigns was an understanding that young people were less culpable of real political opposition than adults and more easily molded into good Soviet citizens.

As the purge wound down, Komsomol leaders put a disproportionate emphasis on forgiveness for its members. Nonetheless, they still asserted that enemies lurked—especially at the highest levels of the youth organization. At the end of 1938, Stalin initiated a purge of the
purgers. The most prominent victim of this campaign was Nikolai Ezhov, the NKVD leader who had faithfully carried out the mass operations. In the Komsomol, the final act of the purge spelled the end not only of the Great Terror but of the era of Aleksandr Kosarev. The longtime youth leader’s arrest and execution seems to have been tied to the high politics of Ezhov’s purge. But like the supposed “Trotskyite degenerates” whom Kosarev had denounced in the August 1937 purge of the Komsomol, the public narrative of the fall of Kosarev was instrumentalized in service of “communist upbringing.”

**Party Admissions in 1937**

In November 1936, party Central Committee secretary Andrei Zhdanov announced that party membership would reopen for the first time since January 1933. In previous recruiting phases of the 1920s and 1930s, new party members came in rapid waves of hundreds of thousands from the ranks of the urban proletariat. After Zhdanov’s announcement, though, new members were not selected primarily by their worker backgrounds. Instead, the success of their applications often depended on their affiliation with the Komsomol. For the youth league’s *pererostki*, it seemed that the opportunity had finally arrived to graduate into the party. Anecdotal evidence suggests that Komsomol organizers were especially eager to join. One example was Shafarenko, the head of the Komsomol in the Central House of the Red Army (TsDKA), the army’s cultural outreach arm. At twenty-four-years old, he applied for his Komsomol group’s recommendation for party candidacy in December 1936. By April of the next year, he was gathering recommendations for full membership in the party. For those already connected into party

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circles like Shafarenko, joining the party as a candidate or even a full member had become a possibility.\textsuperscript{4}

But another difference distinguished this new phase of party recruiting from previous campaigns. Although hundreds of thousands of \textit{pererostki} waited to join the party, the caustic atmosphere of the Great Purge slowed recruiting to a snail’s pace. In the Komsomol and the party, the removal of supposed political enemies was proving messier than the regime had intended. The patronage ties that bound comrades together were breaking apart and party members denounced their peers as a defensive tactic meant to show their own vigilance.\textsuperscript{5} For those Komsomol members whose connections to existing party members were tenuous, the purge had placed intractable obstacles in the way of party membership.

To enter the party, Komsomol members needed two recommendations from party members and the recommendation of their district youth committee. When many Komsomol members asked for recommendations, fear of aiding a would-be enemy made party members question the benefit of vouching for colleagues and acquaintances. The case of Voronin, a minor youth activist in the Commissariat of Defense is telling. At a large meeting of the Komsomol in the commissariat in June 1937, Voronin was so upset that he demanded the floor for an impromptu speech:

\begin{quote}
I am raising a question so it appears in the record. The party bureau won’t look at the question of Komsomol members…who are trying to get into [the party] and cannot because they [party members]…are afraid to give us recommendations.
\end{quote}

Take the following fact: I have studied since 1932 and worked for a year and a half at a serious job and when I asked an engineer of the General staff [of the Red

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{4} RGVA, f. 9, op. 30, d. 80, l. 70.
\textsuperscript{5} Goldman, \textit{Terror and Democracy}, 205.
\end{footnotesize}
Army] C[omrade]. Eremenko, he announced, “Well, you see I don’t really know you.” I only studied with him, finished the Academy and worked with him for one and a half years at the same job…The question is extremely important because if a person who has known me from the school bench cannot give me a recommendation, who could give it to me?

(Presidium: That’s dangerous over-insuring.) He’s afraid that if someone happens with me, he’ll have to answer…If he doesn’t trust me or knows something about me, he should say so. If he trusts me, if we have worked together for a year and a half in the same room on the job, if we have lived in the same apartment, seeing each other morning and night, then he can give me a recommendation.6

Voronov’s absurd situation may have been as personal as it was political. Perhaps Voronov and Eremenko were having an argument or the latter did know something damaging about Voronov but was unwilling to say. The presidium’s reaction, though, and that Voronov was allowed to speak in the first place, suggest otherwise. By recommending a new party candidate, party members put their reputation on the line. If the candidate turned out to be an enemy, their recommenders would have to defend their own political loyalty. Fear of denunciation was impeding some Komsomol members from making or using connections within the party.

By mid-1937 it had become clear to Komsomol leaders that fewer young people were entering the party than they desired. In particular, they were concerned that older league members were not graduating into the party. Kosarev wrote a resolution in June blaming lower-level organizations for failing to provide recommendations for pererostki. The resolution also

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6 RGVA, f. 9, op. 30, d. 82, l. 161-162.
demanded 100,000 Komsomol members enter the party by the beginning of 1938. The head of Gor’kii province’s youth organization complained in August 1937 that just seventy Komsomol members had joined the party; nearly all those who joined were members of district committees and not from the rank and file.

The problem was not just that party members were refusing to support new recruits from the Komsomol. Some Komsomol members refused party membership based on their own apprehensions about connecting themselves with potential enemies. At a November 1937 meeting of provincial youth leaders with Komsomol leaders in Moscow, L.V. Kurkin from Ivanovo addressed the reasons that fewer Komsomol members were joining the Communist Party than the youth leaders desired. In some cases, communists were refusing to give recommendations. “On the other hand,” he said, “we have facts in Kol’shugin and Suzdal districts where some Komsomol members refuse to take recommendations from communists, saying—we’ll wait a little.” Kosarev was taken aback and asked why they refused. Kurkin explained, “They’re afraid, it seems, that the recommender will turn out to be an enemy of the people.” Several Komsomol members from these regions had joined the party only to have their recommender be unmasked. Kurkin continued, “These cases have created an absolutely incorrect, dangerous mood. I don’t know if there are similar occurrences in other provinces, but among us…these are very serious problems.” Current and potential party members were right to worry. Party members who gave recommendations and Komsomol members who received them entered a political relationship with risks. For many it was less risky not to recommend or join than to make a connection with a potential enemy.

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7 RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 23, d. 1211 ll. 42-43.
8 RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 5, d. 41, l. 33.
9 Ibid., op. 5, d. 50, l. 55.
10 On the NKVD’s use of political connections in arrests, see Vatlin, Terror raionnogo mashtaba, 164-174.
Exhortations to increase the number of Komsomol members joining the party were partially successful and the number of applicants for recommendations to the party increased after mid-1937. Very seldom did local committees turn down recommendation requests of would-be party candidates, most of whom were approaching or past the limits of Komsomol age. Some district youth committees, in the rush to recommend as many youth as possible, even gave support to young people who did not have the recommendations of two party members. Despite these efforts, when the Komsomol Central Committee collected data on Komsomol members who had entered the party in late 1937 the results were still unsatisfactory: just 46,207 members were recommended and of those the party had admitted only 13,051 by November 1937. Party and youth leaders exhorted members to heighten their political vigilance against enemies. Yet this same vigilance was limiting youth—those that Komsomol leaders believed were good, honest young people—from joining the party. More than this, though, the Great Purge was creating an environment of wild and indiscriminate repression in political culture more broadly. Increasingly, party and youth leaders became convinced that the purge in political organs had to be reined in.

**Correcting “Mistakes”**

In December 1937, as they pondered how to increase the number of youth entering the party, Komsomol leaders received signals about the growing number of expulsions of rank-and-file members from the youth league. Komsomol secretary for organizational matters, Petr Vershkov, received a harried report that month about mass expulsions from the league. In particular, the report’s author asserted that the number of expulsions for “enemy elements and double dealers”

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11 RGVA, f. 9, op. 30, d. 80, passim.
12 RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 23, d. 1285, ll. 1-2.
13 Ibid., d. 1215, l. 72
had reached unrealistic proportions. Vershkov apparently agreed, underlining the large figure of expulsions under this category. Vershkov apparently agreed, underlining the large figure of expulsions under this category. Later that month, the head of the Central Committee’s appeals commission, V. Ezhov issued a report entitled “About facts of incorrect expulsion from the Komsomol and the work of the commission for admission and expulsion from the Komsomol.” Ezhov pointed to cases where committees had expelled young people from the organization for little or no reason. The heightened atmosphere of vigilance also contributed to an increase in lesser disciplinary measures. Ezhov cited a local organization in Ivanovo province that had given official reprimands to nearly every member. Meanwhile, Ezhov faulted the provincial appeals commissions for rejecting appeals automatically or, worse yet, not making decisions at all. Overwhelmed by huge numbers of appeals, the Smolensk province appeals commission had yet to work through two hundred cases and Krasnodar’s had a thousand unopened appeals. Vershkov and Ezhov had come to the conclusion that the search for enemies was creating unexpected casualties. Local committees were expelling innocent rank-and-file youth and undermining the appeals process that was so important to the Komsomol’s mission of molding youth.

These reports about hyper-vigilance in the league reached Kosarev, who convened a meeting in December 1937 at the Komsomol Central Committee dedicated to the problem of appeals. The heads of a dozen or more provincial appeals commissions arrived in Moscow to report on expulsions in their regions to Kosarev, Pikina and Vershkov. The most experienced worker at the meeting was Konopleva, the appeals commission head from Leningrad’s provincial youth committee, who described a confused and fear-ridden situation on the ground. Part of the problem was that the Komsomol’s Central Committee failed to give firm instructions on

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14 Ibid., d. 1250, ll. 23-24.  
15 Ibid., ll. 27-36.
expulsions. Another issue was the lack of trust the purge had created: “They [youth committees] tell youth to be open, honest and act in good faith, and then they expel them all the same.” She did not speculate why local activists expelled youth who disclosed damaging information willingly but they likely did so as a safeguard against accusations of their own lack of vigilance. District youth committees, where confirmation hearings for expulsions took place, should have moderated the expulsions but organizers were hopelessly overstretched. Konopleva admitted that district youth secretaries often did make bad judgments without investigating the case of each appellant fully. At the same time, she found it hard to blame these organizers, who sat in meetings from “morning until night” and had seventy to ninety supplicants per session.16 Another problem appeals commissioners found was that the youth who were appealing were not from the rank and file but were relatively senior. The appeals commissioner from Smolensk stated that of the 929 young people expelled from the province’s organization, 665 had appealed the decision. However, the appellants were “teachers, heads [of Komsomol departments], accountants, brigadiers [on collective farms].” In contrast, ordinary members who were not activists or in some kind of profession were not appealing decisions as often.17

The Komsomol secretaries present were genuinely surprised by the reports. Kosarev himself seemed to be unaware of the workings of the appeals process. At the beginning of the meeting, the Komsomol General Secretary asked what action district appeals commissions were taking, forgetting or unaware that there was no separate commission at the district level; the district youth secretary handled all appeals at that level. This misunderstanding was noteworthy not only because it suggested Kosarev’s disconnect from affairs on the ground but also because

16 RGASPI f. 1m, op 5, d. 53, ll. 32, 35.
17 Ibid., l. 57. After the commissioner mentioned teachers as a group that was (disappointingly) overrepresented, Pikina interrupted to chastise him, saying that teachers were a group facing undue scrutiny. Her emphasis on the importance of teachers reflected the convergence of Komsomol’s mission in political and moral education with the broader mission of education for adolescents in the Soviet Union.
the number of appeals placed a significant burden on the district secretary, changing the day-to-day workings of the league. In reviewing expulsions in local committees, many of the cases perplexed Kosarev. He had trouble believing that a youth committee in Stalingrad had expelled a young person because his grandmother, who died in 1906, had been a member of the gentry. Nonetheless, some of the provincial appeals commission heads continued to assert the necessity for vigilance. The representative from Smolensk boasted of his commission’s strong ties with the NKVD and how this helped him catch enemies. Kosarev seemed to suggest the Smolensk worker was too intent on catching enemies, “You have your functions and the NKVD has its own,” but moderating himself added, “You need to keep up the connection with them [in the NKVD].”

And far from discouraging all expulsions, Kosarev encouraged an increase in vigilance in some regions. After the Ukrainian appeals commissioner stated that his commission was not doing enough to encourage appeals, Kosarev broke in, “I don’t like your speech… You need to strengthen the struggle to cleanse the Komsomol organization of Ukraine…especially in border regions and among student youth.”

Although Komsomol leaders believed that expulsions of some youth had gone too far, in other areas—among national groups and in the border regions—they maintained that there was too little vigilance.

When the party plenum in January 1938 announced that mistakes of vigilance had occurred, Kosarev petitioned Stalin to hold a similar plenum in the Komsomol devoted to

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18 Ibid., ll. 44, 50, 94.
19 Ibid., ll. 128-129.
20 At a meeting of Komsomol organizers in November 1937, Kosarev stressed the need to limit the presence of certain national groups in the Komsomol. Belorussian youth secretary S. Elagin lamented that local youth organizations on the border were full of Polish contrabandists. Kosarev gave sagely advice, “In those situations you need to beat the heads of the old guys, so that one half unmasks the other and then promote new forces… Nothing terrible will happen if 1-2 people are temporarily removed incorrectly.” It is unclear whether Kosarev was aware of the ongoing NKVD campaign against ethnic Poles in the Soviet Union but he surely knew that Poles were not a welcome presence in Soviet political culture. RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 5, d. 51, l. 150. On the NKVD mass operation against ethnic Poles, see Nikita Petrov and Arsenii Roginskii, “The ‘Polish Operation’ of the NKVD, 1937-8” in Barry McLoughlin and Kevin McDermott eds. Stalin’s Terror: High Politics and Mass Repression in the Soviet Union (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 153-172.
rectifying its excesses. The plenum convened on February 19 and Pikina gave the main report on expulsions. She maintained that the number of youth expelled as supposed “enemy elements” was a “slander of a large portion of youth.” Pikina pointed out that the problem of expulsion was not just a question of equity and truth, but a real problem for Soviet labor. In cases where youth were not arrested, their expulsion led to dismissal from work—even for those whose job was outside the youth organization. Many, she said, had been out of work for several months at this time. With nearly 100,000 youth expelled from the youth organization in the past half-year, the number of youth who were likely unemployable because of their expulsion was considerable.21

The rest of Pikina’s speech and the subsequent responses by provincial youth leaders cataloged unjust and strange expulsions. A typical case involved misinformation. In one, a youth group expelled a young man whose grandfather had supposedly owned serfs in 1868 (apparently the committee was unaware that serfdom had been abolished in 1861) but upon investigation it turned out that the grandfather had himself been a serf. Other cases were fodder for Krokodil: A district youth committee in Belarussia had expelled a deaf young man because, in response to accusations against him, “he could not make himself clear and said nothing in his defense.”22

Some youth leaders brought up sexually charged cases involving women. The secretary from Gor’kii province told a euphemism-laden story of a young woman who in another province had been the assistant of a man later arrested as an enemy of the people. Members of her Komsomol committee in Gor’kii province believed that she had been “connected physically with the enemy.” The committee forced her to go to five doctors to confirm that she was a virgin, as she

21 RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 2, d. 136, l. 22.
22 Ibid., ll. 38, 190.
claimed. “To her good fortune, she turned out to be truly a girl [devushka].” If she had not been declared a virgin, would that have made her an enemy of the people?²³

In another case, a young woman who had been raped and impregnated received permission for a legal abortion when health complications ensued. Nonetheless, her district committee expelled her for the abortion, unwilling to believe that she had legitimate medical reasons. In both examples, though, provincial youth leaders revealed that the mistake of the district youth committees was that the accusations themselves were false, not that they had wrongly made sexual impropriety a punishable offense.²⁴

In most of the cases, youth leaders pointed to mistakes committees had made in investigatory work for expulsions and appeals. The one notable exception was that Pikina asserted that youth with distant relatives who were class aliens or who had moved abroad should remain in the Komsomol: “There are very many cases where [a committee] expels Komsomol members for their social origin and forget that this person has been born and lives under Soviet power, and that, in the final analysis, he cannot and should not answer for his grandfather or grandmother, who may have died abroad long ago.”²⁵ Beyond this caveat, Pikina and other speakers made few pronouncements about what kinds of missteps were more forgivable than others. The specific cases cited at the meeting all involved bureaucratic bungling of information, suggesting that the accusations themselves were plausible grounds for expulsion. The likely explanation for leaders’ unwillingness to endorse rehabilitation in specific instances was self protection. Had these Komsomol leaders endorsed lighter punishments for cases where members had committed a lesser transgression, they themselves could have faced the charge of lacking vigilance.

²³ Ibid., l. 87.
²⁴ Ibid., l. 184.
²⁵ Ibid., l. 43.
Although Pikina did not cite cases where minor infractions could be forgiven, she saw the appeals process as the solution to the mistaken expulsions. According to Pikina’s data, only a third of all expulsions were being appealed by Komsomol members—far too few in her opinion. When members did appeal, the process frequently took too long. In the third quarter of 1937 alone, the Central Committee received 5,575 letters complaining that their respective provincial commissions were taking too long to review appeals. Kosarev had received another 4,333 complaints addressed to him personally; just under half of the letters were about improper expulsion. Pikina asserted that local youth organizers should not use discipline to remove ordinary members but instead see it as a chance to influence them: “In order to help a young person who made a mistake—talk with him, give him specific tasks that would interest him, ensure he corrects himself… Admonishment [ukazat’] or censure him or, in the case of a big mistake, give him a strong reprimand, but do not expel him from the Komsomol.” Paradoxically, as Pikina called for committees to show more forgiveness, she also demanded more expulsions—of those careerists who had “tried to insure themselves through expulsions [of others] from the Komsomol.”

Yet the main point she pressed was that lower-level committees should expel fewer members.

Even before the Komsomol had made its own statement on expulsions, though, youth organizers had applied the party’s January 1938 resolution on “mistakes” to their own work. The head of Saratov’s youth committee stated at the February 1938 Komsomol Central Committee

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26 Ibid., II. 24, 25-26, 27-28, 35, 42.
27 With this purpose in mind, the resolution from the plenum ordered provincial youth leaders from that point forward to confirm all appeals that were rejected at the district level. This measure seems to have had two purposes. First, it prevented youth from giving up on their appeal if they failed at the district level. Second, it sent a signal to district level official that their overzealous mistakes of vigilance would be checked. “Postanovlenie V plenuma TsK VLKSM ob ishibakh, dopushchennykh komsomol’skimi organizatsiiami pri iskluchenii iz komsomola, o formal’no-biurokraticheskom otnoshenii k apelliatsiiam isklucheniykh iz VLKSM i o merakh po ustraneniiu etikh nedostatkov,” Izvestiia TsK Komsomola, no. 6 (1938): 7-12.
plenum that the party’s resolution had persuaded his organizers to limit expulsions. Smolensk’s youth leaders also followed the party’s admonishment to correct mistakes. After the February plenum, provincial youth committees reinstated the majority of youth who appealed for readmission to the youth organization. Of the 204 appeals preserved in the Smolensk archive, the province’s appeals commission reversed all but four of the cases of expulsion. But despite the overwhelming numbers who returned to the ranks of the Komsomol, it was not the case that the youth committees were “wiping the slate clean” and simply reinstating members, as Merle Fainsod asserts. Committees did not simply readmit appellants but also imposed lesser disciplinary action. In one case, the committee gave an official reprimand to a young Stakhanovite who had supposedly hidden his kulak social origin. In another the committee reprimanded a former youth organizer whom it accused of drinking with kulaks and stealing food and funds intended for local infants. According to the committee, both young men had taken the first step toward redemption; they had admitted their faults and vowed to improve themselves. But the disciplinary action against them meant that they would need to continue to prove that they had changed and become worthwhile Komsomol members.

And what of those four members whose expulsions the province committee upheld? In all four cases, the parents of the young people were currently under arrest as enemies of the people. A fifth youth, whose appeal was rejected the first time, appealed successfully the second time after her father was released from NKVD custody. Nationality politics also played a role. A young Latvian woman appealed unsuccessfully after (with good reason) claiming that Latvians

28 RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 2, d. 136, ll. 150, 155.
29 In total there are 234 rehabilitation cases from the Smolensk Archive, WKP 416, 34-198. Some of these cases contain appeals of reprimands but most are non-repeating appeals of expelled youth. Fainsod mistakenly writes that the archive contains “over a thousand” cases. Fainsod, Smolensk under Soviet Rule (New York: Vintage, 1963) 426-429.
were targets of repression.³⁰ It seems that only in cases of expulsion where young people had a close personal connection to someone who was under arrest (e.g., a close relative) was the appeal unsuccessful.

Overall, chances for readmission to the Komsomol in 1938 were good and a very large number of youth took advantage of the opportunity to appeal. Public signals encouraged youth organizers to readmit expelled members. These signals included statistical reports published in Izvestiia TsK Komsomola. According to a report with incomplete data (missing material from several significant provinces, including Moscow), the number of appeals to province-level youth committees in 1938 was 66,600. Of the 54,500 appeals that committees had processed at the time the report was compiled, in 42,200 cases (77 percent) the decision was overturned and the appellant was let back into the youth league. Youth usually made appeals within a year following expulsion, meaning that the pool of young people who might appeal their expulsion in 1938 was about the same as the number of those expelled in 1937, roughly 130,000. Assuming the success rate was the same for those appeals that had not yet been worked through, appeals at the provincial level alone reversed about 40 percent of all expulsions from 1937. The figure may or may not have included those youth who appealed at the district level successfully. (The report did not specify and because many appeals now went to the provincial committee automatically, the two hierarchical levels may have been combined in the statistics.) The figures did not include the 4,770 who appealed directly to the Komsomol Central Committee (the success rate there is unclear). Adding these figures and provinces whose data were not included would have

likely raised the percentage of reversals to 50 percent or more of the total number of youth expelled in 1937.  

To speak more broadly about the magnitude of repression among the Komsomol rank and file, it is telling that so many young people were even able to appeal their expulsions, well over half of those expelled in 1937. The large number of Komsomol members who reentered the league did not mean that youth did not face political repression. In 1937, 47 percent of the population in Soviet labor camps was between the ages of twenty-five and thirty (at the older margins of the Komsomol), more than four times the proportion of this age group in the population at large. Yet the number of adults below the age of twenty-five in the Gulag in 1937 was roughly proportional to their number in the Soviet Union on the whole (12 percent), and indeed fell somewhat (to 9.6 percent) by 1940.  It is unclear exactly how many of these arrestees came from the Komsomol; central statisticians did not record former affiliation with the league and Komsomol statisticians did not record the number of youth who were arrested after expulsion. Komsomol members at the start of 1938 made up approximately 15 percent of the age eligible population, and some of those youth who were arrested or executed came from its ranks. However, it seems probable that many youth who did not appeal also were not arrested. 

For obvious reasons, there are no figures on how many youth were too frightened, too old, too apathetic or too disillusioned to apply for readmission but who also were not arrested, though this number was likely large. That so many Komsomol members were able to appeal their expulsion and gain readmission suggests that arrest was not the fate of most Komsomol members who were expelled. It seems that a majority, perhaps a large majority, of Komsomol youth who faced discipline during the Great Terror did not face arrest. Moreover, a large

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31 RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 23, d. 1385, l. 76, 100.
number of those expelled in 1937 successfully appealed their expulsions in 1938 and reentered the league.

How did the number of “mistaken” expulsions in the Komsomol compare to the number of appeals in the party? According to an editorial in Pravda, the party had received 53,700 appeals at various levels by the January 1938 plenum on “mistakes” and another 101,233 appeals between that meeting and June 1. Of the total, party committees had reviewed 85,273 cases and had readmitted 54 percent of those members, a rate considerably lower than in the Komsomol. Nonetheless, the figures of total appeals for the party are very high—indeed higher than the 100,000 total expulsions from the party in 1937 that Georgii Malenkov cited at the January 1938 plenum. What this improbably high number of appeals suggests is that at least some of the appellants petitioned repeatedly. In a case cited in Pravda, an expelled party member named A. Kaminskii attempted to have his case heard for eight months. He sent petitions to five different investigators before he got a hearing with the city’s party committee and it is possible that each petition counted as a separate appeal. However, assuming that all of the 54 percent of the successful readmissions were unique cases (and there is no definitive evidence either way), the number of readmissions was roughly 46,000 or about 46 percent of the expulsions from the party in 1937, somewhat lower than the likely number of readmissions in the youth league.

Reinstatement after expulsion from the Red Army can also provide a comparison. In 1939 Lev Mekhlis, the head of the Red Army’s political administration called for half of all those officers expelled by party commissions to be reinstated. In the end, 30 percent of those army officers discharged in 1937-38 were reinstated while just 16 percent of dismissed air force

33 “Po-bol’shevistski vypolnit’ postanovlenie ianvarskogo Plenuma TsK VKP(b),” Pravda, 7 August 1938, 1.
34 Artizov, Reabilitatsiia: Kak eto bylo, vol. 2, 623.
officers returned by the end of 1939.\textsuperscript{36} Compared to the Komsomol and the party, the number of readmissions in the military was significantly lower. But in comparison both to the party and the army, the success rate of appeals and the total number of appeals in the Komsomol was higher, sometimes by a large margin.

The numerical difference between the readmission process in the Komsomol and in other organizations reflected different approaches to discipline. Komsomol and party leaders genuinely hoped to use post-purge discipline as a tool to refashion politically active youth, molding them for a life as good Soviet citizens and potential future party members. In the mid-1930s, Komsomol leaders had come to believe that their organization was not a junior version of the party and its members could not be held to the party’s standards. Indeed, by holding young people to the same code as party members, youth organizers were undermining the league’s main purpose. Some young people may have made mistakes but youth committees made even worse mistakes by banishing these wayward young people rather than redeeming them. In contrast, in the party the press painted a picture of the purge that was more black and white. Editorials emphasized that expelled members had been denounced incorrectly by “slanderers.” While a handful of articles in Pravda in 1939 spoke of the party’s role in the vospitanie of its members, most suggested that party members either deserved to be in the party or they did not.\textsuperscript{37} In contrast to party members, for youth in the Komsomol there was a greater grey area of deviance that league leaders and activists believed could be corrected with discipline.

The acknowledgement of “mistakes” in the party and Komsomol not only resulted in large quantities of appeals but in increasing numbers of Komsomol members able to join the party. After the January 1938 party plenum, admissions of new members to the party from the

\textsuperscript{36} Reese, \textit{Stalin’s Reluctant Soldiers}, 143, 146.
Komsomol took off. Komsomol committees recommended members roughly twice as fast after January 1938 as before. After March of 1938, party committees accepted more than half of the applicants from the Komsomol, while before they had accepted around 30 percent. From February to September 1938, the party admitted more than 130,000 young communists as candidates or full members (see table 5.1). In spite of the increase in party admissions, Kosarev called even this figure lackluster and continued to decry the failure of local organizations to shepherd young people into the party. But if Kosarev was unimpressed, the figures indicate that a large number of older Komsomol members had graduated into the ranks of the party and would continue to do so. Komsomol affiliated historians Zorii Apresian and Vladimir Sulemov assert that from 1937 to 1941 roughly two-thirds of party recruiting came directly from the Komsomol, accounting for some 1,200,000 new members and candidates.38

Significantly, these new admissions seem to have come disproportionately from the ranks of pererostki. While their age and association with the old style of radical activism had made them unwanted in the Komsomol, their combination of youth and political loyalty made them desirable as new party members. It seems that party admissions effectively resolved the problem of their cohort in the Komsomol. As pererostki joined the party, they left the Komsomol by choice or necessity. At the Eighteenth Party Congress in 1939, the party’s regulations prohibited its members and candidates from holding Komsomol membership unless they held elected positions in the youth league. As pererostki departed, older members declined as a proportion of the Komsomol. From January 1938 to January 1939, the average age of

Table 5.1 Komsomol Admissions to the Communist Party
July 1937-September 1938\(^{39}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date*</th>
<th>Admitted</th>
<th>Recommended</th>
<th>Admit/month</th>
<th>Rec/month</th>
<th>Admit %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>07/37-11/37</td>
<td>13,051</td>
<td>46,207</td>
<td>3,263</td>
<td>11,552</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/37-2/38</td>
<td>15,672</td>
<td>53,082</td>
<td>5,224</td>
<td>17,694</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/38-3/38</td>
<td>10,472</td>
<td>34,900</td>
<td>10,472</td>
<td>34,900</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/38-9/38</td>
<td>92,744</td>
<td>175,112</td>
<td>15,457</td>
<td>29,185</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*All dates on first of the month.

Komsomol members fell by roughly a year, from 21.7 to 20.8 (see table 4.1 in the previous chapter). The proportion of members in the twenty-six and older category declined from 16 percent in January 1938 to 10 percent in January 1940.\(^{40}\) But most telling was that after September 1938, Komsomol leaders had mostly ceased to talk about pererostki. Indeed, one of the latest references to pererostki was in an article in the April 1939 issue of Izvestiia TsK Komsomola announcing the reversal the policy giving preference to pererostki over more junior members for party recommendations.\(^{41}\) In addition to the departure of pererostki, the changing demographics in the league resulted from the influx of a new cohort of youth. Roughly six million young people would enter the league in 1938 and 1939, and this group was younger, better educated and more likely to be women than previous cohorts. But if the decline of repression allowed many of these new members to join the league, exhortations to admit new members led to an increasing use of coercion in recruiting.

**Recruiting Drive**

At the same Komsomol Central Committee plenum in February 1938 that announced the league’s “mistakes” of hyper-vigilance, party and youth leaders called for higher numbers of

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\(^{39}\) RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 23, d. 1215, l. 84; d. 1285, ll. 73-75; d. 1192, ll. 7-13.

\(^{40}\) RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 126, d. 344, ll. 14, 16, 17; d. 372, ll. 40-41.

\(^{41}\) “Voprosy i otvety,” Izvestiia TsK Komsomola, no. 9 (1939): 24-26. An annual report from the youth committee of Lopasne district (Moscow province) in January 1939 criticized itself for promoting only pererostki, “There was an improper understanding that we needed to recruit pererostki in the Komsomol for the party and this could not but reflect on the [poor] work.” TsAOPIM, f. 648p, op. 1, d. 14, l. 52.
admissions in the league. From 1935 onward, youth leaders had argued for a broader social makeup in the Komsomol but they had not announced an expansion in its membership overall. Now, in February 1938, Petr Vershkov led a session devoted to admissions—effectively announcing the start of a new recruiting campaign in the league. In his opening speech, Vershkov asserted the Komsomol should not limit its membership any further. As justification, he cited Stalin’s intervention in the league in 1935 when the Soviet leader had demanded the Komsomol not duplicate the role of the party: “In our work we are [still] copying the work of the party organization… We were and are obliged to liquidate various poorly thought-up limitations on admission to the Komsomol that are unnecessary for a non-party organization of vospitanie like the Komsomol.”

The main limitations Vershkov had in mind were the complicated political questions local youth organizers asked to test new applicants to the league. In one case Vershkov cited, local activists asked a young man what the enemy in Spain was called. Although the applicant could remember that the enemy in Spain was a Fascist party, he did not know its proper name, the Falange, and was denied admission. To Vershkov, this example reflected a broader trend of youth organizers’ expecting too much of new Komsomol members. Candidates for party admission might need to know the name of Spain’s Fascist party but not a new Komsomol member. In the place of these questions about party history, current affairs and Marxist-Leninist theory, Vershkov maintained that any otherwise worthy youth who knew the basics of the Komsomol’s program and regulations should be able to join.

Commenting on Vershkov’s speech, party Central Committee secretary Andrei Andreev suggested obstruction of admission was perhaps intentional. Andreev had spearheaded efforts in the January 1938 party plenum against those party organizers whom he accused of

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42 RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 2, d. 137, l. 85.
43 Ibid., l. 131.
“overinsuring” in their expulsions of ordinary members. Now, the party secretary stressed that large numbers of young people were ready to join the league but that local activists were not willing to admit them: “Above all, [growth] is being stunted by some organizations that have effectively, willingly or unwillingly, closed the path to admission to the Komsomol.”

Andreev’s speech implied that Komsomol organizers needed to take recruiting seriously, or else they might be lumped into the ranks of hostile elements who had overinsured to protect themselves.

Although the session on admissions implied the start of a major recruiting phase in the league, the prospect of an influx of new members was filled with tension. Failing to admit new members to the Komsomol could now be considered willful obstruction of the official line, and yet youth leaders also feared uncontrolled admissions. In 1930-31 the league had “komsomolized” entire segments of the population and subsequently purged equally large numbers of members in 1932-33. Vershkov argued that the current recruiting campaign could not repeat the mistakes of the early 1930s, “In 1931 when the question of growth was promoted sharply, we had cases of rushing, including some instances of organizations announcing competitions over who could admit more [new Komsomol members] and using control figures.” Expanding Komsomol membership did not mean compromising the exclusivity of Komsomol membership entirely.

The conflict between increasing admissions and ensuring control came to a head over the large number of admissions to the Ukrainian Komsomol. Stepan Usenko, the Komsomol

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42 RGASPI, f. 73, op. 2, d. 41, l. 12.
43 RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 2, d. 137, l. 136. Vershkov expressed the same opinion at the Tenth Komsomol Congress in 1936, “Experience has shown us that when we go down that path [of admitting every applicant]…all sorts of hostile elements, thieves and careerists join the Komsomol… In 1933, 1934 and 1935, 63,343 people were expelled for committing crimes [i.e., were expelled after arrest]. We must think, comrades, that the great portion of those expelled probably should not have entered the ranks of the Komsomol.” RGASPI, f. 6m, op. 10, d. 119, ll. 120-121.
secretary of Ukraine, announced that his organization had recruited 65,000 new members in the final quarter of 1937 alone—a much larger figure than other regional organizations were able to muster. Based on his experience in Ukraine, Usenko suggested that the league on the whole could increase admissions by easing the admissions process in several ways. He proposed that instead of youth coming to interview at the district center with the Komsomol committee, the committee should travel to villages and conduct admissions interviews in the localities. Another provincial youth leader backed this proposal because travelling to the district center for mandatory admissions interview was difficult in large or rural districts (see figure 5.1 for the admissions process). Usenko also suggested that two oral recommendations replace the existing requirement of two written recommendations for admission. The Ukrainian youth leader’s speech drew a litany of rebuttals. Kosarev derided the idea that district youth leaders should travel to various cities, saying this would turn the Komsomol into a “gypsy camp.” The broader problem with Usenko’s suggestions was that his peers believed they undermined the authority and the security of the Komsomol. If membership could be decided by something so ephemeral as a verbal recommendation, would the next step be to eliminate the recommendations altogether? Would these policies enable the Komsomol to increase its hold over youth or allow enemies to enter the league?

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46 Anecdotal evidence suggests that his proposal to allow youth to join with two oral recommendations instead of two written recommendations was already the norm in some local organizations. Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System, Schedule A, Vol. 14, Case 189, Sequence 29. RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 2, d. 138, l. 27, 28, 99.

47 A significant criticism of Usenko’s speech was its lack of self-criticism. The plenum’s members all demanded that their committees perform better in recruiting while the tone of Usenko’s speech was, in contrast, congratulatory. The proclaimed successes of Ukraine’s Komsomol called into question the very need for the plenum. Arch Getty has examined the ritual of self-criticism and the consequences of a lack of criticism in party Central Committee meetings. At these meetings, party leaders who failed to voice self-criticism faced punishment as much for their unwillingness to play into the ritual as for the failings that demanded criticism. Getty and Naumov, The Road to Terror, 22-24, 175.

48 RGASPI, f. 73, op. 2, d. 41, l. 202.

49 RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 2, d. 138, ll. 27, 197; f. 73, op. 2, d. 41, l. 202.
Figure 5.1 Flow chart of Komsomol application process
Usenko’s suggestions were not implemented but the Komsomol soon saw a huge influx of new members. As they received news about the February 1938 plenum, lower-level organizers interpreted its resolutions to mean that they were to find more members for their organizations, period. In March 1938, youth organizers from Istrinskii district (Moscow province) echoed Vershkov and Andreev in their criticisms of the low number of new members. District leaders asserted that some local secretaries continued to ask difficult political questions of potential members—perhaps an intentional means of halting admission. The district youth committee accused one group leader of “[asking] tricky questions, trying by any means to stop the growth of the Komsomol organization.” In one youth group, organizers had asked “no fewer than fifteen questions, and we scared youth away with all these questions.” But another local activist complained that young people were having trouble learning the minimal requirements for admission, knowledge of the Komsomol’s program and regulations. How could they accept new members who could did not meet these basic requirements?50

The perceived need to admit more youth enabled drastic, coercive, and often officially unsanctioned methods of recruiting youth. While it seems that local youth committees avoided using quotas for new members, a Komsomol Central Committee resolution from early 1940 criticized the mass admission of new members; the resolution cited some cases where as many as sixty young people were admitted in a single meeting of district youth committees.51 This figure was apparently common. In Lopasne district (Moscow province), the youth committee admitted similar numbers of new members at almost every meeting between 1938 and 1940. In Lopasne, the admissions process centered on a handful of people in each local group. Potential members needed to receive two recommendations from any established members of the Komsomol but the

50 TsAOPIM, f. 644p, op. 1, d. 6, ll. 144-147.
recommenders in each local organization were usually the same two or three people—often including secretaries or senior activists who appeared frequently at the district committee.\textsuperscript{52}

The presence of just a few people involved in recruiting large numbers of youth suggests that a limited number of organizers were not only recommending members, but recruiting or even coercing youth to join the league. The conflict between voluntary admissions and active recruiting came out at a meeting of Kiev province’s youth leaders in February 1940. One district organizer, Sytnik, accused another of having admitted too few young people. The latter responded, “Comrade Sytnik criticized our district [for low admissions figures] but I want to ask—are we conscripting [youth] into the Komsomol or accepting them? I believe we rejected conscription.” The province’s youth leader, Nikolai Sizonenko interrupted the speech: “We aren’t going to conscript anyone, that’s not necessary, but to work with youth, to attract them to the Komsomol is necessary.”\textsuperscript{53} The line between coercion and persuasion was a thin one—and was often present in the same case.

The example of Nikolai Melnikov, a young man who later told his story as an émigré, illustrates the pressures and desires facing potential new members at the time. In 1938 Melnikov was a sixteen-year-old apprentice working just outside Leningrad at the Vyborg Machine Plant and its workshop training school. He fell under the influence of Mikhail Sheikin, the deputy political director of the school, and became part of an activist group. Sheikin plied the boys (apparently the group was all male) with passes to sanatoriums and theater tickers while using his influence to tell them about the Komsomol. Nikolai became more involved in the group and a minor celebrity at the factory after he began to publish poems in its newspaper. He commented on his life at the time, “I made friends among the management of the Leningrad Motion Picture

\textsuperscript{52} TsAOPIM, f. 648p, op. 1, d. 11, passim.
\textsuperscript{53} DAKO, f. 9, op. 3, spr. 28, ark. 30-31.
House… There I met stars of the Soviet screen… I gradually realized that the Komsomol opened
the door to a life that was worth having.” All the same, Melnikov was not yet a league member
and feared (it seems out of general anxiety) the committee would reject him if he applied.

Things changed for Nikolai one day in January 1938 when Sheikin summoned him to his
office. “You are a bright lad,” the political director said smiling, “you like discipline, you are
learning well, and you take a keen part in the social activities of the plant. It’s youngsters like
you that are needed by the Leninist Komsomol, many millions of boys and girls.” Melnikov still
demurred but that day the two reviewed the Komsomol’s programs and regulations together.
Sheikin then asked Melnikov to continue studying both documents and take a few days to make a
decision. Nikolai was not alone: “The very same day I heard that Sheikin was tackling all my
friends in the course in the same way. We all agreed to join.”

Sheikin began to prepare Melnikov and his friends for their entrance. Melnikov had to
learn “by heart the names of the members of the Politburo…study the constitution, and
thoroughly grasp the main principles of the statutes and program of the Komsomol.” Even this
minimal training was perhaps overkill. Admission in the factory itself was not difficult as few
questions were asked. Melnikov’s audience at the district committee was more intimidating:
“The committee members looked like budding Party functionaries. Many of them wore military
type clothes and looked at us severely, even arrogantly.” They asked him whether the
Komsomol was “a party or non-party organization.” Nikolai answered, correctly, that the
Komsomol was not a party organization. But he could not explain why that was. (As one of the
district committee members explained, it was because the Communist Party was the only party in
the Soviet Union.) Nonetheless, the adolescent had passed the test and became a Komsomol member.  

Melnikov’s story involved the four main factors in Komsomol recruiting: first, belief in the Soviet Union and a desire to better Soviet society; second, access to benefits and advancement; third, pressure by superiors; fourth, existing social dynamics. Having emigrated to the West, he tried to camouflage his adolescent activism as naivety in his account; nonetheless, Melnikov seemed to have at least enjoyed his work as an activist, if he claimed later to have been ignorant of the support for the regime it implied. The perks of activism and association with the Komsomol were obvious to him; not only did he get passes and local fame, he also watched around him as peers received promotion through their Komsomol ties. Sheikin, a trusted mentor, pressured Melnikov to join the Komsomol. Although he was still uncertain about joining, the company of his friends helped him agree in the end. Each young person joined the Komsomol for their own reasons but these four factors were at work to varying degrees in every case. And as Melnikov’s case shows, these factors were not mutually exclusive.

Who were the new members who arrived in 1938-39? Many were quite similar to Melnikov (see table 5.2). Along with approximately three million other new Komsomol youth—approximately half of all admissions—he was under 18 years old and a student. These groups, along with young women, made up an increasing percentage of those admitted after 1937. But the most readily apparent change was the magnitude of expansion in the Komsomol; from 1937 to 1940 its ranks more than doubled. While many youth surely wanted to join the league out of their belief in the party’s goals or the benefits membership would give them, it seems that social pressure also played a large role in convincing youth to join the league.

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Table 5.2 Komsomol Admissions, 1937-1939

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1937</th>
<th>1938</th>
<th>1939</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Membership</strong>**</td>
<td>4,375,604</td>
<td>7,296,135</td>
<td>8,677,202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Accepted</strong>*</td>
<td>958,987</td>
<td>3,354,289</td>
<td>2,841,641</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Total Membership</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Women</strong></td>
<td>317,411</td>
<td>1,247,738</td>
<td>1,118,347</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>15-17 Year Olds</strong></td>
<td>404,122</td>
<td>1,574,573</td>
<td>1,490,005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Workers (Factory, MTS)</strong></td>
<td>183,715</td>
<td>642,984</td>
<td>529,850</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kolkhoz Laborer</strong></td>
<td>300,729</td>
<td>961,219</td>
<td>682,109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Students (Secondary and Higher)</strong></td>
<td>361,224</td>
<td>1,663,552</td>
<td>1,329,408</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figures do not include Komsomol members in non-civilian branches like the Red Army or railroads.
**Total membership as of January 1 the following year (e.g., figure under 1937 includes all members on January 1, 1938).
***This figure is total admissions, not net increase in the league, a smaller number that would also subtract youth who left the league or went to the army.

By late 1938, the pendulum of repression had swung back in the Komsomol. Organizers might be accused of limiting admissions to the league but exhortations to root out enemies had mostly halted. Large numbers of “mistakenly” expelled members were returning to its ranks, the chain of promotion from the youth league to the party was restarted and the Komsomol had recruited more than three million members in 1938 alone. But as repression among rank-and-file members had largely ceased, Kosarev’s leadership group would be the final victims of the Komsomol’s Great Purge.

Fall of the House of Kosarev

On November 9, 1938 Aleksandr Kosarev wrote an anxious letter to Stalin: “Comrade Stalin! I beg an audience with you to discuss Komsomol issues.” Kosarev, in his ninth year as

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55 RGASPI f. 1m, op. 126, d. 344, ll. 7-10; d. 358, ll. 3-4, 20-21, 32-33, 50-51; d. 372, ll. 5-6, 15-16, 26-27, 44-45.
Komsomol secretary, did not get his audience. He was correct to worry—although in public he seemed to be at the height of his authority. The Komsomol had recently in October 1938 commemorated the twentieth anniversary of its founding and at the celebratory parade, Kosarev gave the main speech to roaring applause. He was a great friend of star athletes and the patron—or more—of up-and-coming movie starlets like Valentina Serova.\(^{57}\) Yet by the end of the year he and dozens of other youth leaders found themselves deposed and arrested. What explained Kosarev’s downfall? According to accusations party and youth leaders made against him, Kosarev had turned a blind eye to enemies in his administration and incorrectly punished those who would have rooted them out. Additionally, he had allegedly maintained friendships with degenerates, enabling and taking part in their vices. Behind these reasons, though, it seems that Kosarev’s main fault was his connection to Nikolai Ezhov, the NKVD head who himself would soon be deposed.

The seeds of Kosarev’s arrest were planted more than a year before his purge in November 1938. According to Khrushchev-era reports, NKVD investigators opened a file on the Komsomol leader in September 1937, just after the Komsomol’s first purge plenum.\(^{58}\) And Kosarev was aware what had been at stake during the plenum. At a meeting just after the plenum he reacted angrily when a provincial youth leader mentioned ill-founded rumors that Kosarev himself had been purged too.\(^{59}\) During the plenum, Kosarev had argued in his defense that he and most of the Komsomol apparatus had been woefully but not willfully ignorant of the machinations of enemies in the league. Party leaders insisted that Kosarev take his share of the

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\(^{56}\) RGASPI, f. 558, op. 11, d. 756, l. 120.
\(^{59}\) RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 5, d. 50, l. 126.
blame in the purge. When the Komsomol secretary directed criticism at youth leaders in the second person but not at himself by using the first person, party secretary Zhdanov asked, “Why you?” Kosarev replied, “Of course, we.”

At the end of the plenum, Kosarev had responded to comments and criticism about his own conduct in his closing address. He divided criticism into categories of “fair” and “slander”—with the loudest slander coming from acting head of Soviet sports, Elena Knopova. Knopova had come up through the ranks of the Komsomol and received Kosarev’s recommendation to move to the sports administration with its newly appointed chief, Ivan Kharchenko, in 1936. She became its head just weeks before the plenum after Kharchenko was removed as an enemy of the people. In her speech, saved only in outline form, she made ten different allegations against Kosarev, the most damaging that he had protected enemies whom she had unmasked in the sports administration. Kosarev turned Knopova’s accusations around on her, “This is very suspicious. Could this not be an attempt to paralyze my activity in the struggle to unmask enemies—in particular, the person of Knopova?”

Kosarev had warded off Knopova in this instance, but the two engaged in mutual recriminations for the next year. Before the plenum even, Knopova had reported to her superior, Soviet premier Viacheslav Molotov, the shocking facts surrounding Kosarev’s meddling in the infamous soccer game between Spartak and the Basque national team. Robert Edelman writes that Komsomol organizers—at the order of Kosarev—attempted to increase the Soviet team’s chances of victory by plying the Basque team with alcohol and women on the eve of the game.

60 RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 2, d. 133, l. 54.
61 Ibid., l. 93.
62 Edelman, Spartak, 106.
But Knopova also reported the more insidious charge of Vershkov demanding that Spartak players intentionally injure the best Basque players. 63

Kosarev responded by attacking Knopova materially and professionally. Because Knopova had been a Komsomol official before joining the sports administration, she continued to occupy an apartment belonging to the youth league in 1937. In the fall of that year, new Komsomol administrators arrived from the regions to the city to fill the positions of the purged. As Kosarev searched for places to house these workers, revenge and practicality made Knopova’s apartment an attractive option. She came home one day to find a new Komsomol worker settled in one of its rooms. On October 9, 1937, the new sports committee head, A.V. Zelikov had to petition Sovnarkom to provision Knopova with new lodgings. 64 In November 1938, Kosarev reported on both Knopova and Zelikov in the findings of an investigation of the sports administration he claimed to have opened on Molotov’s request. He found compromising material on a number of workers in the sports committee and suggested that Knopova and Zelikov should be removed. He even pointed to celebrated pilot Valerii Chkalov as a figure for further investigation. 65

These were more than petty squabbles. The bureaucratic infighting between Kosarev and Knopova shows that Kosarev was losing hold over his patronage network. Strong patron-client networks allowed bureaucratic groups to shield themselves from repressive measures of the center. As lower-level members of these networks faced removal or arrest, their patrons had fewer allies willing to voice support against accusations of political disloyalty. 66 The Komsomol

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63 RGASPI f. 82, op. 2, d. 970, ll. 46, 48-49.
64 GARF, f. 7576, op. 1, d. 345, l. 70.
65 RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 23, d. 1321, ll. 35-39, 47. A later report to Komsomol secretaries Mikhailov and Zakharov maintained that Zelikov was an innocent victim of Kosarev’s slander. Knopova was arrested in 1938 and sentenced to fifteen years in a labor camp. See Arkhiv presidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii (APRF), op. 24, d. 377, l. 116, 133, available online at http://stalin.memo.ru/spiski/.
66 Easter, Reconstructing the State, 149-150.
Central Committee heavily influenced both the sports committee and Osoaviakhim, and Kosarev stocked both administrations with his supporters. In July 1937, the sports administration had turned against him and he lost most of his longtime lieutenants from the Komsomol itself. Other subordinates had moved to new work, like Vershkov, who became the party secretary of Saratov province in 1938. In early November 1938, Osoaviakhim head Pavel Gorshenin had been arrested. Thus, Kosarev found himself with fewer allies and more opponents in the Komsomol and its affiliates in late 1938.

Gorshenin’s arrest was damaging for Kosarev in other ways. When he learned about Gorshenin’s fall, Kosarev lost no time denouncing him, as he had denounced Kharchenko in 1937. But try as he might to distance himself from Gorshenin, Kosarev would have a difficult time hiding his longtime friendship with the civil defense leader and army colonel. At the Komsomol Central Committee plenum in April 1937—before Gorshenin’s elevation to the chair of Osoaviakhim—several Komsomol leaders accused him of doing little as secretary for military affairs. Kosarev acted surprised at these accusations and deflected their seriousness.67 During the purge plenum in November 1938, Kosarev’s friendship and patronage of Gorshenin became one of the accusations against the Komsomol leader.

The most important charge against Kosarev, though, involved a Komsomol instructor named Ol’ga Mishakova. In the wake of the Komsomol’s summer 1937 purge, the Komsomol Central Committee had sent Mishakova to monitor the Chuvash republic’s youth committee congress. At the congress, Mishakova attempted to persuade activists in attendance to remove the first and second secretaries of the republic’s Komsomol for their alleged connections with enemies of the people. When the delegates refused, she appealed to Kosarev who removed the

67 RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 2, d. 126, 99; d. 128, l. 147; d. 129, l. 11.
Chuvash youth leaders himself. Mishakova had not stopped there, writing in November 1937 to Malenkov, then head of the party’s department of leading party organs, to denounce the first secretary of the Chuvash party. In response to these claims, the party Central Committee subsequently removed from him from the post. After the January 1938 party plenum, the mood had turned against “slanderers” and the Chuvash party organization denounced Mishakova for her denunciations. The Komsomol Central Committee removed her from her post in March as someone who “overinsured,” denouncing those who had done nothing wrong. Even after losing her position, though, Mishakova continued to make accusations against various party and Komsomol leaders—including Kosarev in a letter to Stalin in October 1938. In turn, Stalin directed Matvei Shkiriatov, a member of the party control commission, to investigate the matter.

Before the Mishakova affair, Stalin and his subordinates had already begun gathering evidence against Kosarev. Besides the NKVD file on Kosarev, party records from September 1938 show that party secretary Andrei Andreev solicited a denunciation from a former youth worker who had worked closely with Kosarev. The letter placed the Komsomol leader in the apartments of various workers later revealed to be enemies of the people—Ivan Kharchenko, Dmitrii Luk’ianov and Sergei Saltanov among others. The letter also alleged that Kosarev in the mid-1930s had come to classes on Marxist-Leninism with wine in hand. On the eve of Kosarev’s removal, no fewer than eight Komsomol administrators (including Nikolai Mikhailov, who replaced Kosarev) sent denunciations about Kosarev to party secretaries Andreev and

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68 RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 23, d. 1212, ll. 41-48.
Zhdanov. According to an apocryphal story, shortly before the plenum Stalin saw Kosarev at a ball. As the two clinked glasses, Stalin said, “Traitor! I’ll kill you!” Based on Kosarev’s rather measured behavior at the plenum and in the weeks before, this account seems unlikely. However, Kosarev knew that something was afoot. He admitted at the plenum that he knew about Shkiriatov’s investigation into the Mishakova case and he had attempted to get an audience with Stalin following Gorshenin’s removal. Nonetheless, it seems that Kosarev believed well into the plenum’s proceedings that he could remain leader of the Komsomol.

On November 11 the Komsomol’s Central Committee reinstated Mishakova and at the insistence of party leaders, hastily began organizing a plenary meeting for a week later, on November 19. The plenum lasted four days and unlike most Central Committee meetings, which usually had multiple items for discussion, the only issue was the Mishakova affair. Kosarev, who technically convened the plenum, gave the floor immediately to Shkiriatov to discuss his investigation. In his report, Shkiriatov portrayed Mishakova as a vigilant young woman fighting against a hostile leadership group in the Komsomol. He accused Kosarev of protecting enemies in the Chuvash republic whom Mishakova had denounced. (Kosarev’s initial willingness to remove the Chuvash youth leaders in September 1937 apparently had not made up for their reinstatement after the January-February party plenum.) Mishakova herself participated at the plenum, interrupting Kosarev at one point so rudely (“You lie, Kosarev!”) that he blurted out, “I’m still in the party.” Beyond Shkiriatov and Mishakova’s accusations, other Komsomol workers attacked Kosarev, Vershkov, I. Belosludtsev (the head of the Komsomol’s

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70 RGASPI, f. 17, op. 120, d. 351, ll. 6-8, 9-60. Whether party secretaries solicited these letters or the Komsomol workers sent them in response to rumors circulating is unknown.
71 For the apocryphal story, see Arkady Vaksburg, The Prosecutor and the Prey: Vyshinsky and the 1930s Moscow Show Trials (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1990), 168.
72 RGASPI, f. 17, op. 120, d. 353, l. 129.
organizational department) and, to a lesser extent, Pikina for their cliquishness and protection of various associates, including Gorshenin, who had been removed in the past year.\footnote{Ibid., d. 351, ll. 65-120, 103-124.}

Kosarev was allowed to speak often, although he was frequently interrupted, and defended himself as he had at the August 1937 plenum. In both cases, the general secretary maintained that his subordinates had been enemies and that he was merely guilty of insufficient vigilance. He claimed that Vershkov and Belosludtsev had handled the Mishakova affair without his knowledge. They had bullied Mishakova to protect their own friends from her denunciations and attacked her (verbally—although the verbiage used “to beat” [pobit’ and izbivat’] was intentionally suggestive of physical violence) at a meeting in March 1938 where she was removed. Kosarev said he was responsible in the general sense as a leader but not for any of the specific wrongdoing his underlings perpetrated:

Kosarev: I didn’t know about it [the Mishakova case], until the commission for party control began to investigate… [Vershkov] was responsible for the attack on Mishakova [in March 1938] but he said nothing about it during his speech [at the March 1938 meeting], nor beforehand during discussion of this issue, nor during the preliminary preparation of this question for discussion by the bureau of the C[entral] C[ommittee].

Vershkov: You should have reviewed it.

Kosarev: Yes, that was my mistake.

Vershkov: Well, look now at what they are accusing me of.

Kosarev: Listen, Comrade Vershkov, I’ll answer for my mistakes, you’ll answer for yours.\footnote{Ibid., d. 353, l. 129.}
The Komsomol leader played the part of boy-leader, presenting himself as a naïve but well-meaning youth organizer. This tactic led party secretary Andreev to accuse the thirty-five-year-old Kosarev of intentionally infantilizing himself. “Don’t try to paint yourself as some kind of nursing child [grudnoi mladenets]… You’re no nursing child, you’ve run the Komsomol for ten years.”  

The mood turned even more against Kosarev with Stalin’s intervention. On the morning of the second day, one Komsomol worker gave a speech where he criticized Kosarev mildly, saying that the youth leader had misunderstood the meaning of the August 1937 purge plenum. Stalin, who attended only that session, asked whether this was a misunderstanding of the August 1937 plenum’s exhortation to remove enemies or an intentional attempt to conceal hostile workers in the youth organization. “Perhaps he [Kosarev] understood, but did not admit it,” Stalin began and then suggested, “or maybe this is a system and not a mistake?” References to the August plenum also hinted at degeneracy, particularly drinking, on the part of Kosarev, although he denied that any drinking bouts had occurred since August 1937. Youth leaders continued to attack Kosarev through the second and third days. However, if the evidence used in the first three days made Kosarev out to be arrogant, ignorant and generally incompetent in rooting out enemies, it did not prove he had acted with malice. The proof of Kosarev’s hostile intentions would be his friendship with Gorshenin.

On November 22, the fourth and final day of the plenum, Zhdanov dropped a bombshell regarding Kosarev and the civil defense leader—their drunken fishing trips. A fisherman named

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75 Ibid., l. 135. Kosarev had used this tactic in the past as well. After the perceived failure of the Komsomol to control the recently introduced new year’s celebrations in 1936-1937, Kosarev said that “kakaia-nibud’ mamasha [some mother] came and supervised, and what did she know about how to do this?” Quoted in Petrone, Life Has Become More Joyous, Comrades, 107.

76 RGASPI, f. 17, op. 120, d. 352, l. 134.
Andreenko had just sent the party secretary a letter with confirmation of Kosarev’s hostile intentions. Just days before, Andreenko read a *Komsomol’skaia Pravda* editorial criticizing Kosarev and realized he had crucial evidence against the Komsomol leader. The fisherman wrote that Kosarev had made debauched fishing trips, at least two, with Gorshenin on the Istra river just outside Moscow: “Once they got so drunk that they almost overturned the boat and drowned. Gorshenin was so drunk he burned his boots in the campfire and he had to find new shoes to get back to Moscow.” The two kept up the inhabitants of the village Pokhlebaiki all night with their loud, drunken swearing. Here was proof positive that Kosarev had engaged in degenerate activity and, even worse, had attempted to hide his drinking with an enemy of the people. The evidence led Zhanov to remark, “After the arrest [of Gorshenin] we have to ask the question, were Gorshenin and Kosarev just catching fish?”

In the case of Mishakova, Kosarev could claim ignorance and it would be his word against Vershkov’s as to who was guilty of mishandling cadres. With Gorshenin the case was clear. Zhdanov invited the Komsomol workers at the plenum to imagine alcohol-fueled outings to an isolated area where the two could hatch schemes against Stalin and the party. Vershkov, too, was implicated in the fishing plots. He had claimed not to have been connected with Kosarev in “everyday life”—in other words, that they were not close friends. Yet when Komsomol workers in the audience pressed him on whether he had been at the fishing outings and if these outings were after the August 1937 plenum, he confirmed on both counts. “Oh, a bunch of fishermen!” a Komsomol worker exclaimed. The outings linked Kosarev with both Gorshenin and Vershkov under suspicious circumstances. Moreover, they showed that Kosarev did not understand the meaning of the August plenum. He had, after all, engaged in drinking

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77 RGASPI, f. 77, op. 3, d. 19, l. 57.
78 RGASPI, f. 17, op. 120, d. 353, l. 153.
79 Ibid., l. 188.
despite his denunciation of degeneracy at the plenum. Stalin’s suggestion that Kosarev had intentionally disregarded the August 1937 plenum seemed to be true.

Kosarev protested his innocence until the last. After Zhdanov and Andrei Andreev spoke, he seemed to realize the dire situation he was in: “This is an absolute fabrication, an absolute slander.” Shortly after, though, Komsomol workers voted to remove Kosarev, Pikina, Belosludtsev and two other leaders from their positions. Vershkov was removed from the Komsomol Central Committee (and he was soon removed of his position in the party). The plenum elected a new Komsomol leadership including Nikolai Mikhailov, the thirty-two-year-old editor of *Komsomol’skaia Pravda* who became Komsomol General Secretary and Mishakova who became its secretary for student affairs.  

Why was Kosarev purged? Was it his proclivity for drinking, his connections with Gorshenin and other disgraced colleagues, or his handling of Mishakova? These factors provided the ammunition for his removal but ultimately his demise appears to have been related to a motivation that did not come up at the plenum—his connection with Nikolai Ezhov. The NKVD leader and his well-connected wife, Evgeniia had been personal acquaintances of Kosarev, who attended their parties alongside personages like *Pravda* correspondent Mikhail Kol’tsov and writer Isaac Babel. In his April 1939 interrogation, Ezhov’s nephew A.N. Babulin would link Kosarev to a host of arrested figures.  

Ezhov’s demise began in early 1938 when Lavrentii Beria, a longtime member of Stalin’s political family, was appointed as his lieutenant in the NKVD. Ezhov, who himself had replaced the disgraced Genrikh Iagoda after a brief appointment as his assistant, must have noticed a pattern. Cracking under the strain of his apparent doom, Ezhov began to drink heavily in the middle of 1938. Why did Stalin apparently

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80 Ibid., 230-232, 236.
81 APRF, f. 3, op. 24, d. 373, ll. 3-44. Thanks to Arch Getty for alerting me to this source and to the broader connection between the Kosarev and Ezhov purges.
engineer Ezhov’s removal from early 1938 onward? Perhaps the Soviet leader feared that Ezhov was leaking state secrets. Or perhaps Stalin simply wanted to remove the traces of the Great Terror—what seems to have motivated the broader purge of the NKVD in late 1938. In either case, the timing of Kosarev’s purge corresponded closely with Ezhov. On November 22, Evgeniia Ezhova committed suicide after months of sending petitions to Stalin with no response. On November 25, just days after Kosarev was removed from his position, Ezhov resigned as NKVD commissar. In April 1939, Ezhov was arrested. In February 1940 he was tried and secretly executed. While, as Marc Jansen and Nikita Petrov write, there is no direct evidence that would link Kosarev’s fall to the broader Ezhov purge, the circumstantial evidence is highly suggestive of a connection between the two. Kosarev and his family were arrested shortly after the November 1938 Komsomol plenum and the former youth leader was executed on February 23, 1939.

In her petitions from the 1950s, Kosarev’s wife asserted that Beria was largely to blame for her family’s misfortune. It is likely that the downfall of Beria was a major reason that Kosarev received a posthumous rehabilitation from the party on August 13, 1954. Along with Ezhov, whose purge was also framed as Beria’s doing, he was one of the earliest to receive this dubious honor. Among the other Komsomol leaders removed at the plenum, it seems that only

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82 On the purge of the purgers see Vatlin, Terror raionnogo masstaba, 102-110; Shearer, Policing Stalin’s Socialism, 368; Getty and Naumov, The Road to Terror, 531.
84 The willingness to scapegoat then-disgraced Beria was also characteristic of rehabilitations. On his rehabilitation, see Artizov A., ed., Reabilitatsiiia kak eto bylo, vol. 1 (Moscow: Demokratia, 2000), 79-80, 156-157, 166-168, 396. In narrating the purge of Kosarev and allies, post-Soviet Russian historians have juxtaposed the excessive political paranoia of Stalin with the naivety of youth. Kosarev, with his boyish image, emerged from these works as a flawed young hero who represented the absurd limits of Stalin’s fears. Rogovin says of the Komsomol in the purge, “The young people in the Komsomol were a danger to Stalin’s regime since they represented a part of society distinguished by their sensitivity toward injustice and by their personal lack of fear.” Rogovin, Stalin’s Terror, 213. Grekhov’s article on the two purge plenums implies an absurdity in the asymmetry of power in the accusations of the party apparatus against the youth league’s leaders. Grekhov, “Rasprava s rukovodstvom komsomola v 1937-1938 godakh,” 136.
Pikina was not executed. She survived more than a decade in labor camps before she was released. Under Nikita Khrushchev, she regained her party status and took up a post in the party control commission where she worked on the issue of political rehabilitation. Mishakova, whose serial denunciations provided the immediate (but not core) reason for Kosarev’s purge and those of other party members, was stripped of party membership under Khrushchev.

Beyond the major figures, the purge of Kosarev cast suspicion on numerous cadres whom he had appointed in the youth league. As Mikhailov and his new leadership group took charge of the Komsomol, they attempted to control the unfolding purge of Kosarev appointees. Unlike the August 1937 purge, when Kosarev had sent instructors to manage purge meetings in the provinces, the demise of the longstanding leader of the Komsomol demanded that Mikhailov and other new league secretaries go out to the provinces personally. Besides overseeing the provincial purges in late 1938 and early 1939, the meetings of the Komsomol’s bureau from the first months of the new leadership are filled with removals of youth organizers appointed under Kosarev. The fall of Kosarev’s group marked the final break with youth organizers who had come up in the Komsomol’s period of radical proletarianism.

As the press and local meetings disseminated news about Kosarev’s purge, its narrative, like the earlier purge after August 1937, came to have an instrumental element. The public story of the purge was that Kosarev had covered up the work of degenerate enemies. He had crushed criticism of himself and his favorites, allowing politically hostile drunks to take over the Komsomol apparatus. Although Kosarev himself was not treated as a degenerate in the press, his purge reignited the Komsomol’s campaign to politicize degeneracy. On December 8, 1938, Komsomolets Karelii printed an article “Moral cleanliness is a guarantee against political degeneracy” that reminded Komsomol committees of the lessons in the August 1937 plenum—
that drinking was not acceptable in the Komsomol. The same newspaper published regular articles under similar titles (e.g., “Behavior is not a private matter”) that focused on a single district or even individuals for their inappropriate behavior, above all drinking. An article from May, 22 1939, “More attention to questions of behavior,” pointed to the change that was occurring in the Komsomol. According to the article, the November 1938 plenum reinforced the link between “cultured” social behavior and appropriate political behavior. Moreover, its author alleged that Komsomol organizers had misinterpreted this message, believing that it was part of a temporary campaign against degeneracy. Instead, the article asserted that policing behavior was a permanent part of Komsomol work, to be “fulfilled systematically, every day.”

At the local level, youth organizers also used the November 1938 purge to reference the earlier purge of “Trotskyist degenerates.” At a conference of Komsomol organizers in Lopasne district on January 27, 1939, the leader of a factory Komsomol group said, “Enemies of the people in the leadership of the Komsomol used drinking bouts, the main tool in their fight to defile the ranks of the Leninist Komsomol.” Toward the end of the conference, the representatives from the Moscow provincial Komsomol urged the activists to look twice at drunkenness, “Enemies of the people made their way into the Komsomol leadership through degeneracy. In this district there have been cases of drunkenness and you need to look—are these cases not the work of hostile hands?”

85 “Moral’noe chistata – garantiia ot politicheskogo razlozheniia,” Komsomolets Karelii, 8 December 1938, 1; “Bol’she vnimaniiia voprosam byta,” Komsomolets Karelii, 22 May 1939, 1. For a similar but more general article on “communist morals” from the central press, see N. Likacheva, “O kommunisticheskoi nравственности,” Komsomol’skii rabotnik, no. 13 (1939): 5-8.
80 TsAOPIM, f. 648p, op. 1, d. 14, ll. 4, 14.
Many local activists acted upon the renewed appeals to root out degenerates. In the months following Kosarev’s purge, the number of members expelled from the league spiked. Since the party’s admission of “mistakes” of hyper-vigilance in January 1938, the number of expulsions had fallen considerably, particularly among those accused of being “hostile elements” (see table 5.3). Even after Kosarev’s purge, the number of youth expelled “hostile elements” continued to fall. This decrease in the number of “hostile element” expulsions reflected party and Komsomol leaders’ assertion that rank-and-file members were often the victim of slander rather than true enemies. But simultaneously the number of youth accused of degeneracy rose as a proportion and in absolute numbers in the months surrounding Kosarev’s fall. Nonetheless, when the dust settled after Kosarev’s demise, the number of expulsions in the Komsomol fell to the lowest levels since recording had begun in 1933.

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Table 5.3: Expulsions from the Komsomol by Quarter, 1938-1939<sup>87</sup>

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<th>1938</th>
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<td>717</td>
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<td>2,775</td>
<td>3,957</td>
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<td>20,001</td>
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<sup>87</sup> RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 126, d. 358, ll. 12-13, 14-15, 36-37, 46,47; d. 372, ll. 11-12; d.373 l. 21, 24-25, 29, 36-37, 38-39.
Conclusion:

By the middle of 1939, Kosarev’s name ceased to appear in the press and organizers only referenced him obliquely, as a counterexample, by the plenum where he was purged. Yet echoes of the Kosarev purge continued after his execution. The 1940 film *The Rule of Life* ([Zakon zhizni](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zakon_zhizni)) was supposed to be the smash hit of that year. The Mosfilm production profiles Serezha Paromov, a Komsomol organizer at a medical institute who takes on the degenerate and corrupt Ognerubov, the youth leader in the province. Ognerubov engages in wanton debauchery, bringing the institute’s Komsomol organization with him into the mire until Paromov proves Ognerubov is a degenerate and takes his place as the province’s youth leader. The film had major backing. Its directors were Aleksandr Stolper, the future Stalin prize winner, and Boris Ivanov. The screenwriter was Aleksandr Avdeenko, famed author of the novel *I Love* ([Ia liubliu](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/I_a_liubliu)). Yet within weeks it was pulled from the theaters and banned. In the fallout of its censure, Avdeenko was thrown out of the Writers’ Union and the party. What was wrong with the film?

Stolper, Ivanov and Avdeenko appeared at a meeting of the party Central Committee on September 9, 1940. Ivanov bluntly said that the film’s main fault was that it now no longer topical. He had apparently modeled Ognerubov directly on Kosarev and believed the film would have been more appropriate had it been released sooner, after the November 1938 purge. Ivanov’s analysis misread the meaning of degeneracy in the Komsomol’s purge; Ognerubov was certainly debased but not a Trotskyist set on undermining youth intentionally, as the Komsomol’s leaders had supposedly been. Yet the main reason the film was banned was not because of its timing, nor its portrayal of the Kosarev-esque figure, but because of its portrayal of young people. According to an editorial in *Pravda*, the film was a “slander on student youth,”
whom it portrays as engaging in debauched activity. What the film’s makers failed to understand was that youth had been rehabilitated. The young people portrayed in the film were training to be physicians—members of the new Soviet intelligentsia and future leaders on the cusp of joining the party—not the weak-willed youth easily taken in by the likes of Ognerubov.

The years 1937-38 had changed the Komsomol. The narrative of the purge had attacked the old ways of organizing in the youth league, and expulsions and arrests had led to the almost wholesale change in its leadership. But the story of the purge was about more than destruction. The Komsomol’s attempt to rehabilitate youth in 1938 reinforced core concepts of “communist upbringing”—that good work and good behavior could redeem wayward young people, turning them into worthwhile citizens. Simultaneously, the easing of the purge in the party finally allowed pererostki to leave an organization that was no longer a center of radical activism. In joining the Communist Party, they infused new blood into an apparatus that the purge had bled dry. In their place, millions of new recruits were changing the culture of youth activism. No longer an organization of radical activists, the Komsomol that emerged from the Great Purge was becoming a mass organization of social promotion.

Chapter 6: Shaping a Mass Youth Organization:  
Political Education, Promotion and Staffing in the Komsomol after the Terror

During the Komsomol’s elections in September 1940, a Central Committee instructor named Voronin went to supervise the voting in the youth committee of Moscow’s School Number 478. The meeting did not proceed as planned. The assistant secretary of the school’s group, Adzhubei (quite possibly Aleksei, the future editor of Komsomol’skaia Pravda and son-in-law of Nikita Khrushchev) “rudely insulted the merits of every Komsomol member.”

Adzhubei’s insult was to question the commitment of new members: “The comrades who have come to our Komsomol committee [as new members] are not bad but they don’t want to work in the Komsomol, they obviously wanted only to get their Komsomol cards for their own personal reasons.” Adzhubei then wondered aloud if the “political and cultural work” of the group would decline with the graduation of senior members. In his mind, the cohort that had recently joined his organization was different than those who had come before. Instead of leading a small group of fervent activists, he now headed a large organization of those he believed were well-meaning but indifferent careerists.

As the huge wave of new members joined in 1938 and 1939, the Komsomol changed from an exclusive organization of activists to a mass organization for socialization and social promotion—an organization that would make youth Soviet. The change in the Komsomol’s purpose reflected a broader reconfiguration of what it meant to be a good Soviet citizen. David Brandenberger writes that under Stalin, public discourse “expanded the notion of ‘Soviet’ from a

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1 Adzhubei, born in 1924, noted in his memoirs that he attended School Number 478. He would have been somewhat young for the position of assistant secretary but taking into account his future career trajectory, it is not inconceivable that he would have held the post. Adzhubei mentioned in his memoirs that he went on a geological expedition in “the summer and fall of 1940 and 1941,” making it possible but unclear that he was in Moscow at the time. However, it seems likely that this Adzhubei was Aleksei or a relative. Aleksei Adzhubei, Te desiat’ let (Moscow: Sovetskaia Rossiia, 1989), 193-196.
2 RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 23, d. 1386, ll. 91-94.
party-oriented affinity based on class to a broader understanding.”

Above all, this new understanding of Soviet citizenship meant loyalty to Stalin’s regime. While scholars have examined public discourse surrounding this shift, few have looked at the institutions responsible for fostering notions of citizenship among Soviet people. How did the more diffusive notion of Sovietness affect the content and implementation of political education? Did these changes meet with resistance from below? And to what extent did Soviet people mobilize behind the regime in search of material rewards?

The Komsomol was one of the main vehicles that inculcated conceptions of citizenship through political education. One of the mechanisms of political education in the Komsomol was its admissions process. The last chapter examined how youth leaders in 1938 had demanded the end of intensive interviews for new members, effectively decreasing the rigor of the league’s admissions process in order to recruit large numbers of new members. Under new Komsomol leader Nikolai Mikhailov—and against the resistance of some youth organizers—the league further undermined paid activists’ control over the admissions process. With a new mass membership, formal political education in the ranks of the Komsomol itself came to be more limited and uniform. These changes in political education tied into broader trends in Soviet political socialization. In 1938, Soviet leaders introduced a new text on political education, The History of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks), Short Course (or just The Short Course), that presented a simplified version of the party’s history. Its purpose, as a 1939 party Central Committee resolution stated, was to put “an end to all arbitrariness and confusion in the

3 Brandenberger, National Bolshevism, 29.
4 Brandenberger, Sarah Davies, Malte Rolf and Karen Petrone have examined how the turn toward Soviet patriotism unfolded in popular discourse and public celebrations. Brandenberger, National Bolshevism; Davies, Popular Opinion in Stalin’s Russia; Malte Rolf, Sovetskie massovye prazdniki; Karen Petrone, Life Has Become More Joyous, Comrades. E. Thomas Ewing does examine the role of teachers as mediators of Stalinism in schools but focuses more on the organization of socialization rather than its content. Ewing, Teachers of Stalinism, 14-15.
treatment of the history of the party.” Yet even this stripped down version of political education was not for everyone. Party leaders asserted that mandatory formal political education for party members was unnecessary. Similarly, Komsomol leaders stressed that *The Short Course* was for dedicated activists, especially those that might apply for party membership, and not the rank and file at all.

As the Komsomol deemphasized formal political education as a goal for ordinary members, groups focused on their broader role in socialization, including enabling social mobility for youth. Of course, the Komsomol had always been a “reserve” of the party, a means of gaining promotion into state or political administrations. Yet central Komsomol leaders had not before made a strong effort to coordinate promotion for youth. The Komsomol’s relationship to promotion changed under Mikhailov. Increasingly, youth leaders and ordinary young people viewed the management of young cadres as a crucial aspect of the league’s mission. This mission extended beyond the league itself and encompassed promotion to positions in state and economic institutions as well. How the Komsomol handled its own cadres changed, too. The massive influx of new members initially resulted in the expansion of the league’s paid staff and demographic changes among the ranks of cadres. However, in 1940 Mikhailov pushed through staffing cuts that eliminated more than half the paid positions in the organization. The stated purpose of these policies was to include more youth in voluntary activism. In effect, though, it made paid Komsomol workers into bureaucratic supervisors over burgeoning ranks of unpaid activists and ordinary members. Rather than attempting to foster a community of radical activists, its leaders hoped the new configuration of Komsomol activism would reinforce a firm, uncomplicated loyalty to the regime among a broad cohort of youth.

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6 Guillory, “We Shall Refashion Life on Earth!,” 211.
An Even Shorter Course: Admissions and Political Education

The Komsomol’s new mass following both resulted from and necessitated simplifying its admissions process and its standards for political education. In 1938, Komsomol organizational secretary Petr Vershkov had called for the simplification of admission to the Komsomol as a “non-party organization.” Yet Vershkov and other youth leaders had recoiled at the suggestion that this interview be eliminated altogether. What would be the value of Komsomol membership if anyone could join without an interview?

Under Nikolai Mikhailov’s new leadership in 1939, though, the Komsomol’s Central Committee relaxed not only this requirement but its expectations for political education more generally. In admissions, Mikhailov pushed through measures that devolved the final decision to accept a new member onto lower-level committees. In large universities, a Komsomol Central Committee resolution allowed groups in academic departments to decide whether to admit or reject an applicant without the final approval of the district youth committee. Along similar lines, the Central Committee began to allow admission without the district-level interview in national-minority territories where infrastructure or distance made travel difficult. To replace the interview, Mikhailov permitted admission by correspondence (zaochnyi priem); the district committee would receive a list of new members with evaluations for its approval.

On the heels of these developments, youth leaders began to suggest the possibility of doing away with district-level interviews in other scenarios. At the April 1939 Komsomol Central Committee plenum, Moscow province’s youth leader A.M. Pegov argued for admission by correspondence in large local organizations. In some major factories and educational institutions, youth organizers oversaw thousands of members, more than in some entire districts.

7 See chapter 5 above.
8 RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 3, d. 204, l. 84.
9 Ibid., d. 202, l. 69.
The motivation behind Pegov’s proposal was likely the problem of overstretched district youth organizers. Millions of young people were applying for membership, forcing district leaders to spend more and more time overseeing admission. The proposal to eliminate the district-level admissions interview would seem to solve the problem of overburdened organizers and, by eliminating a check on new admissions, would help achieve Komsomol leaders’ goal of admitting more new members overall.

The suggestion to entrust admissions to local committees drew sharp criticism from lower-level youth organizers at the plenum. For some, the proposal seemed to remove an important check on the admission of potentially hostile elements and undermined the authority of the youth league. Nikitin, the leader of Moscow city’s Taganskii municipal district proposed that the admissions process might be reorganized but that district committees should not lose their hands-on oversight over the process. Over murmuring, he called for the formation of a special committee in each district that would only handle admission: “How would it work without interviews [of applicants in the district committee]? It won’t work with us. Why? What would be the significance of admitting someone to the Komsomol without it? It would mean rubber stamping the decision of Komsomol committees and local organizations.”10 To Nikitin it seemed that admission by correspondence would effectively mean admission by local committees, whose activists were less experienced and reliable than those at the district level. He argued that as a result, more young people—and perhaps the wrong type of young people—would join the league. At the heart of this argument was anxiety over the nature of the Komsomol. It seemed that delegating admissions to local groups would undermine the exclusivity and legitimacy of the Komsomol as a reserve of the party.

10 RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 2, d. 170, l. 92.
Unfortunately for Nikitin and other activists who shared his convictions, the recruiting campaign begun in 1938 had already undermined the authority of the Komsomol’s admissions process. It was for this reason that Nikolai Romanov, the future leader of postwar Soviet sport and then an up-and-coming Komsomol worker, suggested that devolving admissions decisions would not make the process any less stringent.\textsuperscript{11} According to Romanov, many district committees already had ceased to conduct interviews. He considered this negligence reasonable given that huge numbers of applicants had necessitated that some district committees hold 190 to 200 meetings per year. One secretary of a district youth committee told Romanov that he saw between 150 and 200 new applicants per meeting. Understandably, these large numbers meant that each new member’s interview was brief at best. Romanov quoted the district secretary as saying, “In the district committee it is cramped, there’s little space, and without exception comrades [i.e., new members] leave dissatisfied, saying: they didn’t even give us an interview.” Romanov concluded that the Komsomol would lose no authority (or perhaps had little authority to lose) by letting large local organizations handle admissions on their own.\textsuperscript{12}

The benefits of devolving admission onto lower-level committees ultimately outweighed the dangers of lessening control and authority. On the final day of the plenum, Mikhailov called for a special commission to examine the problem of admission in larger youth committees. He implied that the likely outcome of its deliberations would be that districts would no longer need to interview new members from large organizations in factories or universities. However, Mikhailov insisted that this policy would not mean “the weakening of the principle of individual admission” but instead would strengthen the authority of local committees by making them more

\textsuperscript{11} On Romanov’s role in Soviet sport in the postwar period, see Jenifer Parks, “Red Sport, Red Tape: The Olympic Games, the Soviet Sports Bureaucracy, and the Cold War, 1952-1980” (PhD diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2009).

\textsuperscript{12} RGASPI f. 1m, op. 2, d. 169, ll. 139, 147.
responsible for vetting new members. Ultimately, the commission decided to give local committees even more responsibility than Mikhailov had suggested at the plenum. It gave district youth leaders the choice of continuing to conduct a personal interview or to implement admission by correspondence. However, the commission’s decision applied not only to applicants from large organizations but to new members from all local organizations. Thus, district-level organizers could still interview new members if they believed it necessary but presumably many activists welcomed the reprieve from this time-consuming duty.

Why did Mikhailov, Romanov and other Komsomol leaders support a policy that made the league’s admissions process less rigorous? One reason was the district committees was another gateway in the admissions process; removing the test of the district-level interview would ensure that more youth would join the league. But the main reason was that the expectations leaders had for youth were becoming less rigorous than before. The gateway district committees presented for admission was negligible; Komsomol committees were rejecting very few youth and accepting most pro forma. Local activists had less authority and experience, but the decision-making process that went into admissions now demanded less of activists.

As youth leaders simplified the Komsomol’s admissions process, they also lessened members’ and activists’ obligations in political education. Ol’ga Mishakova oversaw the Komsomol’s programs in political education after Kosarev and his circle were purged. One of the first initiatives she undertook was to organize courses for retraining propaganda workers. The trainees were meant to become district-level assistant secretaries in charge of political education—typically the second most important position in a district youth organization. But

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13 Ibid., d. 171, ll. 154, 155.
instead of giving the propagandists broad training in Marxist-Leninism, Mishakova wanted to teach the propagandists intensively in *The Short Course*. On May 7, 1939, she gave instructions for the training, “The courses will need to limit themselves to studying *The Short Course of the History of the Party* and [other] literature—a limited amount, maybe individual articles.” Besides assigning this curriculum, Mishakova commanded that the propagandists should have at minimum a middle education (usually ten years of schooling); some propagandists were sent home for not meeting this requirement.\(^{15}\) Not only was extensive political education unnecessary for most cadres, but Mishakova characterized it as a mistake at a meeting of the Komsomol in Karelia in October 1940: “One shortcoming is that we tell people with middling levels of [educational] development that they need to study all sources of party history… Our activists with middle levels of development cannot do that right now and we should therefore orient them first of all toward studying *The Short Course of Party History.*” Mishakova went on to say that the rank and file need not even crack *The Short Course*: “Frequently people [Komsomol organizers] give speeches saying: ‘That Komsomol member does not study the history of the party.’ We cannot forget that *The Short Course* is directed at cadres…but the masses in the Komsomol are not yet ready to study party history… For them we must organize popular lectures, conversations.”\(^{16}\)

Mishakova’s handling of political education demonstrated three aspects that would come to characterize the teaching of party history in the Komsomol. First, the approved literature was largely limited to *The Short Course*. Youth were not encouraged—and were implicitly discouraged—from reading other works that were part of the canon. Second, not only did Mishakova curtail the reading list for Komsomol cadres, but she curtailed the audience for

\(^{15}\) RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 3, d. 120, l. 68.

\(^{16}\) NARK, f. 1229, op. 3, d. 41, ll. 112, 114.
political reading as well. Leaders feared that *The Short Course* would be too difficult for youth with less education. Third, general education was becoming more important as a qualification for cadres, including propagandists, than political education. Underlying Mishakova’s policies was a desire to give large numbers of youth a shallow and homogeneous understanding of party history.

In her speech in Karelia, Mishakova apparently responded to reports of intensive political education among Komsomol members for whom it was superfluous. In most groups, though, youth organizers’ political education coincided with Mishakova’s wishes, focusing exclusively on *The Short Course* and current events. Some familiarity with *The Short Course* was especially important for youth who wanted to enter the party. Having read three chapters was an acceptable or even an excellent amount of political education for would-be party members.\(^{17}\) In annual reports from the Commissariat of Defense’s Komsomol organizations, each group reported on its successes in political education exclusively in the terms of *The Short Course*. Most of the time, measuring a group’s quality of political education meant reporting how many members were attending lecture courses on the book, how many had signed up for self-study and, of those, how many chapters members had read.\(^{18}\)

District youth committees refused to supply recommendations for party membership when the applicant had not read part of *The Short Course*. At a time when Komsomol and party leaders were frantically pushing older members into the party, records show that most Komsomol members who applied for the Komsomol’s recommendation to the party received one. But in December 1939 in Lopasne district (Moscow province), the youth committee denied a recommendation to a member who had “absolutely not worked on himself,” having failed to

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\(^{17}\) For example, TsDKA member stated proudly that he had finished three chapters in a February 1939 interview for his youth group’s recommendation. RGVA, f. 9, op. 30, d. 177, l. 124.

\(^{18}\) RGVA, f.9, op 30, d. 179, passim.
read any of *The Short Course* or familiarize himself with the Eighteenth Party Congress.\textsuperscript{19} The young man had made no efforts to learn about party history or to inform himself on current events and thus disqualified himself from party candidacy.

Another aspect of political education that arose in this period was the “theoretical conference.” Giving a presentation in such a conference became an important part of preparing for party membership. Often presentations were quite topical. One Komsomol member, applying for his group’s recommendation to the party on August 19, 1939, mentioned that he would be participating in an upcoming conference—although he said he had prepared poorly so far. His topic was “Just and Unjust Wars” and he gave the committee a synopsis: “I understand the question as such: When a war is fought for independence or liberation—that is a just war. When a war is fought to take colonies, to suppress other nations—unjust.” His Komsomol committee gave him a recommendation for party membership.\textsuperscript{20}

The young man’s answer was prescient, or perhaps he simply echoed editorials from the Soviet press on the eve of Soviet annexations in the west. Soon the Red Army would be fighting a “just war” against Finland and conducting “liberations” of the Baltic countries and territories annexed from Poland and Romania. On August 23, 1939, Soviet and German leaders finalized the non-aggression pact that would divide Eastern Europe between their countries. The pact represented a shift in Soviet foreign policy. Stalin had previously hoped that the threat of British intervention would deter Germany from invading its eastern neighbors. However, the British policy of appeasement toward Germany made the Soviet leader believe that Britain would be unable or unwilling to ensure Soviet security on its western border. With its non-aggression pact with Germany, the Soviet Union not only seemed to buy several years or more to prepare for a

\textsuperscript{19} TsAOPIM, f. 648, op. 1, d. 17, l. 133.
\textsuperscript{20} RGVA, f. 9, op. 30, d. 180, l. 101.
major conflict with the capitalist world, it also offered Stalin the ability to carve out a defensive buffer zone from newly annexed territories.\textsuperscript{21} As Soviet and German armies mobilized to implement the division of Eastern Europe, Soviet newspapers gave German aggression—previously the subject of loud denunciation—little attention but treated Soviet territorial expansion as “national unifications.”\textsuperscript{22} Komsomol members took cues from these editorials, lauding the expansion of Soviet power in theoretical conferences and regular meetings.

The onset of war affected not only the content of political education but also its scope as the Red Army rapidly expanded. On September 1, 1939, the Supreme Soviet passed a law that lowered the call-up age from twenty-one to nineteen. This double cohort was necessary as the Red Army attempted to cope with annexation of new territories. But the influx of a huge number of raw new recruits also demanded more pervasive but simpler political education. A Red Army political administration circular from September 10, 1939, called for three two-hour political education sessions per week among new recruits that would consist of lecture, independent reading and a “summarizing conversation.” The fifteen topics the circular offered as examples for discussion placed a heavy emphasis on discipline and shaping a regime-friendly understanding of current events. For example, topics included “rigid discipline is an inviolable law,” “betraying the motherland is the most grievous of crimes,” “the battle for the motherland at Khasan lake and Khakhin-Gol river,” and “the non-aggression agreement between the USSR and Germany.”\textsuperscript{23} The political administration asserted that only soldiers in their third year of service would begin to study \textit{The Short Course}.\textsuperscript{24}

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{21} On Stalinist \textit{realpolitik}, see Gabriel Gorodetsky, \textit{Grand Delusion: Stalin and the German Invasion of Russia} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 7, 119.
\item \textsuperscript{22} Brooks, \textit{Thank You, Comrade Stalin!}, 152-158.
\item \textsuperscript{23} \textit{Partiino-politicheskoi raboty v Krasnoi Armii}, 388-390.
\item \textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 405.
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Authorities asserted that some knowledge of *The Short Course* and current events was necessary for young Red Army soldiers and Komsomol activists, but some city and even provincial youth leaders had only a limited familiarity with party history. According to a Komsomol Central Committee report, in October 1939 the first secretary of Smolensk province’s youth committee had read *The Short Course* and was beginning to read some works of Lenin and Stalin. The province’s youth propaganda secretary had read these works and some of Engels and Marx as well. While these cadres had undergone some training in party history, they represented the upper reaches of the Komsomol apparatus and were potential candidates for promotion into important positions the party. At lower levels of the Komsomol administration, the level of political education dropped precipitously. For example, the Smolensk city youth leader had read three chapters of *The Short Course*. The report did not specify what his underlings (e.g., factory youth organizers) had read but it was probably a few chapters of *The Short Course* or less. For many the extent of their political education probably included a handful of lectures or participation in one or two theoretical conferences.²⁵

Political education continued to have significance for youth even as its audience and content changed. Youth leaders deemphasized the role of the Komsomol in intensive study of the Marxist-Leninist oeuvre, even among its cadres. By recruiting and socializing more and more young people as members, Komsomol leaders hoped to inculcate a wide cohort of Soviet youth with a homogenous understanding of acceptable political behavior and a broader loyalty to Stalin’s regime. In pursuing this goal, dedicated political education became a less important factor while facilitating social mobility for youth became more important.

²⁵RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 3, d. 222, ll. 60-65.
Cadres and the Komsomol

The durability of Stalin’s regime was due to the opportunities for social advancement it provided supporters. The party recruited hundreds of thousands of factory workers in the early 1930s for education in factory schools, creating an elite group in Soviet society.26 Huge numbers of workers catapulted into positions of responsibility as Soviet leaders attempted to resolve the seemingly endless shortage of cadres and to replace victims of the purges.27 These new workers became the backbone of the new Soviet elite and included figures of national prominence like future Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev.28 The Komsomol’s earlier efforts, too, had enabled social mobility by recruiting young people for education, for special military training and by promoting workers in its own ranks. Yet these endeavors represented ad hoc campaigns of social promotion. The only systematic cadre management the youth league conducted was among its own workers. In 1939 the Komsomol leadership’s approach to cadre management began to change. Under the direction of Mikhailov, youth leaders re-envisioned the Komsomol as an organization of systematic promotion—not only within its own ranks but throughout the USSR.

Before Mikhailov assumed control of the Komsomol, the youth organization’s leadership had undertaken a limited role in cadre development policies. Even among its own cadres, central organizers had trouble asserting control over the process of promotion. Kosarev’s Central Committee had organized the staff of lower-level committees though a department of leading Komsomol organs (Otdel rukovodiaschchikh komosmol’sikh organov). Its head, Belosludtsev, documented the department’s activities in a November 1938 report to the league’s Central

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26 Fitzpatrick, *Education and Social Mobility*, 239-49.
27 Labor shortages existed at all levels of industry in 1930s and were particularly felt among technical cadres. Similarly, Roger Reese shows the Red Army in the late 1930s was also unable to train and retain officers as quickly as it was expanding. Moshe Lewin, “Society, State, and Ideology During the First Five Year Plan” in *The Making of the Soviet System*, 221. Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*, 86-94; Reese, *Stalin’s Reluctant Soldiers*, 108.
Committee. In the report, Belosludtsev criticized his department’s failure to manage cadres adequately within the Komsomol apparatus, “We effectively control only thirteen provincial, regional and republican organizations.” According to Belosludtsev, this lack of control had resulted in too many cadres’ having low educational levels and too few having party membership. He also claimed that lack of oversight had allowed the promotion of enemies of the people or those with connections to hostile elements. For all his criticism, Belosludtsev covered only problems with Komsomol cadres and made no suggestion that his department had overseen promotion for youth more generally.29

In Komsomol Central Committee meetings, Kosarev had also made comments about the Komsomol’s role in promotion. In particular, Kosarev insisted upon the necessity of promoting young cadres—even the potential military importance of ensuring that service-age men had an opportunity to hold a position of responsibility in the league. But Kosarev’s comments on promotion were similarly limited to matters concerning Komsomol positions.30 Implicit in Belosludtsev’s report and Kosarev’s speeches was the idea that the Komsomol’s main role in cadre development involved positions within the league itself.

The conception of the Komsomol’s function in the country’s cadre management changed under Mikhailov. Soon after he became secretary of the youth league, its Central Committee formed a department for cadres (Otdelenie kadrov) that took the place of the department of leading Komsomol organs. Unlike its predecessor, the new department’s mission was not just to

29 RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 3, d. 201, ll. 50-53.
30 RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 5, d. 51, l. 150. At a November 1937 meeting of Komsomol leaders, Kosarev upbraided provincial leaders who had failed to promote young cadres, “Here, comrades, the matter is not of age but of the need to promote cadres faster. We have people who are twenty-three, twenty-five and thirty years old. People who are good, honest workers, who need to be promoted faster, and from those guys—the youngest—we need to forge cadres. These people will serve us well during a war. They will be the ones leading youth during wartime for the sake of the party in all the most dangerous areas.” See also a speech by Kosarev at the February 1938 Komsomol Central Committee plenum where he ties membership recruiting to military needs, RGASPI f. 1m, op. 2, d. 138, ll. 179-181.
manage cadres within the youth league but also to facilitate promotions for young people throughout the Soviet Union. For example, cadres secretaries from the Kirgiz SSR reported in April 1940 on their work in finding positions for league members. Of the 2,902 promotions they counted in the republic, only 392 went to positions on youth committees; most of the young people went to positions in state institutions or enterprises.31

The emphasis on promotion was not only about moving Komsomol members into new positions outside the Komsomol, but moving them into significantly more responsible work. The head of the cadres department, Ivan Grishin referred to these vertical moves as “bold promotion.” At the April 1939 plenum of the Komsomol Central Committee, Grishin contrasted cases when cadres were simply shuffled around various administrations to cases of real promotion: “Nothing will happen in a person’s life if he is moved from the position of secretary of the executive committee [in the local government] to the secretary of the district Komsomol. But promote the secretary of a kolkhoz [Komsomol] organization to secretary of the district Komsomol. That would be bold promotion. That person would have big things ahead of him in his life.”32

“Bold promotion” was the best-case scenario for Grishin, yet publications profiled cases of promotion that were less. From late 1938 to 1941, Komsomolets Karelii published regular articles detailing the big and small promotions of young people. One article, for example, announced the promotions of several Komsomol members from Olonets district. Among them, Tonia Niuchalina, went from an accountant to running a bank and former chauffer Vasia Volkov became the boss of a garage. At the upper end of the scale, Komsomol member Pavel Prokop’ev, the former chair of the district executive committee had recently become the assistant

31 RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 3, d. 234, l. 64.
32 RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 2, d. 169, l. 181.
An April 1939 article in *Komsomol’skii rabotnik* profiled the work of a department store in Moscow. The article began by presenting a worker, E. Eremushkina, who recently received promotions both at work and from candidate to full member of the party. The author spared no detail, quoting her new salary as up to an enviable 1,700 rubles per month. What characterized this kind of promotion was its relatively small scale and, though it was not connected to Komsomol or party work, the explicit link to membership in the Komsomol or party organizations. In effect the Komsomol press was showing young people that the youth organization and the party were interested in improving their positions in the world.

Outside of the press, too, Komsomol members asserted that the league was a vehicle for their personal success. Leaders in the Commissariat of Defense’s Komsomol organization made promotion of local youth an official point of discussion during the annual reporting session in the summer of 1938. In its report from June 1938, the Auto-base (i.e., garage) youth organization in the commissariat gave its assessment of local promotion, “Many Komsomol members have been promoted recently to responsible work: two people as chauffeurs to the assistant commissar, many [others] to good, big cars.” Ataian, a member of the military publishing house (Voenizdat) youth group exhorted his fellows to accelerate the country’s progress to communism at an April 1939 meeting. Then, modestly, he hinted at a way of building communism faster—by finding him and a colleague jobs in their area of specialization.

35 RGVA, f. 9, op. 30, d. 150, 23ob.
36 Ibid., d. 177, l. 265.
meeting of the youth organization of Krasnaia zvezda (Red Star—the Red Army’s newspaper) a member named Iaskovich complained, “The Komsomol bureau [of the paper] does little to promote cadres. They promoted a few people to the letter department and settled at that. For example, I don’t like my work.” A colleague responded that not liking your work was not reason alone for promotion, yet no one asserted that it was inappropriate to expect that the Komsomol could play a role in promoting cadres.37

The annexation of new territories in the Soviet-Finnish War of 1939-40 was another opportunity for promotion that Komsomol members seized upon. Seeking opportunities in the positions that opened up in the new districts and cities, hundreds of Komsomol members sent applications to Karelia’s Komsomol for placement in various posts. In Vologda the interest in working in Vyborg was so great that the town’s youth secretary, Serov inquired on behalf of the entire city’s youth for information on how to apply. As far away as Kabardino-Balkaria youth organizers had developed an interest in new positions. Semen Bitenskii, the head of a district Pioneer organization in that region offered his service, “My work does not please me… If you need workers, contact me with the position, conditions and location.”38 Most often the republican youth committee responded by urging applicants to correspond with a special commission in Karelia’s government that was vetting new workers in the still securitized zone. Significantly, though, many young people went to the Komsomol first, believing that it was the starting place and best hope in their search for promotion.

Observers who later left the USSR remembered the Komsomol of the late 1930s as a place of opportunity and careerism. A former member who participated in the Harvard Interview Project spoke dourly of his time in the Komsomol, initially saying that membership had just

37 Ibid., d. 181, l. 44.
38 NARK, f. 1229, op. 3, d. 23, ll. 8, 12.
burdened good students like him with organizational work. After reflecting, he moderated his opinion and admitted there were advantages for students in the Komsomol such as better food and living conditions. Wolfgang Leonhard came to the Soviet Union as a youth in 1935 with his German communist mother. In his memoirs, written after he had become disillusioned with communism and left the USSR, he divided Komsomol members into four types: naïve enthusiasts, more realistic enthusiasts (his category), those who used the Komsomol for socializing and careerists. He elaborated on the careerists, “They wanted to make something of their lives and often said so quite frankly. They saw in the Komsomol nothing but a springboard to enable them to advance their careers more quickly.” Although both commentators were ill-disposed to the Komsomol, they knew it was a vehicle for bettering the lives of young people.

These glimpses of ordinary promotion suggest that rank-and-file members gave social mobility a meaning that party and youth leaders were aware of and appealed to. As Leonhard said, the Komsomol was well-known as a path to advancement and particularly for ambitious, would-be leaders, the Komsomol provided a major launching point. Perhaps the most prominent case was Yuri Andropov, the future Communist Party General Secretary who moved from the Pioneer leader of Rybinsk in Iaroslavl province in 1937 to the head of that province’s Komsomol in 1938. But for rank-and-file members, promotion could have simpler advantages like extra comforts at work. In the example of the two chauffeurs of the assistant commissars of defense, promotion meant a nicer car to drive, better pay and an influential patron. In the case of promotion to Vyborg and other new Karelian territories, the allure was promotion combined with the adventure of building up a new city in an exotic location. Komsomol members who protested that their organization had neglected their promotion may seem self-serving at first.

41 RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 18, d. 164a, l. 1.
However, their demands for promotion reflected an understanding of career advancement as a function of the youth organization.

Social mobility for youth in the Komsomol was no longer to be a haphazard affair. In the late 1930s, it had become one of the major administrative functions that the leadership and rank-and-file members expected youth groups to provide. The apparent self-promotion of some ordinary members and the monetization of promotion in the Komsomol press reveal another aspect of upward social mobility in the USSR. While many youth couched the discourse of promotion in terms of building communism, they also were interested in improving their material positions. For its part, the youth press encouraged youth to earn the rewards befitting good cadres in the interest of strengthening socialism. These expectations made Komsomol membership an ever more important and public means of improving career prospects.

**Cadres in the Komsomol**

As the Komsomol became more involved in the broader system of cadre management in the country, the way it managed its own cadres was also changing considerably. The number of paid staff in the league had grown from 1938 to 1940 due to the expansion of its membership and the creation of youth groups in new locations. In June 1939 the Komsomol Central Committee approved an across the board increase in paid organizers, mostly new positions in district-level organizations. Where there had been nearly 3,000 youth organizers at the provincial or national republic-level, the resolution called for more than 4,000 positions. District-level positions increased from 17,674 to 26,273. The increase was roughly 35 percent overall.\(^{42}\) Perhaps concerned with the growing staff in the league, Komsomol leaders raised the threshold that gave

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\(^{42}\) RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 2, d. 211, l. 98.
local groups a paid youth worker. In May 1939 they eliminated paid positions from organizations with 500 or fewer members.43

The rapid increase in the number of cadres at the provincial and district level had necessitated recruiting staff that was not technically qualified. According to the Komsomol’s 1936 regulations, candidates for district secretary positions needed to have been in the party for two years if they were from proletariat backgrounds, and three years if they were not.44 Provincial-level leaders needed two more years of experience. But as early as the spring 1937 Komsomol elections, youth leaders had unofficially allowed non-party members to become district level secretaries.45 Even at the provincial level, some secretaries (including Andropov) had attained their positions before becoming party members. Youth leaders advocated this policy in part because placing non-party members into influential positions was “bold promotion;” when a Komsomol journal gave limited public approval to the policy in 1940, it cited “the interests of fast development and promotion of new cadres.”46 But a number of these underqualified organizers found themselves in their positions because there were simply no other organizers. The Eighteenth Party Congress in March 1939 prohibited party members and candidates from holding simultaneous membership in the Komsomol unless they were elected youth organizers. In the aftermath of this decision, local youth groups removed young party members from their rolls. From that point on, for a local group to elect a new secretary who was a party member, it would mean finding someone who was formally outside the group. The disappearance of party members from their midst opened the possibility for youth organizers to gain positions beyond their level of qualification.

44 Tovarishch Komsomol, vol. 1, 544-545.
45 RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 2, d. 130, l. 117.
Outside factors also changed the face of Komsomol activists. The demand for young men in the military played a role in demographic shifts in the league, particularly after the expansion of the Soviet military in 1939. Komsomol activists had the same qualities the Red Army required of its officers and soldiers: youth, political reliability (often still based on social origin), education and civilian paramilitary training. The Red Army required thousands of additional soldiers and officers to staff the newly annexed territories in Belarus, Ukraine and the Baltic states. With the expansion of the military to the nineteen and twenty-year-old cohorts and the call-up of reserves, hundreds of youth organizers from district and even provincial-level positions went into the Red Army. In some regions, the concentration of youth conscripted from the Komsomol meant that entire district committees left for the army. In Orel province, six district youth committees lost every member. The situation was so alarming that in September 1939 Mikhailov sent an entreaty to party secretaries asking them to contain the number of conscriptions from the Komsomol, especially of provincial youth leaders. As experienced organizers went to the army, more women and younger activists joined the league’s administration.

These factors led to demographic changes among organizers in the Komsomol (see table 6.1). In 1939 more than half of provincial youth leaders were over twenty-seven-years-old—two years or more over the age maximum for new members. In city youth leagues, the corresponding figure was more than 40 percent. By 1940 the ages of both groups fell considerably. The average age of provincial and city secretaries was approximately 27.5 and 26, respectively, in 1939, and the corresponding figures for 1940 dropped to roughly 26.8 and 24.2. At the same time, the groups’ collective education levels rose. Very few provincial leaders were not party

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47 RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 23, d. 1328, l. 48.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 6.1 Komsomol Provincial Secretaries and Municipal Committees48</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Province Secretaries</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1939</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Men</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Women</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>19-20</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>21-22</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>23-25</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>26-27</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>28-30</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Over 30</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Party Member</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>or Candidate</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Non-Party</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Incomplete Secondary</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Complete Secondary</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Incomplete Higher</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Higher</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Each province had up to four secretaries.

members or candidates but a sizable and increased proportion of city youth secretaries (15 percent) were not party members when they assumed their offices in 1940. Finally, the percentage of women among mid-level leadership positions drew closer to the overall percentage of women among membership (nearly 40 percent in 1940).

These same changes occurred in exaggerated form among activists, as measured by those who attended Komsomol conferences in districts and city organizations in 1938 and 1940 (see table 6.2). Local youth groups nominated a handful of members to attend these conferences, usually group leaders, activists or ordinary members who had distinguished themselves through

48 RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 23, d. 1395, ll. 4; op. 126, d. 359, ll. 26-27.
Table 6.2 Delegates to District and City Komsomol Conferences, 1938 and 1940

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1938</th>
<th>1940</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>231,674</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>86,974</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party members</td>
<td>15,501</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party candidates</td>
<td>47,060</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under 18</td>
<td>58,221</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19-20</td>
<td>60,568</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-22</td>
<td>45,475</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23-25/26*</td>
<td>72,928</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above 25/26</td>
<td>81,456</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Education</td>
<td>10,600</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower Education</td>
<td>89,438</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incomplete Secondary</td>
<td>115,595</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary Education</td>
<td>90,118</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher Education</td>
<td>12,897</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>318,648</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The figures for 1938 include members through 25 years old in this category while 1940 includes members as old as 26.

Perhaps the most noticeable shift was that the number of youth attending these events was almost 50 percent greater in 1940 than in 1938. Like their counterparts in city and provincial youth leadership positions, the average age of conference attendees and the proportion of those with party membership fell. The proportion of women rose and attendees had more formal education in 1940 than 1938. Although external conditions rather than intentional policy had forced some of these changes in the makeup of Komsomol activists, youth leaders celebrated the changing composition of cadres. Reporting to

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49 RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 23, d. 1395, ll. 23, 24.
Mikhailov in November 1940, a statistician in the Komsomol crowed that the league had succeeded in its goal of making the composition of district committees younger and more inclusive of women. Indeed, the changes made the average Komsomol activist demographically more representative of ordinary youth in the league.

The cohort of activists and administrators in 1940 better resembled the rank and file than before, yet a smaller proportion of the overall membership was participating as paid workers. In spite of the expansion of the Komsomol’s staff, membership had expanded at a much faster rate. Nonetheless, the increasing size of the league’s staff became a tendentious issue that sparked arguments over the role of paid organizers. At the Komsomol Central Committee plenum in April 1939, heated exchanges erupted over the need for professional youth organizers in relatively small committees. Koroteev, the editor of Stalingrad’s youth paper *Molodoi Leninets*, used his speech to argue for limiting the number of paid workers in the youth league, saying that in groups with fewer than 200 or 300 members a paid organizer was not necessary. From the benches, youth leaders fiercely disputed the assertion, yelling “One is necessary!” Koroteev defended his proposal, “We should not forget that we are an organization of voluntary action and should develop the self-reliance of youth.” Shouting filled the hall after this comment. The atmosphere became so animated that the organizers declared a fifteen minute break.

After the break, the head of Bashkiria’s Komsomol, Abdullin, argued against eliminating Komsomol staff. He cited the case of a motor factory where there were three paid party organizers for just over a hundred party members. In contrast, the factory’s Komsomol had nearly 700 members and one paid worker: “It begs the question, how can the [youth] secretary cope with Komsomol work? Even with the best intentions he cannot.” He called for all

50 Ibid., ll. 28-33.
51 RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 2, d. 169, l. 67.
organizations with more than 600 workers to have two paid workers. Mishakova interrupted him, “What are you talking about? Then everyone would be a paid worker.”52 Another youth leader from the Far East suggested that special considerations be made for organizations that covered large territories. For example, an organization in his province had just 350 members but they were spread out over a distance of 150 kilometers. Mishakova dismissed this proposal, asserting that whether a worker was paid or unpaid in this case would not make a difference in performance.53 The disagreement revealed a tension between the Komsomol’s central leadership and lower-level secretaries over cadres. Provincial and district youth secretaries believed that unpaid workers were incapable of fulfilling the needs of organizing Komsomol activity among hundreds of young people and across great distances. And it seems likely that regional leaders also wanted to retain and add paid positions as part of their own patronage networks. In contrast, central leaders asserted that eliminating paid positions in organizations with fewer members would inspire local initiative and improve the quality of activism.

In the spring of 1940, the cadres issue was resolved in favor of eliminating large numbers of paid positions in the youth league. A Komsomol Central Committee directive from April 1940 ordered the number of paid youth workers reduced from 45,580 to 29,681 by June 1, 1940. Another round of cuts occurred in June, 1940, eliminating a further 10,951 positions. These two resolutions demanded a total decrease of approximately 59 percent of all paid positions in the Komsomol—predominately eliminating positions at the local and district levels. The contraction coincided with a reorganization of district-level organizations. In June and July, district committees turned several offices (otdelenia) with paid heads and often paid instructors into three commissions: for propaganda-agitational work, military-physical education, and for work

52 Ibid., 207.
53 Ibid., 220.
with schools and children. These commissions generally had a paid leader but a staff of unpaid activists. For those youth organizers whose paid positions disappeared, the Central Committee urged lower-level committees to find them new work.\textsuperscript{54}

At the June 1940 Komsomol plenum, Mikhailov worked hard to sell the cuts to provincial youth leaders—not without some backlash. His main argument was that many paid activists were doing work that could be done by ordinary members, giving them experience and opportunities for promotion.\textsuperscript{55} Most of the provincial leaders accepted Mikhailov’s decision but some registered dissatisfaction with the elimination of so many positions. The head of Molotov province’s Komsomol claimed that several district youth secretaries were actively fighting to save the positions of their underlings. The leader of the youth committee in Krasnokamsk district (Molotov province) came to his office in the provincial capital and attempted to negotiate for the retention of several members of his staff.\textsuperscript{56} Although some youth leaders spoke of subordinates’ attempts to retain positions, only one youth leader disagreed openly with the policy. Sergeev, the head of the Baku city youth organization, claimed he understood the reason for the cuts: the need to tighten the league’s budget. According to him, eliminating these positions would reduce his already overextended staff from twenty-one to just nine workers and Sergeev claimed that the money was going to the national defense budget. As he started in, voices from the crowd tried to cut him off, “You don’t understand correctly.” Sergeev pressed on, “\textit{Pravda} raised the question about cutting staffs, cutting administrative and other costs to a minimum. The apparatus of the Komsomol…does not produce valuables directly and it is dependent upon the state.” Mishakova interrupted to reiterate Mikhailov’s argument that the measures were meant to improve activity among the rank and file. Apparently realizing that he

\textsuperscript{54} RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 2, d. 234, ll. 90-92; d. 235, l. 43.
\textsuperscript{55} RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 2, d. 203, l. 30.
\textsuperscript{56} RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 2, d. 204, l. 75.
had made a statement that contradicted the position of central Komsomol leaders, Sergeev awkwardly retreated from his comments and Mishakova harassed him for the rest of his presentation.\textsuperscript{57} No other provincial secretaries voiced opposition and the plenum concluded by approving the cuts.

The result of the contraction of the Komsomol’s paid staff was that many positions simply became unpaid. In the case of district-level instructors, formerly a paid position, committees made the position unpaid but increased the total number of instructors. Before, paid instructors had generally been senior positions in the organization. The new instructors were meant to be less experienced and have more limited duties, but to use the opportunity to gain personal authority. The youth press profiled cases where the cuts had supposedly led to an increase in activism and discipline. One profile featured Chachin, an apprentice chemist who had just become an instructor in a Moscow municipal district committee at the tender age of twenty-two. Leaning on the authority of the party, Chachin even managed to tame an unruly youth organization at a factory in his district. The factory’s youth committee had organized no cultural activities at the dormitory and in their absence “hooligans made [the dormitory] their nest.” Chachin found that the secretary of the factory youth committee was unmoved by the state of affairs. Shocked at this lack of concern, Chachin called upon the factory’s party organization to make the local secretary understand the seriousness of the situation. After this intervention, the factory’s Komsomol began to organize more regular activities, leading to a decline in hooliganism at the factory.\textsuperscript{58}

The lack of paid activists also meant that more work fell to rank-and-file members. The youth press claimed that new responsibility had the benefit of creating discipline among youth.

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 105-107.
\textsuperscript{58} N. Nikoforov, “Instruktory,” Komsomol’skii rabotnik no. 18 (1940): 21-23.
Kalinin, a turner at a factory had entered the Komsomol “undisciplined in all respects.” His poor behavior was even the subject of a meeting in the factory youth group. But instead of punishing him, someone at that meeting suggested that he be given the chance to make good by conducting paramilitary work with future conscripts—an important position. The proposal was controversial, “Many were against such a bold suggestion, saying that Kalinin would not handle the task, he would ruin it.” Given the opportunity, Kalinin apparently not only succeeded at his task with flying colors, he became a better Komsomol member, punctual to meetings and with membership dues. The same article cited the case of a turner named Baranov, who was not given any Komsomol work because his group thought him too immature. The results of this opinion were disastrous: “Out of boredom, he looked toward alien people, became involved with a group of criminals, became a bad worker. He was one step away from jail.” Then the committee gave him the task organizing the local cell for the International Organization for Aid to Fighters for Revolution (better known by its Russian acronym MOPR). Throwing himself into this work, he supposedly became a better worker overall, achieving the status of a Stakhanovite. The article concluded, “Public work brings out in every member of the organization a feeling of responsibility, makes a komsomolets disciplined.”

Another way youth leaders tried to compensate for fewer paid Komsomol activists was to demand that all district committees have “office hours” (dezhurstvo) at night. The purpose of office hours was to allow young people and the community at large to discuss youth-related issues with Komsomol organizers. In a case profiled in the youth press, an activist on duty one night was visited by a father who was worried his son, a member of a local Komsomol group, was turning into a hooligan. The youth organizer pointed the father to the local group where the

son worked. Together, the father and the youth group turned the young man back on the right path. This scenario of office hours appears to be mostly wishful thinking on the part of the youth leaders, though. It appears that very few youth committees actually made arrangements for office hours. In one of the only mentions of office hours outside the central press, the Karelian youth newspaper reported that even in Petrozavodsk, whose youth committee was the largest in the republic, office hours were not properly kept: “There should be evening office hours. But just try to get into the Petrozavodsk city Komsomol after working hours: you will only find a security guard at the entrance who will tell you: ‘No one from the municipal [Komsomol] committee is here.’”

An increase in volunteerism was supposed to be the payoff of the cuts to the Komsomol’s paid staff, according to central leaders and press accounts. In all likelihood, though, budgetary concerns were the major factor behind the cuts. Many factories, faced with the prospect of losing their paid youth organizer, supplied the funds to staff a Komsomol activist from their own budgets. Rumors spread that these outlays would soon be prohibited; after all, the point of the cuts was to eliminate excessively bureaucratic approaches in the Komsomol and to spur grassroots activism. Yet Komsomol leaders approved of these factories’ retention of a youth organizer at their own cost. It seems that the main reason for the cuts of mid and lower-level staff was that the central Komsomol leaders would not or could not continue to pay so many youth activists from the youth league’s budget. Between 1939 and 1940, expenditures in the youth organization swelled to pay for outlays for recreational activities or new staff that the expansion of membership had necessitated (see table 6.3).

Of course, the league’s main source of income, membership dues, also increased along with its membership. However, dues were calculated as a proportion of a member’s income, and students—especially school-age adolescents—made very little. It is likely that because students made up a large portion of the influx of new members, the growth of income from membership dues was not proportional to the growth of the league’s membership, nor did it keep pace with the cost of these new members. The influx of these new members contributed to the large difference between the Komsomol’s income and its expenditures from 1939 to 1940: In 1939 Mikhailov asked party leaders to allot the youth league 141,067,500 rubles; in 1940 the figure requested was 341,907,000 rubles, an increase of roughly 200,000,000 over the previous year. It appears that the relationship of the Komsomol’s budget issue to the decision to cut its paid staff as not recorded as a political decision (e.g., an order from the Politburo). However, evidence surrounding the Komsomol’s staffing cuts indicates strongly that the foremost goal behind eliminating paid youth organizer positions was to conserve resources by placing the burden of organization on voluntary activism. If better young activists resulted from this experience—all the better.

Provincial youth committees carried out the cuts but not always with care. The Moscow city youth organization correctly eliminated 416 positions by July 10, according to the report of a Komsomol Central Committee worker. But the report also noted that the method of eliminating these positions was not entirely careful. For one, the city’s youth leaders failed to track those young people who continued on as activists but began to draw pay from their workplace (e.g., a factory). Another fault was that city youth leaders were supposedly indifferent to organizers
### Table 6.3: Komsomol Budget (rubles), 1939-1940

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1939</th>
<th>1940</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Incoming:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Membership Dues</td>
<td>100,750,000</td>
<td>123,300,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Special Fund&quot; and Savings</td>
<td>45,445,000</td>
<td>1,800,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publishing</td>
<td>5,500,000</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Outgoing:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expenditures</td>
<td>292,762,500</td>
<td>467,007,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Difference</strong></td>
<td>-141,067,500</td>
<td>-341,907,000*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The author of the report with the budget apparently miscalculated the difference as 341,045,800 rubles or left some smaller parts of revenue.

who were unable to stay in the Komsomol apparatus. In Tula province, the Komsomol’s Central Committee found the situation was better. The youth committee there needed to eliminate 115 positions and as of June 25, 1940, had already eliminated ninety-nine. Most workers had found new employment in state or party administrations. Those who had not yet found work received compensation from vacation funds. As another consequence, the Tula organization needed to recruit 172 unpaid workers and had managed to find 123 by that point.

In Lopasne district, activists voiced support for the cuts, echoing Mikhailov’s points about activating a broader section of Komsomol youth. Layoffs were messy, though, and it was not always possible to find new work for career youth organizers immediately. In that district, the longtime head of the Pioneers found that her position was eliminated; it was reconstructed as an unpaid position in a new school commission. The youth committee reassigned her to work as an organizer at a local factory—one of the larger organizations in the region and one that had retained a paid position. The former Pioneer leader was fortunate, and probably had the

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62 RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 3 d. 228, l. 10; op. 23, d. 1378, l. 19.
63 RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 23, d. 1395, ll. 44-47.
64 RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 3, d. 240, ll. 53-58.
advantage of years of working on the district youth committee. Other workers’ whose positions were eliminated simply had to find new positions outside of the Komsomol apparatus.\textsuperscript{65}

The changes that occurred among Komsomol cadres in 1939-1940 had contradictory effects. Deliberate policies of rapid promotion and external factors like the expansion of the Red Army had made the average activist more like ordinary members. And by decreasing the number of paid organizers, Komsomol leaders attempted to shift the burden of youth activism onto ordinary members and unpaid activists. At the same time, it seems that these trends also distanced paid Komsomol workers from the rank and file. There were nearly two hundred members per paid worker before the 1940 staffing cuts, and after this figure expanded to nearly five hundred members per paid worker. The cuts moved the responsibility for initiating and organizing activism onto ordinary members, but they simultaneously encumbered paid workers with a greater burden of the administrative bureaucracy in a mass youth organization.

\textbf{Conclusion:}

Returning to the case of Adzhubei at Moscow’s School 478, the disparaging comments he made caused the Komsomol’s Central Committee to chastise the assistant secretary. Questioning the dedication of ordinary members in his organization was a politically incorrect opinion. But if his opinion was unwelcome, it was accurate. What Adzhubei observed was the changing culture of youth activism in the Komsomol. A new cohort of activists had arrived to replace old activists, and new members had flooded the Komsomol’s ranks. As activists attempted to shape the lives of more young people, youth leaders asserted that the organization should involve less and simpler interaction with political education. Youth leaders decoupled Komsomol work from regular interaction with Komsomol youth by devolving the burden of membership control and

\textsuperscript{65} TsAOPIM, f. 648p, op. 1, d. 19, l. 36; d. 21, l. 76.
activism from professional youth workers to unpaid organizers. Rather than significantly increasing the activity of ordinary members and lower-level activists as leaders hoped, these changes undermined the intensity of Komsomol activism overall. As its ranks became broader, the depth of commitment to activism among the average Komsomol member became shallower.

But though the ideological content of the Komsomol had become less demanding in the late 1930s and early 1940s, it had not disappeared entirely. What the Komsomol hoped to impart to its members was the ideology of “communist upbringing”—stressing loyalty, discipline and adherence to “cultured” behavior. For youth leaders, “bold promotion” and even material rewards went hand-in-hand with the transformation of youth into good Soviet citizens and future leaders. Yet membership and activity in the Komsomol was not only capable of forging good citizens. It was also a means of rescuing endangered youth. Through activism and recreation, youth leaders hoped to save and redeem youth from the perils of bad grades, hooliganism and worse.
Chapter 7: Saving Youth for the State: Surveillance and Monitoring of Transgression in the Komsomol, 1939-1940

On September 1, 1939, Germany invaded Poland, marking the start of World War II in Europe. As part of the German-Soviet non-aggression pact, Soviet forces annexed large parts of Eastern Europe and the Baltics. Soon, the USSR was also at war with Finland. And despite the German-Soviet pact, Soviet leaders continued to fear a major war would break out with Germany or Japan. Military ventures and the fear of war spurred Soviet leaders to enact increasingly drastic policies at home. The most extreme of these policies—the “mass operations” of 1937-38 and various deportations of ethnic minorities from borderlands—had attempted to remove potential fifth columnists from vulnerable areas of the country or from society as a whole.¹ Yet these measures also included laws that had roots in the broader context of the chaos the First Five-Year Plan had unleashed in the Soviet Union.

Industrial growth had spurred the expansion of cities and led to increases in urban crime and labor turnover. Throughout the 1930s, Soviet leaders had sought to control these problems through law, surveillance and repression.² In 1940, the onset of war justified an intensification of these policies through new, even harsher laws on workplace shirking and hooliganism. The 1940 anti-shirking law criminalized seemingly minor on-the-job offenses (e.g., slight tardiness to work) while an edict on hooliganism raised the penalties for existing crimes. These were more than symbolic measures. Party leaders called for the laws’ full enforcement by officials and organizations like the Komsomol in the hopes of preventing work stoppages, labor turnover or

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¹ A number of recent works have been published about NKVD Order No. 00447 and the other “mass operations.” For the operations as policy see Paul Hagenloh, Stalin’s Police: Public Order and Mass Repression in the USSR, 1926-1941 (Washington: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2009); Shearer, Policing Stalin’s Socialism; Rolf Binner and Marc Junge, Kak terror stal bol’him: Sekretnyi prikaz No. 00447 i tekhnologiya ego ispolneniia (Moscow: Airo, 2003). On the mass operations as practice, see Vatlin, Terror raionnogo mashtaba. On borderland deportations in this period, see Pavel Polian, Ne po svoei voli (Moscow: Memorial, 2001), 115-123.
² Shearer, Policing Stalin’s Socialism, 243-284; Hagenloh, Stalin’s Police, 89-146; Kotkin, Magnetic Mountain, 95-103.
acts of disobedience. But as Peter Solomon notes of Stalin-era judges, some groups involved in the implementation of these policies moderated their intensity. How would calls for increased punishments fit with the Komsomol’s goal of disciplining, rather than punishing, youth?

The reaction of youth groups to Soviet leaders’ harsh new policies was paradoxical. While they reinforced the state’s disciplining goals, Komsomol groups also mediated the harshness of these laws and other punishments leveled against young society by using internal disciplinary measures. Komsomol activists seem to have acted upon the impulse to protect ordinary members from a legal system that would punish wayward young people and irrevocably mark them for their crime. The targets of the league’s influence were not only potential shirkers and hooligans but the children of class aliens, including special settlers—a group that authorities believed was fertile ground for enemies. Implicit in this practice was the belief among activists that hostile activity could be prevented through disciplining and monitoring in the Komsomol.

Oleg Kharkhordin in his work on the history of Soviet collective surveillance suggests that practices of monitoring were a continuation of a broader Russian confessional culture. In contrast, the collective surveillance promoted by the Komsomol in the late 1930s and early

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3 Solomon, Soviet Criminal Justice, 299-322.
4 Brian LaPierre makes a similar observation about the party and Komsomol’s role in mitigating charges of hooliganism against their respective members under Khrushchev. Citing the relatively low numbers of party members’ charged with hooliganism, LaPierre speculates that in cases that could otherwise be called hooliganism, party and Komsomol groups handled matters internally. LaPierre, Hooligans in Khrushchev’s Russia, 54-55.
5 There was also an element of rehabilitation in the Komsomol’s work as well. For example, in January 1939 the head of the Komsomol in the NKVD, Filaretov, wrote to Komsomol secretary Semen Zakharov about work among juvenile criminals in the GULAG system. Although the leaders of the Komsomol in the NKVD wanted to conduct reformatory work among young criminals, they could not because of a “lack of character builders [vospitateli].” Hoping to “prepare from them [juvenile criminals] full-fledged citizens after their term finishes,” Filaretov asked for 300 workers from the civilian Komsomol to work with these youth. In a month, the Komsomol’s Central Committee ordered provincial youth committees in regions with large GULAG youth organizations to send youth cultural workers to work in the NKVD. RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 2, d. 206, l. 101. On the theme of rehabilitation in Stalin’s penal system, see Steven Barnes, Death and Redemption: The Gulag and the Shaping of Soviet Society (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).
1940s was motivated primarily by the perceived need to discipline society in the immediate context of a potential war.

In their efforts to deter hooliganism and other social maladies, youth leaders also came to see entertainment and the Komsomol community as potential antidotes. During the Great Terror, Komsomol leaders came under attack as “Trotskyist degenerates”—enemies who used drinking and other forms of bad behavior to undermine the state. But as the scale of repression declined in 1939, Komsomol leaders increasingly understood boredom as a major factor driving young people to problematic behavior. Based on this understanding, youth leaders and activists implored local organizations to satiate young people’s natural demand for entertainment with wholesome forms of relaxation. “Cultured” entertainment, Komsomol leaders asserted, would not only occupy youth but would involve them in a community that could monitor and reform problematic behavior, thereby preventing crime in the first place. In their attempts to construct a community to reform troubled youth, Komsomol organizers resembled the “child-savers” who administered Western European youth organizations. The “child-savers” of Britain, France and (pre-Nazi) Germany wanted to protect civil society from delinquents and wayward young people from themselves using the same combination of discipline, surveillance, recreation and community. The difference between “child-savers” and Komsomol organizers was their ultimate goal. “Child savers” worked to defend society from dangerous young people, but Komsomol leaders wanted to defend the state from youth that might become hostile.

**Special Settlement of the Komsomol**

Among the supposedly hostile groups in society, Soviet leaders perhaps most doubted the loyalty of special settlers—including youth. The reason for their doubt lay in the social and legal

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7 Gillis, *Youth and History*, 175-183.
development of special settlers from supposedly hostile class elements. During collectivization, the state had embarked on a policy of dekulakization. Stalin’s campaign against the peasantry uprooted nearly two million people, alleged kulak families who obstructed the process of collectivization, and deported them to so-called special settlements. While some stayed in their home province, many were transported to the least habitable areas of the USSR. The duration of the exile and the possibility of rehabilitation were unclear even at the highest levels of the Soviet state. Initially, plans from 1931 to rehabilitate special settlers after five years and their children at age eighteen were dashed at Stalin’s insistence. Nonetheless, the easing of restrictions on rehabilitation for special settlers in the first half of the 1930s allowed some to shed their status partially; nearly 150,000 people were partially rehabilitated by 1936. Yet legislation from 1935 bound even rehabilitated special settlers to their place of exile. Being a special settler (even with rehabilitation) meant not only bearing restrictions on mobility or civil rights but also an informal stigma, both of which were transferable to their children.\textsuperscript{8} However, the Stalin constitution of 1936 and the accompanying changes in the Komsomol’s own regulations had begun to raise questions among leaders. Would the stigma of special settlement disappear and could special settlers have a place in Soviet youth culture?

The constitution had not only influenced how youth leaders and activists related to class aliens but how those youth themselves approached their place in political culture. Reading or hearing of these inclusionary developments, youth in special settlements had started to ask for various rights, including admission to the Komsomol. The first signals from below in the Komsomol began in 1936. At the April 1937 meeting of the Komsomol Central Committee, Mariniushkin, the leader of the Karelian youth committee remarked that in the last half of 1936,

600 special settlers had applied for Komsomol membership. Karelia’s Komsomol had admitted only nine because it was unclear to organizers (and even Mariniushkin himself) whether these young people were eligible to be members. Even more problematic was the questions young special settlers were raising when they came into contact with activists: “These youths are asking us a number of questions in connection to the Stalin constitution—is it possible to leave the settlement, will they give us a passport, will they let us join the Red Army, can we get married, can we join the Komsomol, the party, be elected to a soviet and a number of other questions.” Karelia had 18,000 young special settlers in twenty-one labor colonies and Mariniushkin anticipated that these incidents would only multiply in the future.9

At another Komsomol Central Committee meeting the next year, the head of the league in the Komi republic (another region with many special settlers) announced that youth committees there had been accepting young special settlers “who have no connection with relatives, have no parents, work in the forest [i.e., in the lumber industry] honestly.” Some activists, though, believed that admitting these class aliens would endanger the youth organization by exposing it to subversion from within. In both cases, provincial leaders tacitly had put forward the idea that special settler youth, under the most stringent conditions, had a place in official youth culture. And in both cases, the provincial youth leaders had asked then Komsomol leader Aleksandr Kosarev to resolve the issue but Kosarev was unwilling to issue a response. Their hesitation and the outright opposition of some activists show that the case for including special settlers in the Komsomol was ambiguous.10

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9 RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 2, d. 129, ll. 8-9.
10 RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 2, d. 136, l. 97.
At the local level, the Stalin constitution had made the question of special settlers’ status in the Komsomol just as unclear.\textsuperscript{11} Two young activists, the secretary and propagandist of a local committee in Northern Province wrote to Kosarev on May 22, 1938 to ask how they should handle the special settlers who wanted to join the Komsomol. They had turned to their district and provincial youth committees for clarification and received no firm answer. The problem was this: “In the majority of cases, [special settler children] display good examples at work, are activists, are interested in the Komsomol organization… Based on the regulations of the Komsomol, we cannot deny them membership.” The authors believed that some special settler youth belonged to the ranks of the “best” youth and therefore should have been in the Komsomol. What made the organizers uncomfortable was special settlers’ legal status. If they accepted special settlers, they believed that this would create a “free” and “exile” Komsomol: “How would we explain to Komsomol members who are in that unusual situation the logic and correctness of their exile? How should we explain the motivation of refusing them admission to the Komsomol if the Central Committee decides to block admission categorically for that kind of youth?”

The authors exercised caution in their letter. After all, by supporting the admission of class aliens into the Komsomol, they could be accused of abetting the enemy. All the same, writing the letter itself was more than likely an appeal meant to benefit special settler youth. Their motivations were unclear; perhaps they had personal connections with special settlers whom they wanted to help or perhaps they were just tired of turning away young people’s applications without an authoritative reason. However, their argument for admitting special

\textsuperscript{11} Among special settlers in general, the Stalin Constitution spurred rumors in special settlements that were similar to those among youth and at least as problematic for the NKVD as they were for the Komsomol. NKVD officials, like youth leaders, were unclear about how to handle special settlers—or perhaps hopeful they would be relieved of the administrative burden of special settlers—in an era of dissipating classes. Viola, \textit{Unknown Gulag}, 158-159.
settler youth employed the language of universal rights for Soviet citizens in the Stalin Constitution.\textsuperscript{12}

These signals from activists and provincial leaders had effected little change in official Komsomol policy. Avoiding this discussion had possibly been a deliberate tactic for Kosarev. The then Komsomol leader had made explicit public remarks, even during the Great Terror, about other types of class aliens who could join the Komsomol if they were “verified.” In a closed meeting of the Komsomol’s bureau in April 1938, the general secretary had reprimanded two regional youth leaders for having neglected class alien youth, “I can’t imagine what kind of kulak he is, he was eight when we did away with the kulaks. If his father was a kulak, then you need to look again—should he be expelled…? You expel him as a kulak when he hardly considers himself a kulak and he is offended, you have created a tragedy in his life.”\textsuperscript{13}

Kosarev had voiced the opinion that children of kulaks could join the league depending on their loyalty to Soviet power and the nature of connection to their class alien parents. Yet the children of special settlers were another case. He had remained silent on the issue, leaving local committees to decide on their own how to handle special settler youth. Several regional youth committees had implemented ad hoc polices, cautiously integrating special settler youth. In other regions, youth committees had categorically refused to admit these young people. The difference between special settlers and other class aliens seemed to have been that in addition to the lasting stigma of their origin, special settlers faced real legal obstacles to their geographical and social mobility. And perhaps Kosarev and others had known about Order No. 00447, the NKVD’s operation from August 1937 that had specifically targeted hundreds of thousands of former kulaks (along with so-called anti-Soviet elements and recidivist criminals) for arrest and

\textsuperscript{12} RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 23, d. 1291, l. 58.
\textsuperscript{13} RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 23, d. 1291, ll. 49-52.
To admit these youth to the Komsomol would have meant accepting the very same kinds of people the NKVD was profiling for arrest.

After the NKVD’s mass operations ended at the close of 1938 and the Komsomol’s leadership changed at the end of that year, youth leaders revisited the issue of special settler youth. Soon after he assumed leadership of the Komsomol, Nikolai Mikhailov became alarmed at the number of special settlers attempting to join the league and the lack of a clear policy regarding their admission. In December 1938 alone, the Komsomol Central Committee had received over sixty letters about the issue. Like Kosarev, though, Mikhailov was unwilling or uncomfortable making a decision on the reviled special settlers. Instead, he wrote directly to Stalin for advice on January 26, 1939. Mikhailov painted a picture where confusion abounded at all levels and treatment of admission for special settler youth was far from uniform even within a single district. He informed Stalin that some local committees were deciding the question “on their own.”

It seems that the sense of alarm in Mikhailov’s letter stemmed more than anything from this lack of central control over the issue. Mikhailov called on Stalin to resolve the matter. At the same time, he cautiously set forth his own opinion, “I believe that the practice of indiscriminately denying children of repressed parents admission to the Komsomol is extremely dangerous [kraine vredna] and could create anger among those youths that want to work honestly for the people.” He suggested a policy of “strong individual admission.” Stalin apparently read the notice immediately and underlined the sentence with the words “extremely dangerous.” He wrote beside the paragraph with Mikhailov’s recommendation “Correct!”

15 RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 23, d. 1327, ll. 21-25, 46.
Why did Mikhailov and Stalin finally address and approve limited admission of special settler youth? Did they, like some lower-level activists, appeal to the ideals of the new constitution? Far from it. Mikhailov emphasized in his letter to Stalin the danger inherent in blocking admission of this segment of the population and it is not surprising that the Soviet leader picked up on this argument. By offering the chance—slight as it was—of acceptance into official political culture, they hoped to open a safety valve on a potential enemy. At the closure of 1938, the end of the Great Terror (or at least of order 00447) also allowed the possibility for special settler children to be drawn into official youth culture.\textsuperscript{16} The attempt to pacify what party leaders still saw as a potentially dangerous cohort was the main motivation behind the policy, far exceeding the desire to leverage special settlers’ willingness to work for the state.

In spite of this decision, news of special settler youth’s status seems to have passed by word of mouth among Komsomol leaders rather than through an official resolution. Mikhailov sent a draft resolution on the issue to party secretaries Andreev and Malenkov but the Komsomol bureau appears to have never officially approved the decision.\textsuperscript{17} The secrecy surrounding the question of special settlers was part of the contradiction of class in Stalin’s socialism. Public proclamations of Soviet class unity belied a situation where class aliens continued to face official and unofficial discrimination. To announce that special settler youth could enter the Komsomol would have, in the minds of Soviet leaders, allowed or encouraged these young people to enter en masse. The entrance of these class aliens would have offended many Komsomol activists who still entertained radical convictions. More than this, youth leaders believed that in the

\textsuperscript{16} Shearer, \textit{Policing Stalin’s Socialism}, 368. Arch Getty argues that the end of the operation under order 00447 was not a repudiation of terror but a repudiation of disorder. I would add that limited admissions of special settlers to the Komsomol was another part of this search for order after a year of uncontrolled terror. Getty and Naumov, \textit{The Road to Terror}, 531.

\textsuperscript{17} Files from the party and Komsomol archives do not include Andreev or Malenkov’s notes on the resolution and the records of the Komsomol bureau’s proceedings do not include an official resolution. The resolution was not in the records of provincial archives of Kiev, Moscow, Petrozavodsk or Riazan’. RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 23, d. 1327, ll. 65, 97.
process of admitting these class aliens, true class enemies might infiltrate the organization and sabotaged it. On the other hand, categorically forbidding children of special settlers from joining the youth organization would have cast doubt on a theoretical pillar of socialism—that class difference was fading away. Thus, Komsomol leaders opted to make infrequent, cryptic, semi-public statements about the ability of class aliens to join the youth league but made no specific directives about who would be eligible. At the same time, they still demanded that youth from all backgrounds note their social origin on applications for admission, for disciplinary appeals and for work in the league. Proclamations of class unity effectively allowed the appearance of inclusion while continuing to employ class discrimination to avoid large numbers of supposedly dangerous elements from joining the ranks of the league.

In spite of restrictions, special settlers slowly joined the youth league. Karelia was one of the places that had admitted some special settlers in 1938. Official documentation shows that eight different districts accepted a total of sixty-three young people. What process special settler youth went through to join the Komsomol at that point is unclear but it is apparent from preserved documents that their admission was not a regular occurrence; provincial youth leaders received reports (far more detailed than regular reviews of admissions) on special settler youth who had joined. In 1939 the admissions policy for special settler youth became more regular. Every special settler who joined the Komsomol first had to interview with the district committee and then had an audience with the province’s youth leaders. The insistence on a provincial-level interview shows the level of distrust youth leaders had for special settler youth; for all other young people, Komsomol leaders had recently made the admissions process less rigorous (see chapter 6). Statistics on the total number of special settlers who joined in Karelia for 1939-1941
are unavailable but the figure was probably several hundred.\textsuperscript{18} This group was only a small fraction of the 18,000 special settler youth the province’s youth leader, Mariniushkin, had cited in 1937 and, as a percentage, far fewer than general saturation of the Komsomol among age-eligible youth at the time (nearing 30 percent by January 1941).

The case of Mayme Sevander illustrates the broader predicament of class aliens at the time in the Komsomol. Sevander was not a special settler but a young woman living in Karelia’s capital, Petrozavodsk from the 1930s onward. She was born in a Finnish-American family in the United States and, like many American Finns, immigrated to Soviet Karelia in 1934. In the years following her family’s arrival, the regime turned against “bourgeois nationalists.” Many American Finns faced arrest (or worse), and Sevander’s father was among them. His arrest cast official suspicion on her—the child of an enemy of the people. In spite of this, the sixteen-year-old found work as an assistant in the city administration and she was initially admitted to its Komsomol group in 1940. Alas, the district committee rejected her application: “The committee gave no reason for my rejection, but it was clear to me that the injustice done to my father was still reverberating through our lives.” Sevander claimed that her application was only given a chance through her acquaintance with a district youth secretary. And the district secretary was not just anyone but a young woman who was the soon-to-be wife of newly appointed Karelian youth chief Yuri Andropov. Her story reveals what it took for children of so-called enemy elements to be politically “verified” for Komsomol membership. Here, the individual approach Mikhailov wrote about to Stalin was literal. Sevander needed to get close to a ranking

\textsuperscript{18} NARK, f. 779, op. 20, d. 60, ll. 15-17; op. 22, d. 25, passim.
Komsomol figure in her district before she could hope to be accepted to the league. How many young people had those connections?19

Once admitted in the Komsomol, special settlers did not enjoy the same treatment as youth from proletarian or white-collar backgrounds. In Perm, for example, the provincial youth leader in charge of defense training, Vedernikov did not know if special settler children could undertake paramilitary training. He checked with party leaders from the province. They said special settlers could not do the training but Vedernikov was still unsure. In December 1940 (as the Komsomol undertook a major defense training campaign), he wrote to the Komsomol Central Committee’s paramilitary training leader, Shteinbakh about the issue. Shteinbakh himself was not certain if special settlers could undertake this training and passed the question on to colleagues in the civil defense society, Osoaviakhim whose decision is not recorded.20 These youth leaders’ hesitance about special settlers’ having access to paramilitary training derived from the same fear that made state leaders bar special settlers from joining the Red Army until World War II.21

Although class alien youth supposedly posed a danger to Soviet society, it seems that this very danger also became a reason to admit them to the league. In 1940, a district youth leader in Karelia wrote to the province’s Komsomol undersecretary in charge of cadre management to ask about a young woman who wanted to join the Komsomol. Her husband had been arrested by the NKVD and this made her application to the youth league problematic. The local youth organizer did not want to admit her but his superior, Grishkin offered differing advice. While Grishkin did

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20 RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 23, d. 1432, l. 116.
not categorically say that the local committee should admit her, he recommended the local youth leader consider her application. Working with youth from bad class backgrounds was all the more important, because, as he said, “We are required to work with this category of youth more in order to prevent the cultivation of hostile moods and dissatisfaction.”

In other words, Grishkin recommended admitting young people like the wife of the arrestee to monitor precisely those who could otherwise become enemies.

The reasons for admitting the children of special settlers to the Komsomol were not always phrased in such instrumental terms. Some youth appealed to the class-leveling ideals of the Stalin constitution, seeing some class aliens as young people who deserved to be counted among the best Soviet youth. Yet Mikhailov and other Komsomol leaders tended to see admission for special settler and other class alien youth pragmatically. Admission of special settlers and other elements of the population leaders viewed as dangerous allowed youth groups to watch, pacify and perhaps even reform these youth before they fell into the grasp of the unforgiving Soviet legal system. The Komsomol’s role in monitoring potentially hostile behavior was not limited to supposed class enemies. When Soviet leaders enacted a harsh new law against labor shirking, Komsomol groups were asked to root out workplace malfeasances. In doing so, youth activists had to decide where discipline and reform for wayward youth ended and punishment for criminals began.

**Combating Shirking**

On June 26, 1940, the Soviet government issued an edict criminalizing shirking in the workplace. Since the early 1930s, Soviet leaders had sought a way of dealing with labor discipline. The rapid change of industrial life and the influx of millions of new workers from the

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22 NARK, f. 779, op. 23, d. 18, l. 101.
countryside had thrown the Soviet industrial workplace into a state of constant flux. While Soviet leaders attempted to acculturate new arrivals to the factory, they also undertook legal and administrative measures to control the population.\textsuperscript{23} With the introduction of internal passports, party leaders hoped that they could better monitor and restrict the population’s mobility in a country where labor turnover and crime had reached crisis levels.\textsuperscript{24} From the Shakhty Trial through the Great Terror, accusations of industrial sabotage had made workplace accidents into potential political crimes. The law of June 26, 1940, (as it was called in official discourse) was a measure that combined the state’s desire to cultivate labor discipline with Soviet leaders’ belief in the inevitability of war. Although the Soviet Union had signed a non-aggression pact with Nazi Germany, Soviet leaders believed that the pact had only achieved a temporary reprieve from a major war.\textsuperscript{25} The law against shirking attempted to place the Soviet workplace on a wartime footing by defining tardiness, on the job intoxication and other offenses as criminal acts. Punishment included short terms of corrective labor (between one and three months) and wage docking. Within the first month of the campaign, more than 100,000 violations had been reported. While enforcing the law was technically the preserve of factories and the judicial system, party and Komsomol committees became involved in the propagation and supervision of the campaign against shirking.\textsuperscript{26}

In the Komsomol, leaders and activists supported the campaign by seeking violators of the labor law among young workers. Days after the Supreme Soviet of the USSR issued the workplace shirking edict, the Komsomol Central Committee demanded a report from Moscow’s city youth organizers on labor discipline in its factories. Youth leaders were shocked that many

\textsuperscript{23} Hoffmann, \textit{Peasant Metropolis}, 99-106, 158-189.
\textsuperscript{24} Shearer, \textit{Policing Stalin’s Socialism}, 246-253.
\textsuperscript{25} Harris, “Encircled by Enemies,” 542.
\textsuperscript{26} Solomon, \textit{Soviet Criminal Justice}, 317.
factory youth groups did not report members who were “malicious violators” of the labor law but were not formally charged: “Komsomol organizers and committees in most cases overlook violations of labor discipline by Komsomol members and do not mobilize social opinion [obshchestvennoe mnenie] against the disorganizers of production.”

Lower-level committees also took up the cause of workplace discipline. In Lopasne district (Moscow province), the local newspaper editor criticized the factory youth secretary for only giving lip service to the workplace shirking law, “Meanwhile at Veniukovskii factory [a large enterprise in the region] certain Komsomol members chat idly during work time.”

Lopasne’s newspaper editor was perhaps correct that many local committees were not contributing to the implementation of the labor law. While local committees uniformly expelled members whom a court had convicted of violating the labor law, they rarely expelled those who had violated the labor law but had not faced legal consequences. In the Mobilization Administration in the Red Army, its youth group (all six members) heard the case of their colleague, Comrade L. The committee charged him with a several malfeasances, some of which probably reflected personal grievances. For instance, one accusation was that he had on several occasions promised to take his lunch at one time and then decided to take it several hours later. He had also borrowed money from friends (including those on hand) and not paid them back. What allowed the committee to air these complaints, though, was that he had arrived forty minutes late to work on July 20. Comrade L. had violated the law, although he was not formally charged. His youth group limited his punishment to an official reprimand—a far less serious form of discipline than he would have faced if the committee had reported him to authorities. In contrast, the youth committee of the Central House of the Red Army (TsDKA) discussed the

27 RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 3, d. 242, ll. 28, 30.
28 TsAOPIM, f. 648p, op. 1, d. 18, l. 5.
case of a member who was facing formal charges for violation of the labor law. Comrade S. had skipped a day of work on August 5, 1940, and was convicted by a court. Having travelled outside of Moscow (where he worked), he had been unable to get a train back to the city, apparently an irregular and unexpected occurrence. Station authorities had provided an official notice confirming that transportation problems had caused Comrade S. to skip a day of work. When Comrade S. was charged formally, though, the court did not recognize the station’s note. However, the notice was convincing enough that one member of youth group spoke out in Comrade S.’s defense. Nonetheless, the committee on the whole agreed with the court’s decision: “A good Komsomol member does not skip [work]. His notice was not recognized by the court and he was convicted. He clearly skipped [work].”

Just a week after the promulgation of the edict, the Commissariat of Defense’s clerical office youth group took issue with several members who had performed inadequately on the job. One case involved Comrade T., a dormitory guard who had been late to his job and had otherwise “acted strangely.” As testimony later revealed, he had groped female visitors at the dorm, “spoke without censoring himself” and completed paperwork incorrectly. However, no court had charged Comrade T. and the accused admitted his faults. Initially the youth group voted to expel Comrade T. but ultimately limited punishment to a reprimand. Another case involving a dormitory security guard occurred in late August when the same Komsomol group charged Comrade E. with falling asleep on the job. Like Comrade T., no legal action was filed against him. Unlike the first case, though, the youth group’s leaders pressed hard for expulsion. A leading member of the group said, “We need to take into consideration all the laws…of the government about discipline and Komsomol members should be exemplary in this regard. This

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29 RGVA, f. 9, op. 30, d. 260, ll. 323-324, 365.
[kind of case] could end with bad consequences: if a Komsomol member sleeps, the enemy does not.” Comrade E. was expelled.  

Two factors influenced these cases. First, the implementation of the labor law became stricter over time. Solomon asserts that after haphazard initial implementation, regime leaders demanded that judges, factories, party and Komsomol organizations enforce the anti-shirking law more rigidly.  

In the Komsomol, members who faced legal charges for workplace violations were expelled under the category of “disciplinary violations” or “other.” The number of youth expelled for these reasons rose sharply over the course of 1940, more than doubling from the second to the third quarter, and then doubling again from the third to the fourth quarter (see table 7.1). As the campaign against shirking gained traction, youth committees felt more pressure to monitor the workplace for violations of discipline and to handle internal discipline more harshly.  

The second factor that decided these cases was whether formal charges were attached to the violation. After 1939 provincial youth committees reviewed all cases of expulsion (often with the expelled youth present) as a precautionary measure to reverse and deter improper expulsions. In many cases, provincial committees did reverse district-level decisions. However, reinstatement did not occur in cases where youth had been formally charged with violating the labor law. In these cases, provincial leaders uniformly confirmed the expulsions.  

As the previous examples show, though, youth committees tended to forgive members (with lesser disciplinary action) when no criminal charges were raised. Of the examples where no criminal charges had been made, only Comrade E. faced expulsion because his sleeping spell was not just a case of shirking but it was considered a potential threat to national security.

30 Ibid., ll. 286-289, 382.  
31 Solomon, Soviet Criminal Justice, 317.  
32 DAKO, f. 7, op. 3, spr. 32, ark. 111-151.
Table 7.1 Expulsions from the Komsomol, 1940

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The anti-shirking law made Komsomol groups become involved in questions of production, as they had done during the early 1930s. However, the politics of production in 1940 were different from those of the Stalin revolution. In the early 1930s, Komsomol groups had attempted to incite radical enthusiasm for fulfilling and overfulfilling massive production quotas. In enforcing the labor law, though, Komsomol groups sought workplace discipline and regularity—the major goals of the anti-shirking law. But promoting the goals of the campaign did not mean enforcing the law itself. Instead, in some cases that technically violated the anti-shirking law, Komsomol groups used internal discipline, reinforcing the aims of the law while moderating the punishment it required. In doing so, youth groups hoped to save youth from the longer lasting and possibly irrevocable stain of criminal charges.

**Discipline in Schools**

The same inclination toward discipline rather than simple punishment motivated the Komsomol’s fight against hooliganism in schools in 1939 and 1940. Yet how Komsomol

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33 RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 126, d. 390, ll 16-18, 34-36, 52-54, 71-73.
leaders approached discipline in schools was filled with tension. In particular, the relationship of students to teachers became a point of contention. The advent of “communist upbringing” had turned the Komsomol’s attention to school-age youth. In the process, a large number of teachers had joined the Komsomol or had become teachers via mobilization from the youth league to pedagogical training. In 1934 18 percent of teachers had belonged to the Komsomol but by 1938 a full 25 percent of teachers belonged. And by the end of the decade, half of all teachers with less than five years of experience were league members.\textsuperscript{34}

Komsomol leaders attempted to protect teachers in the league; to them it seemed that students were not honoring the authority of their instructors, leading to a breakdown in hierarchy. To other youth leaders, though, it seemed that the primary problem in schools was that teachers’ disinterest and excessively callous punishment were driving pupils away. Both these problems were supposedly the cause of “hooliganism,” a crime that had long been a concern for the regime but whose danger was exacerbated by the potential for war. In August 1940, a new edict raised the minimum sentence for the crime to one year, signaling a new campaign against hooliganism. The number of arrests for the crime doubled from 1939 to 1940, based mostly on arrests from the final four months of 1940.\textsuperscript{35} As police attempted to stamp out hooliganism through repressive measures, Komsomol leaders believed that creating an environment in schools that was at once more disciplined and more attentive could prevent youth from turning into hooligans in the first place.

In August 1939, the Komsomol Central Committee convened a plenum to address issues of discipline in schools. Grigorii Gromov, Komsomol secretary for cadres, delivered the main

\textsuperscript{34} Ewing, \textit{Teachers of Stalinism}, 139-140.
\textsuperscript{35} Solomon, \textit{Soviet Criminal Justice}, 328-332. Part of the reason that arrests rose so dramatically from 1939 to 1940 was that in 1939 the USSR Supreme Court ruled that personal attacks were not hooliganism. This change resulted in a drop in prosecutions for hooliganism in 1939. In 1940, though, political pressure caused police and judges to ignore this ruling and prosecute cases of personal attacks as hooliganism.
speech where he criticized teachers for their shortcomings. Rather than channeling students’ exuberance into activities, he said that teachers “left [children] to their own devices.”

Negligence on the part of teachers—an unwillingness to appeal to the interests of youth—was making children and adolescents turn away from schools and turn into hooligans. According to other Komsomol leaders, teachers were not only to blame. Nikolai Romanov linked poor disciplinary work in the Komsomol to the dropout rate in schools—a cause of hooliganism more generally: “Many leading Komsomol workers do not want to understand that…those dropouts frequently fall under the influence of criminals, felons and sometimes even class-alien elements.”

Yuri Andropov claimed that youth organizers needed to watch out for the warning signs that might cause a good student to drop out: “The whole process is based on a few occurrences, today he was late to class, tomorrow he doesn’t prepare for class, the day after tomorrow he interrupts the lesson.”

In the minds of Gromov, Romanov and Andropov, negligence among teachers and Komsomol activists toward pupils was a major factor in the rise of hooliganism.

Some Komsomol leaders accused certain teachers not only of neglect but even of open hostility toward students, leading them to drop out from school. A recent rise in dropouts from schools had caused alarm among Komsomol leaders. Apparently, these dropouts were mostly adolescents who left secondary schools, although some provincial secretaries spoke of cases where younger children left primary school. The head of Moscow province’s youth committee claimed that 4,500 youth had left schools in his province for various reasons. Leningrad’s youth leader, Gol’din, said that his city’s schools had allowed 23,756 pupils to drop out. According to Gol’din, “A few teachers who don’t want to ruin their success rate [their students’ average

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36 RGASPI f. 1m, op. 2, d. 178, l. 17.
37 RGASPI f. 1m, op. 2, d. 180, l. 149.
38 RGASPI f. 1m, op. 2, d. 181, l. 66.
grades] tell a pupil: Kolia, you’re not making very much of yourself—go work [e.g., at a factory].” Like Gromov, he believed the solution for molding good children was to provide means for them to be active and express themselves. Gol’din created a stir at the plenum when he cited the case of two children who were “round-the-worlders” (krugosvetniki), children who boarded random trams and then tried to navigate to a predetermined location. Running into the two children, he asked if this kind of game, a chaotic precursor to hooliganism, was truly fun for them. They responded that they would gladly stay at home with their schoolwork if they had some kind of playground nearby. These children the Komsomol could help, said Gol’din. He was less sure about what should happen to convicted hooligans. Citing a 1935 law of the SNK that called for schools for “defective children,” he believed those schools could be a solution for child-hooligans but asserted that none of these schools actually existed.

Although some Komsomol leaders saw teachers as negligent, others saw teachers (especially those who were affiliated with the Komsomol) as the victims. At the same meeting, the Komsomol’s head of the department of student youth, Merkulov asserted that he had found “a number of cases of wild, and sometimes hooligan, attitude toward our teachers.” When the league’s Central Committee convened another plenum devoted largely to issues of education and schools in December 1939, Mikhailov endorsed a similar position. He asserted that too many children were acting with impunity toward their teachers. Implying that some students had initiated disciplinary hearings against their teachers in the Komsomol, Mikhailov gave the statistics for appeals of expulsion the Komsomol’s Central Committee had heard the previous year. Among the appeals, 278 teachers had contested their expulsion and of those, the Central Committee only confirmed fifty-one expulsions (18 percent) and reduced the measure to official

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39 RGASPI f. 1m, op. 2, d. 178, l. 72.
40 RGASPI f. 1m, op. 2, d. 181, l. 14.
41 RGASPI f. 1m, op. 2, d. 169, l. 226.
reprimands for fifty-five teachers (20 percent). It had decided that more than half of the expulsions were entirely unwarranted. For Mikhailov this smacked of wrongful accusations against teachers—even hooliganism toward them.\textsuperscript{42}

These accusations came from a general lack of discipline among students in schools. Mikhailov cited one case of a Moscow tenth-grade class that collectively refused to take an exam with an ultimatum written in bureaucratese to their teacher: “To chemistry teacher A.S. Panovaia. We the students of Grade Ten School no. 75 considered the proposal that you introduced on 10 October and came to the conclusion that we categorically refuse to write a test because we were not at class on 5 November.”\textsuperscript{43} In this instance, the group had just hindered the learning process but Mikhailov asserted that these seemingly small undisciplined acts would take a toll on the future work of students as they went into the world. The teacher-pupil relationship was not only about imparting knowledge for Mikhailov, but about engendering a way of behaving. Effectively, this behavior meant respecting and obeying one’s elders—a way of relating to authority that the Komsomol leader hoped youth would take into their future careers.\textsuperscript{44}

The tension between the conception of teachers as negligent and as victims appears in the Komsomol-sponsored 1940 film \textit{Spring Thaw [Vesennyi potok]}. The film opens as a young teacher and former orphan, Nadezhda Kulagina (played by starlet Valentina Serova) returns to her home town to teach in the local primary school. She runs into trouble immediately when she finds that the class contains several boys whose behavior borders on hooliganism. The school’s senior teacher, Grushin (Mikhail Astangov)—whose mustache resembles Hitler’s and haircut Trotsky’s (almost certainly unintended resemblances)—demands the expulsion of the main troublemaker, Dimka. Kulagina defends Dimka, who she believes is a good but misguided boy.

\textsuperscript{42} RGASPI f. 1m, op. 2, d. 188, l. 51.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., l. 58.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., l. 65.
with a heartfelt interest in zoology. Despite her good work with the children, the group’s best pupil, distraught over family problems, falsely accuses Kulagina of physical abuse. Based on these accusations, the school suspends the young teacher. Kulagina does not despair, though. With the help of her romantic interest, the Pioneer counselor who doubles as the physical education instructor, she turns Dimka into an excellent student by appealing to his love of animals. Then Dimka, who holds great stature in his class group, rallies his peers to convince the star pupil to retract her denunciation. The young teacher’s efforts succeed in restoring peace and order to the group. Kulagina represents the Komsomol’s ideal instructor: a disciplinarian who was willing to involve herself personally in the lives of her students to ensure their academic and personal well-being. Grushin represents the old way of teaching: the distant instructor who punished redeemable pupils for the sake of ease.

For most groups, patrolling student discipline in the Komsomol meant intervening in students’ coursework or pulling them back to school if they had dropped out. Ideally, discipline would work as it did in an article in Komsomol’skii rabotnik (the successor to Izvestiia TsK Komsomola). M. Kropacheva, a teacher from a Leningrad school, wrote about her experience disciplining a student in her Komsomol organization. A pupil was not living up to his potential in the first quarter and received several bad grades. Kropacheva first involved the pupil’s peers in the youth league, who spoke to the student about raising his grades. These talks had little impact so she moved to stronger measures: “The Komsomol meeting gave him a reprimand for un-Komsomol-like relationship to schoolwork. That worked.” Not only did the reprimand succeed with the struggling student, it served as an example for other students that they could not neglect their studies or else they would face disciplinary consequences.45 There is evidence that outside of press accounts lower-level committees leveraged membership discipline to improve

45 “Kak my provodim obshchie sobraniia,” Komsomol’skii rabotnik, no. 2 (1940): 24-25.
students’ schoolwork. In Kiev province, several members appealed their expulsions to the provincial youth committee after their local groups removed them for receiving poor grades. In most cases, provincial leaders reinstated the students when their grades had improved.\footnote{DAKO, f. 7p, op. 3, spr. 35, ark. 143; spr. 36, ark. 221.} Komsomol groups saw their role not only firming up the work of students in decline but also in bringing dropouts back to school. In February 1940 in Smolensk, provincial youth leaders chastised the organizers of the Komsomol committee in Kadymovo district, where twenty-three of 317 local students dropped out of school. Provincial leaders claimed that material conditions explained the high number of dropouts, “In the district…the majority of schools do not have firewood, do not have necessary facilities, and some schools…are kept in an unsanitary state.” Smolensk’s youth committee commanded local youth activists rectify these problems and return all the dropouts to school.\footnote{E.V. Kodin, ed., \textit{Deti i molodezh' Smolenschiny: 1920-1930-e gody: Sbornik dokumentov} (Smolensk: Madzhenta, 2006), 484-486.}

Although youth leaders and activists asserted that discipline was an essential tool for improving youth, there were limits to youth leaders’ willingness to forgive wayward students. As in cases of labor discipline, law enforcement often played a key role. In October 1940 the police arrested a large number of Kiev’s students for hooliganism. Here, the city’s youth league was to blame because it had failed to uncover or control “facts of degeneracy among youth.” Unsupervised, many of Kiev’s students had formed “groups with their own rules and chiefs—déclassé, socially-dangerous elements—and used hostile methods, drinking bouts and degeneracy, to recruit youth into criminal activity.” Central Komsomol leaders asserted that a factor in the rise of these groups was that Kiev schools had allowed 1,116 children to drop out in the past year. Outside of schoolhouse walls, “weak-willed sections of youth” fell into the world of crime. Commenting on the case, Komsomol leader Nikolai Mikhailov chided the Kiev city
youth committee members who, “Forgot about the decisions of the IV [August 1937] plenum of the C[entral] C[ommittee] of the Komsomol…that one of the methods of enemy work in the Komsomol is the method of degeneracy. They forgot about this statement and approached these facts like ordinary crime. They do not understand the important political meaning of these incidents.”[^48]

Mikhailov reached similar conclusions about the political meaning of a case involving the Komsomol members of Moscow State University. This case was all the more serious, though, because students of the Soviet Union’s leading university should have been exemplary—especially when more than three-quarters of those students were Komsomol members. A Komsomol Central Committee investigation into the university in April 1941 uncovered a seedy underbelly: “Card games, drinking bouts, hooliganism and violations of the dormitory code of conduct.” The report alleged that many students were mired in degeneracy. Even activists were quoted as saying “to drink red wine is the same as beer” and “it’s fine…if people celebrate ‘tremendous’ occasions with drinking bouts.” According to the investigation, the list of “tremendous” occasions included receiving good grades, the end of an exam, birthdays, moving from one dormitory to another, making new acquaintances and the end of the semester, among others. Of course, the university had well-behaved Komsomol members but they were too occupied with studies to notice and act upon the supposed degeneracy of their peers.

The investigation’s findings confirmed youth leaders’ fears: degeneracy unchecked would lead to hooliganism, and hooliganism would lead to political deviation. In groups in the history department degeneracy had given way to candid discussions of current politics. In the course “On the lives and actions of the leaders of the revolution,” one student said, “It’s impossible to compare Stalin with Lenin, as you might compare Marx with Engels, because

[^48]: RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 3, d. 246, ll. 35-47, 48; d. 249, l. 52.
Stalin is vain, he loves applause.” This discussion, youth leaders said, was not an isolated incident but the worst of a “system.” Apparently, some fourth year students treated seminars as “a place where they can raise pointed questions, even if these questions have a counterrevolutionary character.” Needless to say, the Komsomol committee of the university had already expelled students directly involved. Moreover, Mikhailov ordered the removal of the assistant head of Moscow State’s youth committee in connection with the affair.49

The students of Moscow State University and those the Komsomol investigation found in Kiev were too far gone to be redeemed. On the whole, though, Komsomol leaders and organizers demonstrated their willingness and desire to reach out to students who had strayed through minor disciplinary offenses or by dropping out of school. Instead of allowing them to fall into the grasp of the law, Komsomol groups were supposed to help students stay in Soviet disciplinary institutions like schools or the youth league itself. It was for this same goal that Komsomol leaders called for a more general expansion of cultural activity as a means of preventing hooliganism at its source.

Prophylactic Entertainment

“It is often boring in our Komsomol,” Ol’ga Mishakova complained to a group of Komsomol organizers in Karelia in 1940. Her concern with the amusement of youth might seem frivolous against the backdrop of a looming war. Yet the problem of disciplining society (an element of militarization) and wholesome entertainment were linked, as Mishakova explained, “There are no interesting activities at night and because of this there are card games, drinking and a whole range of behavioral perversions… If you do not organize evening activities for them [young people], they will organize their own parties with drinking and cards… We cannot do away with

49 Ibid., d. 370, ll. 3-4, 53.
deviations in behavior, like drinking or youth marrying multiple times, or card games before we organize entertaining relaxation.” 50 Engaging youth in physical culture, in games and in the community of the Komsomol had an instrumental value. To borrow the title of Robert Edelman’s work on Soviet sport, entertainment in the Soviet Union was “serious fun,” whose official purpose was not just as a safety valve but as a means of improving the population. 51 Yet another purpose of recreation and participation in the Komsomol was to fight boredom, and by doing so to beat hooliganism before it took root.

In the minds of Komsomol leaders, boredom was a leading cause of hooliganism but not its only source. Echoes of the 1937-38 purges still were heard in cases from 1939 where Komsomol leaders suggested that hooliganism was a manifestation of political opposition. In Minsk province’s Komsomol an article in Komsomol’skii rabotnik from June 1939 detailed an incident involving the secretary of a local youth group who allowed members to drink during meetings. At one meeting group members berated a young woman applying for membership until she left the meeting in tears. “It is no coincidence,” the author said, “that not one girl wants to join that organization.” The author concluded that this kind of hooliganism occurred because youth leaders in the province had forgotten about the August 1937 and November 1938 purge plenums, conjuring the link between degeneracy and political opposition. 52

The article also represented the continuation of the fight against the old culture of activism, characterized by drinking and rough masculinity. 53 In another case, at the December 1939 plenum of the Komsomol Central Committee, Abdulin, the head of Bashkiria’s youth league argued that hooliganism was a conscious attempt to sabotage the state. In his province,

50 NARK, f. 1229, op. 3, d. 4, l. 117.
53 See Guillory, “We Shall Refashion Life on Earth!,” 152-159.
the Komsomol had found a masked group of hooligans: “It turned out that the group was made up of former people—sons of dekulakized peasants and people alien to us… That group made its goal to taint youth and by these means [degeneracy] had already recruited some Komsomol members into the group.”

Abdulin continued to use the discourse of the purges to link hooliganism to politically motivated attempts to turn Komsomol youth into degenerates.

At the same time, Komsomol activists and leaders in 1939 and 1940 increasingly blamed hooliganism on the lack of healthy outlets for youth’s energy. The youth group of the Red Army newspaper Krasnaia zvezda (Red Star) in October 1939 brought disciplinary proceedings against Comrade K., who lost his Komsomol card at a restaurant after drinking 150 grams of vodka. Apparently, Comrade K. had been with two other men, one of whom he did not know well. Many of the questioners wanted to know who these mystery men were and, most important, if Comrade K. had revealed military secrets to potential spies. Other members of the organization, particularly its leaders, wanted to know why he was drinking in the first place: “Why does this [drinking] happen? It seems to me that this happens because among our youth and among Komsomol members there is no kind of cultural vospitanie. There is no friendship among our Komsomol members… Komsomol members don’t know where to go, what to do, how to spend their time in a way that is more interesting and meaningful.”

The combinations of missteps—drinking, loss of identification papers and the possibility that he revealed military secrets—was too damning for Comrade K. His committee expelled him by an overwhelming vote (twenty to zero with one abstention). In spite of this outcome, the notion that wholesome cultural activity and friendship could cure dangerous activities played a significant role in the proceedings. If youth activists asserted that Comrade K. had revealed

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54 RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 2, d. 189, l. 88.
55 RGVA, f. 9, op. 30, d. 181, l. 47.
military secrets to enemies because he had no better outlet for entertainment than drinking, providing an alternative was literally a matter of national security.56

A youth conference in Lopasne district (Moscow province) revealed similar concerns about the lack of “cultured” outlets for youth. In this case, though, activists claimed that a lack of infrastructure was limiting opportunities for wholesome entertainment. The secretary of Lopasne’s school youth group pleaded with district youth leaders for more and better community spaces: “For leisure the only place our youth can meet up is the highway. Young people go to ‘Tiaga’ [apparently the name of a bar or meeting place] on the highway where they saunter about [proishchot gulkan’e]. In our parks it is dark at night and here people can do whatever to whomever, hooliganize, drink, raise all hell.” Even sport, a likely refuge for youth, was not a suitable alternative in Lopasne: “The soccer field is also an absolutely uncultured place for youth to meet. During practices you can hear all sorts of swearing.”57 In both the case of Comrade K. and Lopasne’s absent recreational facilities, organizers placed the blame for hooliganism not on mysterious and dangerous enemies. Rather the onus was on youth groups’ poor sense of camaraderie, lack of organization or lack of material support for activities.

The benefit of providing wholesome entertainment was not only that it provided an alternative to hooliganism but that it involved youth in the socially healthy community of the league. Fictionalized accounts presented cases where the influence (or lack of influence) of the Komsomol community in members’ personal lives had prevented a slide into hooliganism or other troubles. Author Ol’ga Ziv wrote a short story in the Pioneer magazine, Vozhatyi in the form of a school girl, Nina D.’s diary through her seventh and eighth grades of school. Nina

56 Ibid.
57 TsAOPIM, f. 648p, op. 1, d. 18, l. 13. This was not the first time Lopasne’s organizers had complained about the soccer team. On the holiday Athlete’s Day (Den’ fizkul’turnika), on July 18, 1939, Komsomol organizers complained that the district soccer team marred the celebration by demanding pay for playing a game in honor of the holiday. TsAOPIM, f. 648p, op. 1, d. 15, l. 64.
joins the Komsomol but gets into trouble when she begins a romance with fellow youth league member, Mitia. Unable to reconcile her role in the Komsomol with her feelings for Mitia, her grades decline, her participation in the youth group fades and her relationship with her mother becomes strained. Her diary breaks off. Ziv wrote the conclusion of the piece in the form of an article from the school’s wall newspaper, chronicling the disciplinary proceedings against Nina. At the meeting, Nina’s friend delivers a stirring speech that indicts her mother and the community for making it difficult for love, family and Komsomol activity to co-exist, despite the rather innocent nature of Nina and Mitia’s budding romance. The story ends ambiguously (“The debate about friendship continues,” Ziv concluded.) but its main message was that the Komsomol was more than an activist network; it was a real community of excellent students and activists. When members lagged, the group had a duty to step in or else they ran the risk of allowing delinquency. \(^{58}\)

Similar themes of love and the Komsomol’s influence came up in three supposedly real and unedited letters to Komsomol’skii rabotnik, published in April 1940. The authors of the letters were Komsomol members, writing to ask advice about troubling situations in the personal lives of their friends who were also in the league. Georgii, the subject of the first letter, went to the army and left his wife (a Komsomol member herself) in their home town. He excelled as a soldier but when he came back on leave, rumors of his wife’s infidelity abounded. Unperturbed at first, he soon learned that his wife was pregnant—not with his child. The author ended by asking, “But who is to blame in all this? Only Galina [the wife]? What responsibility does the Komsomol organization carry? Does the Komsomol committee carry any responsibility at all for the behavior of its members in everyday life?” In the next two letters, two young women found themselves abandoned and abused, respectively, by their husbands. The concluding question in

both of these letters was the same as the first, though: Was the Komsomol committee’s lack of intervention to blame? The editors of the article claimed that the letters were meant for discussion but the answer was clear. Komsomol groups had the right and obligation to intervene in the private lives of members.59

Youth leaders believed that participation in strong communities of youth activists was one way of preventing hooliganism. A related means was the organization of more “concrete measures” in the youth league—clubs and activity circles. In an article from 1939, a group of young women workers unaffiliated with the Komsomol approached the youth group at their Moscow factory to organize a copyist circle. Although it took some bureaucratic navigation, the local youth secretary arranged the classes through the factory. Not only did several young women join the Komsomol through their connection with this class, but they became active members because they were already in the youth organization’s sphere. The article’s author, the secretary of the factory youth committee, concluded, “The Komsomol has tens of channels through which youth enter its ranks. Around it there are many organizations where young workers prepare themselves gradually for active social-political work.”60

Were these fictional and journalistic accounts a reality for most youth? Apparently they were not according to Nikolai Mikhailov. In a January 1941 letter to party Central Committee secretaries Andreev, Zhdanov and Malenkov on the status of the Komsomol, Mikhailov disparaged the youth league’s “objectless character” that had pervaded the organization since he had become its leader. He claimed, “Instead of politically preparing young people toward membership in the Komsomol, toward moving them into work in [activity or political education] circles, networks, Komsomol organizations have made the entire affair about giving the newly

admitted members their Komsomol card.” Youth groups focused almost exclusively on membership issues—admission, expulsion and collecting dues—and spent little time on organizing existing members in clubs or as activists. “All this,” he continued, “leads to a large proportion of Komsomol members’ being in the organization…but not happy with the work of the Komsomol, moving away from its influence and belonging to the organization in name only.”61 While Komsomol leaders would exhort lower-level groups to create a community of activism, it seems that local Komsomol groups were better at monitoring and disciplining youth than realizing the center’s desired program of wholesome entertainment.

Conclusion:

In the workplace, at schools and in society, the role of the Komsomol in the late 1930s and early 1940s was to monitor young people, ensure they adhered to norms of behavior and corral them if they strayed beyond acceptable limits. In factory youth groups, this meant watching youth’s punctuality and norm-fulfillment. In schools youth committees were to monitor students’ academic performance and behavior. These goals accompanied continual calls to improve extra-curricular and non-work recreational activities. In backing these activities, youth leaders hoped to engage youth not only (or even primarily) so that they would develop in wholesome ways. Instead, they wanted to keep young people within the disciplinary reach of their Komsomol groups to prevent them from falling irrevocably into the jaws of the legal system. Writing about the Thaw-era campaign against hooliganism, Brian LaPierre observes that criminal justice in Khrushchev’s Soviet Union contained a heavy dose of arbitrary repression despite significant

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61 RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 23, d. 1454, ll. 30-40.
moves toward liberalization. Similarly, the example of the Komsomol contravenes the general picture of the final years of interwar Stalinism. The regime was extremely repressive, yet youth groups found ways to soften its repressive powers by using internal disciplinary measures.

The prophylactic focus in the Komsomol on preventing hooliganism and shirking ran parallel to the league’s mission to cultivate a generation of youth. Komsomol leaders maintained that by retaining marginal members in their community and by providing wholesome recreation, the league could stop hooliganism. In their mission to construct a Soviet generation, they also hoped to constrict the populace, heading off potential dissent or anti-Soviet behavior before it reached the critical point that would demand legal action. To some extent, Komsomol leaders even viewed these activities as defensive measures to contain social groups that could become fifth columnists in a future war. As the apparent likelihood of such a war increased, the Komsomol took on another purpose: the paramilitary training of Soviet youth.

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Chapter 8: From Militant to Militarized: Paramilitary Training for Youth, 1937-1941

At a meeting of youth leaders in early 1940, Nikolai Mikhailov gave a stark warning, “We live in a dangerous era… The second imperialist war has now started…and the conclusion must be that every Komsomol organization must become a fighting unit [boevoi otriad].”¹ From the Komsomol’s inception, its leaders had often employed military metaphors to describe the league’s work in culture and industry. And the Komsomol had previously mobilized young people for paramilitary training, especially those who were soon to be called up to the Red Army or who lived on the border. By the mid to late 1930s, though, party and youth leaders had come to believe a major war was approaching. In 1939, when Germany began its wars in Europe and the Soviet Union itself went to war against Finland, Soviet leaders asserted that the long-envisioned time of war had begun. Now, Mikhailov spoke of the Komsomol as a fighting unit, one that he envisioned as a literal military outfit.

Stalin’s Soviet Union was both a militaristic and a militarized country. Politicians and radical activists glorified the military, and the civil war experience became a key part of Komsomol identity in the 1920s.² The militarization of the country only intensified in the 1930s. David Stone asserts that the First-Five Year Plan placed the Soviet economy on a wartime footing that continued through the end of World War II.³ In the Komsomol of the 1930s, “cultured” behavior for young men in the Komsomol took on aspects of military-style discipline and increasingly Komsomol leaders considered paramilitary training a duty for members (see chapter 2). Yet the onset of war made Mikhailov advocate a style of paramilitary training that was more intense than before. The difference was in the scope of militarization and its agents.

¹ RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 2, d. 203, l. 55.
² Guillory, “We Shall Refashion Life on Earth!,” 44-87; Neumann, The Communist Youth League, 45-59.
³ Stone, Hammer and Rifle, 209.
Previously, Osoaviakhim officials had been the primary organizers of military training among all sectors of the population outside of the military itself, including in the Komsomol. At the end of the 1930s, though, political and military leaders asserted that Osoaviakhim’s efforts were both insufficiently intense and excessively broad. From 1939 onward, Red Army planners directly collaborated with civilian Komsomol leaders to implement paramilitary programs for large numbers of youth. The essence of these programs was to ensure that all potential soldiers would have the skills they needed in the event of a mass conscription. Above all, military and youth leaders believed that regular and realistic training was the most effective way to discipline youth for war. These administrators began to envision the Komsomol itself as a parallel military structure, capable of being converted for a war on short notice. The immediate catalyst for these changes was the disastrous Soviet-Finnish War, from which Soviet leaders sought to draw lessons more broadly for a future war. Moreover, Nazi Germany’s rapid defeat of France in 1940 only increased the chances for an eventual war with their then ally in the minds of these leaders.

The military shocks of 1939 and 1940 motivated the attempt to intensify the militarization of youth, but these changes also accompanied a broader reconfiguring of the role of military training in youth culture. A major source of these ideas was Soviet studies of foreign youth programs. In spite of its reputation as an isolated dictatorship, administrators in Stalin’s regime were aware and interested in the developments of their European counterparts. But Soviet administrators were not merely part of a general European cultural ecosystem, as David

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4 The records of party Central Committee meetings about the lessons to be learned from the war have been published in the document collection, “Zimniaia voina”: rabota nad oshibkami (aprel’-mai 1940 g.): materialy komissii Glavnogo voennogo soveta Krasnoi armii po obobshcheniu opyta finskoi kampanii (Moscow: Letnii sad, 2004). Stalin characterized one of the main mistakes of the army was the “cult of tradition and experience of the civil war” (37).
Hoffmann asserts.⁶ Youth and sports leaders were inspired not by all foreign youth organizations but by those of their authoritarian neighbors whom Soviet officials believed were the best at militarizing youth. Based on information gleaned from these youth programs—above all those in Germany—youth leaders developed an understanding of physical and military training as a pillar of modern youth programs.⁷

**Learning from the Enemy**

Soviet leaders came to know about foreign youth and sports programs through a variety of sources, including analysts’ reports about these programs and translations of foreign materials. The Moscow Central Scientific Research Institute of Physical Culture compiled a regular bulletin about sports and physical education training abroad. These bulletins were often composed of translations or summaries of methodological articles from other countries. The June-July 1935 bulletin contained articles about the upcoming Berlin Olympics and Germany and Japan’s sporting prowess.⁸ It justified the study of foreign sport as a science that would allow Soviet athletes “to catch up and overtake” their foreign counterparts. As Robert Edelman has shown of Soviet soccer, experts within the Soviet sport establishment were open to foreign practices in sport and physical culture, hoping the latest foreign methods would help Soviet athletes.⁹

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⁶ See Hoffmann, *Stalinist Values*, 7-8. Part of the problem with this assertion is that it derives from an exclusively comparative approach. While comparison of the Soviet Union with its neighbors can show similarities, without some transnational perspective, it cannot show causality. Michael David-Fox argues for the use of a transnational approach through his study of Western visitors and observers. David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment: Cultural Diplomacy and Western Visitors to the Soviet Union, 1921-1941* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 250.

⁷ The accuracy of Soviet perceptions of militarism in foreign youth programs is not central. Nonetheless, research on Italian and German youth organizations suggests that administrators in these programs intended to prepare youth for army service, with varying degrees of success. In the Italian case, Tracy Koon asserts that politicians overseeing youth and educational affairs implemented policies intended to make youth into citizen-soldiers but that these policies were ultimately not effective in mobilization. See Koon, *Believe, Obey, Fight*; Kater, *Hitler Youth*.


Although Soviet sports authorities examined information on different countries, the models they sought out were most often from other authoritarian states. A meeting of Ukrainian workers in physical culture convened in November 1935 to discuss the possibility of opening up special ten-year sports schools. There the suitability of sports in authoritarian countries as a model became a source of contention. One administrator cited a recent article by a colleague on physical culture in Italy: “Of course, I’ll say now that the physical education work in Italy cannot serve as an example for us. But Comrade Sarkisov [the article’s author] writes…that of all the bourgeois countries Italy places the greatest accent on physical education for children.” The influential head of the Ukrainian Institute of Physical Education, V.A. Bliakh demanded any sports school needed to encourage discipline and be militarized “to some degree.” He also cited the need to look at foreign examples, including an eight-year school for physical training in Japan.\(^\text{10}\) When they cited these foreign programs as models, sports authorities qualified their interest because they understood these regimes as ideological and geopolitical enemies of the Soviet Union. However, these models themselves were attractive for sports leaders because they were perceived to be accomplishing desirable goals like military and disciplinary training.

Because the Komsomol apparatus overlapped considerably with the administration of physical education and sport, youth leaders were well aware of developments in foreign physical culture as well as foreign youth programs. Youth leaders received irregular intelligence about youth organizations in other countries from Red Army attachés and intelligence officers. Usually these accounts had to do with military aspects of these organizations.\(^\text{11}\) Take for example the 1936 report called “About Military-Fascist youth organizations abroad.” Markings on this report indicate that the reader, almost certainly Komsomol leader Aleksandr Kosarev, had

\(^{10}\) Ibid., spr. 1326, ark. 6-7, 9. \\
\(^{11}\) RGASPI, f. 1м, op. 23, d. 1152, passim; d. 1207, passim; d. 1287, passim; d. 1447, passim. Each file contains various reports on foreign sport.
been interested in the practices of foreign youth organizations. He underlined, among other parts, the section discussing the Hitler Youth’s annual summer camps: “Military training occurs in middle and high schools where…military disciplining is undertaken [in courses] with mandatory exams.” On another page, he circled the types of military activities that the Hitler Youth carried out in its camps: shooting, marching, grenade-throwing, topography, signaling and camouflage.\(^{12}\)

Public representations of foreign youth organizations were decidedly negative and youth leaders used information from military reports to denounce the foreign militarization of youth. The Komsomol press regularly printed articles about youth organizations in Fascist countries, often during international worker holidays like May 1 or International Youth Day. A 1937 article first published in *Iunyi communist* (Young Communist) and reprinted widely called “Fascism prepares a new war” stated, “They have created an entire system of mandatory ‘upbringing’ for youth in the spirit of chauvinism and militarism. From childhood to 24-25 years old, young people must go from one military-fascist organization to another.”\(^{13}\) At the Tenth Komsomol Congress in 1936, Kosarev had given a similar report on youth abroad: “Fascist capitalist governments are carrying out intense militarization of youth…particularly in Germany, Poland, Japan and Italy… The Hitler Youth is more than just a semi-military organization. It’s led by a military staff with a chief of staff.”\(^{14}\) The information and precise phrasing had come from the report “About Military-Fascist youth organizations abroad.” In articles and speeches, the main point was to contrast the difference between the peace-loving (but defense-ready) nature of the Komsomol and the warlike nature of Fascism. Reports on foreign youth organizations often provided examples that the Komsomol used in public near verbatim.

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\(^{12}\) RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 23, d. 1207, ll. 3, 4.
\(^{13}\) Reprinted in *Komsomolets Karelii*, 2 August 1937, 3.
\(^{14}\) RGASPI, f. 6m, op. 10, d. 1, l. 55.
The counterpart of the monolithic public representation of militaristic Fascist youth organizations was private controls on access to information about Fascism. In a strange but revealing episode from early 1937, Mikhail Chernov, son of the Commissar of Agriculture (also Mikhail), lent his father’s NKVD-translated copy of Mein Kampf to a Comrade D., a Komsomol organizer in the Central House of the Red Army (TsDKA). Comrade D. initially asked local party members informally whether it was acceptable to read the book, apparently to their indifference. He also naively asked Chernov if he could read the book on the tram and showed it widely to members of his local Komsomol committee. Comrade D. later claimed that he had only been interested in the book to learn about the enemy. Moreover, he said that he had found the book to be such drivel that he was unable to finish it.\(^{15}\)

After some time, party members apparently realized the political danger of Comrade D.’s reading material and the local committee intervened. A party commission removed the youth organizer from the party and Komsomol and he was likely arrested. Chernov was expelled from the Komsomol and later arrested. (It seems likely that his arrest was in conjunction with his father’s arrest. The older Chernov was arrested later in 1937 and executed after being tried in the third Moscow show trial in 1938.) Moreover, the party committee rounded up all those who had been exposed to the book, giving many of the activists official reprimands that cost them their positions in the Komsomol organization. Why was reading Mein Kampf such a tendentious issue? In all likelihood, Comrade D.’s case was really about a young man who wanted to impress his peers with his access to secret knowledge. Yet the case also shows a curiosity with Fascism and, on the part of authorities, a fear of the spread of information about Fascism outside of officially mandated channels. Additionally, one Komsomol leader in the commissariat asserted

\(^{15}\) RGVA, f. 9, op. 30, d. 82, ll. 142-146, 166-170.
that Comrade D. had acted dangerously because of the potential for people to find out “that in the Soviet Union Hitler’s book is being read.”

Foreign sports and physical education literature was considered nearly as dangerous as *Mein Kampf*. One of the main purposes of the Moscow Physical Culture Institute was to study and translate foreign methodological works about sport and physical fitness. Yet the perceived danger of bourgeois and Fascist ideas limited the materials available to the institute. At a meeting of the institute in 1937, a translator named Nepomiashchii complained that censors were confiscating too many foreign journals he needed for work. He admitted that the journals were dangerous but that they were necessary. Referring to a German magazine in particular he said, “This magazine had a Fascist spirit and a strong one, but we have enough immunity [*my obladaem dostatochnym immunitetom*] that we aren’t scared of it.” Both the case of Comrade D. and Nepomiashchii demonstrated an understanding of Fascist information sources as infectious, capable of turning the unsuspecting and weak into Fascist sympathizers. At the same time, these cases underline the belief on the part of Soviet authorities that it was necessary to translate and study these sources in spite of the danger; they needed to learn from their enemies or at least to understand them.

In the Soviet sports committee, the perception that foreign sports and youth organizations were fast becoming tools of militarization directly influenced the revision of the GTO program. This view accompanied an increased sense of urgency among Stalinist leaders about the prospect of war more generally. Stalinist leaders blamed the defeat of the Soviet-backed Spanish

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16 RGVA, f. 9, op. 30, d. 81, ll. 312, 315-318, 319-322. In another case, a Komsomol provincial leader during the February 1938 Komsomol Central Committee plenum recounted how an otherwise model young worker had been caught with a picture of Hitler. He was expelled from the Komsomol. The provincial leader asked the young man about the card when he appealed his case. Apparently, a foreign alpinist had given it to him a year ago. The former Komsomol member claimed, “I was studying his [Hitler’s] face so that if I ever met him I’d be able to give him one [i.e., hit him].” RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 2, d. 136, l. 102.

17 GARF, f. 7576, op. 1, d. 325, l. 10.
Republic on the disunity of the left in Spain. The Great Terror had in part resulted from the fear that a fifth column of disloyal Soviet citizens would undermine a future war effort in the USSR as they believed it had in Spain. It is likely that the Spanish Civil War taught Soviet leaders other lessons as well. In particular, it seems that sports administrators came to believe that fascist methods of militarizing youth were producing physically superior soldiers.

When sports administrators and physical education experts met in October 1937 in Moscow to discuss changes to GTO, the specter of war loomed. Elena Knopova, acting head of the sports committee explained why the changes were necessary in her opening address, “The world is on the brink of war. This isn’t some kind of outlook on the future, but the world is really on the edge of war. War has essentially begun. Therefore, we must prepare our youth for the staunch defense of our country.” The architect of the new program, A.D. Novikov, a researcher at the Moscow Physical Culture Institute, explained how he had developed the revised program: “When we approached the GTO complex…we took into account not only our domestic experience but the experiences in world-wide practices for realizing government programs of physical preparation.” As Novikov continued to speak, he made clear that these world-wide practices included, indeed were primarily, those of “Fascist” states.

In designing a program to prepare youth to face off against enemies who would most likely be Fascists, Novikov and his institute consciously used principles they perceived as Fascist. Novikov took two main ideas and adapted them to the Soviet context. The first was the need to keep a contingent of reserves physically prepared for the duration of their potential service. Novikov hoped the new GTO program would achieve this goal by placing expirations on the program’s certification, forcing young people to retake the exam after several years if they

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18 Khlevniuk, “The Reasons for the Great Terror: the Foreign-Political Aspect.”
19 GARF, f. 7576, op. 9, d. 7, ll. 1-2, 9-10.
wanted to maintain their GTO qualification. The second was to increase the focus on physical activities with “defense applications,” including, among others, shooting, grenade throwing, marching, skiing and swimming with clothes. In some cases, these militarizing activities were carryovers from the previous GTO program (e.g., grenade throwing).

GTO was not the only program meant to militarize Soviet youth; the military content of Osoaviakhim’s Voroshilov Shooter firearms training program was arguably higher than GTO. However, for the revised version of GTO, Novikov and the other sport experts made military goals the essence of the program rather than just one of its goals. And GTO in comparison to the Voroshilov Shooter course was the Soviet Union’s flagship fitness program, meant to incorporate a broad population of Soviet youth. By intensifying the military content of GTO, Soviet sports and youth authorities were adopting what they believed was a major goal of Fascist physical education. Of course, Novikov also emphasized that the goals of the GTO program were different from its foreign counterpart; Soviet physical education employed these practices for a defensive rather than offensive war. Yet the purpose of Soviet and foreign programs was fundamentally similar. Novikov he stated that foreign sports programs “didn’t just exist for their own sake” but to prepare youth for the army. From their study of foreign sports programs, Novikov and other experts in sport came to believe that other authoritarian countries’ programs were superior at militarizing youth. They imbued the GTO revisions with what they perceived as

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20 Having a GTO badge was more than just a matter of pride. A stated benefit of the program was that participants would gain priority access to sports facilities. Implied benefits included better access to promotion in the Komsomol and the party as an active member of Soviet society. On the GTO program and its relationship to the new Soviet person, see Grant, Physical Culture and Sport, 37-41.

21 For example, the control figures for the Military-Technical Examination of 1935 proposed that the number of youth completing GTO (1,207,666 million) would roughly double the number who completed the Voroshilov Shooter program (676,939). RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 3, d. 133, l. 168.
Fascist practices in order to militarize Soviet youth better—potentially to fight Fascist countries.  

After the Soviet Union concluded its non-aggression pact with Germany, the influence of practices gleaned from studies of foreign youth programs became more transparent. New studies ceased to call these countries “Fascist,” favoring German (or Italian and Japanese), and information about these countries seemed even more significant. The rapid victories of Nazi Germany further impressed upon Soviet youth leaders the apparent success of German youth programs. Grigorii Gromov, a Komsomol Central Committee secretary said in a meeting about children’s book publisher Detizdat, “The Germans have put out engaging military games. Is it really impossible for us to give those kinds of things to children—to create interesting military games and channel their creativity [tvorcheskaia samodeiatel’nost’] in that direction?” In July 1940, the head of the sports administration, Vasilii Snegov sent Stalin, Molotov and Voroshilov a report on the state of physical culture and sport in the USSR. The report focused heavily on the comparison of Soviet sport to German sport and included a long appendix about German programs. Snegov opened, “Recent events have shown that physical preparation…is by far not the least important factor in victory [in war]…Germany conducted particularly intensive work in the physical upbringing of its population, particularly of youth, and Italy has set up a clear state system of physical education.” Among other things, Snegov implied that the Soviet Union could replicate the German system by including more hours for physical education in the school

22 GARF, f. 7576, op. 9, d. 7, ll. 9-10, 15. Novikov also modified the program to allow for the wide range of ecosystems and sports cultures in the USSR. For example, exam takers could substitute extra marches for skiing in areas where the climate would not permit skiing. It is also worth noting that, perhaps due to the chaos and turnover the purges of sports personnel caused, the GTO revisions were not finalized until 1939. RGASPI f. 1m, op. 3, d. 213, ll. 28-35. Novikov himself came under intense scrutiny in 1937-38 for his connections to purged cadres in physical culture. GARF, f. 7576, op. 1, d. 325, passim.

23 RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 3, d. 238, l. 95.
program and one day per week of “military games” as he said the Germans used.\textsuperscript{24} In both instances, youth and sports leaders wrote about German programs approvingly and in neutral tones that did not attempt to distance the practices from the regime that produced them.

The praise of German youth programs among sports authorities was sometimes so effusive that it drew criticism from Komsomol leaders. The Central Moscow Institute of Physical Culture published a journal called \textit{Sport za rubezhom (Sports Abroad)} in 1941. The journal’s coverage of Germany struck Mikhailov as so laudatory that he denounced the publication to Politburo candidate Aleksandr Shcherbakov. Mikhailov complained that the journal gave voice to “the Germanophile idea.” He cited one sentence as particularly offensive: “When undertaking a game on the field, in the forest and so on, youth learn from the practices of the tactics of their army and this allows youth to enter the army already having certain military skills… Learning from this material will bring major benefits to our organizations of physical culture.”\textsuperscript{25} Written in May 1941, Mikhailov’s letter may have represented a shifting view of Germany as an imminent threat once again. Yet the crux of Mikhailov’s complaint was not that studying Germany programs was inappropriate but that the praise of Germany in the journal was too public. Overall, Mikhailov and other Komsomol leaders continued to express interest in understanding how German and other foreign youth programs operated.

Sports and youth leaders viewed foreign programs as potential models for the Soviet Union. But more than seeing individual practices as potentially applicable in the Soviet context, information about these programs’ goals shaped the broader conceptions of how state programs could and should mold youth in the Soviet Union. From the mid-1930s onward, youth and sports organizations increasingly believed that they needed to counter the superior militarizing

\textsuperscript{24} RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 23, d. 1433, ll. 1-19, 28-39.
\textsuperscript{25} RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 23, d. 1453, l. 16; d. 1454, ll. 151-154.
capabilities of Fascist youth organizations. Soviet organizations did not always try to duplicate exactly the methods of their would-be enemies. Indeed, public praise and sometimes even internal study of foreign programs made some administrators uncomfortable. But it seems that Soviet youth and sports leaders believed that by adapting foreign practices to the youth of the USSR, they could beat their enemies at their own game of militarization. The influence of military practices on youth policy soon turned into not only paramilitary training but measures meant to prepare Komsomol groups for conversion into military units.

The Soviet-Finnish War and the Komsomol Ski Brigade

During the Soviet-Finnish War of 1939-40, party and military leaders called upon the Komsomol to furnish military units for the first time since the Russian civil war. The war started as a result of the non-aggression pact with Germany. According to the agreement, Finland fell into the Soviet sphere of influence. Soviet leaders made an ultimatum (first privately in 1938 and then publicly in the fall of 1939) to the Finnish government to cede territories around Leningrad, believing the region could be a launching point for an invasion of the USSR. Unwilling to accede to these demands, Finland began to mobilize its military for war with the Soviet Union. In the conflict that began in November 1939, the Red Army endured humiliating losses to an enemy that was numerically smaller but better trained and suited for a winter war. Desperately needing militarized skiers for the Red Army, party leaders commanded Nikolai Mikhailov to recruit ski brigades from the ranks of Komsomol members in January 1940.

Mikhailov apparently considered the orders to be critically important and jumped on the issue. On January 10, he telegraphed youth leaders in cold-weather territories, writing that the party would “allow” them to form special military brigades. He gave quotas for recruiting in
each province, the total figure coming to about 1,500 young men. The battalions were to form along geographical lines: Moscow would provide one, Ukraine two and other Russian provinces two more. The recruits were to be “politically capable, decisive, brave and physically fit.” Mikhailov’s contact in the military was F.F. Kuznetsov, the assistant head of the Political Administration of the Red Army, who was to provide the battalions with equipment and special uniforms.26

Results were mostly strong as provincial youth organizations attempted to fill their recruitment quotas. According to a report on January 13 by an instructor from the Komsomol’s information department, some youth leaders claimed not to receive the cables on the campaign or received them late. It seems possible that, either due to weather or the fact that these cables came during Russia’s traditional holiday season, the orders were overlooked or temporarily ignored. Yet the majority of youth committees jumped at the chance to influence the outcome of the war and set about recruiting youth with urgency. The instructor’s report made a special note of Yuri Andropov, the future Soviet leader who was then secretary of the Iaroslavl’ provincial youth committee. Besides rapidly fulfilling the recruitment quotas, Andropov himself volunteered for conscription, although he ultimately did not take part directly in the conflict. However, Andropov’s organization and others were able to fulfill and exceed the control figures. Among the most impressive results were in Ukraine, where the youth committee recruited 1,236 Komsomol soldiers in just three days.27

The recruiting phase had occurred faster than the army could handle the new soldiers. On January 14, Mikhailov updated party secretaries Andreev and Malenkov that the youth league would be able to recruit more than a sufficient number of soldiers and would commandeer skis

26 RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 23, d. 1439, ll. 4-6, 9-11, 12-14.
from sports associations.\footnote{The issue of skis was no small matter. The April party Central Committee meeting of Red Army commanders with Stalin and other political leaders dissected the mistakes of the war. One commander not only lamented the lack of training but the absense of skis themselves, “Things are bad with ski training, but it’s an important subject. We don’t have the skis we need—short, wide skis—you just can’t get them.” Alexander Chubaryan and Harold Shukman eds., Stalin and the Soviet-Finnish War, 1939-40 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 47.} The only bottleneck in the operation was that the army was not providing commanders. A day later, Mikhailov reported that the Komsomol had recruited seven battalions instead of five and could recruit another two if necessary. Meanwhile, Komsomol leaders had also begun to gather information on Finnish speakers within the league. They compiled a list of 1,891 young people, mostly from Leningrad province, apparently with the goal of sending them to the front as translators or agitators.\footnote{RGASPI f. 1m, op. 23, d. 1454, ll. 16-18, 19-20, 29-30, 40.}

Who joined these brigades? One of the Moscow groups included a total of 786 young men. Of these, 640 were Komsomol members, 105 were candidates for party membership, thirty-six were full party members and five had no affiliation. By profession, 293 were industrial workers, 246 were students, 202 were white-collar workers and forty-five were peasants. Most of the new soldiers had lower or middle education (372 and 339 respectively) while roughly 10 percent (seventy-seven) had at least some higher education. The recruits were relatively well-educated, politically active young men from social classes Soviet leaders considered reliable.\footnote{Ibid., ll. 103-112.}

Having successfully recruited a large number of militarized skiers, Mikhailov drafted an account to Stalin himself on January 28. He reported that the seven battalions had a high level of political preparation (as measured by the proportion of party members among them) and military preparedness (unlikely given that the battalions were thrown together just two weeks before). Overall the tenor of the report went against Soviet leaders’ penchant for self criticism before superiors; Mikhailov mentioned only a few shortcomings. These deficiencies included instances when youth committees had not approached recruiting as seriously as possible (hinting perhaps
at the lack of initial response in some provinces) and that three of the battalions were not as capable as the other four. After Georgii Malenkov reviewed the draft of the report, and apparently at his insistence, these few shortcomings disappeared from the text Stalin received. The recruiting phase of the Komsomol ski battalions was portrayed as a success.\footnote{Ibid., ll. 41-44, 46-47.}

Problems began as recruits for the ski battalions gathered at training camps in February. Military and Komsomol leaders sent home many recruits (almost 18 percent in one battalion) for practical and, to a lesser extent, political reasons. According to a report from Moscow’s Leningrad municipal district, one Komsomol member left the battalion when league organizers discovered that he had two uncles arrested by the NKVD. The political motivation of his discharge was an exception, though, and the majority was sent home for lack of military training or for medical reasons. For example, one of those sent away could shoot only while wearing glasses. Assessing the overall political mood of the battalions, several Komsomol reports asserted it was “healthy” and that the recruits were ready to fight the Finns.\footnote{RGASPI f. 1m, op. 23, 1439, ll. 103-112, 97, 98, 99-100; d. 1440, l. 8.} Army officials conducted their own survey of the battalions and were less impressed. Inspectors from the Commissariat of Defense reported to Mikhailov, “The military preparation of the formed battalions is characterized by an absolute lack of training on skis. The longest march in Serpukhov, Podol’sk, Dubrovishchi and Leningrad [places where ski battalions formed] was no greater than 8-10 km.”\footnote{RGASPI f. 1m, op. 23, d. 1441, l. 30.} Whether these battalions participated in fighting is unclear, although it seems unlikely given the serious problems with training. Moreover, in March 1940 the war came to an end, with the Soviet Union winning a costly victory. Komsomol records do not show what happened to the battalions near or after the war’s end.
Even though the battalions probably did not fight, the episode suggests a turn in the Komsomol’s relationship with the military. Previously, the youth league had interacted with the Red Army through intermediaries. Its activists had been political enforcers during conscription campaigns and mobilized youth for Osoaviakhim training. The Komsomol had also come into contact with the military in annual drafts of youth for military academies. These activities would continue past 1939. What was new was that Komsomol leaders had also begun to recruit youth directly for army combat service. And with the spread of war through Europe, Komsomol and Red Army leaders increasingly worked together to militarize youth—especially within the league itself. To Soviet party and military leaders in 1939 and 1940, it seemed that existing methods to militarize youth were not sufficient for delivering the quality or quantity of soldiers the dangers of the era demanded. More and more, party leaders turned to the Komsomol as an independent agent of militarization.

“If Tomorrow War Comes”: Visions of a Militarized Komsomol

In August 1939, as Soviet and German leaders were finalizing their non-aggression pact, the Komsomol’s Central Committee convened a plenum that focused on the issue of paramilitary training. Shteinbakh, the head of the league’s office of military and physical culture cast shame on those members who could not fight and justified the need for this training: “We often repeat, ‘If tomorrow war comes…,’ [the title of a well-known song] [We] frequently say, that war will break out any day, at any time… But does every Komsomol leader really understand what he will do and what each Komsomol member will do on the day of mobilization in the event of war in our country?”34 Shteinbakh reflected a common view among the Komsomol’s leadership: When war came, it would be the cohort of young men from the Komsomol who would bear the

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34 RGASPI f. 1m, op. 2, d. 178, ll. 184, 188.
brunt of the fighting. Soon after, on September 1, 1939, a new Supreme Soviet law lowered the call-up age in the USSR from twenty-one to nineteen, creating a double cohort of recruits. In the spring of 1940 Nazi Germany won what seemed to be unexpectedly easy military victories in Europe while the USSR reeled from its struggle with Finland. The double cohort, the apparently increased likelihood of war and the Soviet military’s seemingly unpreparedness for combat all made paramilitary training in the youth league a central issue. Based on fear and necessity, Komsomol leaders became increasingly involved with Red Army planners in their attempts to raise a generation of soldiers.

Even before war broke out in Europe, Komsomol leaders had taken steps to intensify military training in the league. Stalin himself had signaled the need for more military training in a rare appearance by the dictator in the Komsomol press in 1938. In a letter to Stalin on January 18, 1938, a district-level propagandist in the Komsomol, Ivan Ivanov asked if he had been wrong in an argument with his superior, a provincial youth secretary named Urozhenko. The dispute hinged on whether the “victory of socialism” over internal class enemies made the military overthrow of Soviet power impossible. Ivanov said it had not made intervention impossible and Urozhenko argued that it had. Stalin responded personally and the Komsomol press widely published the entire exchange. In his response, Stalin said that Ivanov was correct because capitalists still surrounded the USSR, waiting for a chance to strike. “It would be silly and stupid to close one’s eyes…and to think that our external enemies, for example, fascists, are not trying…to carry out a military attack on the USSR.” Indeed, the current situation called for increasing the military mobilization capacity of the Soviet Union: “We must keep the entire people in a state of mobilized preparedness before the danger of military attack so that no ‘accident’ or trick of our external enemies catch us unawares.” Stalin’s intervention in the
Komsomol was unusual; party secretary Andrei Andreev oversaw the league at this time while Stalin only interceded on special issues or major public statements. The Ivanov-Stalin exchange was therefore of special importance. It let organizers know that Stalin himself was thinking of the Komsomol’s role in the defense of the country.  

In early 1939, Nikolai Mikhailov renewed a program from 1935—a campaign of military training camps for Komsomol workers (see chapter 2). As in the camps of 1935, the program was classified and Mikhailov wanted a group of lower-level youth organizers (approximately 400) to emerge from the camps ready to be examples for their youth groups. Unlike the 1935 campaign that was developed in conjunction with Osoaviakhim, the 1939 camps were organized with the help of the Red Army. The 1939 program devoted the majority of time (280 of 400 total hours) to military training (tactics and strategy, topography, army structure and physical fitness)—a major increase over the previous program. Only 120 hours were slotted for political education (i.e., the structure of the party system in the Red Army and current events). The increased number of total hours in the new program meant the camps would run two months (June and July) rather than just one. Youth leaders reaffirmed the need to continue military training for activists later that year by approving a second round of training for another 200 activists. Provincial youth committees bore responsibility for selecting participants and recruited activists often with the goal of turning them into future leaders of military-physical culture departments in the league. In sum, the 1939 plan was substantially different from its predecessor.

35 “Pis’mo t. Ivanova i otvet t. Stalina,” Molodaia gvardiia, no. 2 (1938): 8-9, 10-11. Continuing the condemnation of Urozhenko at the February 1938 Komsomol Central Committee plenum, Aleksandr Kosarev justified his denunciation of the provincial secretary by placing a heavy emphasis on the role of Komsomol membership in militarizing youth, “Our youth will play a major role in armed combat with capitalist countries… You won’t sit a sixty-year-old in an airplane, nor on a tank, you won’t teach him in a short period of time how to wield difficult modern military technology. In the looming war—and there will be one—our young people will play a big role and fight for power [vlast’].” Despite these attacks, party secretary Andrei Andreev, highlighting the theme of using leniency instead of excessive vigilance, protected Urozhenko, saying that the youth secretary had been mistaken but should not be removed from his position. RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 2, d. 138, ll. 179-181.
in scope and content. In 1935, the youth league—facing budgetary constraints and organizational problems—had needed to cut back on the length of the planned camps. In contrast, youth leaders carried out the ambitious two-month program of the 1939 camps, increased the number of cadres who would do training and focused primarily on skills that would only apply to work in the military rather than skills that could apply to work in the civilian youth organization as well.36

The camps reflected not only the intensification of military training in the Komsomol but the increasing entanglement of the Komsomol with military personnel. Before 1939 cadres from Osoaviakhim and the sports committee participated at Komsomol Central Committee meetings as experts on military and physical training. When non-Komsomol personnel from the Red Army first appeared in the league’s major meetings in 1939, they spoke openly about their militarizing role in the youth league. For example, at a plenum of the Komsomol Central Committee in December 1939, an inspector of military schools in the Red Army named Semashko provided stark figures for recruiting in the upcoming months and years: “The size of the Red Army often goes unsaid. But another twelve million [young people] will join the Red Army of whom eight million need to go through basic military training and four million need pre-conscription training.” For Semashko, this burden was too much for the army to carry alone. He proposed a program in every school class from fifth to seventh grade that would include eighty to 120 hours of military training. This proposed training would include fitness preparation, marching training and education about the history of the Red Army. Semashko’s suggestion involved the heavy participation both of the Commissariat of Enlightenment and the

36 RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 2, d. 214, ll. 43-50; op. 3, d. 208, l. 99; op. 3, d. 210, l. 2; op. 23, d. 1327, ll. 99-102.
Komsomol. In contrast, he failed to mention or intentionally omitted a role for the Soviet organization traditionally responsible for paramilitary training, Osoaviakhim.\textsuperscript{37}

In the two years before the German invasion of the Soviet Union, skepticism about the ability of Osoaviakhim to fulfill its duties surfaced among leaders in the party, Komsomol and even Osoaviakhim itself. After the arrest of civil defense head and former Komsomol secretary Pavel Gorshenin in October 1938, its new chair became Pavel Kobelev. Under Kobalev, Osoaviakhim grew by large number—from nine million to thirteen million members over the course of 1939. Of those, three million were also Komsomol members.\textsuperscript{38} But if ensuring that Komsomol members joined Osoaviakhim had been the main goal of the Komsomol’s paramilitary activities in the past, Komsomol leaders increasingly asserted that Osoaviakhim membership was not resulting in a better prepared cohort of youth. At a Komsomol Central Committee plenum in June 1940, Mikhailov interrupted a speech by Kobelev to assert that only half of those Osoaviakhim members actively participated in any form of training.\textsuperscript{39}

Underlying this strain was Komsomol activists’ assertion that Osoaviakhim cadres ignored their obligations to youth. At a Komsomol conference in Lopasne district (Moscow province) in January 1939, the youth committee blamed civil defense workers with not providing “operative leadership,” although its members also criticized their own passiveness in demanding better work from Osoaviakhim.\textsuperscript{40} Ranking sports committee leaders accused Osoaviakhim administrators of creating a bottleneck in the number of youth who could undertake the GTO program. The fitness program included a firearms training test but a SNK law of April 1938 had made civilian firearms training the exclusive domain of Osoaviakhim; to arrange the complete

\textsuperscript{37} RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 2, d. 188, l. 170.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., l. 190.
\textsuperscript{39} RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 2, d. 204, ll. 70-71.
\textsuperscript{40} TsAOPIM, f. 648, op. 1, d. 14, l. 59-60.
GTO program, local sports workers needed to come to an agreement with civil defense workers, who, according to anecdotal evidence, were not always willing to share their resources.  

Another criticism of the civil defense society was that its training did not simulate real life conditions. Youth leaders had leveled similar accusations at Osoaviakhim previously. The Komsomol’s Central Committee in 1937 had lambasted an Osoaviakhim-published book, *Military-chemical games*, a collection of gas mask training activities. The critique—probably a fair one—was that the games were “contrived”; they included “three-legged race in gas masks,” “volleyball in gas masks,” “chess and checkers tournament in gas masks,” and “hammering nails in gas masks.”

In 1940 a report by the Leningrad Komsomol’s leadership charged Osoaviakhim with focusing too narrowly on firearms instruction and not pairing this training with other activities that could make a well-rounded soldier. Other reports from that year at closed meetings of the Komsomol’s Central Committee bureau were even more pointed about the poor work in the civil defense organization. The most unsavory accusation brought up at a January 1940 meeting was that Osoaviakhim leaders hoarded ammunition, either out of incompetence or other reasons. In Moscow, the Osoaviakhim chair was quoted as refusing to give MGU students ammunition for training because “students are not going to the army soon and they will manage to forget everything so the bullets will be wasted.”

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41 RGASPI, f. 1 m, op. 23, d. 1432, ll. 101-104.
43 The same report also stated that the name Osoaviakhim was no good. “The name of the society ‘Osoaviakhim’ – society for aid to defense and the avia-chemical construction of the USSR – has aged and no longer describes either the content or goals of the organization.” RGASPI, f. 1 m, op. 23, d. 1444, l. 92.
44 RGASPI, f. 1 m, op. 3, d. 227, ll. 76-97. Complaints went both ways. As the Komsomol began to conduct military training on its own and with the Red Army, Kobelev began to critique the Komsomol for simply using, but not involving, Osoaviakhim. In a January 1941 letter to Andrei Andreev and Kliment Voroshilov he complained that “all these [Komsomol paramilitary training] measures, although not bad, show a direct wish of Komsomol leaders to organize military training of Osoaviakhim-Komsomol members without Osoaviakhim [involvement], but
Among the various criticisms of Osoaviakhim, the most important for Soviet leaders was that the defense society was not effective in its primary mission to make future soldiers out of pre-conscription groups. In September 1940, a commission of Lev Mekhlis (political commissar of the Red Army), Mikhailov and Kobelev wrote a report for party Central Committee secretaries Andreev and Malenkov on the work of Osoaviakhim. The report diagnosed the main problem of Osoaviakhim as having too many functions, including aims so disparate as pre-conscription training and pest control. Within its function as a military organization, the report condemned the civil defense organization: “Osoaviakhim does not give the army and navy a worthy soldier, and [Osoaviakhim’s] civilian methods of preparing service-obliged contingents do not create Soviet military discipline among them.” The authors proposed changes that would make Osoaviakhim’s sole aim the military preparation of the civilian population. While they believed this shift would make Osoaviakhim itself a less far-reaching organization, it would also make civilian military instruction more effective. The report concluded that Osoaviakhim should concentrate on producing soldiers through holistic training, including large scale tactical and strategic excursions.45

The other major committee working on aspects of civilian paramilitary training, the All-Union Committee of Physical Culture and Sport, was also the subject of official skepticism in 1940. In the same July 1940 report that lauded foreign (especially German) physical education, sports head Vasilii Snegov underlined the deficiencies of Soviet sport. The problem was not the content of physical education programs themselves (he had finalized the new, militarized GTO program in 1939) but their implementation. In passing, Snegov mentioned what was probably

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45 RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 23, d. 1444, ll. 2-14. A month later, Mikhailov reiterated many of these criticisms in a separate report. RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 23, d. 1383, ll. 30-37, 62-67.
the main factor in these deficiencies: officials considered positions in physical education significantly less important than those in the economy and the state; they therefore sent the worst cadres to work in sports and mined the best workers from the ranks of sports committees. However, Snegov placed the lion’s share of the blame for the shortcomings of physical education on sports societies, club associations affiliated with various parent organizations (e.g., Dinamo, the sports society of the NKVD). These sports associations were supposed to organize physical education and sports for workers in their parent organization but most often simply organized professional sport. Snegov insisted that because of this focus, sports societies inhibited real physical education for youth.

In the wake of the Soviet-Finnish War, Red Army personnel attacked Osoaviakhim, the sports committee and, to a lesser extent, the Komsomol for failing to make civilians ready to become soldiers. At the April 1940 party-Red Army meeting to discuss the Soviet-Finnish War, Khadzhen-Umar Mamsurov, the commander of a special ski detachment in the war made a special criticism of the recreational focus of the sports committee and Osoaviakhim: “We have a lot of soccer… But I think that soccer is of little use for national defense. (Voice: I don’t agree.) I think we ought to have mass running competitions instead of soccer… We must build up skiing and devote our main attention to the defensive aspects of sport.”

46 These clubs—called “voluntary sports associations” (dobrovol’nye sportivnye obshchestva)—varied in their mission. While all were supposed to be egalitarian clubs for sport among local workers (e.g., at a factory), they also provided the teams for top-level sports. Their players were ostensibly workers within the parent factory trade union or other workplace organization but were de facto professional athletes. Komsomol leaders frequently criticized the un-egalitarian nature of some clubs and the actions of players who were supposedly more interested in personal gain than the good of the country. On these clubs, see Edelman, *Serious Fun*, 65-66; Grant, *Physical Culture and Sport*, 41-44.

47 RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 23, d. 1433, ll. 1-19.

political work in the army produced a protocol just days after the meeting that faulted the Komsomol for the “weak provisioning” of military work among youth, especially skiing.49

Of course, the fallout after the Winter War had much larger repercussions for the army than changes to youth paramilitary training. Perhaps the most visible change was that Marshal Semen Timoshenko replaced Kliment Voroshilov, the longtime Commissar of Defense. The new commissar embarked on a broad set of reforms that aimed to modernize and mechanize the Red Army. But he also stressed the role of the Komsomol as a direct agent of militarization. On June 3, 1940, Timoshenko wrote a call to arms to youth leaders.50 He began his letter to the Komsomol’s Central Committee by citing Stalin’s exhortation from 1938 to Comrade Ivanov (and really to all Komsomol youth) that the young people should remain in a state of “mobilized preparedness.” This state of readiness was only possible when ordinary people mastered the Red Army’s military technology. In turn, this mastery was only possible for those people who were physically fit for service.

The physical preparation of civilians would thus be of paramount importance to the Red Army’s future: “Physical training of a soldier should start long before his conscription to serve in the Red Army, with the goal of retaining and perfecting his physical qualities and skills necessary in a state of war, [and it] necessarily continues after his retirement into the reserves.” According to Timoshenko, the mobilization in September 1939 that followed the Supreme Soviet’s law on conscription had been a failure precisely because physical preparation among the new recruits was so poor. He blamed agencies responsible for training—Osoaviakhim and the

49 Zimniaia voina, 131.
50 It is unclear whether the timing of these changes coincided with Germany’s rapid conquest of France but it seems likely. Certainly, I do not mean to propose that Soviet leaders were preparing for an offensive war against Germany. As Gabriel Gorodetsky in asserts, Stalin’s diplomacy was that of realpolitik. At the same time, Soviet leaders clearly ramped up efforts to place the country on a wartime footing in the summer of 1940. Gorodetsky, The Grand Delusion, 7.
sports committee—and their failure to cooperate to create a unified military preparation program; Osoaviakhim only taught shooting and the sports committee only taught sports. Timoshenko closed by asking the Komsomol to lead the way, to direct youth into a true hybrid of physical and military training that would prepare them for service in the army.51

Soon after, on June 7, 1940, Mikhailov convened a plenary meeting of the Komsomol’s Central Committee where military training became a central issue. Mikhailov suggested that the youth league needed stricter forms of upbringing to cultivate discipline: “Komsomol discipline must help bring out in Komsomol members military instincts [voennoye chuvstva]…physical endurance, strength [and] fearlessness.” Mikhailov suggested that military discipline should bleed over into the everyday lives of youth. Yet the main thrust of his speech, and those of other Komsomol leaders, was on the need for more, better and more practical military instruction for youth.52

In his search for practical military training, Mikhailov made an example of the faults of military training for girls, and others picked up on this thread. The Komsomol secretary said that there was a “natural urge among our Soviet girls…to prepare oneself for the defense of the motherland.” However, Mikhailov believed that training women for combat service was a waste of resources: “Experience shows that in the conditions of battle, women bring a bigger advantage as nurses… This is how we should be training women.”53 Ivan Vidiukov, the head of the Komsomol in the Red Army, was even blunter about the status of women. At a Komsomol Central Committee meeting the previous year, Vidiukov had advocated a plan (later adopted by

51 RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 23, d. 1438, ll. 7-11.
52 RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 2, d. 203, l. 55. Similar suggestions of the use of military discipline in civilian life were made at a conference on children’s literature. One participant said, “A military upbringing is not some kind of special trend of education for children in service of temporary goals. True, at this moment the goal of military education has taken on special importance… We know that both in the most peaceful of times, our goal is not to raise sentimental snouts [kliupiki] and mama’s boys, but manly builders who must be always ready for war.” RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 23, d. 1446, ll. 47-76.
53 RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 2, d. 203, l. 61.
the Komsomol and the Commissariat of Land), to train 100,000 young female tractor drivers. “If this task is fulfilled,” he had said then, “this army [of female tractor drivers] will have a big impact on the future battles with capitalist countries. These hundreds and thousands of girl-tractor drivers we will be able to move from tractors to tanks. Some girls will work during wartime in our socialist industry, and others will participate in military operations.”

Apparently, he had revised his view and in June 1940 believed that combat service was impractical: “Mikhailov made the question very clear (laughter [in the crowd]). They [advocates of paramilitary training for women] shout ‘girls to the planes’ or ‘girls to the tanks,’ but you yourselves know that girls will not go to the army, nor into a plane, nor into a tank.”

Proposals to limit military training to projects with outcomes youth leaders believed would be practical in wartime not only concerned discussions of training for women. Osoaviakhim’s Kobelev complained at the same meeting that parachutists were not taking the matter seriously: “For ten years the preparation of parachutists was the following—jump as much as you want…you don’t need to know anything… Who needs those kinds of parachutists? Why spend time and precious resources?”

Previously, sports committee members had argued that parachuting was a means of developing intangible qualities necessary for battle like courage. Indeed, youth leaders thought that paramilitary training for women had a similar psychological effect on general preparation.

54 RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 2, d. 170, l. 69.
55 RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 2, d. 204, l. 25. In another case, a young woman named Evgeniia Gavrilova wrote to Vidiukov in an attempt to gain admission to flight school. Vidiukov replied that women were not able to join either flight or tank schools but suggested that she could join the military-topography school in Leningrad or the military-medicine school in Kharkov. RGVA, f. 9, op. 34, d. 28, ll. 5, 7-8.
56 RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 2, d. 204, l. 63.
57 For example, a leader of the Dinamo sports organization reflected a general opinion when he claimed during a discussion of revisions to GTO in 1937 that parachute jumping was necessary to engender courage (smelost’) among youth. GARF, f. 7576, op. 9, d. 7, ll. 69-73. On pre-war training for women, see also Krylova, Soviet Women in Combat, 35-83.
programs in favor of those they believed would bear immediate results in combat or behind the lines.

Based on Timoshenko and Mikhailov’s appeals for practical training, Komsomol leaders began new paramilitary projects for activists and the rank and file soon after the plenum. On June 17, 1940, the Komsomol’s Central Committee initiated a certification (attestatsiia) of military preparation among youth secretaries and department heads at all levels from the district up. Rather than sending 400 youth organizers to military training, as youth leaders had the previous year, the plan for 1940 called for some 4,000 to pass a test on military training. Only women and physically unﬁt men among organizers were exempt from the test. The Central Committee scheduled the certification to occur from July 15 to August 15. After passing the certification, these workers were to be sent to training camps or to serve a short traineeship (stazhirovka) in the military. Outside of these relatively high-level workers, the Central Committee ordered lower-level youth activists to complete a paramilitary training program. It consisted of 240 hours of training, including ﬁtness training, shooting practice, tactics, topography and both ski and foot marches. Study groups would meet in the city, district or territorial center and would include up to thirty people. The same resolution demanded that twenty-four hours a month of free time be devoted to military training. Osoaviakhim would provide the staff for the certification exams. Although the GTO program claimed to satisfy the desires of youth for recreation while preparing them for service, the Komsomol’s military program had no such pretensions. It aimed to fulﬁll Timoshenko’s desire for a hybrid of physical and military training that would lead a smoother transition for young men to enter military service.\footnote{RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 23, d. 1430, ll. 1-4.}
While activists completed the attestation, military and youth leaders drew up a holistic program of military and physical training for youth. More than just an intensification of military training, these plans marked a shift in Komsomol policy: now youth leaders conceived of the transformation of the Komsomol as a whole into a military unit. On November 15 the Komsomol Central Committee circulated a draft resolution, “On the organization of military-physical training of members of the Komsomol.” The project recast the Komsomol as a potential military unit. The league’s militarized version mirrored the civilian Komsomol organization: a workshop or class youth group would be a “company”; a local factory or school organization would be a “brigade;” a district organization would be a “battalion.” According to the resolution, organizing the Komsomol into these groupings would allow them to conduct larger-scale tactical and strategic training in ways that were previously unmanageable. The instruction itself was of four types: theoretical classes on tactics and topography, formation training, physical preparation and war games. Komsomol members who worked were to spend 300 hours total on this training while students were to spend 250 hours (as some of the instruction was supposed to be conducted in their institution). For both groups this amounted to six hours per week, split into a pair of three-hour sessions. The Red Army’s training manual provided the core of the methods to be used. According to the memo, women and men would undertake the training separately. Men would train in topography, camouflage, physical preparation and shooting. Women would practice signaling, first aid, telephony, marching and physical preparation. For extra preparation, older trainees (ages twenty-two to twenty-six) would be required to carry a training rifle on marches to simulate the conditions of a real march.59

Komsomol leaders forwarded the draft resolution to Major General Tarasov, the inspector of physical preparation and sport in the Red Army. Tarasov responded with enthusiasm but also

59 RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 23, d. 1432, ll. 59-66.
substantial revisions. He asserted that the Red Army had only a limited training capacity that was wasted on training youth in “elementary skills”: “shooting, topography, formation marching, obstacle courses, grenade throwing, bayonet fighting, skiing, swimming and so on.” In his view, the Red Army could focus its capacities on more specialized types of soldiers (e.g., tank drivers) if youth came to the army with basic skills. Tarasov proposed several changes to the resolution. He believed that in the next two to three years, the most important factor in defense preparations would be the development of men who had done no training or who were junior reserve officers. With this in mind, Tarasov placed special emphasis on working with Komsomol members who had not done any training previously, insisting that they undertake the equivalent of basic training in the Red Army. Those that had done some training could continue instruction to become specialists. Like his counterparts in the Komsomol, Tarasov was skeptical of the effectiveness of training women for combat but suggested a more balanced program of preparation for women as “soldiers in the infantry, rifle shooting and in specializations: medical worker, nurse, cook, baker, telephone operator, telegraph operator, machinist and others.”

Tarasov’s suggestions continued the pragmatic discourse in the youth league and among its affiliates about paramilitary training; he favored projects intended to enhance the defense capabilities of the country in the immediate term or near future.

Based on Tarasov’s comments, the Komsomol leadership revised and released its resolution on military training on November 27, 1940. It began with an accusation against many Komsomol organizations of ignoring military training and allowing substandard work in this field to go unpunished, “The result of this carelessness is that many Komsomol members, even after several years of being in the Komsomol, have not received any military knowledge or tactical skills and therefore in the unforgiving circumstances of battle, might prove helpless.”

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60 Ibid., ll. 67-72.
The resolution also marked an important discursive turn in the presentation of the Komsomol’s relationship to the military. The youth league’s program and regulations asserted that it was the “reserve” of the party and even responsible for national security to some degree. Yet the program had never maintained a direct link between the Komsomol and the Red Army. In contrast, the resolution suggested that the youth league was a direct reserve of the military, justifying the intensification of paramilitary training: “It is necessary to understand that the Komsomol, as a reserve for the Red Army and Navy, needs to improve its military and physical preparation day in and day out.” As an organization with military significance, the directive asserted that military training in the Komsomol could no longer be voluntary, arguing that the common attitude “‘if I want I’ll study, if not I won’t’ is a contradiction of the program and regulations of the Komsomol.” Per General Tarasov’s suggestion, the Komsomol’s plan tended to focus on the rank and file and emphasized the need for the training to equal the level of basic training in the Red Army. All members were supposed to begin military and physical training on January 1, 1941. The directive required those who had not completed training previously to undertake a planned 200-hour program over the next nine months in the Komsomol’s parallel military structure described above. Further emphasizing the militarized role of the Komsomol, the resolution said that members who completed the training would receive a special uniform.61

The plan was the outcome of an intensification of militarizing attitudes in the Komsomol that occurred from the mid-1930s onward. Youth leaders increasingly asserted that the best Soviet youth were those who had military and physical discipline and not revolutionary fervor. Discussions about paramilitary training even began to focus on young people’s bodies themselves. At the Komsomol Central Committee plenum in June 1940, the head of Bashkiria’s youth committee said, “The Leninist-Stalinist Komsomol prides itself on being the reserve, the

61 Ibid., ll. 50-56.
fighting helper of the party, but should we be proud of ourselves and can we really be the 
fighting helper of our party if we are sickly? If we do not have strong muscles?” \(^{62}\) In effect, 
youth leaders’ plans for military training envisioned the league as a reserve for the Red Army 
and even a potential supplementary army, complete with its own command structure and 
uniforms. Komsomol and military leaders asserted that the main purpose of this training was to 
aid and possibly supplant the Red Army in the basic tasks of training soldiers. With this goal, 
Komsomol leaders urged paramilitary commanders to treat youth groups as though they were 
truly army units and subject to military discipline. In the process, youth leaders’ plans for 
paramilitary training exceeded previous programs that relied almost exclusively on mobilizing 
youth into Osoaviakhim or physical education programs. Now, youth leaders, in conjunction 
with the military, had begun to construct their own program of paramilitary training for youth.

**The Parade Grounds: Paramilitary Training on the Eve of War**

From late 1940 to the outbreak of war in 1941, paramilitary instruction dominated life in the 
youth league. Komsomol leaders promoted military games in their attempts to simulate the 
conditions of war. Even Pioneers and young children took part in these mass exercises. In late 
1940 and early 1941 the Komsomol affiliated children’s newspaper, *Pionerskaia Pravda* and the 
military newspaper, *Na shturm* organized tactical games for children in multiple cities. The 
papers enlisted military figures, including General Tarasov, to help in the endeavor. Participants 
had to complete exercises in marching, fitness, firearm assembly and topography. During the 
exercises children received modified military titles—essentially the same as in the military but 
with the word “young” tacked on (e.g., “young private first class”). According to a report on the 
games, 100,000 children took part in Moscow alone and throughout the Soviet Union as many as

\(^{62}\) RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 2, d. 203, l. 89.
700,000 children joined in the game. In addition to these games, the Komsomol and Pioneers organized a yearlong competition of military skills for children in 1940 that drew in approximately 1.5 million participants. These competitions attempted to lay the groundwork for future paramilitary work, teaching the basic skills that children could perfect as they grew into adults. Perhaps more important than the skills they would teach, though, these competitions created a militarized mentality and an understanding (albeit unrealistic) of what war involved.

Military games among young adults were serious business in comparison to the children’s games. In the early morning on October 27, 1940, youth activists from Kiev organized a citywide military game meant to simulate an invasion of Ukraine’s capital. The secretary and military office head of the provincial youth committee collaborated on an account of the simulated battle in Komsomol’skii rabotnik. At midnight, the military staff of the Komsomol received a call: “Hello, this is the head of staff of anti-air defense in Kiev—raise the alarm. Airborne forces from an unknown country have landed at the airfield near Darnitsia [a district on the east bank of the Dnepr] and are moving toward the city.” Aleshin-Minin, a reserve commander in charge of the Komsomol military sub-division ordered youth activists to gather league members. He assigned each a package of “absolutely secret” instructions addressed to the homes of youth secretaries from local organizations, ordering them to meet at the House of Defense (Dom oborony) in the center of town at 4AM. With these orders, “district committees, in spite of the late hour, turned into mobilization headquarters.” As the district youth military leaders scurried from group to group, the town garrison issued an order: “Move out at 6AM…uncover and exterminate the enemy.” After ten kilometers of marching in the morning darkness, scouts encountered the enemy (the youth organization of Darnitsia) and the defenders of Kiev took up positions in nearby woods. In spite of a clever feint of the enemy

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63 RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 23, d. 1471, ll. 116-118; op. 3, d. 243, ll. 128-135.
(complete with fake trenches), the Komsomol group from Kiev outmaneuvered the enemy and won the game.\textsuperscript{64}

Not every war game was as elaborate as Kiev’s but all attempted to simulate wartime conditions. In November 1940, Moscow’s Komsomol organization put on a militarized orienteering race in the city. The press account of the race placed a particular emphasis on how it had taught participants the marching and topographical skills they would use in a war. In the article, a member of one team in the race complained, “They sure did pick a path for a march.” His teammate responded, “Did you want asphalt? In a war there won’t always be asphalt.” The article concluded that marches were a wonderful tool—but only if participants took them as a “serious military affair” and not a “lackadaisical stroll.”\textsuperscript{65} In both the case of this race and military games like those in Kiev, the goal was not just to train skills and discipline but to create imaginable scenarios. Nowhere was this truer than in Karelia, recent theater of the Soviet-Finnish War.

After adding territory via annexation in that war, Karelia became a union-level republic (i.e., with the same territorial status as Ukraine or other national republics) and its party and Komsomol leadership saw an influx of new faces. In June 1940, the Komsomol’s Central Committee nominated Yuri Andropov to head the new republic’s youth league. It seems likely that the league’s leaders chose Andropov because of his successful mobilization of skiers from Iaroslavl’ province for the Komsomol ski brigades. As Komsomol leader in Karelia, a major aspect of Andropov’s work would be the preparation of military-ready skiers. The Winter War had exposed the weakness of ski brigades in the Red Army, a failure anomalous in a country

where opportunities to practice skiing abounded. With this failure in mind, Andropov’s republic became the center of a massive skiing campaign, the Komsomol Ski Cross (lyzhyi kross).

According to internal Komsomol documents, Andropov found the inspiration for the ski cross in a local initiative. The youth group of Petrozavodsk’s School of Signaling challenged a youth group from Arkhangel’sk to a ski competition. The winner would be the organization that had more members complete the GTO skiing test. On November 26, Andropov picked up the initiative and expanded its parameters to a broad competition between four northern regions: the Karelian republic and Gor’kii, Molotov and Arkhangel’sk provinces. The Karelian Komsomol’s resolution declared organizational work for the competition would begin on December 1. Soon after, the Komsomol’s Central Committee further expanded the campaign to encompass all areas of the Soviet Union whose climate would permit skiing.66

In a sense, the spread of the ski campaign resembled the Military-Technical Examination of 1934-35. It began as a local initiative that expanded to the republic’s youth organization and then to the entire Soviet Union. Moreover, like the earlier examination, the ski campaign provided the impetus to inventory and increase levels of equipment; in Karelia Andropov claimed that the campaign had motivated the creation of a depot with ten thousand pairs of skis.67 Yet the goals of the ski cross were simultaneously more specific and broader than those of the Military-Technical Examination. On December 9, Mikhailov wrote to Timoshenko about the campaign, “A Komsomol activist is now ashamed not to be able to ski, complete a long march, or if he shoots poorly.” Just days later, Timoshenko replied in a letter that lauded the campaign. He stressed not only that physical preparation would be an important factor in future battles but that the ski cross was especially important because the Finnish War had been

66 NARK, f. 1229, op. 3, d. 135, ll. 6-7. RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 23, d. 1437, ll. 22-41.
67 RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 23, d. 1437, ll. 61-67, 102-124. In other areas like Voronezh, there was trouble mustering sufficient numbers of skis.
such a stark lesson on the military value of skiing. Unlike the broadly focused Military Technical-Examination, youth leaders developed the ski cross as a reaction to a specific failure of military preparation in the war with Finland. However, the ski cross had even broader organizational goals than the Military-Technical Examination and other efforts. Andropov commanded youth activists in cities and districts to organize “battalions, brigades and units,” mirroring the project for youth military training Komsomol leaders had developed with Red Army planners. Thus, the ski cross would serve not only to train individuals but also as a push start for the parallel military organization that Komsomol leaders had developed with Red Army planners. A month into the campaign, on December 25, Mikhailov emphasized that activists should not consider the ski cross a campaign in itself but the beginning of a military training system: “It would be advantageous now to begin work in other types of sports, to organize various competitions aimed at including more Komsomol members, moving them into regularized military preparation.”

The broad goals for the ski cross were to start a system of paramilitary training, but the immediate goal was to have as many youth as possible complete the GTO test for skiing. Komsomol leaders worked with sports committee administrators to organize a countrywide testing during the final week of January 1941. Between December and January 31, youth organizers were to arrange lessons for all youth—from beginners to expert skiers, and of Komsomol and non-Komsomol youth. In Vedlozersk district, youth groups began preparations by organizing ski training in groups where five novices would be attached to a strong skier who acted as the commander. Over the next two months, these small units not only had to practice (or even learn) skiing but had to find equipment—not always an easy task. The test itself

68 Ibid., d. 1430, ll. 29-33; d. 1437, ll. 42-44.
69 RGASPI, f.1m, op. 3, d. 239, l. 173.
70 NARK, f. 1229, op. 3, d. 135, ll. 14-17.
differed by sex, age and skill but at all levels participants had to ski two standard distances in a set amount of time. (See table 8.1)

In the final days of the campaign, Karelia’s leaders went to local organizations to exhort youth to complete the test and to monitor the proceedings. Andropov himself went to Kalevala, a town in the northwest of the republic. The results were impressive: In Karelia alone, roughly a third of all Komsomol members had passed the test—almost ten thousand young people. According to a newspaper account, 4.85 million youth (both inside and outside the youth league) completed the test. The Komsomol Ski Cross, considered a success in the Komsomol leadership, became the template for a competition for gymnastics testing in the spring and planned tests of track and field, cycling and swimming that the German invasion cut short.

In a newspaper account about the results, Andropov both congratulated and warned Komsomol organizers. The results of the ski campaign were a start to “work on bringing out in Komsomol members the strong will of fighters in the Worker-Peasant Red Army.” Andropov set out an agenda for new members of the Komsomol based on the ski cross and military programming in general: “You enter the Komsomol…[and] you want to mold yourself in the ways of a genuine Soviet person, that means you must absolutely know how to shoot straight, ski well, know how to assist the wounded, and do everything necessary to be a fully qualified Red Army soldier.” The problem was not that the ski cross was unsuccessful, but that it was just a start. Andropov worried that with the ski cross over, youth would soon forget their commitments to defense training. He related a conversation he had with a young woman at a factory in

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71 Ibid., l. 13.
72 NARK, f. 1229, op. 3, d. 135, l. 9; RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 23, d. 1454, ll. 53-54; Komsomolets Karelii, 28 February 1941, 1.
Table 8.1 Ski Test Minimums for GTO

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14-16</td>
<td>3 Km.</td>
<td>2 Km.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>22 Min.</td>
<td>16 Min.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 and older</td>
<td>10 Km.</td>
<td>3 Km.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>65 Min.</td>
<td>22 Min.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expert level</td>
<td>10 Km.</td>
<td>5 Km.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>60 Min.</td>
<td>35 Min.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Petrozavodsk. He asked her if she had done the test and if she had plans for future skiing expeditions: “Oy, no, are you kidding” she replied, “at least I passed the test.”

Andropov shared concerns with the Komsomol leaders generally. And they were concerned about more than the regularity of military training. Youth leaders viewed many of the training exercises as not being intense or realistic enough. At a Komsomol Central Committee meeting in August 1939, the Komsomol’s head of student youth claimed of Osoaviakhim’s Voroshilov Shooter program, “A guy goes to do the test for the V[oroshilov] S[hooter] badge, stops in at the range, there they give you and a soft feather bed, rugs and a trumeau mirror…but when people in field conditions begin to shoot, they cannot hit a target, they run forward a few steps and cannot shoot but we give them a badge… When they have to fight, they won’t be climbing into a feather bed.”

At a June 1940 Komsomol Central Committee plenum, Mikhailov expressed disappointment that some of the militarized marches resembled parties rather than serious defense training. Anatolii Pegov from the Moscow youth committee admitted that it was his organization that Mikhailov had in mind: “We had a situation here [in Moscow] where youth went with rifles a few kilometers and behind them there was a bus with hot cocoa and different things, creating cozy conditions.” Vidiukov claimed that these “cozy conditions”

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73 RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 23, d. 1454, l. 175.
75 RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 2, d. 179, l. 129.
misled youth about the life in the army and made them soft: “We must end this bluster about the Red Army. When they [in books and films] show life in the Red Army there is always an accordion…but they do not show the difficulties that [young people] must prepare for, the necessity for being physically tough and strong.”

Local Komsomol workers had noticed similar patterns but were unable to correct these issues. In May 1939, the Novo-Petrovskii district (Moscow province) Komsomol held a meeting dedicated to paramilitary work among youth. One Komsomol worker characterized the training as “campaign-like;” young people “began to learn the workings of a rifle, went to shoot, but now the work has died out.” The campaign-like nature of these programs may have derived from a lack of equipment. Of the forty-four Komsomol organizations in the area, only sixteen had access to a gun, making shooting practice impossible in most organizations.

Besides equipment, a constant issue virtually everywhere in the Soviet Union, the main problem was apparently a lack of will on the ground to conduct paramilitary training. Previous chapters have shown how Komsomol leaders promoted the use of disciplinary tools, even expulsion, to combat political indiscretion, shape social behavior and enforce Komsomol initiatives in membership policy. Central resolutions demanded that youth who failed to do military training face “strict discipline” but these demands did not accompany a public disciplinary campaign like the 1937-39 campaign against degeneracy. At the local level, youth organizations rarely punished activists who failed to fulfill their paramilitary training obligations. Any disciplinary action was usually limited to verbal reprimands rather than a written reprimand or expulsion. Moreover, participation in paramilitary training—despite the exhortations of youth leaders like Andropov—was a lesser factor compared to success in the workplace or at school.

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76 RGASPI, f. 1m, op. 2, d. 203, l. 62; d. 204, ll. 14, 20.
77 TsAOPIM, f. 5358, op. 1, d. 12, ll. 9-10.
when youth applied for party membership or sought other forms of promotion. Some activists were fervent about defense training, and they often drew in a substantial number of youth who did real training. However, it seems that the relatively limited use of both carrots and sticks to promote paramilitary work constrained its effectiveness in the Komsomol.

Komsomol leaders continued to be skeptical about the quality of paramilitary training up to the German invasion in June 1941. Leading members of the Komsomol, Osoaviakhim, sports committee and the military itself attempted to make the youth paramilitary programs both more accessible and more like those in the Red Army. Yet in the June 1941 issue of *Komsomol’skii rabotnik*, the final issue published before the war necessitated halting production, the lead article exhorted Komsomol youth to carry out military and physical education “systematically and daily.” The article went on to chastise organizers who “forgot about preparing [youth] well” in their effort to drive up participation numbers.78 On the eve of war, it seems that Komsomol leaders were still displeased with the seriousness and regularity of paramilitary training among young people.79

How did youth themselves experience paramilitary training? Any answer is necessarily anecdotal. Young people who left behind diaries or wrote accounts later in life do not suggest

79 Komsomol administrators were not the only ones involved in assessing the effectiveness of paramilitary training for youth. Part of the regular school and higher education program involved military training classes. A department within Narkompros—administered in Moscow by twelve Red Army officers—developed and monitored the implementation of this curriculum. In the spring of 1941, cadres from this department intensified their scrutiny on military instruction in higher education. Their assessments were mixed. At the Moscow Foreign Language Pedagogical Institute, the instructors asserted that discipline and conditions were poor. The institute did not have access to a firing range, its military training instructor asserted that the institute had a policy of “free, voluntary attendance” in the classes and only 48 percent of students attended over the six-day inspection. The inspectors described the classes, “The students answer the commands of the military instructor sitting, gesticulating with their arms. They address the military instructor by his last name, not by his rank.” At the other end of the scale, inspectors considered conditions for paramilitary training at Moscow State University to be quite good. Infrastructure there was sufficient and while the methods of some of the instructors were considered outdated, the inspectors lauded the university’s military trainers for creating enthusiasm. GARF, f. 2306r, op. 70, d. 6152, ll. 1-3, 22-24.
that military training was a central part of their lives. At the same time, defense training appears in most of their accounts to varying degrees. German émigré Wolfgang Leonhard (b. 1921) disparaged his activities in Osoaviakhim and the Komsomol in the 1930s and early 1940s: “In practice, however, our role in this society [Osoaviakhim] was limited to the duty of paying our subscriptions and attending lectures on the air-raid defense three or four times a year.” Anfisa Dudina, (b. 1921) who also later emigrated, disliked paramilitary training but suggested that many Komsomol youth completed the mandatory training. However, Nina Kosterina, whose diary entry about a militarized march opened this study, felt that the preparation had made her ready for war when it should come.

**Conclusion:**

A day after the German invasion of the Soviet Union, June 23, 1941, Kosterina wrote an emotional entry in her diary. Just a year earlier she had been a company commander in the militarized march and now war had arrived. She still believed she was prepared. Her entry read, “Well, then, I am ready… I want action, I want to go to the front.” Soon after, she joined a partisan brigade. And like so many of her generation, she perished before the year had ended. Nikolai Melnikov, the young man from Leningrad who joined his factory’s Komsomol in his teens (see chapter 5), recalled that the Soviet government conscripted youth league members by the thousands in the first days of the war to “cement” the army as it retreated: “As [Komsomol members] lacked military training, having been brought up filled with the spirit of easy victories

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82 Kosterina, *The Diary of Nina Kosterina*, 145.
83 Ibid., 167.
and false Soviet patriotism, they lost their lives to no purpose in the very first actions.”

Melnikov’s assessment sits well with historian Roger Reese’s assertion that if military training should allow soldiers the best chance of survival, the Red Army failed miserably in this task. The losses were horrible; of young men who were born in 1921—those who faced the brunt of the fighting as front-line soldiers—up to 90 percent died. Yet if the main goal of Komsomol leaders was not to ensure survival but to enable mass mobilization, they succeeded.

Assessing the military preparedness of Stalin’s Soviet Union before World War II, commentators have frequently pointed to three main failings. First, the purge of military personnel in 1937-38 undoubtedly detracted both from the overall competency of the Soviet officer corps and its willingness to implement militarily-sound initiatives that contradicted the will of political leaders. Second, Reese asserts that the largest problem for the country’s military was the quality of junior officers and soldiers. The undertrained, undereducated Red Army officer corps reflected the country’s inability to educate large sections of the population properly. The officers responsible for conducting war on the ground were wholly unprepared for the task. Third, there is the widely popular opinion that Stalin himself disastrously mismanaged the war, especially in the first days after the German invasion. With all these factors stacked against the Soviet war effort, how did the USSR survive the shock of the first part of the war?

Part of the answer is that Soviet leaders in paramilitary training successfully prepared youth to go to war. From the mid-1930s, Stalinist administrators became increasingly adamant

84 N. Melnikov, “Road to Life,” 226.
85 Reese, Stalin’s Reluctant Soldiers, xii.
88 Reese, Stalin’s Reluctant Soldiers, 161-162.
89 See, for example, Constantine Pleshakov, Stalin’s Folly: The Tragic First Ten Days of World War II on the Eastern Front (New York: Mariner Books, 2005).
about the need for paramilitary training among the young people who they believed would fight the next war. Their attempts to train Komsomol youth intensified in 1939, even before the German-Soviet agreement, and grew even stronger over the next two years. Military and youth leaders at the time were incredulous about the quality of the parade-style training. In the Hitler Youth—which served as one model for the Soviet military training for youth—the “hallmark of socialization was militarization” and the Wehrmacht had entrenched institutional ties in the youth organization.\textsuperscript{90} In contrast, Komsomol leaders had extensive ties to party, civil defense, sports and educational organizations but fewer to the Red Army’s military experts until 1939. And perhaps because the youth league was an institution of social promotion, monitoring and indoctrination, its leaders were unable to alter how organizers on the ground approached the issue of military training in 1940-41. It is impossible to assess exactly the precise impact of the Komsomol’s programs for military preparation. However, available evidence suggests they did not come close to the goal of reproducing Red Army basic training.

Although the training youth received before they went to war was horrifically inadequate, it would be incorrect to dismiss the military impact of the training. It did not contribute to the capacity of youth to fight but it did contribute to their ability and willingness to mobilize. Komsomol paramilitary training had taught organizers and youth how to organize themselves quickly into semi-military formations. Most were undertrained for combat—but who could have prepared for the Soviet experience of World War II? Moreover, the exigencies of the war would allow little time for catching up. All the same, young people fell into their places as they had during militarized marches, the ski cross campaign and other training activities. Training in the Komsomol was a factor that enabled the Red Army to tap the youth league’s ten-million

\textsuperscript{90} Kater, \textit{Hitler Youth}, 28-32. However, attempts of Hitler Youth leaders to organize social and political promotion through special schools (named Adolf Hitler Schools) largely failed, in Kater’s view. Soviet youth leaders, on the other hand, used the youth league to further promotion quite effectively.
members rapidly in the crucial first months of the war. And it is possible that the training helped prepare youth for war psychologically. Komsomol leaders, activists and the rank and file had learned for years that war was on its way in numerous ways: engaging with war-themed media; listening to the speeches of Soviet leaders; participating in efforts related to the Soviet-Finnish War; conducting paramilitary training. When the initial shock of Germany’s attack wore off, youth could tell themselves that they knew war had been coming and, perhaps, even believed they were ready for it.
Conclusion

“Communist upbringing” was the term given to the Komsomol’s turn toward mass socialization in the mid-1930s. In a broader sense, though, it was the process of molding society for communism—a cultural revolution from above that aimed to reshape young people in the desired form of Stalin’s regime. Using practices that blurred the lines between repression and discipline, Komsomol leaders and activists attempted to impart loyalty to the state, instill regimented behavior and, particularly at the end of the decade, undertake paramilitary preparation geared toward war. While “communist upbringing” was aimed at youth, it also represented a microcosm of Stalinist society. After the chaos that the First Five-Year Plan unleashed, the regime strove to stabilize and discipline society. Through “communist upbringing” in the Komsomol, Stalin’s regime promoted traditional gender roles, reliance on a strict social hierarchy, disciplined and sober behavior, and traditional education over political education or vocational training. Above all, the advent of “communist upbringing” meant the Komsomol no longer sought to make youth into class conscious proletarians, as it had during NEP, or to organize them directly for the Soviet economy, as it had during the First Five-Year Plan. Instead, Stalin’s Komsomol attempted to tie young people to the regime in ways that a way that would supersede their other identities—to make youth Soviet.

The attempt to create this cohort of young people was part of the broader “retreat” in Soviet culture of the 1930s. Like the greater conservative shift in Stalinist social policy, the Komsomol’s development into a mass youth organization should not be construed as a cynical move away from a fixed revolutionary vision of an egalitarian, proletarian-led society. Komsomol and party leaders, as well as ordinary youth, asserted that “communist upbringing” was not an abandonment of revolutionary ideals but instead part of the necessary evolution of the
revolutionary regime into a socialist country. Implicit in this assertion was that “communist upbringing” was not just a set of neutral practices that all modern states employed but instead natural elements of socialism. “Communist upbringing” was meant to prepare society to transition from socialism to the historical inevitability of communism.

The arrival of socialism made the unrestrained revolutionary enthusiasm of the previous generation’s youth unnecessary and even contrary to youth leaders’ goals. Komsomol leaders hoped to stabilize the new socialist order by fostering conformity and behavioral discipline among adolescents and young adults—not just workers but “the best” Soviet youth. A major change that this new focus entailed was a shifting idea of who could be included in the Komsomol. During NEP and especially in the cultural revolution, the class origin of youth had been the main determining factor for admissions and the proletarian purity of the Komsomol the primary demand of its radical activists. While class never went away as a means of categorizing youth, the class-based criteria of the cultural revolution became less central in determining who could be a member while performance at school or on the job became more important. Young people’s personal behavior also became more significant to their place in young Soviet society. During the years of the Great Terror in particular, Komsomol committees instrumentalized repression in an attempt to intensify the league’s fight against drunkenness, sexual deviancy and other forms of “degeneracy.” Not only did the Komsomol’s social composition and demands of its membership change, but membership expanded tremendously in the late 1930s as well, encompassing between a quarter and a third of age-eligible youth by 1941.

The shift toward mass socialization in the Komsomol did not occur without contradictions or dissent. Similar to the radicals of the NEP period, not all Soviet citizens in the 1930s viewed the path to communism that Stalin’s regime took as the right way. Komsomol
activists, too, challenged aspects of “communist upbringing” as incongruent with their conceptions of communism. Yet this dissent never came close to the pitch of radical youth in the 1920s. In part, the muting of radical opposition was due to the maturation of activists, their movement into the Communist Party and their transformation into the new elite of Soviet society. But another reason that the radical challenge was so limited was the repression Stalinist leaders deployed in their cultural revolution from above. Attacking the rough, exclusionary, working class culture of Komsomol activism from the cultural revolution, youth leaders sought to replace it with a disciplined and “cultured” upbringing for all Soviet youth. The Komsomol changed from a revolutionary league to an honors society that the regime could use to mold, monitor and mobilize young people, forming the foundation of Soviet official youth culture until the 1980s.

As the postwar Soviet regime looked back and mythologized the upbringing of youth in the 1930s, it did not emphasize the role of repression in forming Soviet mass youth culture. Instead, Soviet leaders and historians lauded how “patriotic upbringing” had developed the natural heroism of the Soviet people, especially young people, on the eve of World War II.¹ The assertion that “patriotic upbringing” had made a significant contribution to the war effort was part of the uncritical legend of the Soviet experience of the war, yet it also contained a grain of truth. As conflict seemed more and more inevitable, youth leaders increasingly conflated the goals of “communist upbringing” with military training for youth. Combining the aims of mass socialization and militarization, the Komsomol became an organization similar to its authoritarian contemporaries in Europe.

¹ See for example, G.D. Komkov, “Patrioticheskoe vospitanie sovetskikh liudei v predvoennye gody (1938 – iyun’ 1941 g.),” Istoriiia SSSR no. 3 (1980), 3-18. In popular culture, the 1964 film Do svidaniia, mal’chiki! portrayed the tragic sacrifice of young people as a reflection of their patriotism.
When comparing the Stalin’s Soviet Union to its neighbors in Europe, the inevitable comparison is to Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. Of course, Stalinist youth culture bore significant differences to the youth culture of these states. The proportion of Komsomol members among age-eligible youth before World War II did not come close to the level of saturation of Hitler Youth members in Germany. And unlike leaders of the Hitler Youth, Komsomol leaders never envisioned their youth league as a racial community. Instead, and more along the lines of the British Boy Scouts in this regard, the Komsomol attempted to foster a young citizenry. But like Hitler Youth leaders, Soviet youth leaders did see the Soviet youth league increasingly (though not without contradictions) as a national (or supra-national) community whose members were outstanding and loyal citizens irrespective of their class or ethnic origin. Stalinist youth leaders did not believe that every young person was cut out to be a Komsomol member, but they wanted to extend the influence of “communist upbringing” to every corner of the Soviet Union. Stalin’s regime, unlike liberal democracies but very much like Nazi Germany or Fascist Italy, made a total claim on the population—perhaps even more so on young people, whom regime leaders believed were more malleable than adults. And a final similarity that this dissertation has focused on in particular was the way that Stalin’s Komsomol, like its authoritarian neighbors, attempted to train youth for a future of military conflict.

What accounts for the Komsomol’s turn toward the policies of its often hostile neighbors? In the Soviet Union social policies originated from the same broad intellectual traditions of enlightenment rationalism that existed in other modern states; like the politicians and experts in these countries, Soviet leaders held a holistic view of their state that linked society to economic and military security.\(^2\) But Stalinist socialism was above all a product of its specific historical context—a period when aggressive, centralized and militarizing states seemed to be on

the rise as liberal democracies were mired in the economic and social woes of the 1930s. Not surprisingly, the disciplinary practices that authoritarian states employed among youth seemed more suited to the Soviet Union than the relatively hands-off policies in other states. In the specific case of youth paramilitary training, there is compelling evidence that Soviet leaders studied and borrowed the practices of their authoritarian counterparts in an attempt to infuse what they believed was superior militarizing practices into youth culture. When Soviet leaders adopted these policies, they did not seek simply to copy their authoritarian neighbors. Rather, they adapted and folded authoritarian practices into existing notions of what a socialist state would be.

Unlike its counterparts, the Komsomol survived into the postwar period and took the practices of the interwar period with it. By the late 1930s, membership in the Komsomol was a significant, well-known and increasingly regulated means for youth to achieve material gains through social mobility. At the same time, political socialization became less concerned with party history and more concerned with shaping “cultured” behavior, often through intervention in the private lives of members. Cases of the Komsomol’s intervention into the lives of young people in the 1930s were often highly invasive but in some cases limited the repercussions for youth whom police might have found culpable of hooliganism or other crimes. The Komsomol’s role as an organization of mass socialization continued and intensified after World War II. The space for political education in the Komsomol narrowed in the postwar period, taken up more and more by the practical concerns of satisfying the material desires of youth.3 By the 1970s, membership was virtually mandatory for large groups of Soviet youth, especially those seeking

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3 Fürst, Stalin’s Last Generation, 6.
higher education.\textsuperscript{4} And it seems likely that the method of disciplining politically active young people in the 1930s carried over into the political culture of the postwar Communist Party as Komsomol members joined as its ranks. Moreover, the effect of the Soviet mass youth organization extended beyond its borders. In Eastern Bloc countries, officials set up national youth leagues whose goal of socialization for the regime were similar to those of the Soviet Komsomol.\textsuperscript{5}

“Communist upbringing” was supposed to provide the kind of \textit{vospitanie} that would eventually prepare society for the future of communism. Of course, communism never arrived and as the Soviet empire fell apart, the Komsomol and corresponding organizations in Eastern Europe transformed as well.\textsuperscript{6} In some of these leagues, including the Soviet Komsomol, youth leaders attempted to repurpose their organizations as political forces independent of an umbrella political party.\textsuperscript{7} But even those leagues that were successfully (if temporarily) turned into political vehicles lost their function as organizations of mass socialization. They represented only politically active young people and their mass membership, no longer compelled or enticed to join, melted away.

In Russia and other post-Soviet countries, the depoliticization of youth culture led to a vacuum filled by a proliferation of youth organizations affiliated with various national and political movements. However, the resurgence of authoritarian nationalism in former Soviet countries has led to an increased interest in reviving mass youth organizations for the socialization of youth. Unlike the Komsomol of the 1930s, the new push for authoritarian youth

\textsuperscript{5} For example on Hungarian youth in the postwar period, see Laszlo Kurti, \textit{Youth and the State in Hungary} (London: Pluto Press, 2002), 140-179.
culture is not based on the fear of war. Instead, groups like the pro-Putin organization “Nashi” (Ours) hope to undermine the basis for youth-supported revolts like Czechoslovakia’s Velvet Revolution and Ukraine’s Orange Revolution. Attempts to revive a Komsomol-like organization are not only based in political fears but also in the desire to shape the morals of a generation. Political leaders and sizeable portions of the population express anxiety about perceived moral deviance and unchecked Westernization among post-Soviet youth. These concerns are particularly acute among many members of the older generation who long for a national youth organization that would take charge of the moral upbringing of youth, imposing behavioral discipline, patriotism and physical training—what they call “patriotic upbringing.” But if these demands are supposedly devoid of the political content of the Soviet era, the disciplinary practices they hark back to have their roots in “communist upbringing” in the Komsomol of the 1930s.

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8 For example, Aleksei Mukhin, a pro-Kremlin political author wrote of the role of youth in then-upcoming elections in 2007 and 2008, “Some threaten a ‘color’ [e.g., Orange] revolution, that is, of unconstitutional means of changing power.” Mukhin, *Pokolenie 2008: nashi i ne nashi* (Moscow: Algoritm, 2006), 5.

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