

Document 4.26 Stalin and the Grain Crisis

The NEP had periodically suffered from food shortages in the cities. Grain collection depended on the sensitive management of market forces, above all a pricing policy for grain that would encourage peasants to market their surpluses. For Bolshevik enthusiasts, it appeared that the peasants were able to hold the revolution to ransom. The rupture of the *smychka* (alliance) between workers and peasants would both free the Bolsheviks of this incubus and provide resources for industrialisation. An additional advantage for Stalin in this policy was that it would embarrass his erstwhile allies, Bukharin and Rykov. The year 1928 saw ever more use of administrative measures to confiscate grain from the peasantry, representing an abandonment of NEP's use of the market.

The basic cause of our grain difficulties is that the increase in the production of grain for the market is not keeping pace with the increase in the demand for grain. Industry is growing. The number of workers is growing. Towns are growing. And, finally, regions producing industrial crops (cotton, flax, sugar beet, etc.) are growing, creating a demand for grain. All this leads to a rapid increase in our requirements for grain, for marketable grain. But the production of grain for the market is increasing at a disastrously slow rate . . .

The reason is primarily and mainly the change in the structure of our agriculture brought about by the October revolution, the change from large-scale landlord and large-scale kulak farming, which provided the largest amount of marketed grain, to small and middle peasant farming, which provides the smallest proportion of marketed grain. The mere fact that before the war there were 15–16 million individual peasant farms, whereas at present there are 24–5 million peasant farms, reveals that now the basis of our agriculture is essentially small peasant farming, which provides a minimum amount of grain for the market . . .

What is the way out of this situation?

There are some who see the way out of this situation in a return to kulak farming, in the development and extension of kulak farming. These people dare not advocate a return to landlord farming, for they realise, evidently, that to talk of these things in our times is dangerous. All the more eagerly, therefore, they urge the utmost development of kulak farming in the interest of Soviet power. These people think that Soviet power can simultaneously rely on two opposed classes – the class of the kulaks, whose economic principle is the exploitation of the working class, and the class of the workers, whose economic principle is the abolition of all exploitation. A trick worthy of reactionaries. There is no need to prove that these reactionary 'plans' have nothing in common with the interests of the working class, with the principles of Marxism, with the tasks of Leninism . . .

What, then, is the way out of the situation?

- 1 The way out lies, above all, in the transition from small, backward and scattered peasant farms to amalgamated, large-scale socialised farms, equipped with machinery, armed with scientific knowledge and capable of producing the greatest quantity of grain for the market. The solution lies in the transition from individual peasant farming to collective, socialised farming . . .
- 2 The way out lies, second, in expanding and strengthening the old state farms, and in organising and developing new, large state farms . . .
- 3 Finally, the way out lies in systematically increasing the yield of the small and middle individual-peasant farms. We cannot and should not lend any support to the individual large kulak farms. But we can and should assist the individual small- and middle-peasant farms, helping them to increase their crop yields and drawing them into co-operative organisations . . .

Thus, if all these tasks are fulfilled, the state can in three or four years have at its disposal 250–300 million additional poods [4.1–4.9 million tonnes] of marketable grain, more or less enough to enable us to give us freedom of action within the country as well as abroad.

Source: Stalin, 'On the Grain Front', Talk to Students of the Institute of Red Professors, the Communist Academy and the Sverdlov University, 28 May 1928, *Voprosy Leninizma*, pp. 386–7, 388, 390–1, 393, 394.

Document 4.27 Bukharin Warns against Stalin

The Fifteenth Party Congress adopted plans for increasing the tempo of industrialisation, and taken together with Stalin's shift towards a more punitive approach towards the peasants, Bukharin, Rykov and others were increasingly alarmed. They formed what their opponents later called the 'Right Deviation'. Bukharin sought a rapprochement with his erstwhile opponents in the left opposition. Visiting Kamenev on 11 July 1928, Bukharin poured out his fears about Stalin.

Kamenev: Is the struggle really serious?

Bukharin: That's precisely what I wanted to talk about. We feel that Stalin's line is disastrous for the whole revolution. We could be overthrown on account of it. *The disagreements between us and Stalin are many times more serious than the disagreements which we used to have with you.* Rykov, Tomsky and I are unanimous in formulating the situation thus: 'It would be much better if Zinoviev and Kamenev were in the Politburo instead of Stalin.' I spoke with Rykov and Tomsky about this quite frankly. I have not spoken with Stalin for several weeks. He is an unprincipled intriguer, who subordinates everything to the preservation of his own power. He changes his theory according to whom he needs to get rid of. In the 'seven' [the leadership group], our arguments with him reached the point of saying, 'false,'

'you lie', etc. Now he has made concessions, so that he can cut our throats. We understand this, but he manoeuvres so as to make us appear to be the sectarians... This is the line which he pronounced at the plenum: (1) Capitalism developed through colonies, or loans, or the exploitation of the workers. We have no colonies, we can get no loans, therefore our basis is tribute from the peasantry. You understand that this is just what Preobrazhensky's theory is; (2) The more socialism grows, the greater will be the resistance [to it]... This is idiotic illiteracy; (3) Since tribute is necessary and resistance will grow, we need firm leadership. Self-criticism should not apply to the leadership, but only to those who carry out orders. Self-criticism is in fact aimed at Tomsky and Uglanov [the rightist secretary of the Moscow Party Organisation]. As a result we are getting a police regime. This is not a 'cuckoo' matter, but will really decide the fate of the revolution. With this theory everything can be lost...

The Petersburg [Leningrad] people are in general with us, but they got scared when the discussion moved on to the possibility of removing Stalin... Our potential forces are vast, but: (1) the middle-ranking Central Committee member still does not understand the depth of the disagreements; and (2) there is a terrible fear of a split. Therefore, when Stalin conceded on the extraordinary measures, he made it difficult for us to attack him. We don't want to appear as sectarians, for then they would slaughter us. But Tomsky in his latest speech showed clearly that Stalin is the sectarian.

Source: Notes by Kamenev, in Yu. G. Fel'tshtinskii, *Razgovory s Bukharinym* (Moscow, *Izd-vo gumanitarnoi literatury*, 1993), pp. 32, 33.

Document 4.28 Bukharin – Notes of an Economist

In addition to condemning Stalin personally, Bukharin denounced plans for accelerated industrialisation, calling for caution and equilibrium, in particular for a greater balance between consumer and investment spending. In his *Notes of an Economist* Bukharin insisted that sustained industrial growth could best be achieved within the framework of the NEP and with the balanced development of agriculture.

The growth of our economy and the undoubted growth of *socialism* is accompanied by distinctive 'crises'... To attain the most favourable possible march of social reproduction (the most crisis-free), and to attain the systematic growth of socialism, and, in consequence, to attain the most favourable possible situation for the proletariat in the relations of class forces in the country, it is necessary to achieve a coordination of the basic elements of the national economy, to 'balance' them, arrange them in such fashion that they best fulfil their respective functions, and actively influence the

development of economic life and the class struggle so as to attain the best possible balance or equilibrium...

In their simplicity, the ideologists of Trotskyism assume that the maximum annual pumping out of resources from the peasant economy into industry will assure the maximum tempo of the development of industry. But that is clearly not so. The greatest not temporary but continuous tempo can be attained by such a coordination in which industry develops on the foundations of a rapidly growing agricultural economy. It is then that industry attains its own record-breaking figures in its development...

What the Trotskyists fail to comprehend is that the development of industry is dependent on the development of agriculture.

Source: N. I. Bukharin, 'Zametki ekonomista', *Pravda*, 30 September 1928, in *Put' k sotsializmu* (Novosibirsk, *Nauka*, 1990), pp. 336–66.

Document 4.29 Nadezhda Mandelstam – 'Hope Abandoned'

Nadezhda Mandelstam was the companion and wife of the poet Osip Mandelstam, who was exiled and imprisoned following his denunciation of Stalin in the early 1930s. Following his death in 1938 Nadezhda survived, like so many others, by teaching in faraway provincial towns. In 1956 she was allowed to return to Moscow where she wrote two volumes of memoirs, *Hope against Hope* (a play on her first name, which means 'hope' in Russian), and *Hope Abandoned* about her and Osip's life together. It is both a powerful literary memoir and an important historical source, providing a movingly intelligent impression of the times. The incident described below helps put Lenin's letter on the events in Shui (Document 4.4) in perspective, while the extract ends with a powerful corrective to those who considered (and consider) NEP as some sort of golden age coming between the Civil War and Stalinist terror.

There were rumours about the famine on the Volga, and a letter about it from Patriarch Tikhon, who wanted to organize aid for the victims, was passed from hand to hand. The Muscovites flippantly dismissed it as a joke, saying that the new State did not need any help from priests. In Bogoslovski Street, not far from where we were living, there was a little church. I remember how once, stopping at the sight of a small crowd gathered outside, we were told that all church property was being confiscated. I do not know whether it was the same everywhere else, but here it was being done quite openly. No one tried to bar our way as we went inside. An elderly, dishevelled priest was trembling all over, large tears rolling down his cheeks, as the icons were stripped of their coverings and flung to the ground. The people doing all this were simultaneously carrying on loud anti-religious propaganda while old women wept, and the crowd jeered, hugely enjoying the spectacle. The