The pre-1941 local administration in the Soviet countryside:

How effectively it worked, and what rules of political communication followed to prevent peasant rebellions

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When it comes to the local administration in the Soviet countryside, we see a surprisingly uniform picture in the historical research—the so-called "rural undergovernment". In the article, the author questions this perception and shows how strongly it was influenced by the official discourse, i.e. of the 1930s Stalin's interpretation. The author believes that rural administration, on the contrary, functioned as it was designed to, and that its obvious incompetence was the most important part of Stalin's strategy of governance. To understand the functioning of rural administration on the eve of the German occupation, we have to consider the decisive changes in the local management that took place under the collectivization in the 1930s, and the real aims of the state, i.e. Stalin's dictatorship. The local administration was not limited to purely bureaucratic tasks but had to solve specific economic and political problems to keep up political stability. To evaluate the efficiency of rural administration we have to consider first the political priorities of the regime for even economic inefficiency and the abuse of office could be inevitable by-products of a highly efficient system of keeping up the regime. After the German occupation, it became evident that rural administration was not suitable to deliver what the new rulers expected: to deliver just grain. The author starts with a chronology focusing on the significant ruptures affecting the local rural administration between the mid-1920s and the German occupation in 1941. The second part of the article discusses what the state under Stalin really wanted the local administration to achieve. The third part of the article considers the bases of the rural management in the second half of the 1930s to reveal the intersection of the Party, the state and state security apparatus interests in the countryside. In the conclusion, the author presents his general findings, pointing out as well why the German Occupational Regime failed to take as much grain as Stalin's administration before.

Keywords: local administration, Soviet countryside, incompetence, "rural undergovernment", German occupation, Stalin's dictatorship, political and economic aims, efficiency

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The typical argument, as presented by Lynne Viola (2007), is that the Soviet local administration was weak and, thus, did not function in the way the state or Stalin expected: this interpretation emphasizes "rural undergovernment" as the key problem since the 1860s. (However, I do not agree that "traditional rural undergovernment reinforced Stalin's own despotic tendencies, leading to hyper-centralization", as Viola (2010) states, for, on the contrary, Stalin used the widespread prejudice that rural administration was weak to create his regime of

terror). The rural officials were blamed for mistakes in implementing the general policy due to their as if essential weakness. This argument is not convincing: "strength" and "weakness" cannot be a feature of local administration by itself and should be considered in the framework of its tasks, i.e. the aims of the state policy. The Prussian-German experience proves that local self-government can work efficiently to guarantee the state interests. Russia followed the Prussian example in the 1860s by creating *zemstvas* in the countryside and urban forms of self-government, which worked successfully from the 1890s (Eklof et al., 1994; Raphael, 2000).

The tasks of the local rural administration changed greatly in the early 1930s. Under the collectivization the peasants were forced to work for the state without salary. From now on preventing peasant rebellions became the top state priority. While the pre-1928 rural administration was to convince peasants, from now on the task was to intimidate them by exercising violence and breaking the will of the peasantry. Millions of Party members and state officials could not have implemented Stalin's agricultural policy without using brute force. Although the economic results of organizing agricultural production in the 1930s were still poor (Merl, 1990a: 35–59), the rural administration did an excellent job considering the priority aims of the regime—prevented peasant rebellions against it. There hardly could have been a more efficient management model for such aims than the rural administration of the 1930s. The poor economic results, by the way, were determined mainly by contradictory orders 'from above'. The rural administration failed to raise yields, but provided the state with an incredible amount of grain and potatoes without payment, thus, holding the peasantry as non-free workers similar to slaves (Merl, 2015).

The dictatorship could not and did not function in the way it pretended to. The official picture of the economy run by Stalin's orders and ensuring a wealthy living to the Soviet people was far from the reality though played a central role in the political communication for the aims of legitimacy (in Max Weber's terms). To suppress the public conversations about real life miseries under the Stalin's rule was another condition for its survival. Nobody trusts the regime that admits to have caused starvation, famine, and widespread corrupt practices (As the term "corruption" does not fit, the author uses the term "corruptive practices" for any behaviour hurting the official norms) (Merl, 2010). Therefore, we have to be very careful with the official regime's descriptions for all archival data are written in the official language of 'right' terms (Merl, 2012; Ermakov, 2013; Kil'dyushov, 2014). They do not tell "the truth", as some historians still believe. How big the gap between the official descriptions and the real life was is best described for the so-called "command economy". From the early 1930s the economy never worked only by the Stalin's commands. In order to pretend that the economy followed his orders and its growth

depended on them, Stalin had to accept the widespread and officially forbidden corrupt practices of directors of industrial enterprises and even people's commissariats. Bargains with the controlling officials in the commissariats to 'soften' the plans, networks to conceal the losses of mean of production by paying bribes, *blat* and false reports were the ways to hide and compensate for the worst shortcoming of the central orders and to achieve economic growth. The most important thing for everybody involved was to keep silent for the people doing something illegal often did not understand that their corrupt practices was the necessary condition for the functioning of the command economy. Only (not always conscious) tolerance to these practices allowed Stalin to achieve economic successes and present himself as an irreplaceable arbitrator of economic interests (Berliner, 1957; Merl, 2007; Merl, 2017; Gregory, 2004). The command economy actually functioned as a symbiosis of commands and threats 'from above' and corrupt practices of the majority of people including officials and directors of industrial enterprises.

Management in agriculture strongly differed from management in industry for the state constantly intervened in farm management. The command economy worked quite successfully in industry ensuring impressive rates of growth, but was not efficient in agriculture at all. The kolkhoz heads lacked any autonomy and did not dispose of salary funds (as in industry) so as to pay bribes for the needed means of production not provided by the state (Merl, 2015). The kolkhoz system also combined severe control and treats of extracting agricultural products with tolerance to corrupt practices so as to save people from starvation. The terror alone, as some authors argue, cannot ensure the function of neither industry nor agriculture. To keep up the regime the rural administration at the same time had to intimidate the peasants and to allow them to use corrupt practices condemned in the official slogans.

To understand how the regime functioned in the countryside we have to reveal the real, i. e. informal, 'rules of the game' by reconstructing them through the behaviour of the people. The malfunctions listed in official reports or in the everyday communication would have caused the breakdown of the regime if the people realized that the dictator was responsible for their miseries. However, the contradictive orders 'from above' prove that 'breaking the law' was the only way to keep up the regime (Filtzer, 2006; Merl, 2012: 101–143), while respecting the law and the official slogans would have lead to sabotage and repressions up to severe punishment. Although the people respected informal rules, there was not any special reflection due to people's ability not to recognize important facts and not to pay attention to discrepancies between words and deeds (so-called "regressive learning"—Langenohl, 2010).

It was essential for the Stalin's regime to keep the rules of the game secret. The myth that rural administration was weak and

wrongdoing proved to be the strongest basis of the Stalin's rule in the countryside for it corresponded to the firm conviction of the rural people that local officials were wrongdoing. The people expected Stalin to pursue the traditional paternalist rule by playing the role of a "good tsar". By punishing local officials as scapegoats and by removing them from office, Stalin succeeded in putting the responsibility for his regime's shortcomings on the local rural officials. Stalin's rule depended on the rural population's conviction that their hardships were due to the local administration's incompetence. If we take into account that the local officials succeeded in keeping about 100 million peasants from rebelling against their miserable living conditions even under the "great famine" of 1932–1934, the effectiveness of the local administration in securing the rule becomes evident.

To evaluate this effectiveness we have to start from the state interests rather than economic efficiency in the Western understanding. The effectiveness of the local administration for the regime meant effective control rather than effective management of production. Under the Stalin's rule, the rural policy's main requirement was that the peasantry should bear the burden of financing the forced industrialization. *Kolkhozniki* were not paid for their work (the fact that there was some symbolic payment does not change this judgement: considering the costs of production, the price for grain was just about 20 percent of production costs, for milk and meat—about 50 percent) (Merl, 1990a). Stalin made this very clear in the Constitution of 1936 speaking of workers and peasants as "two friendly united" classes in both the right for social security and vacation. However, finances were provided only to state workers and employees, while *kolkhozniki* had to finance their social security by their own 'profits', which they actually did not have (Die Stalinsche Staatsverfassung, 1986; Merl, 2011; Getty, 1991). The official argument that *kolkhozniki* were 'owners' of kolkhoz assets was a pure fiction. The Stalin's law (1932) declared all kolkhoz property and even the agricultural products growing on the fields a "socialist property". *Kolkhozniki* caught in the kolkhoz fields while taking the yields planted by them could be shot on the spot as "thieves of socialist property" (Sobranie zakonov, 1932).

Key changes in the local administration under the collectivization

After the revolution, the state apparatus consisted of locally elected soviets. The rural soviets in the 1920s co-existed with the traditional administration of village communes, the elders and village assemblies (Viola, 2010). The influence of the local soviets on the rural life besides tax collection and state campaigns was not too strong due to their rather limited tasks such as organizing the production on the land allotments of peasant communes. Cooperatives were responsi-

ble for credits, farm implements and selling of the part of agricultural production. The market and the state controlled the prices, which affected the peasants' production decisions (Merl, 1981). The state intervention in modernizing agricultural production started with the Stolypin Reform (1906) and continued until the 1920s. The state' agricultural bodies at the *volost*' and later *rayon* level helped with the land management (*zemleustrojstvo)* as well as with the introduction of better crop rotation and seeds, thus, successfully supporting peasants on request (Yaney, 1982: 510–557; Bruisch, 2014; Merl, 1985a: 166–212).

During the 1924 election campaign to the rural soviets, the Party leadership intervened due to the low peasant participation. Considering this as an indicator that the rural soviets had not won the peasants' trust, the Party changed the agricultural policy, which obtained the heading of *litsom k derevne* (turning the face to the village). The positive response of peasants to the new policy underlines that the share of Party members or people in rural soviets alone are not sufficient indicators for the concept of agricultural policy plays an important role. The *litsom k derevne* policy positively affected the peasants' perception of the regime and produced incentives to modernize and increase the agricultural production. The results of the first elections were annulled if less than 35 percent of the rural population voted or peasants complained about the procedures. The rural population reacted with higher participation rates in the second election: though the number of communists elected in the rural soviets dropped, the Party noted a better inclusion of peasants into the system of Soviet rule (Merl, 1981: 41–49). In the mid 1920s, the positive reaction of peasants to the policy of *litsom k derevne* became evident due to the quick growth of agricultural production. Many peasants joined cooperatives and some 'middle peasants' decided to join the Party. This trust to the Soviet regime ended in 1927 with a new rupture in the Party's agricultural policy, i. e. with the social discrimination of the better-off peasants by the tax policy and disenfranchisement of the so-called 'kulaks' (Merl, 1981: 291–309, 411–436). Peasants reacted very badly also when the Party did not thank them for the participation in the October revolution: for its 10th anniversary some privileges were granted only to workers and state employees (Bericht, 1993). Peasants' dissatisfaction was evident in the lower rates of participation in the 1927 rural election (only 48 percent of peasants showed up) (Merl, 1985a: 90–100).

The results of the local rural administration in the 1920s primarily depended on whether the agricultural policy took into account peasant interests. Until 1927, the role of the state apparatus in the villages was limited to monitoring the compliance with the state laws, the land use and the restrictions to hire workers. The peasants evaluated the Soviet rule positively if it stimulated the growth of agricultural production; while dissatisfaction was the result of rural incomes fall due to the state price policy. The state kept the agricultural pric-

es artificially low, thus, making the terms of trade for peasants significantly worse than in 1914 due to the increasing gap between agricultural prices and the prices peasants had to pay for industrial goods (Merl, 1981: 194–312, 368–410).

A strong rupture that turned the local rural administration into a means of violence and pressure took place in 1928. It destroyed the power of traditional institutions of peasant self-government within village communes, and deprived the peasants of any possibility to express legally their will. This rupture was accompanied by the forced expropriation of grain in winter of 1927–1928. To put more pressure on peasants so as to make them sell their grain harvest, in August 1927 the state introduced an additional tax. As the 'unified' agricultural tax was already collected then, there was no legal basis for any additional tax. Therefore, the state decided to use the so-called 'self-taxation'. According to the law, only the village commune could introduce self-taxation under the consent of its members for such local needs as building/reconstruction of schools, roads and bridges. The introduction of self-taxation by the state was a contradiction in itself and, thus, entailed the state violence. The state ordered rural soviets to call the assemblies of peasant communes to vote for self-taxation of 35 percent of the state agricultural tax (Merl, 1981: 368–388; Bericht, 1993).

In the majority of villages, the peasants saw no local needs for such a tax and refused to vote for it. The resistance was general and did not depend on the social position as poor, middle or well-to-do peasants. The campaign was under the responsibility of the Oblast' Party committees (*obkom*) and used the state's forces of repression. *Obkoms* send their plenipotentiaries to *rayons* to conduct the campaign, and *rayons* send their officials further to rural soviets. All stood under severe pressure for every head official was to be removed from office on the spot if he did not will or was not able to exercise the necessary pressure on peasants or to arrest those speaking or voting against the necessary decision. The assemblies of village communes were called in February-March 1928 by rural soviets. Often a day before there was a self-organized meeting of the commune to vote against self-taxation. The 'official' assemblies were convened by the head of the village soviet or plenipotentiaries from *raikom* (or *volostkom*). As a rule, the state security or militia officials attended the assemblies to keep peasants from speaking openly against self-taxation (everybody knew that it would lead to the arrest on the spot). The assembly did not end until the decision needed by the Party was made. Often the head of the meeting put only one question for vote "Who is against Soviet power?" to achieve the desired results. The only chance to avoid the 'unanimous vote' for self-taxation was to break up the meeting by gathering in the stinking barn or by starting to sing "Christ is resurrected". However, such a relief was temporary as the village soviet would call the meeting again to get the

required vote for the 35 percent agricultural tax (Merl, 1981: 368–388; Bericht, 1993; Merl, 2012: 64–68).

For the first time a new and seemingly democratic communication mode of controlling the peasants was applied. To incorporate them into binding decisions, the state used 'closed assemblies' governed by the rules of interpersonal communication (Merl, 2012: 48–81; Erren, 2000) and headed by a Party official. A dissent voting was impossible due to the question wording: the voting essentially was not about the self-taxation, but rather about consent or dissent with the Soviet rule. The voting against was considered to be against the Soviet regime, which lead to the accusations in being counterrevolutionary, arrest and often annihilation by the security forces. The self-taxation campaign destroyed the independence of village communes and became a dress-rehearsal for the forced collectivization that started a few months later and used the same means of breaking the will of peasants.

The state considered forcing peasants to vote unanimously for what they definitely did not want a brilliant idea. After an assembly the peasants were bound by their vote and lost the right to resist the decision (otherwise the one would act against the will of the meeting). The forced collectivisation in the winter of 1929–1930 was imposed by the same kind of voting of the closed assemblies. This time peasants were aware that voting against collectivisation was impossible under the risk to be arrested or even shot on the spot. This time urban workers were sent to the countryside to take grain by force and to take part in the village assemblies to exert an additional intimidation. Under the collectivization, the commune finally lost the function of public opinion institution for solving peasants' problems. The assembly turned into the state means of making peasants vote for whatever the state wanted. Desperate dissent or anger over expropriation could be expressed only through 'terrorist acts'—the state uses this term to delegitimize any forms of protest until the present day. Some peasants chose this way and attacked officials or rural activists, committed arsons to protest against the forced expropriation (Merl, 1990a: 61–90).

In implementing the state violence against peasants, the local soviets from 1928 become an effective institution within the state machine of repression. However, this machine was only destructive: it was effective in expropriating grain, collecting taxes and intimidating peasants, but unable to give peasants any incentives for productive labour. The closed assemblies played a decisive role in negating the peasants' ability to resist. A man risked to be arrested on the spot if spoke against the state or Party orders in public. The state force, however, was not used against female peasants as the Party denied their ability have an opinion. That is the reason why in 1930 the state witnessed the *bab'i bunty*, i. e. peasant women rebels against collectivization, every time the state expropriated the family's cow, the basis of children's survival (Viola, 1986; Merl, 1981: 150–152). The officials had to find a male to blame and arrest—a local priest or a

kulak—as being responsible for instigating women against the Soviet power.

The creation of *kolkhozes* meant an additional rupture as the definitive end of the village communes. The commune's assembly was replaced by the meeting of *kolkhoz's* members. Often small kolkhozes were identical to one or a few former villages, however, independent meetings of peasants/*kolkhozniki* were no longer allowed—the kolkhoz assembly could be convoked only by the head of rural soviet or by instructors from *rayon*. In convoking the assemblies, the rural officials acted as auxiliary troops for the plenipotentiaries 'from above'. From the very beginning, kolkhoz assemblies were under the state control: they had to take place at least once a year to listen to the report of the board and to elect it. These elections were obligatory under the guidance of a representative of the regional Party organization, and sometimes were attended by a state security official. All speakers of such assemblies were to use the official speech codes to avoid arrest. Every kolkhoz member had to attend them to be bound by their decisions. The assemblies ensured unanimous voting for whatever the state demanded: shooting of "enemies of the people", signing state loans, giving all grain to the state, socialist competition in increasing milk yields per cow, finishing sowing earlier than required by the state plan. The assemblies trained the peasants to repeat the official slogans of the Party and to follow the official terms in any argument. The inclusion into the regime during the assemblies was ensured performatively by the presence itself. Therefore, rural officials had to make sure that nobody was missing and to report about the participation. The rules of the game allowed the *kolkhozniki* to criticize the *kolkhoz* administration, however, only following the official slogans. If they wanted to get rid of an unpopular kolkhoz director, he was to be blamed of betraying the state. If they spoke about the real causes of their anger (that he neglected their needs), they would be arrested on the spot (Merl, 2012: 64–72). Any hints of unsolved state tasks would attract the controllers 'from above'. If the people mentioned facts of a betrayal of the state, the director would be arrested. However, even in this case the peasants were only actors in the script written by the dictator for they helped him to select the scapegoats. Sheila Fitzpatrick (1994: 286–312) is wrong in that this was an expression of the power of the weak. The miserable fate of the people did not change: the *raikom* would appoint the successor who would execute the state orders with the same brutality.

The kolkhoz assemblies differed from former village assemblies in other important aspects: under the dekulakization (arrest and deportation of *kulaks*) and the strong peasant outflow in the cities, the assemblies lacked the previously dominant group of better-off peasants, who still influenced the village life in the 1920s. Local priests retained some influence on the local religious commune and especially women until 1937. This meant that a return to the pre-1929 system was im-

possible: the traditional group of elders was no longer present, and peasants communes after the forced collectivization were beheaded and could no longer express an independent political will.

The creation of the "kolkhoz system" (Merl, 1990a) as a reaction to the famine of 1932–1933 was the next significant rupture for the rural population. After the period of arbitrary violence against the peasants, the kolkhoz system returned to some form of compromise between the state and peasant interests, which points to the fact that Stalin considered the famine a real danger to his rule. However, he could not admit openly that industrialization and forced collectivization were the causes of the famine so as not to lose the legitimacy of the regime (Schiller, 1988: 203; Merl, 1993). The state demanded the grain and other agricultural products (milk, meat and potatoes) from the peasants without paying the full cost of production. To end the arbitrary taking of 'surpluses' (often leaving the peasant with no food and fodder at all), from 1933 the obligatory deliveries were based on the fixed numbers per hectare of sown area, per cow or per *kolkhoz* household. Thus, the obligatory delivery became similar to the tax in kind calculated for *kolkhozes* and the *kolkhoz* households in advance (the nature of the tax in kind was vague for the state made a low symbolic payment: for the grain about 20 percent of production costs by the end of the 1930s, for milk and meat a little bit higher). The grain procurement lost much of its previous arbitrariness: *kolkhozes* knew in advance how much grain they had to give to the state. Unlike 1921, there was no grain at the free market of agricultural products after 1933—it could be sold only to the state.

The peasant strive to survive within *kolkhozes* was taken into account by the state by permitting each *kolkhoz* household working in the *kolkhoz* to have a small plot (about 0,25 hectares) and a limited number of cattle as a 'personal' property. This allowed *kolkhozniki* to produce some food for their survival. *Kolkhozniki* had to deliver a certain amount of milk per cow to the state and, regardless of having cattle, to deliver a certain amount of meat. *Kolkhozniki* won the right to sell their 'agricultural surpluses' at free prices at the so-called '*kolkhoz* markets' after the obligatory deliveries to the state. *Kolkhozniki* in general did not receive any money from *kolkhozes* for their work in the 1930s outside the cotton areas (and there only from 1935), their only source for money even for paying state taxes were markets. The last element of the *kolkhoz* system was the regulation of so-called 'advance payment': during threshing and regardless obligatory deliveries to the state, 10 to 15 percent of the threshed grain had to be distributed among *kolkhozniki* according to their labour results. Unlike the period of 1930–1932, the kolkhoz system now ensured that the *kolkhozniki* were rewarded for their work and were not doomed to starvation (Merl, 1990a: 129–140, 260–280, 360–371, 453–476).

Actually household plots were a part of the shadow economy, they gave peasants chances for survival by the use of corrupt practic-

es. Under the Second World War these plots allowed rural people to survive. From 1933 they lived under an occupation-like regime and got used to producing a significant part of their food by themselves (Merl, 1998).

The next significant rupture was due to the 1936 Constitution. Soviet people got the right of "direct, free, general and secret" vote at all levels of the Soviet system including the Supreme Soviet of the USSR and the National Soviet. The first "free and secret" election took place at the end of 1937 after the intensive campaign to prevent public dissatisfaction and after the arrests of the adherents of dangerous opinions (local popes, former kulaks or "children of kulaks"). Most of the arrested including the majority of priests were shot after secret trials of local *troikas*. Shortly before the election campaign, Stalin changed his mind and ordered that only one candidate would be on the ballots to avoid his best policy executors to be crossed out by the voters. The election, thus, served as an additional control tool like the closed assemblies: a refusal to vote was considered as voting against the Soviet state, i. e. as a crime (Merl, 2011). Such a "voting without any choice" played an important role in the control over the local officials. Everybody had to take part in the election; those who did not show up were registered and had to explain their absence. The participation in the election was a criterion for estimating the local officials' work. The share of non-voters that exceeded the average number (about one percent) was a proof of the local officials' bad work (Merl, 2011). The Soviet elections were to demonstrate primarily the people's unanimous trust to the regime; voting was considered a performative act of trust to the regime, a sign of its support and subordination.

The final important rupture hit the *kolkhoz* peasants on the eve of the German invasion, and was especially brutal in the Western part of the Soviet Union, where a lot of *kolkhozniki* still lived on *khutors*, i. e. single farmsteads in the mid of previously arable land. They lived outside of the central village of the *kolkhoz* and, thus, somewhat out of control of the local administration. In 1932 the size of private plots was reduced according to the *kolkhoz* statute; and the herd had to be reduced to the allowed limits, while the exceeding number of cattle was to be confiscated (Merl, 1990a: 295–319; 2015). The attack on private plots and *kolkhozniki* living at single farmsteads significantly reduced the possibilities of their survival. As the rural households were reluctant to execute the central orders the new campaign of mass violence started. It covered about 3 million rural inhabitants at the pre-1939 Western border, which was later occupied by the Germans. The *khutor* buildings were removed to the central settlements by force. While *khutors* were destroyed with the help of local activists of rural soviets, little or no material support was provided to settle at the new place. A lot of peasants in the Western administrative regions in 1939–1940 suffered violence and the threats to survival (Merl, 1990a: 191–197; 2015).

Stalin's expectations from the local rural officials

To estimate whether or not the Soviet rural administration fulfilled its functions, we have to identify the tasks the Stalin's rule wanted it to solve and the extent to which such requirements could be met. One of the requirements was to ensure a political communication that would create the faith in the legitimacy of the political rule. Thus, to keep up the myth of Stalin as a good tsar, the local rural officials were to be scapegoats, and to take full responsibility for all shortcomings of the official policy. Stalin needed scapegoats at the grass-root level to put his paternalist rule convincingly on stage. He used the fact that the majority of rural people believed that rural officials were incompetent and corrupt. Therefore, the latter were ideal scapegoats to be blamed if *kolkhozniki* refused to accept the self-taxation, to "voluntarily" join a *kolkhoz*, or to support the collectivization. Actually, nobody, not even the well-trained officials could have fulfilled this task. The orders of the Party leadership could be executed only by brute force. The rural officials had no other way than to use violence and to intimidate peasants by arrests, arbitrary expropriation of farm implements, and deportation of *kulak* families. Some officials tried to make impossible promises such as providing tractors after creating the *kolkhoz*, which only reinforced the economic chaos and destruction of agricultural means of production (Merl, 1985b).

Although the use of violence contradicted the slogans of the regime, the plenipotentiaries 'from above' forced the local officials to use brutal terror. In 1928 in Western Siberia Stalin showed an example of intimidation, pressure and violence against peasants, and of removing local officials and blaming them as saboteurs if they did not cope with such tasks. Although the local officials fulfilled the tasks Stalin blamed them for not convincing peasants "to do voluntarily" what the regime wanted them to do (Kindler, 2014: 113–117). Blaming the local officials after the end of campaigns to implement the hurting central decrees, although the officials did exactly what they were ordered to do, became a routine. One of the most brilliant examples is Stalin's article in "*Pravda*" on "dizziness from success" (2 March 1930), in which he accused the local officials of doing what he personally ordered them to do—of forcing peasants to join *kolkhozes* under the collectivization campaign in winter of 1929–1930. At the peak of the famine in 1933, Stalin blamed the local officials and activists in Ukraine for wrongdoings (Merl, 1990b: 50–53). All responsibility for violence and terror was put on the local officials, who were accused of distorting the campaign slogans that supposed convincing peasants to voluntarily join the *kolkhoz* or give the state their last reserves of grain.

The archival data does not allow doubts that rural officials were punished or repressed not only if they did not cope with the state tasks: even if they did and whether or not they used force, they became scapegoats for that was the regime's symbolic game. Many of-

ficials were removed from office if they did not cope with the tasks, but even if they did after a while they were sent to another position to do about the same job as before. The main idea of blaming the local officials was to create confusion about Stalin's aims and responsibility (Merl, 2015). About a third of the elected rural officials were removed every year from office mostly during the state campaigns (Merl, 1990b: 90–120, 234–249). Thus, the state succeeded in killing two birds with one stone: the local people were satisfied that the state punished unpopular officials, while the state was glad not to lose effective officials capable of using force.

The local officials had to perform two functions: (1) to use force against the rural population to fulfil the state tasks, and (2) after the campaigns to serve as scapegoats to take the responsibility and to divert attention from those at the head of the Party who gave orders. This game was repeated under the Stalin's rule again and again, and it is hard to estimate to what extent the people truly believed in its justice for they obviously were confused about the responsibility; however, many were willing to believe that the local officials were responsible. At the peak of the state campaigns, some wrote letters to Stalin accusing local officials. By punishing some of his loyal officials, Stalin contributed to the credibility of the myth of being a wise father of the people. Under the campaigns the force was always used, while the scapegoats were chosen only after the end of the campaigns.

In 1930, the rules of the game still caused some misunderstandings and demoralization among officials, who did not understand why they were blamed for wrongdoings if they had only executed the orders 'from above'. However, soon the rural officials got used to the rules, accepted their double functions, and realized that real repressions against them in general were the result of not using force. The rural officials had their compensation as local rulers between the campaigns, that is why despite all the risks, there are always were volunteers for the local administration positions.

The discrepancy between the order to "convince" and the real pressure to use force against peasants is a typical example of "regressive learning" in the political communication under a dictatorship (Langenohl, 2010). People learnt to praise the regime while breaking the official rules at the same time. Words and slogans lost their meaning for guiding actions, and people no longer paid attention to them. Another essential element of the regime were contradictory orders of the Party that could not be executed at the same time. The officials had to know which orders to fulfil under different circumstances to avoid repression, and which to neglect because their execution would entail problems. The contradiction between slogans and actions became normal under Stalin. Officials and rank and file repeated the slogans at closed assemblies, but acted differently. For example: the rules of the "kolkhoz system" in the countryside from 1932 to 1949/1953 did not contribute to the growth of agricultural production

although the officials spoke of revolutionary rural production forces. The state wanted to ensure a high grain harvest and at the same time to neutralize the peasantry (Merl, 1998). As obligatory deliveries of grain were bound to the sown area, the local authorities controlled the size of the latter: although the Party required introducing scientific crop rotations, the local officials did not allow it for it would reduce the size of the sown area (Merl, 2015).

The people lost independent assemblies to discuss their needs and wanted compensation. A new vertical channel of communication between the people and the regime won overwhelming importance for keeping up the Stalin's rule. As Russian peasants had a habit of writing petitions to the ruler, the regime took advantage of this tradition. People were encouraged to write letters including complaints, which opened the way to "bargain" personal dissatisfaction: the ruler had to react to the letters by sending orders or commissions to check the local situation, or by providing the needed help such as firewood to the elderly. Peasant letters could be addressed to the *oblast* (or *kraj*) Party Committee, most of them were send directly to Stalin or other members of the Party leadership. Each Party leader in Moscow had a secretariat to deal with thousands of letters per year. In most cases the situation was checked and an answer was given (State Archive of the Russian Federation...). People considered such a communication as a privilege and accepted it as a part of the paternalist rule. Both sides involved kept the content of the letters confident so the regime was not obliged to discuss openly its shortcomings. For the regime, the most important function of such letters was preventing local protests. The letters helped the ruler to react timely so as not to let the dissatisfaction to reach a critical level (Merl, 2012: 82–100; Fainsod, 1958: 378–408). They became an additional means of control over rural officials that put limits to their arbitrariness. Any unusual accumulation of letters against some officials would lead to the inspection 'from above' endangering the job holders (Kozlov, 1997; Merl, 2012: 93–94). Thus, the letters fulfilled an important valve function in preventing local rebellions and in putting all responsibility for shortcomings on local officials. The letter writing itself meant acceptance of Stalin's position as a wise ruler.

Letters to Stalin and other Party bosses reveal the efficiency of letter writing for putting all responsibility on the local officials. Stalin enjoyed playing the role of an arbiter, i. e. the Party leadership as if learnt only from these letters about the wrongdoing of the local officials. The letter writing underlines that the regime took advantage of the widespread paternalist understanding of the rule. People were allowed to address personally "Father" Stalin and other Soviet leaders. People trusted not to institutions, but to personal relations between the heads of institutions. Stalin as a "just tsar" could be addressed in letters personally.

Besides playing a role of scapegoats, the rural officials had to pro-

vide the state with the agricultural products. As the state orders on deliveries of agricultural products and on taxes did not take into account the local need for survival, every year a big state campaign headed by plenipotentiaries was organized to fulfil the procurement plan. The pressure on *kolkhozes* and *kolkhozniki* did not decrease by 1941. Every year the local officials had to "find" new *kulaks* for expropriation and "enemies of the people" to intimidate the rest of *kolkhozniki* and to make them fulfil their obligations to the state. The officials had to put merciless pressure on those not coping with their obligations. If they failed to do so, they were to be removed from office by the *rajon* authorities (Dobronozenko, 2008). As *kolkhozes* were interested to reduce the sown area, "taking grain" turned into a permanent fight, and local officials were to keep up a war-like situation in the countryside to meet the state requirements. The "kolkhoz system" did provide the state a huge share of the harvest, but it did not guarantee the *kolkhoz* enough grain for its own and *kolkhozniki's* needs.

In order to put an additional pressure on *kolkhozes* to get as much grain as possible from the fields, the official harvest name from 1933 onwards was changed to the "biological harvest", i. e. the amount of grain ripening before the start of harvesting, which was 20 to 30 percent above the "bunker" harvest, the previous concept defining only the grain at the kolkhoz or state barns. As losses during the harvest were unavoidable, a significant part of the "biological harvest" was a fiction. However this not existing part of the harvest was considered to be left for kolkhozes' own disposal. At the end of the year, when the "distribution of the profit" was to take place, in fact nothing was left for distribution (Merl, 2015).

Constant intimidation was a part of the production campaigns, of sowing, harvesting or keeping the cattle in winter. The majority of rural population lost incentives to produce and especially to increase productivity in kolkhozes. State procurement prices for grain paid only about 20 percent of the production costs. To prevent peasant sabotage the officials put merciless pressure in the form of "socialist competition" to achieve the state production goals. During the campaigns peasants' complaints were neglected not to risk achieving economic goals. However, too much pressure would discriminate a local official by the letters reporting of his wrongdoings to the higher bodies.

Finally, the local officials had to prevent peasant rebellions. If terror and repression were ubiquitous, the Stalin's regime should have caused rebellions and broken down. Therefore, the rural official's task was not only to use force and intimidation during the campaigns, but also to look away at other times allowing the *kolkhozniki* from time to time to betray the state (Merl, 2012: 101–109). As the corrupt practices were a means to ensure one's survival, nearly all everybody in the countryside use them to provide oneself with food or other needed goods. Stealing the so-called "socialist proper-

ty" was a basis of local survival up to the *rayon* level. The risk of such a corruption was calculable if one was cautious and kept a secret. While ordinary *kolkhozniki* stole from the fields for themselves as much as possible, the higher bodies used the *kolkhoz* assets for "gifts", bribes, and *blat* within their networks. "Stealing" also included not taking part in the *kolkhoz* work. The officials' corrupt practices included misusing the state property, which had strong roots in the pre-1930 rural tradition (Merl, 2008). It required some willingness of compromise, and "looking the other way" if people were doing something not officially permitted. "Stealing" from *kolkhoz* fields since August 1932 was to be punished severely; though nearly every *kolkhoznik* practiced it, very few people actually were shot or punished at all (Merl, 2012: 101–109).

It took the *kolkhozniki* a few years to understand the rules of the game. The situation in the early 1930s lacked any calculability due to the arbitrariness of the state terror. With the "kolkhoz system", the rural people regained the possibility to assess the risks by grasping the rules. As under serfdom and slavery, most *kolkhozniki* were forced to work in the fields. The brigadier had to be stern and punish those unwilling to work. After understanding the rules, the *kolkhozniki* in their fight for survival started to take advantage of them: participating in *kolkhoz* work until the threshing meant that the labour days were counted for "pre-payment", and labour days after that were worthless for nothing was left for distribution at the end of the year; therefore many *kolkhozniki* stopped working in *kolkhoz* after getting the "pre-payment". From the mid-1930s, it became difficult to force the *kolkhozniki* to work in the fields in autumn, when they maximized their labour input in private plots or paid work outside the *kolkhozes*(Merl, 2015; Merl, 1990a: 281–319, 371–391).

The *kolkhoz* until the 1950s was often based on the previous village communes, i. e. its members knew each other more or less, and the general situation was not anonymous. The village communes after 1861 did not lose completely the possibility to protect peasants from the state arbitrariness, and small *kolkhozes* partly fulfilled this function. According to the Russian tradition, an elected person has to represent the will of the voters, but at the same time to perform official functions of the state administration.These two duties were sometimes contradictory, and the local officials had put pressure on the local people. However, under the state campaigns, the *kolkhozniki* could use the kolkhoz assemblies in collective action to blame officials of not fulfilling their obligations towards the state as compensation. This is evident from the strong opposition of kolkhoz members to merging with another kolkhoz for it would bring "outsiders" in the established local community. Before, the *kolkhoz* kept to some extent ambigious character: It was the means of state pressure over the *kolkhozniki*, but *kolkhoz* members could use it sometimes to defend their interests against the state.

The Soviet political system consisted of three main elements with often conflicting tasks: the Party, the state, and the state security. All three had their own apparatus on all levels of the administrative hierarchy with the *rayon* as the lowest level. The First Secretaries of the Party hold real power, controlled the state apparatus, and were responsible for everything in their sphere of influence. The First Secretary of the Party *raikom* was the rural boss responsible for all rural soviets and *kolkhozes* on his territory. Under the campaigns, he had to execute the direct orders of the First Secretary of the *oblast* or *krai* Party Committee. Between the political and economic campaigns his power was nearly unlimited as long as he could avoid peasant written complains about his misuse of power (Fainsod, 1958; Merl, 1990b: 62–63).

The power structure within the Party was often based on networks connected with the nomenclature system. Leading Party officials were selected and recommended 'from above' and only formally elected 'from below'. Even if a candidate failed to be elected, the next one was still recommended 'from above'. The Party boss had the right to select the staff for key positions in the lower level of the hierarchy. All candidates for chairmen of rural soviets and *kolkhozes* were recommended by the *raikom* secretary. The most important criteria for the selection was not professional qualification but an ability to efficiently execute important orders 'from above' and personal loyalty. The use of personal networks was against the official rules of the Party but they ensured some protection from the arbitrary pressure 'from above'. The patron, *raikom* secretary, would normally protect "his" people—*kolkhoz* chairmen, heads of rural soviets, etc.

The Stalinist regime was based not only on the official orders 'from above', but rather on knowing which of them had to be executed and which could be neglected without risk. The best way to protect oneself was to report successes and to fulfil one's functions without major and visible failures. False reporting (higher figures of fulfilment/production than real accomplishments) was one of the means to be praised 'from above' and avoid any forms of repressive control. False reporting was more secure than telling the truth about failures for the latter inevitable lead to inspections with usually fatal consequences for the local officials (Berliner, 1957). Under the campaigns the success had to be celebrated and a disclosure of sabotage or failure had to be avoided.

The second element of the administrative system was the state and its executive apparatus. Although from 1937 through the direct elections the soviets were subordinated to the Party apparatus, the chairmen were recommended only 'from above'. The executive administration was under the direct control of the Party committee. The Party controlled all important administrative and economic structures to

ensure a direct control over the state apparatus. The central body of control was the Commissariat of peasants and workers (the Party had an additional Control Commission over the Party apparatus). From 1938, the collection of taxes was transferred to the special apparatus within the *Rayon* Executive Committee (RIK). Thus, the head of the rural soviet lost the possibility for arbitrary fining of peasants (Merl, 1990a: 247–256; Merl, 1990b: 248–249).

In the countryside, there were two types of officials by legal status. Only workers and employees have all civil rights, were paid for the job and included in the social security system. From 1932, *kolkhozniki* had a lower legal status and were paid in "labour units" instead of getting a salary. Withholding of passports from *kolkhozniki* deprived them the right of free mobility within the country. Most of kolkhozes and rural soviets chairmen until the end of the 1930s had the limited legal status of a *kolkhoznik*. They were be paid and included in the social security system only if their status was 'worker' or 'employee'. As a kolkhoznik they would were paid in "labour units" with undefined money equivalent. The chairman of the rural soviet, however, regardless his legal status, got a salary depending on the size of regional population. The uncertainty of payment for the kolkhoz chairman determined the problem of finding qualified persons for the position. By the end of the 1930s, he at least received a fixed value of the "labour units" just like a tractor driver. Thus, a minimum of "labour units" was paid to about 240,000 kolkhoz chairmen, and their fixed salary was similar to chairmen of rural soviets (Merl, 1990a: 391–393; Merl, 1990b: 116–121; Merl, 2015).

The total number of rural soviets' chairmen was about 70,000 at the beginning of the 1930s, 63,000—in the second half of the 1930s. In the 1931 elections and at the end of 1934 for each rural soviet about 20 persons were elected, i. e. 1.3 million in total, among them 19 percent were communists. About three of four chairmen were communists, every second in 1934 still had a status of the *kolkhoznik*. The share of employees increased between 1931 and 1934 from 7 to 30 percent, the share of workers stayed almost the same—14 percent in 1934 and 15 percent in 1931. Due to the high turnover rate of about 30 percent a year, less than half of the elected in 1934 were still in office by mid-1936 (Merl, 1990b: 234–249). The reasons for removal were, for instance, drunkenness, and personal enrichment from the confiscated property. In general, the illegal "self-organization" and exchange of food products seems to have been widespread among local officials misusing their official position to access the food.

The institutional and personal control through networks was more important than the Party membership. Admission to the Party was limited in 1933 with the start of the "purging" campaigns and only in 1937–1938 started to reopen. About two thirds of the Party members of 1932 were dismissed under the campaigns of changing the party tickets between 1933 and 1937 (Merl, 1990b: 49–60). Thus, only a

shrinking minority of *kolkhoz* chairmen were Party members in the 1930s. Chairmen of rural soviets in general had to be Party members as every official in the Party committees and key officials in the state apparatus. From the end of the 1930s, the Party membership became an additional means of control over officials in the leading positions. While in the early 1930s joining the Party could be a start of a career, in the late 1930s those who had proved to be capable of fulfilling the tasks 'from above' were asked to become a member of the Party, which positively influenced a person's further upward mobility and contributed to the additional control of the Party.

In destroying the still effective patriarchal system of the village the Soviet regime was successful in organizing its active supporters from among the underprivileged such as the youth lacking recognition within the traditional peasant commune mainly young women. They became team leaders, *stakhanovite* milk maids or tractor drivers (Merl, 1990b: 182–188, 207–233), managed to be recognized at least by the regime and to be awarded prizes and privileges (invitations to *stakhanovite* meetings in *oblast'* centre or even in Moscow). Besides these activists of production there were activists of political campaigns and village soviets' commissions.

The third apparatus of the state repression was the state security under the Commissariat of the Interior (NKVD) from 1934 (Fainsod, 1985: 153–172). It functioned as an independent source of information and means of control even over the Party and the state apparatus. Formally being under the control or in connection with the *oblast'* Party Secretary, the state security gathered information even about it. The state security was used as an instrument of power by the commissars of the interior (by Jagoda, Ezhov, and from 1938 by Beria) and was under the personal control of Stalin; partly it was used by the Party committees. The state security had its own informants (*seksoty*) in *kolkhozes* effectively hindering any sort of organisation 'from below': all possible ringleaders were arrested and shot before they tried to organize resistance or sabotage. During the great terror, the intimidation in the form of arrests became widespread and included denunciations on the basis of information about "dangerous" people 'from below'. The *kolkhozniki* were aware of the *seksoty* and, therefore, were extremely careful about their social contacts, especially about those they drunk together (Harvard Interview B328).

Besides the state apparatus, there were also economic agencies: while state farms were under the control of Republican commissariats, the *kolkhozes* were under the control of *rayon* administration and of machine-tractor-stations. The executive agricultural organisation at the *rayon* level consisted of agronomists, land offices and procurement organisations. To understand how this administration worked, it is necessary to consider the state campaigns, for instance, "socialist competition" and awarding its winners were normal procedures. Every economic action in the countryside was under the party's con-

trol—preparation for the spring sowing campaign (collection of seeds, preparation of rural machinery, sowing campaign itself), preparation for the harvest, harvesting and the top-priority campaign of delivering the harvest to the state. During every campaign, the officials had to report every 5 or 10 days, and the percentages of plan fulfilling were announced in the local and central media. The campaign for winter sowing and fallow ploughing overlapped with the procurement campaigns. Besides there were political campaigns: Lenin's birthday, the soviets' elections, awarding ceremonies for the winners of the "socialist competition", 8th March, 1st of May, October Revolution Day and so on. As Karen Petrone (2000) puts it, the campaigns followed the old rural schemata of long times of fasting and then celebrating in abundance.

The *kolkhoz* chairmen selected "their" people for administrative positions: only men for the more attractive jobs as heads of departments and brigadiers; women could be accountants and team leaders in growing industrial crops (as sugar beets). While the yearly turnover rates of *kolkhoz* chairmen were up to 30 percent under normal conditions (Merl, 1990b: 73–121), this did not mean that 30 percent were repressed every year. A kolkhoz chairman had little opportunity to work successfully, and a removal from office was his normal fate. If he coped with his tasks in general, he had (provided that he was a member of the limited cadre reserve of the Party boss) good chances to be sent to another kolkhoz or to another position at the same administrative level after the removal. There are models of a kolkhoz chairman career: (1) was promoted, did not cope with the tasks, was removed and lost the position, sometimes was declared a scapegoat and repressed; (2) coped with the job as a successful manager and repressor, was removed from office as a scapegoat, but in fact was transferred to another position at the same level of hierarchy and stayed in the local cadre reserve.

Certainly, the village communes before the collectivisation were not places of harmony for conflicts between families were widespread. This allowed the Party to find rural activists willing to execute its orders almost in every kolkhoz (Vasylyev, 2014; Kindler, 2014; Merl, 1990b: 207–233). Interviews from the Harvard Refugee Project (B124, 285) also prove the lack of trust among neighbours: conflicts between families sometimes resulted in denunciation letters against each other. The relations of rural people were also shaped by the "moral economy", i. e. their own understanding of what was legal or illegal including different forms of protest. The legitimacy of *buntovat'* presupposed the violation of their moral rights. For relief and restoration of the rights they could address a higher official or Stalin in letters of complaint or denunciation, or offend a chairman at the *kolkhoz* assembly.

The Soviet rural administration was effective in putting the state pressure on peasants, in keeping them in *kolkhozes* and in preventing peasant rebels against the regime. The rural administration did exactly what the state demanded. The rural officials did their job effectively as evidenced by the high figures of grain, milk, meat and other agricultural products supplied to the state, although these goods were in very short supply in the village and the producers were starving. The officials managed to collect taxes from the rural population, although their money income was almost zero. What is often taken as a proof of the "rural undergovernment" is nothing but the rules of the game: rural officials were blamed for incompetency and wrongdoing because that was a means of pursuing the policy of merciless use of violence against the rural population. There was no other way for the regime to exploit the *kolkhozniki* who were not paid for the work in the *kolkhoz*.

The agricultural production did not grow not because of failures or shortcomings of the local administration, but rather due to the contradictory orders 'from above'. Without paying the *kolkhozniki* for their work, there was no stimulus to increase agricultural production. The officials and ordinary people tried to minimize the risk to fall victim of the state repressions. As the risk to be shot was significantly higher if grain was not supplied, the officials did not pay attention to the agrotechnical orders that contradicted the task of grain supplies. The scientific crop rotation would have increased yields, but the reduction of acreage would have reduced the grain supplies.

The rural population suffered worse exploitation than the slaves, but understood that open resistance would lead only to arrests and executions. Therefore, they took advantage of the communication channels offered by the regime: some wrote letters to Stalin to tell about miseries and to denunciate local officials responsible for them; some closed assemblies accused unpopular kolkhoz chairmen of embezzling agricultural products, and, thus, helped the state to find among its officials the best scapegoats as if responsible for the people's miseries; most peasant used corrupt practices and kept silence about them (Merl, 2015). The rural population accepted the Stalin's paternalist rule to a certain extent and participated in the game of blaming the local officials for all their miseries. It would hardly have been possible to transfer such a system of rule to the German occupational policy.

To what extent this rural administration was bound to the specific needs of Stalin's dictatorial rule became evident, when the Germans tried to built up there rural administration after occupation. For this they had no alternative to using the available local people, as Germans were not available. From the beginning, the German advisors,

i.e. agricultural experts such as Otto Schiller and those responsible for the occupation, could not agree on the agricultural policy. While the experts favoured the direct privatization of agriculture, the others insisted on postponing the privatization and considered *kolkhozes* the best means of getting agricultural products from peasants (Hoover Institution...; Berkhoff, 2004: 116-120; Bundesarchiv, Fond R58). The Germans obviously relied on the official descriptions of the regime (*kolkhoz* system and rural administration) and believed that Stalin's *kolkhozes* strictly and ruthlessly controlled the peasants. The Germans trusted in official institutions while the Russians rather in personal relations. The Germans did not expect that every year taking grain and collecting taxes would need a new fight with *kolkhozniki* using crude methods of intimidation. They could not anticipate to what extent the "kolkhoz system" was based on the corrupt practices of stealing from *kolkhozes* and on false reporting, and that all *kolkhozniki* could use the rules of the game in their own interests including deceiving the state in response to the strong terror (Berkhoff, 2004: 114-140; Al'tmann, 2008; Pennar, 1962). The Soviet Union had "voluntarily" supplied grain to Germany in 1939-1941 according to the Hitler-Stalin pact; but under the occupational regime, the Germans did not succeed in taking the same amounts of grain. Without an effective system of control, the occupational regime started arbitrary mass repressions in response to not having its orders executed, which only strengthened the obstruction and resistance of the local people. As a result the agricultural supplies shrank and corrupt practices strongly increased. As Karen Berkhoff (2004: 54–58, 305–313) argues, the German occupation lacked paternalist patterns, which were the basis of the Stalin's rule, which turned the peasants against it.

The German *Landwirte* were unable to complete the task of taking agricultural products for Germany from the people following their own aims and skilful in corrupt practices. The rural population was better off compared to the Soviet rule in terms of food left in the countryside though the situation varied across the regions. The German controllers could not become a part of the local networks. The old terms they used—"elders" and *volost'*—did not mean the return to the pre-revolutionary conditions. These "officials" traditionally played on two fields serving both state and peasant interests, i.e. they rationally chose the behaviour that would protect them best from both the state repressions and peasants' vengeance. The Germans also could not cope with the huge amount of denunciations, most of which either were false or aimed to get rid of personal or political enemies. And the German killed many of those willing to cooperate with them as "red partisans" (Berkhoff, 2004: 54–58, 114–140)

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Формы местного управления в советской деревне накануне Великой Отечественной войны: критерии эффективности и коммуникативные практики предотвращения крестьянских бунтов

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Когда речь заходит о формах местного управления в советской деревне, в исторических исследованиях наблюдается поразительно однородная картина, получившая название «сельское недоуправление». В статье автор ставит под сомнение подобную точку зрения и показывает, что она была порождена официальным дискурсом, т. е. позицией И. В. Сталина в 1930-е годы. Автор полагает, что, наоборот, сельская администрация выполняла ровно те задачи, которые перед ней ставило государство, и ее очевидная управленческая несостоятельность была продуманной частью сталинской стратегии. Для оценки функций советской сельской администрации накануне немецкой оккупации автор рассматривает принципиальные изменения в модели сельского управления, которые произошли в 1930-е годы в ходе коллективизации, а также реальные, а не провозглашаемые цели сталинского режима. Местные сельские администрации отнюдь не были призваны решать только бюрократические задачи, они играли важнейшую экономическую и политическую роль в обеспечении стабильности государственной диктатуры. Для понимания причин эффективности сельских администраций в этой роли автор исследует политические приоритеты режима, отмечая, что экономическая неэффективность и злоупотребления властью на местном уровне были неизбежным порождением продуманной системы поддержания стабильности режима. Что касается немецкой оккупации, то главный вопрос здесь состоит в том, собиралась ли немецкая система управления сохранить прежние функции местных сельских администраций. Статья начинается с исторического обзора основных проблем, с которыми сталкивались сельские администрации с середины 1920-х годов и до немецкой оккупации в 1941 году. Затем автор переходит к рассмотрению реальных задач, которые сталинский режим ставил перед местным уровнем управления в деревнях. Далее в статье обозначены основы сельского управления во второй половине 1930-х годов, чтобы показать пересечение интересов партии, государства и системы госбезопасности в деревне. В заключение автор отмечает проблемы немецкой оккупации, порожденные особенностями созданной сталинским режимом модели местного сельского управления.

Ключевые слова: местная администрация, советская деревня, некомпетентность, «сельское недоуправление», немецкая оккупация, сталинская диктатура, политические и экономические задачи, эффективность

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