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IN STALINIST RUSSIA**

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THE PRACTICE OF DENUNCIATION IN STALINIST RUSSIA

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VOLUME 2: CONTENTS

Vladimir Kozlov (State Archives of the Russian Federation), "Denunciations within the NKVD/MVD System of the USSR, 1944-1953"

Summary	i
Introduction	1
"Disinterested" Denunciations	6
"Interested" Denunciations	14
The Rhetoric of Denunciations	17
Procedure for Processing Denunciations	22
Methods of Bureaucratic Obstruction of Denunciations: The Circle of Collective Accountability (<i>kurgovaia poruka</i>)	27
In Place of a Conclusion	32
Endnotes	34
Conference Summary: "The Practice of Denunciation in Comparative Perspective"	35
Summary of Conference Paper by Dr. Kozlov "STASI: The East German State Security, Its Organization and Its Informers"	42

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Executive Summary of the Project

Sheila Fitzpatrick (Principal Investigator, University of Chicago), "Signals from Below: Soviet Letters of Denunciation of the 1930s"]

DENUNCIATIONS IN THE NKVD/MVD SYSTEM OF THE USSR,
1944-1953

Vladimir A. Kozlov
(State Archive of the Russian Federation, Moscow)

Summary

Dr. Kozlov stresses the continuities between what he calls "the paternalistic statism" of the Tsarist regime and the administrative methods of the Soviet Communist state. The legitimacy of both regimes depended in large part upon the general population's sense that corruption, abuse of power and poor administration were attributable to incompetent or greedy officials at the local level, rather than to the "good Tsar" at the center. The populace tended to blame local officials, "the Tsar's evil servants," for their troubles, and believed that if the benevolent central authorities knew what was really happening in the localities, they would step in and make things right. During the Soviet period the highest state authorities took on the aura of "the good Tsar" in the eyes of the common people.

From the point of view of the populace, then, it made good sense to appeal to central authorities when local officials behaved in a criminal or negligent manner. This, for Dr. Kozlov, was the archetypical denunciation: an ordinary citizen informing the center of some bureaucrat's malfeasance, incompetence, or political unreliability. Denunciations were sent to many government institutions, including the internal security forces (the MVD and later the NKVD), the Politburo and the Communist Party Central Committee. For the central authorities, denunciations were an essential means of controlling lower levels of the state apparatus, especially in distant provinces.

Dr. Kozlov views Russian denunciations as a symptom of the "underdevelopment" (*dogoniatiushchee razvitiie*) of Russian state and society. In his paper "underdevelopment" refers specifically to the weakness of civil society in Russia relative to the United States and Western European countries. Soviet Russia lacked institutions intermediate between state and society, such as privately owned newspapers, professional associations, independent private universities, and religious organizations. In Tsarist Russia such institutions were relatively weak. Dr. Kozlov argues that in Russia denunciation substituted for civil society, serving as a check on the power of local bureaucracies and providing the central authorities with information about the needs and concerns of the general population.

A related aspect of underdevelopment was the weakness of the state apparatus. Due to the great size of the USSR and the lack of any tradition of "rule of law" (*zakonnost'*) central organs of the state had difficulty managing the minor officials who ruled the periphery. Denunciation facilitated central control, providing the leaders with a club they could hold over the heads of their local agents. Dr. Kozlov suggests that denunciations were necessary for maintaining an equilibrium of power within the triad of the central authority, local bureaucrats and "the masses."

The chief (in the period under study, Stalin) had the power to upset the equilibrium by calling upon the populace to denounce corrupt bureaucrats. This would set off an explosion of denunciations which the central power could use to gut the local bureaucratic apparatuses. When the rulers at the center wished to initiate reforms they would use "the machinery of denunciation" to pressure local bureaucrats or even fire them in a "revolution from above." Dr. Kozlov views the Great Terror of 1937-38 as one example of this process, in which a central call for denunciations of local officials culminated in mass firings, arrests and executions.

The triadic power equilibrium might also be disturbed when conflicts developed between government organs in a specific locality, leading to denunciations within the bureaucracy, or when local officials squeezed the population so severely as to evoke a mass outpouring of denunciations. In either of these situations the central government would eventually have to intervene to bring its local agents under control and restore equilibrium.

Dr. Kozlov focuses his research on denunciations sent to the NKVD Secretariat between 1944 and 1953. He divides these into "interested" denunciations, sent in hopes of immediate benefit for the author, and "disinterested denunciations," sent by concerned citizens who simply wanted to right some wrong. The writers of both types used similar set phrases and rhetorical tactics. Denouncers often strove to present themselves as "insiders," long-time servants of Soviet Power, by elaborating upon their services in the October Revolution, the Civil War or World War II. Frequently used tropes were the appeal to "the good Tsar" to castigate his "evil servants," the claim that the denouncer was concerned not with his own profit, but with the common good, and the wartime appeal for punishment of local officials who had neglected or abused "Red Army" families - the wives, widows and children of soldiers who were dying at the front to save the motherland.

Dr. Kozlov also elaborates upon the NKVD's procedures for processing denunciations and the bureaucracy's methods of self-defense. The latter were numerous. Within the NKVD, for example, agents denounced for criminal offenses like rape would be disciplined

for minor infractions of in-house rules, getting transferred or demoted as "punishment." Local officials would seek to discredit their denouncers' motives as self-seeking. They could also put pressure on denouncers by denying them promotion on the job, withholding use of collective farm draft animals and so forth.

In contemporary Russia denunciation seems to have died out. On the face of it, this is a positive development. However, Dr. Kozlov concludes that it also has a negative side, for there is no longer any check on the arbitrary authority of local bureaucrats. Institutions of civil society have not yet evolved to the point that they can provide an alternate check on local officials. The bureaucracy has escaped the control of the central power and is now free to exploit the populace as it will.

DENUNCIATIONS IN THE NKVD/MVD SYSTEM OF THE USSR, 1944-1953.

Vladimir A. Kozlov
(State Archive of the Russian Federation,
Center for the Study and Publication of Documents)

Translated by Christopher Burton, Matthew Lenoë, and Steven Richmond.

INTRODUCTION.

According to Vladimir Dahl, author of the Annotated Dictionary of the Great Russian Language published in the second half of the nineteenth century, a denunciation is "not a petition of complaint on one's own behalf, but the revelation of the illegal acts of another."¹ In the nineteenth century the word "denunciation" did not convey a clear negative meaning. Alexander Pushkin considered "Kochubei's denunciation of the evil hetman to Tsar Peter" a completely positive act (the reference is to the treason of the Ukrainian hetman Mazepa during a war between the Swedes and the Russians in the early eighteenth century). Most probably it was only in the Soviet period, especially after the wave of bloody political denunciations in the thirties, that the word "denunciation" took on a negative, even repugnant, connotation. S. I. Ozhegov, compiler of the Dictionary of the Russian Language, noted this development along with his definition: "a secret revelation to government representatives of some kind of illegal activity."²

The negative connotation of the word "denunciation" in the modern Russian language not only reflects essential shifts in the traditional culture of Russian society, but also sets up psychological obstacles to understanding the actual social phenomenon signified by the word. The fact is that archaic survivals within the political culture of the USSR (the almost complete absence of a tradition of legal resolution of conflicts between the individual and political institutions - between the rulers and the ruled - the extremely limited legal rights of the population to organize autonomously, the anxiety generated in the individual by the feeling of a direct psychological connection between "me and the central power") made the denunciation more than anything else a necessary element of Russia's traditional system of bureaucratic governance, and only secondarily a moral problem, understood within the context of the problem of good and evil.

While the denunciation of those close to one - of a relative, a neighbor or a co-worker - was always considered an act deserving of moral censure (thus "everyday ethics" did mark out and protect the boundaries of the autonomous personality against the state), matters stood

otherwise when it came to the denunciation of the malfeasance of "the bosses," local officials and bureaucrats. Making such a move often demanded of the denouncer courage and a readiness to suffer "for the people." It is simply impossible to imagine how the central government could have maintained any control over its local agents without many such acts, carried out every day, year in and year out. For long periods of time bureaucrats scattered throughout the vast spaces of Russia were able to act independently and arbitrarily, following the dictates of their own self-interest, rather than the greater good of the state. Within the complex of interrelations that made up the triad of the populace, the bureaucracy and the central power (in this instance it is not important who the central power was, whether the monarch, the Party chiefs or even the Central Committee of the Communist Party), the institution of the denunciation functioned as a communicative back-channel in the cumbersome, ineffective, but nonetheless stable governing apparatus. The denunciation was an important element of the culture of governance for many centuries.

The denunciation, along with petitions of complaint to the "big bosses" over the heads of the bureaucrats and officials who oppressed and abused the people, substituted for courts and other institutions of civil society. The denunciation gave the population a final hope that justice would be done, preserved for the central power an aura of infallibility and righteousness, and redirected the population's dissatisfaction down the channel of "local criticism." For these reasons, the evolution of the institution of denunciation in Russia must in my opinion be viewed within the framework of overall research into the history of Russian government, as a specific case of paternalistic statism in an "underdeveloped" country.

To verify this hypothesis, I turned to the documents of one of the most important organizations of Stalinist Russia - the USSR People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs or NKVD (from 1946 the USSR Ministry of Internal Affairs or MVD). The NKVD/MVD archive is stored in the State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF), which combines the former TsGAOR and TsGA of the USSR. Some archival materials are no longer classified, while the classifications of "secret," "top secret," and "special file" will be lifted for others in the near future.³

My research covers the years 1944-1953. Purely technical reasons explain the first date. In 1961 NKVD/MVD materials for the years 1944-1960 were handed over to TsGAOR for storage. Analogous documents for the second half of the 1930's and the early 1940's are stored in other archives. My selection of 1953 as the last year of my research period should be understood. It is the year of Stalin's death.

I studied denunciations filed among the materials of the NKVD/MVD Secretariat of the USSR, and above all those which were filed under certain specific headings - correspondence over the signature of the People's Commissar himself (Beria, and then Kruglov) or the Commissar's deputy (Kruglov, Zaveniagin and others). A large number of denunciations have been preserved with this correspondence (both in original and duplicate). Likewise, the paper trail for these denunciations has been saved. This includes copies of notes appended when the denunciation was forwarded to Party Committees, the executive organs of Soviet power, local NKVD organizations, the counter-espionage organ SMERSH, the People's Commissariats or state ministries for "verification and administrative action," and the replies of the above organizations and institutions regarding the results of their investigations.

I should note right away that in my opinion the denunciations sent in to the NKVD of the USSR from 1944-1953 differ little from denunciations of earlier or later periods in motivations for composition, the denouncers' psychology, or rhetoric (which was usually borrowed from official propaganda or used the traditional Russian schema of the "good Tsar," protector of the people, versus his evil servants). This is additional evidence for the stability and persistence of denunciation as a back-channel in the system of bureaucratic governance of Russia and the USSR.

Of course the 1944 denunciations are colored by the period (postwar difficulties, various political campaigns). But the unique character of the denunciatory letters sent to the NKVD/MVD lies not in their addressees, their style, their themes or their dates of composition, but in their targets.

The targets of denunciation were higher officers of the NKVD (for example, the Deputy Commissar of Internal Affairs for the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic, the Commissar of Internal Affairs for the Dagestan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, the commander of the NKVD Rear Area Security troops for the Second Belorussian Front), agents of city or raion (an administrative area roughly equivalent to "county" - translator) NKVD branches, plenipotentiary NKVD operatives stationed at labor camps and "special hospitals," NKVD military branch officers, agents at educational institutions and secret scientific research institutes under NKVD jurisdiction, prison wardens (for example, the warden of the notorious Taganka jail in Moscow) and so on.

When the author of a denunciation addressed him or herself to the NKVD (and some trusting and honest people really did consider this institution a font of higher justice), but wrote "not on (NKVD) business" - that is, not regarding the malfeasance of NKVD opera-

tives - his letter was immediately forwarded to another office with the notation, "to proper jurisdiction," and "for verification and administrative action."

"Incorrectly addressed" denunciations (that is, those not dealing with NKVD officers) of local officials' activities were forwarded to oblast ("province" or "county" - the administrative division one level above raion) Communist Party committees, enterprise managers, the appropriate People's Commissariats, State and Party officials, the Central Committee's Department of Cadres, a public prosecutor's office, the Prosecutor General of the USSR Gorshenin, the auxiliary office of the Economic Section of the Soviet of People's Commissars (SNK) headed by P. Chadaev, and etc.

Sometimes the NKVD received denunciations of the entire governing apparatus of some agricultural raion (for example, a denunciation written by one Khoron'ko, a kolkhoznik, from Turukhansk raion), but in such cases NKVD officers were among the denounced. In a denunciation of defects in the renovation of the Moscow movie theater "Uran," sent to Beria, there was not a word about any NKVD connection. However, it turns out that the denunciation's author served in the local antiaircraft defense system, which was under NKVD jurisdiction. In another complaint against a military doctor a former secret informant of the NKVD complained of the disclosure of his assumed name.

The People's Commissar and his deputies naturally showed an interest in all of these cases, and in other similar ones, and did not simply forward the denunciations to other jurisdictions. Whoever the target of the denunciation, its paper trail was nearly always preserved in the archives of the NKVD, informing the NKVD/MVD leadership of the results of investigations into forwarded denunciations. Another current of paperwork flowed in the opposite direction. The Central Committee, the ministries and other departments forwarded "incorrectly addressed" denunciations of NKVD operatives to the NKVD.

There are very few instances of political denunciation among those I have studied. This is due to the fact that after the division of the NKVD into two independent People's Commissariats such denunciations were investigated (and stored) by the People's Commissariat of State Security of the USSR (KGB), which took upon itself the functions of the secret political police. The NKVD retained principally regular police functions, such as battling crime, management of places of incarceration, utilization of forced labor, control of the work and organization of the passport system, and so on. In addition, some of those denunciations which served as the basis for juridical or extrajudicial repression ultimately ended up in the files of courts and investigative agencies, which were stored in other archives.

Most denunciations in the NKVD/MVD archive are devoted to the ordinary themes of Russian denunciation - the abuse of power, bureaucratic neglect of duties or financial misdemeanors, and so-called "moral breakdown," from alcoholism to marital infidelity, corruption, the taking of bribes, and theft of state funds. In this sense they have above all a routine, indeed, a "timeless" character, and they give us the opportunity to look into the ordinary, traditional forms of denunciatory activity in Russia and the USSR. These forms differ somewhat from the hysterical denunciations during the "Great Terror" in the 1930's. But they differ more in their numbers than in motivations, techniques of composition and rhetoric. At the same time it is obvious that precisely this traditional and persistent denunciation, existing at all times as an instrument of back-channel communication in the Russian administrative system and as a part of the political culture of the people, could in certain situations be dry kindling for a bonfire of massive political repression. The leader's exhortation and the eagerness of subordinates and deputies to get their bosses' jobs no matter what the cost were enough to get the machinery of denunciation working at full speed. This machinery always disposed of experienced, clever "cadres," a numerous "reserve army" of "amateurs," and legitimacy in the eyes of the people, who hungered for order and for the punishment of the bureaucrats who constantly abused and insulted them.

For these reasons I have been less interested as I prepared this paper in denunciations in and of themselves than in the whole complex of problems connected with their social and administrative functioning, from the complicated NKVD procedures for the processing of denunciations to the methods and results of investigations and administrative action. The structure of my paper in fact mirrors the social history of the denunciation: the types of authors, the motivations for composition, the peculiarities of style and rhetoric, the means of registration and procedural controls, the investigative routines, the bureaucracy's self-defense mechanisms, the results of denunciation, and the trials of denouncers and denounced.

Clearly it is impossible to present the results of such an investigation in one paper. I shall focus only on a few of the more important points, attempting to formulate a series of working hypotheses without making any claim to comprehensive research coverage or to totalizing conclusions.

In this paper I also do not set myself the task of presenting a complete classification of denunciations and denouncers. There are too many facets to the object of study. One could do an entire study of the characteristics of lower level denunciation of managers or of co-workers within the bureaucracy, or of the distinction between rural/provincial denunciations and denunciations written by city residents. For the latter the local government was too

abstract an entity, too distant to justify a general denunciation of corruption within the entire urban apparatus. Such denunciations were more typical of rural localities or small towns where bureaucrats' activity and personal relationships were constantly in public view, where administrative connections had a deeply personalized character and where the circle of collective accountability among bureaucrats (*krugovaia poruka chinovnikov*) was more developed. Another entirely separate topic might be the comparison of anonymous denunciations, written over pseudonyms or made-up names, with those whose authors did not hide their identity.

This paper touches on all of these questions, but I have chosen to base my typology on the identity of the denouncer and on his or her motivation, in particular on the presence or absence of motives of personal gain in his or her turning "to those above."

"DISINTERESTED" DENUNCIATIONS.

Among the documents of the NKVD one very often finds denunciations which are written without any obvious personal motives and which are imbued with an abstract striving toward justice, a desire to expose "the enemies of the party and the people." In such denunciations the author does not achieve anything for himself -- at least not directly. One denunciation from the Zaporozhskoi district reads:

Prosecutor Ostrokon' of the Mikhailovskii raion is a criminal. He destroys Red Army families, misappropriates kolkhoz produce, undermines the kolkhoz finances, and is rude to those who register complaints. Such plaintiffs get bad treatment. Often the prosecutor refuses to receive a plaintiff who has traveled many kilometers. During working hours he goes about his personal business. It is time to investigate this person!

He is repeating the year 1933. This fellow has traveled down the wrong path. Although he cheers "Long Live Soviet Power!" he quails before Soviet power. There are many signs of trouble here, and the people are concerned.

Red Army soldier K. Sokolov
Let's finish the war and clean things up!
2 December 1944.⁴

Such attempts to unmask others are often so angry and convoluted that they seem nonsensical. They were authored by people who sincerely believed in the fairness of the central government and in the possibility of restoring justice. Often they were simply a cry

from the soul of a person from the lower levels of society, directed to the higher arbiter and not referring to any real facts.

The role of selfless defenders of justice was also filled often by members of the local intelligentsia. In taking it on they condemned themselves to a long and fierce battle with corrupt bureaucrats.

Some "disinterested" denunciations are directed against specific individuals (immediate supervisors and co-workers). One example is the official report of the Deputy Director of the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic NKVD Police Command, Golubkov, to the Deputy Commissar of the republic NKVD, Kiselev:

I consider it essential to inform you of the following:

On Saturday, 8 August of this year I had a discussion with the Director of the NKVD Police Command, Comrade Logusov. In the discussion he told me that one of the Deputy Commissars of the NKVD (there were two Deputy Commissars, Kal'vo and Kiselev - translator), Comrade Kal'vo, is a nationalist and has a very bad attitude toward Russians. According to Comrade Logusov, Comrade Kal'vo once asked him during conversation (they always speak in Estonian) if he were concealing something from him (Kal'vo), since it seemed to him that Logusov was not passing on to him necessary information.

Logusov answered that he was concealing nothing. Kal'vo then informed Logusov: "Nothing.... Well, don't you worry. When we reach Estonia, we'll show them our teeth."

This "We'll show them our teeth." Logusov explained to me. "refers to Russians."³

The above "report" proves, or in any case allows us to assume the existence of a specific personality type especially inclined to write denunciations. It is characteristic that the main source of compromising information in the "report" -- Logusov -- did not write the denunciation. This dirty job was taken on by another person, who himself had no compromising information on Kal'vo.

The author of the denunciation of Kal'vo does not put forward any personal requests: this is a classic example of the selfless "announcement of the illegal actions of another person." Devoid of any special rhetorical strategies, it contains only information touching upon a single fact known to the denouncer. The only thing of which the author can be

suspected is a concealed careerism. However, the documents which we have reviewed neither refute or confirm this suspicion.

There is a much more important point here. The report quoted above was swiftly used in a complicated judicial intrigue. Logusov's oral communication went into the written report of Lieutenant Colonel Golubkov, which in turn became an extremely important part of the following denunciation, this time not just a "report" (*raport*) but an "inquiry" (*spravki*) into the activities of Deputy Commissar of the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic NKVD, Police Colonel A. Ia. Kal'vo," signed by Deputy Commissar Kiselev.

This document is a typical denunciation, but its author is obviously attempting to make the detailed facts more believable by referring to it as an "inquiry," an ordinary bureaucratic document.

Similar cases - denunciations labelled "inquiry" (*spravki*), "report" (*dokladnye zapiski*), or "personal note" (*tovarishcheskoe pis'mo*) - occur often. It is relatively easy to distinguish such documents from those which were genuine official correspondence. For example, "inquiries" were usually written in response to some official request or were attached to some other document as additional information. When an "inquiry" was written without reference to other documentation, on the sole initiative of its author, the label obviously concealed an agenda. A *dokladnaia zapiska* was usually the result of a full-scale bureaucratic investigation and was prepared in order to resolve some sort of specific problem. In short, an attempt by a denouncer on his own personal initiative to expose an official should never be considered an "inquiry," a "report," or a "personal note," no matter what the official label.

The only bureaucratic genre which could give the denunciation a decorous title was "report." Indeed, often this term is synonymous with "denunciation." Like the denunciation, the "report" often begins with the sacramental phrase: "I consider it essential to inform you of the following...."

To return to the "inquiry" about Kal'vo: in using this term for his denunciation Kiselev was attempting to follow the canons of composition for such a document. In trying to prove the devotion of Kal'vo to the ideas of Estonian nationalism, he was affecting objective research into Kal'vo's life. The author of the "inquiry" quoted "several verbal signals about the 'strange' position and line of conduct which Kal'vo maintained in relation to colleagues of Russian nationality." "They (Kal'vo's Russian colleagues) report," he wrote, "that Kal'vo fulfills any requests made by Estonian colleagues and refuses all those made by Russians.

Recently he has begun to surround himself with Estonian police workers who are under investigation by the counterintelligence department SMERSH."⁶

Colonel Kiselev utilized Lieutenant Colonel Golubkov's written "report" in his "inquiry" as the only real proof of Kal'vo's guilt. The inquiry initiated a whole series of political accusations and graphically demonstrates the functions of denunciation not only as an effective instrument of official intrigue, but also as an important means of forcing government bureaucrats to adhere to state policies. In this case the attack on Kal'vo fizzled out - in the upper margin of the "inquiry" there was noted the bureaucratic resolution typical of such cases: "To be filed." The central authorities probably did not consider the accusation serious enough. However, the resolution of this particular case does not change my overall interpretation of the social function of such communications to the upper level "bosses."

An officer of the NKVD was always threatened with denunciation and this constant fear guaranteed his political and bureaucratic loyalty. The Soviet bureaucrat in general always lived with the oppressive illusion that his political reliability and behavior were under total control. (I speak of an "illusion" because the control itself was not total, but the fear of control was. The sense of danger was constant.) The fear of the "stool-pigeon," so characteristic of Soviet reality, was founded not on a myth of mass denunciation, but on a constant fear of being "misunderstood," and becoming the victim of a routine "disinterested" denunciation.

While the denunciation of colleagues and immediate supervisors causes one to suspect concealed bureaucratic intrigue and secret personal motives, the "disinterested" denunciations of local authorities' malfeasance look to be the offspring of a peculiar denunciatory "graphomania."

Some of these denunciations may indeed have been born of the play of demented imagination and paranoia. The deputy director of the Moscow raion NKVD command, one Polukarov, described in this way the author of more than 300 denunciations, addressed to every imaginable (and unimaginable) destination: "He systematically wrote letters of a trouble-mongering and slanderous character regarding the supposedly criminal activities of the evacuation hospital to central and oblast' organizations, both Party and Soviet."⁷ adding that "as a rule, investigation did not confirm the claims spelled out in the letters."⁸

The author of another denunciation, Ivanov, declared: "I have in the past given you information. While I have never been accused of deceiving you, I have suffered unpleasantness at the hands of several individuals."⁹ Ivanov represented an unusual type, the professional fighter for justice, but it is true that he did strongly resemble a "trouble-monger." It was

not coincidental that while serving with troops of the MPVO he was deputy chairman of the People's Court and a member of the cafeteria "control commission": in short he was constantly watching the people around him and "educating" them. Ivanov carried a reputation with him from one workplace to the next. Co-workers feared him and told potential victims of Ivanov's "vigilance": "he is a very dangerous man. when he was serving in the battalion, he informed on us...."¹⁰

Word that someone was capable of a "disinterested" denunciation of co-workers or acquaintances spread widely. A wall of estrangement and fear surrounded such people. Others feared them and always tried to get away from them as soon as possible. Ivanov complained about this also to Beria. ("Writers" afflicted with the mania of suspicion and exposing others were not loved even within the NKVD system, especially if their "creativity" was directed against co-workers. They "got the squeeze," "got nailed," or were denied promotion.)¹¹

Another fighter against malfeasance and disorders, Kovalev, a prisoner at the Noril'skii NKVD camp, was, judging by the texts of his denunciations, as sincere and disinterested as Ivanov. He was in the habit of numbering his statements at the top. I came across a document bearing the number...318. No more, no less! Perplexed, the Deputy Commissar of the USSR NKVD Zaveniagin at first supported Kovalev, whose complaints had aroused the ire of the camp commanders. These had accused the informer of making "provocative declarations." (Initially the camp commanders themselves had communicated with the Deputy Commissar regarding early release of Kovalev, but then the latter's accusations had escalated.) Finally, Zaveniagin ordered the commanders "to point out" to the truth-seeker that it was incorrect for him "to submit one statement after another, totalling over 300," and to deliver a serious warning to him.¹²

Such denunciations frightened those in the vicinity precisely because they were written, as it were, "from love of the art," and so it was not possible to use standard defenses against them - discrediting the denouncer or exposing his personal interest in the matter. Nonetheless, most of the authors of the denunciations I studied did not suffer from denunciation mania. I have encountered many "clean" denunciations - "clean," that is, from the point of view of the authors' motives - which were written by completely normal people who despaired of getting justice on the local scene.

(When I had nearly finished this paper, I was surprised to discover that I had been unconsciously using a certain "code" in order to reflect the difference between "interested" and "disinterested" denunciations. The authors of "interested" denunciations I referred to as

"denunciators" (*donoshchiki*), using a word which had a clear negative connotation in the contemporary Russian language. And to signify those who did not have obviously self-serving motives, who did not engage in slander but fought for justice however they understood it, I used the term "denouncer" (*donositel*), which has a more neutral meaning and simply signifies the type of action taken rather than its negative associations.

As a rule, the authors of "disinterested" denunciations give the impression of being people who are fearless and ready to fight stoically for justice. Some of them are clearly afflicted with the "denunciation" virus, using politicized rhetoric and a set of images and metaphors standard for Soviet political culture.

"Disinterested" denunciations based not on concrete facts but on a general moral indictment of "the bosses'" corruption were often anonymous or had in place of a signature a pseudonym or symbol designed to present the author to the higher authorities as "their own." The authors of pseudonymous denunciations were unconsciously attempting to create in the reader's mind a psychological image of "us," as opposed to "them" -- the secret enemies of power who discredited its agents. Hence pseudonyms such as "One of your own," "Partisan," "Red Army soldier," "Party member" and so forth.

There was another motivation for "disinterested" denunciations signed with false names. Here there was a peculiar underlying cause: to create the illusion that the letter was authentic, to forestall the unfortunate psychological impression created by anonymity (the absence of a signature automatically created doubt about the "clean motives" of the denouncer, leading to suspicions that he was personally interested in the results of his denunciation). Local authorities often criticized "disinterested" denunciations as "anti-Soviet activity." In them appeared elements of a different, alternative political culture which went beyond the limits of permissible Communist rhetoric. Criticism and the desire to expose "unjust government workers" departed from the traditional division between the "good" central authority and its "bad" bureaucrats on the periphery and developed into a criticism of the entire political system. During Khrushchev's time this type of denunciation became a specific form of "antisoviet propaganda" -- anonymous letters, addressed to the highest Soviet leaders, criticizing the regime. These were mailed in duplicate to many people. Such documents as a rule lacked the calls to "reestablish law and order" in one raion or another.

I offer as an example one of the these "denunciation-proclamations" which was written in 1944:

I want to scream!

When I look around at what is happening, I cannot keep silent. Once upon a time there was the autocracy of the Tsar. Things were clear: there was the lord and his workers. One had rights and the other responsibilities. But in the so-called socialist republic where there is supposed to be socialist rule of law (*zakonnost'*), the purity of which is supposed to be maintained by the Soviet government, something unbelievable is going on.

This government, the only one of its kind in the world, was born with such difficulty, so much priceless workers' blood was spilled, so many strong young lives were given with total faith in the shining future. Happy are they who died in that faith, the faith in a shining future for their oppressed, forgotten but nonetheless beautiful motherland. They did not live to see the scandalous injustice of today.

For three long years, the Soviet land has been drinking human blood, even as it still soaked in the blood of previous wars. For three long years the Soviet people has carried on its back the heavy burden of war. The weight presses upon people, crushing them into the earth. And this burden has been distributed very unevenly. For some the war is immeasurable physical sufferings and spiritual torture; for others it is not so much war as pleasure. Beside those who have emaciated faces, who are wracked by scurvy, who are barefoot and unclothed, you see others who are sated, who have more than they need, who are dressed smartly, lack nothing and live in spacious apartments which are light, warm, dry and well-furnished. What is the war to them? ... And right next to them... naked degradation. People huddle together in dugouts, crushed in until no more can fit. It's humid, the air is unbearably heavy. The so-called "healthy" are here and also the sick. Dressed in rags, people die from hunger although there is food, die in cold, damp shelters although there is firewood. Nobody helps them. And this is inside Soviet territory, thousands of kilometers from the front. Where is this sad corner? It is the Turukhansk raion of the Krasnoiarsk krai ("province"). The town of Turukhansk -- a regional center with a raion Party Committee, a Party Executive Committee, a Prosecutor's office, a People's Court, and so on and so forth, where there sit (and I do mean sit ... on their behinds) leaders who do not care for the condition of the raion, but only for their personal well-being. They don't care that people are dying of hunger, are dying in the dugouts; it doesn't matter to them that hundreds, indeed thousands of tons of foodstuffs are rotting.

In 1942/43, at the settlement of Sukhaia Tungunskia on the Yenisei River, 90 kilometers north of Turukhansk, a large convoy (38 barges) carrying produce and consumer goods, was frozen in. In the spring the convoy was completely lost along with an ice-breaker and hundreds of thousands of cargo items. All along the Yenisei flour was floating. People collected it and for this they were sent to prison. In the fall of 1942, and winter of 1943 regional authorities in

the persons of the Chairman of the raion Soviet, Sysoev, the NKVD Director Autin and others were on board the iced-in convoy. Did they make any effort to save the convoy, or even the foodstuffs, so as to improve even a bit the condition of the population? Nothing was done. They came onto the convoy, got drunk, took things for themselves.... That's all they did. Because of their incompetence or outright criminality these "leaders" were transferred to other raions. New people were assigned in their place, but it's the same story all over again. In Turukhansk itself the school, library and bath-house are closed through most of the winter due to a lack of firewood, although we live in the middle of a forest. At the same time there have been conferences of every kind which end in boisterous drinking binges. These conferences take the best fishermen away from production, as well as the chairmen of the collective fishery farms. This may not be so important. But is a conference so important if its one where you just talk big, deliver speeches, but can't get anything substantive done because you're a talentless fool. People are sent to prisons for any reason and for no good reason at all. Conduct is rude. There are beatings during interrogations. Schoolchildren study on starvation rations. They get the same amount of bread as prisoners. There are no school gardens producing food. Kids starve. Individual gardening is not encouraged, but squelched wherever it crops up....

Money does not make it easier to buy things. And there's no money anyway. There is only one exit: death by starvation. We've got the right to "employment" (as forced labor!) and the right to eternal rest. The greatest number of deaths occur in transport contingents (Volga Germans and Greeks). But among the regional authorities the opinion about these people is: "It's all the same if they croak." And so people die....

Can one protest? Say a word, and you'll disappear! Lawless arbitrariness... It can be compared only with serfdom. That was a hundred years ago.... Wartime is used to cover up all kinds of incompetence, indifference and even crime, like a "fig-leaf." And this is happening thousands of miles from the front. If only this leaf were torn away as it should be, that would be a lesson to others!

I just don't have the time or energy to describe all the dirt. No energy, when I see the uselessness of it all. For I am not cheering "Hurrah!" but shouting "Danger!" And that, only as long as I still have my voice. And for that I could lose everything. What I lose once, I won't have to lose again, but the best I can hope to get is prison. You new gentry bastards! It's hard to get used to you, to give in....

These are all trifles. But when will trifles be treated as great, important matters, and the great matters as trifles? Surely great matters boil down to trifles.

" A Partisan. "¹³

The author of this denunciation makes no personal requests or demands. Against the background of a typical denunciation of the local authorities and the usual wartime charges that "the rats in the rear" are "provisioning themselves" (*samosnabzhenie* - the Stalinist equivalent of "corruption") trumpet much louder political motifs: the bureaucratic degeneration of the socialist system ("You new gentry bastards!"), the leaders' betrayal of their avowed principles, and an indictment of the government for demagoguery and deception.

"INTERESTED" DENUNCIATIONS.

"Interested" denunciations are those written to protect the personal interests of their authors. They occupy an intermediary position between the ordinary petition and the denunciation in the narrow sense of the word, as it was understood by Vladimir Dal'. It is not surprising that documents like these are addressed against immediate supervisors, co-workers, and neighbors. One almost never finds in them an abstract desire to achieve justice.

I know of one curious case in which a denunciation that was apparently a "disinterested" exposure of local corruption and "counterrevolutionary statements" among NKVD agents turned out upon investigation to be an "interested" document. Sakhnenko, the regional fire inspector of the Buriat-Mongolian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (the fire command was a part of the NKVD system) accused some collective farm directors of engaging in sabotage during the 1943 harvest. He also accused some local NKVD officials (names were not provided) of Buriat nationality "of rubbing their hands in satisfaction at the prospect of Japan's arrival, saying that when the Japanese come, we Buriats will show you Russians...."¹⁴

The higher leadership of the NKVD naturally became interested in this denunciation, but an investigation proved it to be totally false. It turned out that Sakhnenko wanted only to be transferred back from Buriat-Mongolia to Ukraine. According to the author's own naive confession, the denunciation was written "as a supplement to my official request to be sent on a mission to Ukraine," with the sole "aim of making an 'argument' for a positive decision."¹⁵ The only thing the author achieved with his denunciation was a transfer to another raion within the same Buriat-Mongol Republic he disliked so much.

The "interested" denunciation was sometimes used as a means of self-defense. People who were themselves accused of abuses and indicted took to writing denunciations against their persecutors. Their hope was to make a preemptive strike and appear to be the victims of "suppression of criticism." In materials related to the investigation of such cases there appeared supplements of the following type: "I must also note that the authors of this statement, Ermakov and Sharapov, were themselves involved in embezzlement of government property and are violators of labor discipline, for which they were removed from their responsibilities by the director of Manufactory Number 100. Materials related to their case have been handed over to the proper organs for indictment."¹⁶

A typical example of such a denunciation is the accusation of one Fedainov, a former employee in the prosecutor's office, against the Chief Military Prosecutor, Afanasiev. In August 1941 Fedainov was caught in a surrounded pocket and lived for two years in German-occupied territory. By the standards of that time this was in itself a serious transgression. Nor was Fedainov able to produce any proof that he had taken part in the resistance against the Germans. In short he had been "sitting things out" in the German rear. After an investigation, Fedainov was expelled from the Party and thus automatically lost the right to work in the prosecutor's office.

In the opinion of officials at the Communist Party Central Committee Control Commission (TsKK pri TsK VKP) Fedainov had written a denunciation against his long-time acquaintance, the Chief Military Prosecutor, "only because he himself was in a bad position, as he had lived in occupied territory, and Comrade Afanasiev, as the Chief Military Prosecutor, was obligated (for there was nothing else he could do) to hold off on the decision whether to restore Fedainov to his former job as a military prosecutor until a clarification of the question about his party standing."¹⁷

Fedainov had chosen not to wait for that decision, but instead had answered with a preventative strike against Afanasiev, charging that he had ties with the "enemy of the people," former Chief Military Prosecutor Rogovskii, arrested six years earlier. Afanasiev was fortunate. The Control Commission concluded: "...everything that Fedainov writes about Afanasiev has been collected or thought up by him only now, six to seven years after the fact."¹⁸

The motive behind an "interested" denunciation could be the striving to take secret vengeance on someone who had offended the denunciator, most often an immediate supervisor. One example of this was an anonymous denunciation against the commander of the First Detached Division of the NKVD Special Service troops, Engineer-Major Iadrosnikov.

Iadrosnikov had longtime relations with a former commander of the division, Colonel Khrychikov. Khrychikov used a tried-and-true tactic -- he created a commission comprised of people devoted to him which was to collect compromising material against his deputy and "drown" him. Even this commission, which the Leningrad District (okrug) NKVD counterespionage department (SMERSH) concluded had "tendentious origins," was not able to find any evidence of corruption on Iadrosnikov's part. A repeat attempt to use the same tendentiously selected commission against Iadrosnikov was undertaken, in the opinion of a newly created commission of inquiry, "with clearly slanderous intent by persons Engineer-Major Iadrosnikov had 'offended.'"¹⁹

A special type of "interested" denunciation is the "petition-denunciation." The authors of such documents are clearly pursuing personal goals as they struggle against some sort of injustice done against them. However, the pathos of appealing to central authorities goes beyond the limits of a single episode (for example, "Help a family that was robbed get back their stolen goods") and reaches the level of generalization ("No one is fighting against crime in our region; the people's complaints are ignored"). In this manner a petition on one's own behalf is given a higher status -- one of a denunciation or complaint which is "not for oneself", which is "a declaration of the unlawful acts of another." This is meant not only to make a personal petition more convincing, but also to wash out any taint of suspicion that the author had self-interested, egoistic motives in turning to the highest authorities.

In this manner a personal request, having been turned into a denunciation, was cast as part of a fight for higher justice, of service in the name of the "common good," of "the people," of "the state." Authors of such declarations to the authorities were as a rule more educated and consciously or unconsciously exploited Russian statist traditions in order to achieve their personal goals. Not only did they place their request within the symbolic system of the dominant political culture, they also used the most effective rhetorical tactics for that system.

For example, Captain N. A. Beliaev wrote to the Deputy Commissar of the NKVD, Kruglov. "This is why, Comrade Kruglov, I am turning to you concerning this small matter and asking you to demand from the authorities of the city of Serpukhov that effective measures be taken to protect the families of soldiers, especially at such a difficult time. One understood the situation when it was the fascists who pillaged and burned, but something must be done now about the Russian bandits. Send help from Moscow to Serpukhov and protect our families and workers. This situation is a major political issue in Serpukhov."²⁰

Having opened with a request for the return of his stolen property (for the Beliaev family had lost everything) the author masks his main motive behind a concern for the common good, presenting his own problem as one brush stroke in the terrifying total picture of a city submerged in a crime wave. This folding of a personal problem into a "big political question" through the constant references to the heavy lot of the families of the military servicemen defending the fatherland was a typical rhetorical approach. It was not coincidental that this passage of the petition-denunciation in particular was underlined in blue pencil by an upper level NKVD official.

The above example was the product of careful work by an experienced petitioner. Ordinary petitioners would often, without reflection, try to strengthen their very concrete petition with more general accusations against the denounced.²¹ In this fashion they composed supplementary accusations, often of a political nature, in pursuit of a fully comprehensible goal - not just to get their personal request fulfilled, but to fortify it with "higher" motives, to present the petition as "selfless," to cover up the personal motive with concern for the general welfare. The existence of various methods for making ordinary petitions mimic denunciations undoubtedly demonstrates the latter form's higher status, and confirms the proposition that denunciations had a special social function in post-revolutionary Russian society.

THE RHETORIC OF DENUNCIATIONS.

In almost any denunciation one can find a kind of general minimum, compulsory for nearly everyone, of ideological beliefs and moral judgments. The widespread logic was: Soviet power is the best and most just in the world, how can it bear the illegal and amoral actions of its bureaucrats. Or: A war is on, millions of people are dying on the front, and those traitors living in the rear are committing offenses against the wives and children of the fighting troops ("The valiant troops of the Red Army who are spilling their blood would never permit themselves to engage in disorders such as those wrought by the people who have spent the whole war in the rear"). Or: The authorities are disgracing the title of Communist. Sometimes denunciations against the malfeasance of local authorities concluded with symbolic threats ("Let's finish the war and clean everything up").

Behind sentiments meant to key into the ideological codes which would open the road to a mutual understanding with the higher authorities and get them to recognize the author as "one of us," there lay, as noted above, completely different motives. Some authors used standard ideological "packages" sincerely, almost subconsciously; others cynically exploited

themes "native" to the communist regime. All strove to establish their right of petition to the higher authorities by presenting positive facts about themselves - often this presentation resembled "the lives of the saints."

The theme of "a little about myself," was related to a number of the more widespread rhetorical devices. The author of one denunciation wrote: "I was a participant in the October battles, a member of the Red Guard workers' militia in 1917, a military commissar in the civil war, and a soldier in the Great Fatherland War (World War II) from its first days. I have been twice injured and suffered contusions." This author was attempting to "activate" in the consciousness of the reader a whole system of symbols which reflected the basic ideological and political preferences of the government -- here including the revolutionary past, the author's worker origins and social status, and Soviet patriotism.

The use of applicable ideological codes was supposed to set up a special, almost intimate connection between denunciator or denouncer and the regime, and to indicate also that the author was deserving of special trust. An ably written denunciation invariably utilized at least one of the rhetorical strategies described above. In the majority of the denunciations which I examined the authors also strove, however, not to overuse political rhetoric. Only in a few, relatively rare cases did the denunciators deviate from the principle of the "quick prayer" - that minimum of moral and political sentiments, compulsory as a dinnertime prayer in a religious family, which would be enough to activate in the mind of the bureaucrat the system for "recognizing one's own." In such cases (of deviation from the "quick prayer") the denunciation began to resemble a front-page article from the newspaper Pravda, with a quotation from one of the standard "great" speeches of Comrade Stalin as the central support for the argument: "People must be evaluated and judged according to the results of their activities, according to their abilities." The abuses detailed in the denunciation were presented to the reader as contravening the Great Chief's Great Precepts, that is, they were turned into a political crime.

Apart from this some "writers" clearly misused references to their "revolutionary services." As a result the effective approach of "a little about myself" turned into its opposite -- "a lot about myself." And this was bound to provoke a negative reaction from the bureaucrats who were required to read and verify the long confessions and autobiographies.

The techniques employed in the writing of denunciations depended primarily upon the author's motives -- disinterested pursuit of the truth or personal gain, as well as upon his or her level of education. In spite of superficial similarities, such as the use of rumors or fabrications, there were fundamental differences in the preparation of the "denunciatory pie."

The phraseology of "disinterested" denunciations against local authorities was directly determined by the educational level of the denouncer. Semi-literate people usually just detailed concrete facts, making no claim to generalization. As a rule they did not employ the devices of political demagogy. "Disinterested" denunciations were likewise founded on a deep conviction of the possibility of getting justice and finding truth "from above." Their authors lacked either the ability or the desire to formally demonstrate what were to them home truths. Through the author's consciousness the traditional Russian myth about "the good tsar" and his "bad servants" who deprived the people of truth and justice was transformed into Soviet form. In such a system of social concepts, the central authority was supposed to act as an agent "of the people": it was through this authority that the people were supposed to achieve justice. Without a doubt, the morality of this authority was a kind of given, established *à priori*. In the traditional view, the higher authorities had but one problem: that the immoral and self-serving bureaucrats who represented authority in the regions were not telling them "the whole truth." And as it was so, there was no need to further prod the "chiefs" - to "stimulate" them to action - because they themselves would restore justice, if they only knew the whole truth.

The naive traditional faith in the limitless fairness of the highest authorities normally accompanied another traditional motif: "Here comes the lord. The lord will be our judge." Authors of many denunciations wrote insistently to Stalin or Beria: "I beg you to come here yourself." Many denunciations repeated this request in various forms and contexts, but one can always discern the paternalistic traditions of the authoritarian Russian state and the last hope of the "oppressed and debased" for the personal intervention of the higher leader who was almost as powerful as the Lord God Himself.

Traditional consciousness found its expression not only in such petitions to higher authority. Many denunciations were characterized by archaic rhetoric, including the expression of values condemned by Communist ideology, at least officially, such as anti-Semitism. Traditional consciousness slipped up here by making use of impermissible motifs. Yet at the same time there was an essential difference between the truly archaic everyday anti-semitism of the uneducated with, for instance, their complaints that Jews dominated trade, and the appeals of educated and semi-educated denunciators who called upon Beria to save "Georgian sports" from Jewish sabotage. This particular denunciation was written a few years before the beginning of the anti-semitic political campaign officially dubbed "the battle against cosmopolitanism." The author of the denunciation apparently was attempting to make use not only of the official system of political symbols, but also of the chauvinistic prejudices deeply

rooted (and carefully concealed) in the consciousness of the regime leaders. And quite probably (as the text of the denunciation allows us to suppose) the author knew that these prejudices existed.

Denunciations were often rigged out with a system of supplementary arguments which were supposed to strengthen their emotional and logical power. Social origins such as "factory owner," "kulak," and "Nepman" (a small-time trader during the NEP period, when economic controls were relaxed) were very often used as incriminating evidence. In the political culture of Stalinist Russia, belonging to one of the categories was in itself no small sin. And again, some of the authors sincerely believed that simply belonging to such social categories was practically a crime, while others obviously were using the class preferences of the authorities to further their personal interests.

In many cases "disinterested" accusations were clearly written by people who were mentally ill or (as one bureaucrat who had to check out denunciations observed) were inclined to interpret facts incorrectly, giving them a wider meaning than necessary. In other words, "disinterested" denunciators of this type saw "enemies of the people" everywhere, and their brains built up logical frameworks of "betrayal" from completely innocuous facts.

Such pathological cases would not merit even passing mention in this report except for the fact that the author discovered an analogous logic in "self-serving" denunciations which were written by completely normal people. For example, the only more or less real fact mentioned in a denunciation against the Chairman of the All-Union Arts Committee, Khrapchenko, was the national heritage of his wife's relatives (German). Everything else was conjecture and innuendo. On these bases Khrapenko was portrayed as practically a German spy: as he had the opportunity to meet with Stalin he could then tell what he heard to his German relatives, who, by the way, lived in another town.

Most slanderous denunciations were constructed according to this ingenuous schema. For instance, the denunciation written by one Dombrovskii against the director of a Moscow institution of higher education was based on the following real fact: he had recently dismissed eight persons from the institute. On this basis it was concluded that the director was "poisoning and smashing cadres (meaning here 'personnel' or 'human resources')." Investigation revealed that some of the workers had been fired before the tenure of the present director and that others had simply been transferred to new posts upon their graduation from the institution. Only one relevant case was found: "The management of the Institute intends to relieve Comrade Chernaia...from her post for neglect of her clerical duties."

Other accusations were based on a similar method. In actuality Dombrovskii's slander of the director was constructed in conformity with the law of the myth: one real fact and a completely fantastical interpretation. Some "disinterested" denunciations following this rule were written by people with a clearly sick imagination. But the difference between these letters and Dombrovskii's slander is obvious. What was for some a genuine "model of the world," was for Dombrovskii a consciously applied stratagem, a pretense that this was really how the author thought the world was.

A comparison of the rhetorical devices and techniques of "disinterested" and "interested" denunciations suggests that we are dealing with two completely different cultural systems: one that is traditional, sincere, and naive, and one that is its cynical imitation. On the one hand we have the genuine sacralization of leaders; on the other hypocritical paeans to them. On the one hand there is an almost mystical belief in the traditional paternalism of the higher authorities; on the other a sanctimonious appeal to that paternalism which relies on the "concern for the common good" sanctioned by official ideology. We have the sincere faith in socialism as heaven on earth, which for many replaced religious faith, and the calculating use of the symbols and substance of that faith for personal gain.

In truth the legitimacy of the Communist regime rested on a system of values traditional for Russia and only lightly swathed in the clothing of socialist ideology. This legitimacy was destroyed not by Gorbachev or the democratic movement, but by an egotistical individualism which had begun to develop at the core of Stalinist society, which understood the value of socialist demagogy and was able to use it for its own goals. This individualism touched not only "the people," but also the Party elite itself.

Those who destroyed the traditional system of values and concepts, among them the authors of many "interested" denunciations, appear as unattractive historical personages, but no more so than the "knights of the early epoch of the accumulation of capital," the representatives of the young and greedy bourgeois class, especially in comparison with the well-born feudal nobles of the waning.

Fortunately, cynicism was not the only refuge for people torn out of the old, traditional culture. Oppositional defiance and the beginning of the formation of a new ideology of protest existed in embryo within the shell of the traditional "disinterested" denunciation. It is enough to recall, for example, the letter from "Partisan" quoted above, with its criticism of the system, as opposed to the system's own devious servants, in order to understand: base compromise and hypocritical egotism are not the only product of the decomposition of the old value system. From it also sprouted sincere and noble protest.

PROCEDURE FOR PROCESSING DENUNCIATIONS

The denunciation was completed. A multiplicity of bureaucratic procedures lay ahead. First of all, the writer wanted his letter to have an audience. Usually for "professional" writers of denunciations the method was to send the denunciation simultaneously to several addressees at once, just to be sure. One quite typical list of addressees was:

People's Commissar of Internal Affairs (NKVD).
A Marshal of the Soviet Union (high-ranking general).
Comrade Beria.
Copy: Central Committee of the Communist Party.
Copy: General Prosecutor of the USSR.

The presence of several addresses in the denunciation usually testified to the considerable experience of its author. In the documents, regrettably, there is no further evidence about the interaction of the various authorities after they received copies of the denunciation. It seems that the denunciation was the exclusive basis for beginning an inquiry, in particular an investigation into the co-workers of the department against whom the denouncer had written or into the activities of the ministry he had touched upon. In this situation it was not important who received the original and who the copy.

All denunciations were processed at the Secretariat of the NKVD or MVD. Correspondence between the People's Commissar and his deputies "with any institutions and organizations in the USSR, as well as all statements and letters of workers sent to the NKVD," were handled through the Secretariat. If the denunciation was sent to the NKVD from another institution or organization, then the First Department of the Secretariat dealt with it. On the majority of denunciations I have studied is the registration stamp of the Second Department, responsible for "letters from workers." Besides this, both departments kept track of which documents were sent to what office and monitored the fulfillment of the orders issued by the People's Commissar (later Minister of Internal Affairs) and his deputies.

There were many ways of investigating information received through denunciations. Important cases were assigned to the so-called Special Inspectorates of the republic NKVD sections, and to krai and oblast NKVD commands, founded in 1941 after the division of the MVD into the NKVD and the KGB. Up to that time Special Plenipotentiary agents of the republic NKVD sections and the oblast and krai NKVD commands had fulfilled analogous functions. There also existed a Special Inspectorate within the central NKVD command.

A May 15, 1941 NKVD circular delegated to the Special Inspectorate the fulfillment of special assignments, investigations into matters related to crimes perpetrated by NKVD personnel, the checking of statements, complaints and reports of crimes committed by NKVD personnel on or off duty, and so on.

From investigative materials the Special Inspectorate prepared reports for the NKVD commanders, and also proposed measures to be taken in response to the denunciation. This part of the conclusion, written by Special Inspectorate personnel, began with the words: "It is deemed essential that...."

As a rule the Special Inspectorate did not handle cases without good "judicial prospects," those that were covered by the Disciplinary Rules (*Distsiplinarnii Ustav*) or NKVD internal regulations. The majority of the denunciations I have studied belong to this category: without good "judicial prospects." Denunciations with good judicial prospects most likely ended up in the prosecution file for cases against NKVD officers.

Sometimes the Special Inspectorate would move to close an investigation and presented its decision for ratification to the commanders of the all-Union NKVD and republic, krai, and oblast' NKVD sections. In this case the denunciation sent to the Special Inspectorate for investigation was returned to the Secretariat for final reporting to the commanding officers and filing.

It is clear that the majority of those denunciations preserved in the Secretariat's archive were processed according to standard procedure with the exception of a few extraordinary in-house situations, when, after the Special Inspectorate's report, Beria personally decided to close the investigation in spite of the seriousness of the transgression.

An ordinary denunciation would, upon arrival at the NKVD, be sent to the "*Kontrol*" (in English, "oversight" or "audit") department. A special card was attached to the document, labelled "Statement audit" (*kontrol' po zaiavleniuiu*), on which was written the denouncer's name, his or her address, the addressee, a short summary of its contents, a complete transcript of all decisions taken by the People's Commissar or his deputies and any offices to which the document was forwarded.

Sometimes the higher officers of the Secretariat (at the instance of the People's Commissar or on their own initiative) would summon the denunciator for a personal interview. In this case the bureaucratic machine cranked out yet another document, as a supplement to the denunciation - a report on the results of the interview, written by the interviewer.

After the denunciation was registered with the Secretariat, its movement from office to office was a matter of bureaucratic routine. It is interesting that the bureaucrats in their pragmatic cynicism quickly crossed out all of the ideological rhetoric, with which the denouncers and denunciators had so painstakingly decorated their composition. The People's Commissar or one of his deputies usually underlined with his pen or pencil only the concrete facts: that which it would be possible to verify; that for which someone could be fired or arrested. (This does not mean, however, that ideological rhetoric did not have an influence on NKVD officers. While it was not information susceptible to verification, ideology, as was shown earlier, did fit into the bureaucrat's ideological code system and cultural symbols, so that he would recognize the writer as "one of our own," or "alien.")

As a rule vague complaints, lamentations weakly supported by facts, were forwarded to the appropriate offices, failed to attract much interest, got some kind of official stamp and were put in the files for preservation unto eternity.

Ideological rhetoric had greater effect when addressed not to state, but to Party organs, responsible for the total political situation in the country, and therefore more concerned with the mood of the population and its grievances. A complaint or denunciation forwarded from the Central Committee, especially with the magic stamp, "*Kontrol*" (oversight), automatically had higher status. Such a document demanded much greater attention and effort from the bureaucrats, who would use all possible verification procedures in their investigation.

If a denunciation sent from the Central Committee contained compromising material about higher officers or generals of the NKVD, and if the Central Committee personnel department, which was responsible for selection and recruitment of officials from the nomenklatura, then bureaucrats of the highest rank (even up to section directors in the counterespionage organ SMERSH) dealt with verification of the information it contained.

All documents related to higher officers of the NKVD of the USSR were classified "Top Secret." In many cases the last name of the person under investigation was written into the already typed text by hand, as an additional guarantee of secrecy, so that even the trusted clerical employees, who as is well-known, "know all," could only guess who "the cart was going to run over" this time.

The procedure for processing denunciations even depended upon the capacity in which Beria received them. There was one case when Beria received a denunciation at the Chief Military Prosecutor's Office, but which was addressed to Comrade Beria, Politburo member, and not to the People's Commissar of the NKVD. Beria did not handle the

investigation within his department, but immediately forwarded the denunciation to "the appropriate office," that of the Central Committee Secretary Malenkov who at that time also headed the Central Committee Control (oversight) Commission. The latter sent the denunciation back to Beria for checking after it had been processed in the Control Commission. Malenkov was behaving in accordance with the "laws" of the Party hierarchy: in reality Beria ranked higher, and Malenkov, by sending the denunciation back, was emphasizing the fact that he was fulfilling the instructions of the higher level hierarch.²²

Beria sent denunciations he received to higher level Party and state bureaucrats in the Central Committee, even if they were sent to him as People's Commissar of the NKVD.²³ This was what happened, for example, with the anonymous denunciation of the Chairman of the Arts Committee of the Soviet of People's Commissars, Khrapchenko, mentioned above. And when Malenkov received an anonymous denunciation of the commander of the NKVD rear security troops, Second Belorussian Front, one Rogatin, he immediately forwarded the document to Beria at the NKVD.

The most common method of processing denunciations was sending them to the appropriate local NKVD jurisdiction or, if the document was not about an NKVD officer, to the Central Committee, to oblast' or republic Communist Party committees, or to central or local state organs.

NKVD authorities used a special bureaucratic lexicon when submitting documents for investigation, as if to "program" into the investigating office a certain attitude toward the facts. The cover letter for an ordinary denunciation normally contained but one sentence and looked about like this:

USSR
People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs (NKVD)
August, 1945
Name
City of Moscow
Top Secret
Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks)
To: Comrade G. M. Malenkov
I am sending you the enclosed anonymous letter.
People's Commissar of Internal Affairs of the USSR.
Beria.

Sometimes the accompanying letter announced that the document was sent for "verification and administrative action," which indicated that the NKVD leadership had a

stronger interest in the denunciatory material. Cases are known in which Beria, while forwarding the document to a Party committee for "examination and administrative action," would, just to be certain, order his own apparatus to make inquiries into the matter.

Another formula was: "Please inform us of results of investigation." Generally speaking, it was not necessary to make a special request for this. An answer was always made to any letter signed by Beria. But the request to be informed of results indicated, in the symbolic system of the Soviet bureaucracy, the heightened interest of the higher authorities in the case and excluded (or practically excluded) the possibility of a purely formal answer - a form letter reply.

It was a special case when the People's Commissar or one of his deputies noted on the address of the forwarded document (in such instances usually forwarded to a person with a high post in the Party or state hierarchy - a minister, oblast' committee secretary, etc.) "personal" (or, as Beria wrote on one of his letters to the First Secretary of the Ukrainian Central Committee Khrushchev, "I request your attention to this matter"). In the bureaucratic slang of the time, a note like this was pregnant with meaning. It indicated not merely the confidentiality of the letter (all such correspondence were stamped "secret" or "top secret") but also a demand that the high authority addressed pay special attention to the course of the investigation, overseeing it personally.

So we see that the Soviet Party-state system disposed of a wide range of bureaucratic signals, allowing bureaucrats to signal the importance of a document or to "program" the course of the investigation by the addition of a single word or phrase to the cover letter.

Procedures for investigating denunciations on the spot might include secret operational measures, interrogation of witnesses, eyewitnesses and victims, mailing out various questionnaires to gather information about the author of the denunciation or about those who he denounced. Sometimes an operative or even a brigade of trusted agents would be dispatched to the site. In the most important cases Special Assignment Officers of the NKVD (usually holding the rank of colonel) and their deputies would be dispatched.

The final phase of work related to the denunciation was the report to the People's Commissar (later, Minister) or his deputy on the results of the investigation and the decisions reached. The NKVD leadership could, in contravention of the law, break off further investigation on its own initiative, limit disciplinary measures taken by lower-level offices, send the denunciation for further investigation or forward it to the appropriate organs for final trial. And here, as will be shown below, Beria's personal attitude (his successor at the post, Kruglov, had less latitude for action as he was not a Politburo member) often decided

the fate of the denunciation's victim, and of its author (if his or her accusations proved upon investigation to be slanderous).

The latitude for choice in decision-making, the possibility of not taking the case to court, even if it involved very serious crimes, the unlimited right (unlimited, that is, barring the intervention of the highest state authorities) to decide questions of guilt and responsibility before trial - all these were elements of the Soviet bureaucracy's complex system of corporate self-defense against the denunciatory activities of the population.

METHODS OF BUREAUCRATIC OBSTRUCTION OF DENUNCIATIONS: THE CIRCLE OF COLLECTIVE ACCOUNTABILITY (*Krugovaia poruka*)

The existence of denunciation as a specific form of political culture in traditional society and as a means of social control over the behavior of local authorities in the vast spaces of the USSR was a "sword of Damocles" hanging constantly over the heads of the bureaucrats. The population, which had no means of democratic control over officials' actions, used the denunciation as a means to bring the central power in to resolve this or that conflict, and to defend itself against the malfeasance of local bureaucrats and restore justice.

It would have been strange indeed had the bureaucracy not found ways to defend itself against the intervention of the central power in its own "turf," and to counteract denouncers. In a situation where even potential centers of opposition were totally suppressed, especially following the "Great Terror" of the thirties, the chances that low and middle level bureaucrats would be able to block the denunciatory activity of the population were substantially higher. The key was to "keep out of politics," for the authorities could hope to avoid responsibility for economic crimes and malfeasance.

The most farsighted bureaucrats understood this, and strove to take care that things did not get so bad that the oppressed population would send the most dangerous form of denunciation ("disinterested") to the highest leaders of the country. Others took a riskier path. They "broke the rules of the game" by which the "people's government" was supposed to be concerned solely with the people's needs, and created in their jurisdiction, their small city or raion, an atmosphere of "suppression of criticism" which made any attempt at denunciation extremely dangerous.

"Head Engineer A. P. Kazantsev is a personal friend of the director. The Party Committee Secretaries are completely under the influence of Iosif'ian. Surrounding himself with his own people, Iosif'ian feels himself total master of the situation, he suppresses criticism without fear of reprisal, he does whatever he wants...." Such was the typical

picture which many denouncers painted, in various tints and with various degrees of conviction, risking conflict with "the bosses."

At times the local authorities of distant regions and remote places felt that they could act with impunity: "In Turukhansk in 1943 a great quantity of food products and consumer goods was squandered. A commission was formed to look into this crime. But because persons were involved whose authority one is not allowed to challenge (even though there should be no such people) the matter was covered over and they told us, 'Keep quiet.' What can you say? The goods 'disappeared'!? It's lawlessness...."

Obviously this could be a dangerous game for the bureaucrats themselves. The central authorities, of course,, had to worry about their popularity, their legitimacy in the eyes of the population - this was in the interest of the entire ruling class of Communist Russia. There is nothing more dangerous for rulers than when the population loses all hope of protection and support from the government. So those who "broke the rules of the game" were in fact in opposition to their own estate, and they could expect a cruel retribution.

For Russian bureaucrats the biggest risk factor was not breaking the laws themselves, but losing their "sense of proportion," their "feeling for their turf," their knowledge of what they could and could not get away with. It was precisely this simple truth which denunciation authors and the regime leaders had in mind when they referred to "out-of-control bureaucrats."

Among the permissible methods of suppressing criticism were various softer forms of pressure on subordinates and the population. Preventing the "critic's" (the denunciation author's) promotion at work, denying him use of a collective farm horse, seizing upon minor violations of formal rules and instructions, so as to put the squeeze on the actual or potential denouncer - none of these went beyond the bounds of bureaucratic propriety or put the bureaucrat in a compromising position.

It was another matter to go beyond permissible bounds, not of the law, but of community ethics. For example, not to simply "put the squeeze on" the authors of complaints and petitions sent to central organs, but to seize their letters. There were many such practices, and this was widely known. In any event, people who took the road of confrontation with "the bosses" constantly feared that the local authorities were simply seizing their letters at the post office, acting in the same way as they had in the time of Nicholas the First (the Postmaster in the Gogol play, *The Inspector General*, acted in this way).

The kolkhoznik (collective farmer) Khoron'ko, the author of a denunciation of the malfeasance of Osokarovskii raion officials (Karagandinskii oblast', Kazakhstan) demonstrat-

ed that at least two of his letters had been intercepted by local authorities using the services of the military censor, who had the legal right to seize correspondence or to blank out any information of military significance. According to Khoron'ko, his enemies "were in bed with" the local NKVD and the military censor and "under the pretext of state security protect themselves from Moscow and Soviet justice."

"I have written two letters to Comrade Stalin about the above-mentioned facts. But obviously they did not reach him, but fell into Loshman's hands." (Loshman was a local official persecuting Khoron'ko.) Complaints of this sort were normal in letters reaching the NKVD. It is not surprising that denouncers preferred to avoid using the regular post if they could, sending their letters instead by more exotic routes - they would, for instance, drop them in the boxes set up at the NKVD or KGB passport departments, or at other offices and organizations, sometimes without an envelope.

In general the certainty of denouncers and denunciators that local bureaucrats were seizing their letters, and that the country's leaders simply did not know the truth, fed the legend of the "good Tsar," and his "evil servants." And indeed the "good Tsar" in the person of one Party hierarch or another would, in the name of the central power, severely punish the violators of bureaucratic propriety, those who deviated from the generally accepted "rules of the bureaucratic game." They were removed from their positions, expelled from the Party - some were arrested and tried. To judge by the material I have seen, sometimes there were full-scale purges of local bureaucracies or the officials of this or that department, not only for suppression of criticism, but for serious financial malfeasance, abuse of power, corruption, and so on. In the early period such purges were referred to in bureaucratic slang as "lancing the boil."

In a word, there existed legal and illegal methods of suppressing criticism. The corporate morals of the bureaucrats censured gross and obvious violations of law which would discredit the entire bureaucracy in the eyes of the population, but accepted, or at any rate took a neutral stance toward more refined traditional methods of self-defense. Intercepting correspondence, using the military censor and postal workers for one's own purposes, was obviously "nasty work." But other methods yielding analogous results did not provoke distaste, even in the central authorities, much less in the lower levels of the bureaucratic estate.

Return of a denunciation to the local authorities for investigation was a normal practice, in essence little different from the interception of correspondence. In this case the denunciation most often fell into the hands of those against whom it was written, of their

associates or of their friends. None of these had any interest in "airing dirty laundry." Such an "investigation" resulted in much unpleasantness for the denunciator. This in turn strengthened the conviction of the populace that the only place to seek justice was at the very top of the pyramid of power - from the sinless and fair "chiefs."

Those bureaucrats who avoided gross violations of the "rules of the game" and did not overstep the bounds of bureaucratic morals were often saved from accountability by patrons at higher levels. Every "big boss" had his own people in local positions, upon whom he depended, whom he trusted, and who were personally devoted to him. If they had good relations with higher-ups the local "bosses" could avoid accountability for serious misbehavior and even crimes.

"Loshmanov knew of these disorders, yet he was merely transferred to another jurisdiction, without punishment." Such phrases appear often in denunciations sent to the NKVD. One usual method of saving "one's own man" from accountability was to punish him for internal disciplinary infractions, even in cases of criminal misconduct. In one of the denunciations I found an egregious example: a man implicated in the rape of one of his woman subordinates received as punishment 20 days of arrest and a demotion. Cases which developed according to a similar scenario appear frequently in the NKVD Secretariat files: formal measures were taken, and the case was filed.

In one well-known case, Beria in this fashion removed an acquaintance from his post as NKVD commander of rear security forces on the Second Belorussian Front for misappropriation of captured materiel, compelling female subordinates to sleep with him and other crimes and misdemeanors. Without bringing the case to trial, Beria prevented his acquaintance from sinning further - by removing him to another post on another front.

In the bureaucrats' system of defense against denunciation, discrediting the denunciator's character had an important place. If the denunciator frequently relied on the "a little about myself" script to strengthen his case, refutation of the denunciation mirrored the same script. The author, pointing to his services to the regime, tried to show that he was right because he was "one of our own," while the bureaucrats tried to show that he was wrong because he was "an outsider." One distorted logic confronted another. It was the denunciation's author who was discredited, rather than his or her information. In general the accused's defense was based on the same rhetorical tactics as the slanderous denunciation - the clear facts were not disputed, but simply given another interpretation, more favorable to the denunciation's victim. The Soviet bureaucrats' system of corporate self-presentation included one very important postulate: that the "personal motive" of the denouncer who

turned to the central authorities devalued his information, bringing it into moral question and in many cases entirely obviating the need for the defense to make any counter-arguments or reach any conclusions. This was especially the case with anonymous denunciations. Refusal to sign almost automatically evoked doubt that the denunciator's motives were "clean," leading to suspicion that there was an element of personal interest in the results of the investigation.

When an investigation concluded that an anonymous denunciation was slanderous, the revelation of the author's identity, together with some evidence of his personal interest in the results of the investigation were the final stroke proving the complete innocence of the denunciation's victim. (And the search for an anonymous author under the pretext of seeking further information was an important part of any investigation.)

It was noted above that bureaucrats who observed "the rules of the game" and knew the limits of the permissible could feel that they were relatively safe and did not need to fear denunciations: they were protected by the network of "collective accountability" based on personal ties. Only the "transgressors," those who grossly violated the written and unwritten rules of behavior and bureaucratic ethics, could seriously suffer from denunciations.

However, under certain circumstances the system of bureaucratic defense against denunciations could malfunction. In the first place this could occur if the "rules of the game" were broken by those very higher authorities who had set them up. In unstable or crisis situations, or in the course of major reforms ("revolution from above"), the "chiefs" would appeal directly to the masses, calling on them to expose "enemies" and "saboteurs" and smashing the bureaucracy's congenital conservatism. In this way the stable relationships and the predetermined behavior of the bureaucratic layer of society were broken up. The political symbiosis of "the chiefs," the masses, and the bureaucrats would cease to exist, one part of the bureaucracy would attack another, the denunciatory activity of the masses and of the bureaucrats themselves would reach an apogee and the investigation of denunciations would become a mere formality. The denunciation as a "normal" instrument of administrative oversight and control, the exposure and punishment of "transgressors," would be converted into a means of political struggle. The system of bureaucratic self-defense against denunciations would cease to work. The destructive potential of denunciation would be fully realized. "The people" would take their revenge upon the bureaucracy, but having smashed the complex, self-regulating equilibrium of the social system at the chiefs' call, they themselves would then become victims of yet greater lawlessness.

In the second place, in certain rare cases the denunciatory activity of the population of one or another region, in combination with the flow of complaints, letters to newspapers, etc., would reach such magnitude that it became a political, rather than an administrative, problem. This would force the intervention of the central power to reestablish "law and order," breaking up the circle of collective accountability (*krugovaia poruka*) and the whole system of personal ties. In this situation it was no longer safe to save "one's own" people.

In the third place, there might be "withdrawals" from the bureaucrats' circle of collective accountability in the localities. One or another institution within the local government structure would begin a struggle for power, or attempt to widen its sphere of influence. A wave of mutual denunciations and exposures would begin. The "disinterested denunciations" written "from below" would become a dangerous weapon in the internecine struggle, whether they were truth or slander. This sharply raised any given denunciator's chances of success and stimulated the composition of more and more denunciations. Intervention of the central authorities, undesirable under normal circumstances, would become the only exit from the local crisis of authority.

To use Marx's apt expression, bureaucrats treat the state as their private property. However, the paternalistic statism of the Communist regime imbued "the people," at least its more active representatives, with the same feeling. In the resulting conflict between the two different positions in life neither side could gain the upper hand without smashing the system as a whole. The regime chiefs were the arbiters of the inevitable compromise: indeed their own power depended upon this conflict between the "masses" and the "apparatus." The denunciation in its turn was one of the instruments of control which maintained the equilibrium of the entire system of relationships that constituted Soviet society. Under certain conditions, it could become one specific factor in dynamic changes in that system, facilitating turnover in the bureaucratic elite and political transformations of the regime.

The "ignition key" for these functions was always in the hands of the ruling Communist oligarchy.

IN PLACE OF A CONCLUSION

I have never been a proponent of global theoretical generalizations based on relatively limited local empirical materials. Frankly speaking, I do not believe that analysis of the denunciations from the late 1940s and early 1950s can lead to any serious changes in the traditional understanding of the nature of Soviet Communism in general and Stalinism in particular. But such an analysis is fundamentally important for a comprehension of the deep

continuities between Communist governance and traditional Russian statism. In this sense, denunciations and denunciatory activity have always been an attribute of Russian governance and in fact have served as substitutes for many social institutions.

In modern Russia, my own observation suggests that denunciations are no longer a means of controlling the work of the governing apparatus. Fortunately, this time around denunciations have not been an instrument of political struggle in the overturn (or transformation?) of the ruling Russian elite. Yet at the same time it is hardly good that the traditional resort of the "oppressed and degraded" in their search for justice has disappeared. And the new institutions, formally established and nominally resembling the institutions of civil society, have "refused to" work at all effectively. This break in the Russian tradition of mutual relations between the central authorities, the people and the bureaucracy, as a result of which the populace has no place to turn and government institutions are corrupted as never before, is one of the salient characteristics of the present Russian crisis. The bureaucracy has torn itself free of all restraints, no one today exercises any control over it, the system of "chief-apparatus-masses" is broken and with it has been smashed the population's traditional view of the central authorities as higher arbiters and protectors of the people.

The fact that the institution of denunciation has ceased, or is ceasing, to play its previous role in the administrative system is a blessing, as far as any normal, thinking person (*dliã liubogo normal'nogo intelligentã*) is concerned. But the facts that in its place, and in place of other traditional institutions, there remains an empty lacuna, that through the breach there has washed a wave of corruption and bureaucratic lawlessness, and that the bureaucracy has since Brezhnev's time been escaping from the control of the "chiefs" and has not come under the control of the institutions of civil society, calls into doubt hopes for the success of political and economic reforms. It is not the historian's business to prescribe remedies. But it is sad, if nonetheless necessary, to recognize that in this paradoxical country, Russia, the disappearance of an ancient sin - mass denunciation - has been not only an obvious blessing, but also a much more subtle curse.

ENDNOTES

1. Dal', V., Tolkovni slovar' v chetyrekh tomakh. Tolkovni slovar' zhivogo velikoruskogo iazyka. Vol. 1, A-Z. (Moscow, 1989).
2. Ozhegov, S. I., Slovar' russkogo iazyka. 3rd edition. (Moscow, 1953), 149.
3. In cooperation with the Center for the Study of Russia and the Soviet Union (USA), GARF has published a catalog of the so-called "Stalin Special File" (consisting of letters and reports sent from the NKVD/MVD personally to Stalin), the first volume of a large series of catalogues of NKVD/MVD documents for the years 1944-1960. The second volume, the "Molotov Special File," is now ready for publication. The said publications inaugurate the publication of GARF's series "Archive of the New Russian History" (under the editorship of V. Kozlov and S. Mironenko).
4. GARF, fond 9401, op. 1, d. 2184, l. 1413.
5. Ibid., d. 4935, l. 273.
6. Ibid., l. 272 (ob.).
7. Ibid., d. 4933, ll. 119(ob.)-120.
8. Ibid., l. 120.
9. Ibid., d. 4934, l. 273.
10. Ibid., d. 4934, l. 277.
11. See for example: f. 9401, op. 1, d. 4930, ll. 363-68.
12. Ibid., d. 4933, l. 57.
13. Ibid., d. 2184, ll. 836-39.
14. Ibid., d. 2141, l. 1441.
15. Ibid., l. 1440.
16. Ibid., d. 4935, l. 60.
17. Ibid., d. 4930, ll. 542-43.
18. Ibid., d. 4930, l. 538.
19. Ibid., d. 4936, l. 60-64.
20. Ibid., d. 4933, l. 123.
21. See for example: fond 9401, op. 1, d. 4934, ll. 291-92.
22. Fond 9401, op. 1, d. 4934, ll. 291-92.
23. Among the documents I have examined, there were also denunciations addressed to Beria as Vice Chairman of the Soviet of People's Commissars (Sovnarkom) of the USSR. (See for example fond 9401, op. 1, d. 4930, l. 533.)

CONFERENCE SUMMARY:
THE PRACTICE OF DENUNCIATION IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

University of Chicago. April 29-30, 1994

Professor Sheila Fitzpatrick (University of Chicago) opened the conference on the afternoon of Friday, April 29 with a working definition of "denunciation" as citizens informing state authorities of the wrongdoing, disloyalty or lack of virtue of other citizens. While observing that denunciations exist in most societies (citing, for example, the denunciation of illegal aliens in the United States), Prof. Fitzpatrick suggested that police states, revolutionary states and theocratic states may especially encourage their citizens to denounce one another. She wondered whether denunciations in a police state were somehow different from those in other contexts.

Prof. Robert Gellately (Huron College, London, Ontario) presented the first paper, "Denunciation in Twentieth Century Germany: The Third Reich and the German Democratic Republic Compared." Prof. Gellately argued that the emergence of "surveillance societies" in Europe over the course of the last two centuries was a general phenomenon, and not confined to dictatorships like the Nazi state and the GDR. By "surveillance societies" Prof. Gellately meant societies characterized by a high level of formal state policing activity and the articulation of a citizen's duty to inform the state authorities of criminal activity. The surveillance society was supposed to be an "all-seeing society in which no one ever felt beyond surveillance." Prof. Gellately applied Michel Foucault's term, "panopticism," to this type of regime.

Much of the previous scholarship on the Nazi regime, according to Prof. Gellately, has focused on the state apparatus, describing it as a totalitarian behemoth, oppressing and terrorizing the populace. What has not been examined is the general population's participation in and manipulation of state policing activities. In fact the Gestapo could not have operated effectively without such participation: it lacked the resources to monitor and control society on its own. At the end of 1944 the Gestapo had only 32,000 full-time employees throughout the entire Third Reich. The Nazi regime encouraged and indeed depended upon voluntary, spontaneous denunciations from the populace.

Prof. Gellately cited evidence from his own work on Gestapo materials in Wurzburg and Unterfranken and from German historian Reinhard Mann's research in the Dusseldorf Gestapo files showing that around one-half of Gestapo cases (*Vorgang*) began with unsolicited information volunteered by citizens. People denounced members of groups targeted by the

Nazis' racial policies, such as Jews and foreign workers, as well as other "marginal" groups like homosexuals. Germans were denounced for associations with Jews or foreign workers, for "malicious gossip," and for various other reasons.

Along with popular cooperation, the Gestapo depended upon people's belief that the secret police were omnipresent and all-seeing. Because of this "Gestapo mythos," people behaved as if they were under constant surveillance even when they were not.

Like the Gestapo, the Stasi seems to have benefited from the mythos of a technically sophisticated, all-powerful, all-seeing secret police, and from the collaboration of large segments of the population. However, the Stasi disposed of more resources than the Gestapo ever did (85,000 full-time employees in 1989). Also, the Stasi did not like spontaneous, voluntary denunciations, but relied instead on a network of carefully recruited informers. Like Dr. Reinke in his later paper, Prof. Gellately referred to this network as an "institutionalized" system of denunciation. The large number of East Germans who worked as regular informers for the Stasi at one time or another (in December, 1989 there were 109,000 active informers) indicates a high level of popular acquiescence in the state security organ's activities, if not active cooperation with them.

What was unprecedented about the Stasi was its general use of "extra-legal" methods of malicious harassment against "oppositional" persons. These included setting up affairs between *agents provocateurs* and the target's spouse and mailing compromising photos or letters to the target's friends and family.

In his conclusion Prof. Gellately called for a study of the "social history of policing," including the widespread participation of the population in "the surveillance state." He emphasized that the Gestapo and the Stasi had actually *depended upon* such denunciation, and upon the mythos of an all-powerful, all-seeing secret police. The Stasi differed from the Gestapo in that it had institutionalized denunciation in a network of informers. The GDR regime exercised much tighter, more detailed control over the Stasi and its informers than the Nazi state ever did over the Gestapo. The Nazis' less "scientific" approach to denunciation and secret policing may have had to do with the fact that the Third Reich was a revolutionary regime which lasted for only 12 years, half of these in a state of wartime emergency. There was simply no time to rationalize the police apparatus.

Following Prof. Gellately's paper, Dr. Reinke of the Stasi archives in Berlin presented his essay, "Stasi: The East German State Security, Its Organization and Its Informers." Dr. Reinke, like Prof. Gellately, regarded the Stasi informer network as a kind of institutionalized denunciation. He added the notion that as a channel of information on the population's needs

and moods to higher authorities, the informer network functioned as a substitute for an independent media and free information exchange (A summary of Dr. Reinke's paper follows later in this volume.)

Discussants questioned Prof. Gellately's claim that the "surveillance society" was a peculiarly modern phenomenon. Prof. Thomas Childers (University of Pennsylvania) noted that medieval village life was very public, with lots of gossip and even "informing" and "denunciation" going on. The very concept of privacy, of a right to live free of surveillance, was a modern idea. Prof. William Monter (Northwestern University) cited the Spanish Inquisition as a pre-modern example of denunciation.

Childers also challenged the concept of "the surveillance state" or "panopticon" on other grounds, arguing that it did not allow one to distinguish between different types of modern regimes. Was the most important difference between, say, the United States and the Third Reich, that the intensity of surveillance was greater in the latter? Hannah Arendt's concept of "totalitarianism" was a more useful way to distinguish between regimes, in Prof. Childers's opinion.

The initial presentation on the morning of Saturday, April 30 was Prof. Sheila Fitzpatrick's paper, "Stalinist Denunciations of the 1930s: New Materials From the Soviet Archives," followed by Dr. Vladimir A. Kozlov's essay, "Denunciations in the NKVD/MVD System of the USSR, 1944-1953." (A revised version of Prof. Fitzpatrick's paper is presented in Vol. 1 of the Final Report; a summary and complete text of Dr. Kozlov's paper opens Vol. 2.) Fitzpatrick analyzed a database of 94 denunciations from various areas of the USSR from the years 1929-1940, categorizing them by type of accusation (disloyalty to Communist Party or state, alien class background, abuse of power), targets (bosses, "class enemies," urban neighbors sharing communal apartments), and outcomes (target of denunciation punished, no action taken, denouncer punished). She noted the very large number of denunciations, complaints and petitions sent to authorities, observing that this was just about the only form of political participation available to ordinary citizens. Many of these appeals were written as if to a benevolent, paternalistic higher authority, giving them a "traditional, even pre-modern" character. Dr. Kozlov (State Archive of the Russian Federation, Moscow) focused on popular denunciation of local officials to the central authorities. He viewed denunciation as a form of popular control over the middle levels of bureaucracy.

In commentary on the papers, Prof. Andrew Verner (University of Illinois, Champagne-Urbana) proposed that Russian peasants were using denunciations to strengthen their village communities, by expelling marginals and troublemakers, and by bringing in the central

power to solve intra-village conflicts. He also commented on the way in which Russian denouncers used the language of the state to align themselves with state authority, a point made in detail in Dr. Kozlov's paper. Prof. Verner, whose current research is on peasants in late Imperial Russia, lent his support to Kozlov's claim that Stalinist era denunciations of rural officials resembled late Imperial peasant petitions. Prof. David Joravsky (Northwestern University, Chicago) disputed Kozlov's assertion that the Russian word *donos* ("denunciation") had a positive connotation prior to the Soviet era. He argued that its negative meaning dated from the Imperial era.

There was also a debate about the usefulness of "police-saturation indices" as a way of comparing the repressive strength of different states. In her conclusion Prof. Fitzpatrick had noted that at the end of the 1930s the Gestapo had about 30,000 full-time workers and the NKVD 360,000. The USSR deployed approximately five times as many secret police employees per capita as the Third Reich, giving the USSR a far higher "police-saturation index" than Nazi Germany. Prof. Childers questioned whether this was an effective measure of strength and efficiency of repression. The Stasi deployed more men than the Gestapo to control a smaller population, but Childers was not convinced it was more effective than the Gestapo.

Following lunch Prof. Richard Hellie (University of Chicago) presented an essay entitled "The Origins of Denunciation in Muscovite Law." Hellie linked the early Muscovite state's use of denunciation to the institution of *krugovaia poruka* ("collective accountability"), which was widespread in medieval Russian society. Under *krugovaia poruka* most members of society were bound into one collective or another, and were responsible for the behavior of other collective members. In other words, if one member committed a crime, all members of his or her collective were liable for punishment. The only way for the state to break into such a system was to solicit denunciations from the populace.

Hellie drew a distinction between political and criminal denunciations. Political denunciations originated in fourteenth century agreements between Russian princes to share information on "matters good or evil." By the early 15th century, as Moscow came to dominate the collection of principalities on Russian territory, princes serving the Muscovite Grand Prince had a legal obligation to report to him all matters related to his interests. Political denunciations peaked in the 1560s during Muscovy's long war with Lithuania, as high-ranking nobles (*boiars*) denounced each other for treating with the enemy.

Until the first years of the seventeenth century political denunciation was an elite institution, ensuring the loyalty of serving princes. However, during the Time of Troubles, a period of dynastic crisis, civil disorder and Polish and Swedish invasion running from about

1600 to 1613, it spread to the general population. To repel the foreign invaders and to shore up his shaky legitimacy the new Tsar, Mikhail Fedorovich, had to gather mass support. In this crisis situation, Muscovite authorities expected all segments of the population to report any anti-government activity.

Prof. Hellie linked the rise of criminal denunciation with the increasing involvement of the state in arbiting legal disputes (in technical terms, with the evolution from a dyadic to a triadic legal system). He discussed in some detail each mention of denunciation in the 1649 Muscovite legal code, the *Ulozhenie*, including denunciation of masters by their slaves, denunciation of persons plotting rebellion or assassination of the Tsar, denunciation of parents by their children (which was forbidden), revelation of the hiding place of fugitives and the exposure of tax evaders. Denunciation was clearly an important part of the daily operation of the Muscovite legal system at this date. Hellie also traced the origins of the various *Ulozhenie* articles dealing with denunciation to Lithuanian law codes of the late 16th century and to Byzantine statutes.

In his commentary on Hellie's paper, Prof. David Miller (Roosevelt University, Chicago) argued that the general use of denunciation in Muscovy was a manifestation of the weakness of the early modern state. The Muscovite state lacked legal enforcement mechanisms, and so had to solicit information from the population. Prof. Hellie responded that the Muscovite state in the seventeenth century was quite strong and efficient compared to many of its European counterparts.

The final conference paper, "Denunciation in the French Revolution," was presented by Prof. Colin Lucas (University of Chicago). Prof. Lucas discussed two types of denunciations: attacks on public figures in newspapers and broadsheets and denunciations to legally constituted committees. French revolutionary denunciations were mostly of conspiracies against the state. In the early phases of the revolution the Paris Commune (1789) and the National Assembly (1791) set up committees to receive denunciations (*comité de recherches*). At this point the denunciation was no more than a starting point for an enquiry by a magistrate - an "indication of where trouble might be lurking" - rather than formal evidence to be offered at trial.

In the first years of the Revolution public figures and politicians disputed whether the use of denunciations would be salutary, helping to expose counterrevolutionary conspiracies and "purify" the republic of corruption, or corrosive, eroding liberty and the "confidence between citizens." Advocates of denunciation such as Marat saw it as a civic duty, an exercise of the individual citizen's sovereignty. Opponents worried that encouragement of denunciations would threaten liberty. Who would guard liberty against the denouncer? Lucas emphasized the

importance of Classical texts for the revolutionaries, observing that each side could find support in Classical precedents. For the proponents of denunciation there were the *censores* of the early Roman Republic who supervised the citizens' morality and guarded public virtue. For opponents, there were the *delatores* of the Roman Empire, who might come in for a portion of the property of those they secretly denounced. According to Tacitus, the denunciations of the *delatores* contributed to the decline of Rome.

Following these two Classical precedents two words came into use to refer to denunciations: *dénonciation*, which had a positive connotation, and *délation*, which conveyed a negative meaning.

With the advent of the Jacobin Terror in 1793 two important changes occurred in the institution of denunciation. First, the Jacobins closed opposition newspapers, thus denying their political opponents any possibility of public reply to denunciations in Jacobin papers. Second, they established so-called "vigilance committees" (*comités de surveillance*) which received secret denunciations (denunciations to the *comités de recherches* had been matters of public record - names of denouncers were frequently posted) and had the power to arrest on mere suspicion of wrongdoing. According to Prof. Lucas, these changes transformed denunciation from "a censoring watchdog on government" to a weapon of factional strife within the government and an instrument of state power through surveillance.

Proponents of denunciation from the first moments of the revolution thought of it in terms of making all of society transparent and public. Denunciation was a tool to strip off masks and expose enemies of the nation. Nonetheless, denunciations early in the revolution focused on more or less empirically verifiable facts, such as social or estate categories (noble, priest) or visibly suspect behavior. With the triumph of Jacobinism, however, there was an increasing tendency to use denunciations to penetrate the heart of the denounced, to discover his or her criminal or counterrevolutionary intentions. Once this move was made, virtue itself might be a mask concealing nefarious thoughts. The intentions of the denouncer were thus as suspect as those of the denounced and the distinction between *délation*, bad denunciation, and *dénonciation*, good denunciation, collapsed. The Jacobins began denouncing each other. They "tore themselves apart under the Terror."

Prof. William Sewall (University of Chicago) commented that Lucas was making two arguments about denunciations during the Terror: a "slippery slope" argument and a "leap over the precipice" argument. According to the "slippery slope" argument, the frenzy of denunciation and the attempt to penetrate human intentions during the Terror was an inevitable outcome of the rhetoric of "transparency" during the earlier phases of the revolution. Any

attempt to make society completely public and "transparent" was bound to culminate in the Terror. The "leap over the precipice" argument stated that the Jacobins took measures in 1793 which fundamentally changed the nature of the denunciation game, namely closing opposition newspapers and establishing vigilance committees. This was no "slippery slope" of rhetoric, but a deliberately chosen leap. Sewell preferred the "leap over the precipice" account of the Terror.

Prof. Sewell also urged more detailed study of how denunciation was manipulated at the village level in France to resolve local conflicts.

During the concluding discussion participants proposed a number of different general conceptual frameworks for studying denunciations. Prof. John Bushnell (Northwestern University, Chicago) proposed that denunciations appeared whenever the state criminalized a set of behaviors. They were a byproduct of widening the area of criminal behavior. As an example of this he cited contemporary campaigns against sexual harassment and domestic violence in the United States. Prof. Colin Lucas suggested that denunciations were always a way of transforming human beings and purifying society, of making people be "what they should be."

Prof. Robert Gellately made an argument that "routine" forms of denunciation, such as informing on fugitives or exposing the crimes of local officials, could become explosive in revolutionary crises. In a revolutionary period, when legitimate authority and normal governing apparatuses had dissolved, denunciations were a link between the new authorities, their policies and the population.

Prof. Andrew Verner reiterated his view that denunciations in peasant villages were a way of strengthening community solidarity by expelling deviants and dissidents and bringing in an outside power to resolve local conflicts. Prof. Jan T. Gross, a specialist in the Soviet occupation of Poland, disagreed, arguing that denunciation contributed to an atomization of society, in which individuals used the state to settle private grudges, thus "privatizing the public sphere." When denunciation was given free reign nothing was left of the commonweal but personal grudges and individual interest.

STASI: THE EAST GERMAN STATE SECURITY, ITS ORGANIZATION AND ITS INFORMERS

Herbert Reinke
(Stasi Archives, Berlin)

Summary

Dr. Reinke argues that the Stasi institutionalized denunciatory activity by setting up a regular network of informers. The Stasi was suspicious of spontaneous denunciations of the sort discussed by Dr. Kozlov. Rather than rely on these, it recruited and remained in contact with a large number of regular informers (approximately 170,000 in early 1989). Each informer was assigned a case officer, with whom he or she met regularly at secret "conspiratorial" apartments. The Stasi officer provided the informer with guidelines about what sort of information to gather: what topics were of interest to the state, who to watch and report on, how to observe effectively. Thus, according to Dr. Reinke, the Stasi "framed" the informer's denunciatory activity and "prevented him from running wild."

The secret police kept a potential informer under observation, sometimes for years, before making contact with him or her. They were seeking people who would make reasonably intelligent observers, whose job situation and home life were structured so that they would have time for the "conspiratorial" meetings, and who were loyal to the regime and Communist ideals. The Stasi administration even set quotas by social category ("scientific intelligentsia," "youth") of informers to be recruited each year in a given district. When Stasi agents did finally contact a potential informer, they would get from him or her a written or verbal agreement to serve as an informer.

Informers reported on most aspects of daily life in the German Democratic Republic, including their workplace, leisure activities and relations with friends and family. The state security used information provided by informers to prosecute criminal cases and make up special files on serious political opponents. Stasi officers could check the reliability of one informer's facts by having another informer report on him or her, or by turning to alternate sources of information, such as lower-level Communist Party groups.

According to Dr. Reinke ex-informers who have discussed their activities say that they agreed to work for the Stasi because they hoped to effect change from within the GDR political system. Through their influence on information input to Party leaders, these informers hoped to affect policy decisions. As Dr. Reinke points out, this may very well be an *ex post facto* rationalization of their motivations. It is nonetheless true that the Stasi printed weekly and

monthly reports on the mood of the population and their problems, based in part on information provided by informers. The highest officials in the state and Party hierarchies read these reports.

Like the Russian denunciations, the Stasi informers' reports may have been a kind of substitute for the institutions of civil society, in particular for a pluralistic, independent media. Dr. Reinke suggests that the network of informers can be thought of as "a functional equivalent to non-existent media debates and information exchange...."

Dr. Reinke also discusses the accuracy of the Stasi bulletins. They were subject to distortion both because state security agents were "framing" the informers' reports, requesting certain kinds of information, and because the authors who reprocessed the reports into bulletins may have shied away from painting too negative a picture for their superiors. Dr. Reinke concludes that like the Nazi Party's *Sicherheitsdienst* reports, the Stasi bulletins were fairly objective. There was some avoidance of very negative reporting. A more serious weakness was the bulletin authors' limited understanding of the GDR's problems. They would lay down the "mere facts" about political opposition or economic difficulties and propose measures of control or suppression. This limited conceptual framework contributed to the Stasi's failure to react effectively to the impending collapse of the GDR in 1989.

In summary, Dr. Reinke views the Stasi's network of informers as a kind of "institutionalized denunciation" which substituted for an independent media and free information exchange. The failure of this system in 1989 was not due to bad intelligence gathering, but to the inadequacy of the conceptual framework used to interpret that intelligence.