

Rural Adaptation in Russia

Edited by
Stephen K. Wegren

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Soviet Peasants and Collectivization, 1930–39: Resistance and Adaptation

MARK B. TAUGER

INTRODUCTION: ADAPTATION AND RESISTANCE

Collectivization was the most significant transformation of peasant agriculture in the Russian region in its entire history, certainly a much greater change than the limited decollectivization of the 1990s, the Stolypin reforms of the early twentieth century, or even the gradual imposition of serfdom in the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries. Scholars have described collectivization in dramatic terms: as a re-creation of serfdom, as harsh colonial exploitation, as the final stage of a 'Great Soviet (or Russian) Peasant War', and as genocide conducted to suppress Ukrainian nationalism [Lewin, 1985a: 178–88; Fitzpatrick, 1994: 128ff; Viola, 1996: 3, 14, 29, ff; Graziosi, 1996; Conquest, 1986; and *Commission on the Ukraine Famine*, 1988]. On the basis of these perspectives, this scholarship minimizes the extent to which peasants made any adaptation to the new system, and instead focuses on opposition, rebellion and resistance as indicative of peasants' responses to collectivization. In their view, peasants used methods ranging from open rebellion to covert actions to frustrate and undermine the collective farm system and to assert their autonomy within it [Scott, 1985].¹ Many if not most of these authors dismiss any other responses as

Associate Professor, Dept. of History, West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV 26506-6303; mark.tauger@mail.wvu.edu. I would like to thank the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX) and the Social Science Research Council for supporting this research, and Lynne Viola, Lars Lih and Stephen Wegren.

'accommodation' or 'acquiescence', and see any possibility of support for the system as unlikely and scarcely worthy of mention. I will refer to this perspective as 'the resistance interpretation' of peasant responses to collectivization.

Studies of resistance have brought much new information into scholarly discourse, and have altered some of our basic understandings of Soviet history in this period, revealing, as Lynn Viola put it, 'a semi-autonomous world of many layers, cultures, and languages of existence, experience, and survival that coexisted with' the Stalinist political system [Viola, 2002: 1]. These approaches have also established linkages with other fields in history and the social sciences. These scholars differ among themselves, however, in the ways they invoke this interpretation. Viola, who wrote one of the most important studies of peasant resistance, has noted in a recent work that resistance 'was only one part, likely a small part, in a wide continuum of societal responses to the Stalinist state that included accommodation, adaptation, acquiescence, apathy, internal emigration, opportunism, and support' [Viola, 2002: 1, 15 fn. 35, 43]. Some, on the other hand employ this approach in a reductionist manner; Graziosi even asserted that by the peak of the collectivization campaign in February 1930 'the villages had united, overcoming their initial divisions' in opposing collectivization [Graziosi, 1996: 52]. This type of focus on resistance ultimately results in a misleading and even inaccurate interpretation of peasant responses to collectivization. This article acknowledges that many peasants did resist collectivization, and examines certain aspects of the character and meaning of that resistance. It shows, however, on the basis of standard social scientific source criticism and new evidence, that resistance was not the most common response, and that more peasants adapted to the new system in ways that enabled it to function and solve crucial agricultural problems.

The resistance interpretation assumes that evidence of resistance, in archival documents, primarily reports from various branches of the OGPU (*Ob'edinnoe gosudarstvennoe politicheskoe upravlenie*, or Unified State Political Administration, the name for the Soviet secret police from 1923 to 1934), but also peasants' letters, memoir sources and certain scholarly works, was representative of peasants' attitudes. We know, of course, that few peasants joined collective farms in the 1920s, and that most peasants joined the farms only under the threats of taxation and dekulakization during the collectivization campaigns of the 1930s.² From a historiographical viewpoint, however, these sources appear less persuasive and more problematic. The OGPU, for example, had the explicit objective of exposing political threats. At the April 1929 Central Committee plenum, the North Caucasus *kraikom* secretary A.A. Andreev warned his colleagues against decision making on the basis of OGPU reports:

And then one must not study the political situation according to the GPU [officials often referred to the OGPU in this shorthand manner] reports. The GPU was formed to find and expose the very worst and most unfavourable in our country, and if we construct our policy only on the basis of GPU reports, we will always be in a state of panic, it is perfectly clear, our hair will always stand on end [Danilov et al., 2000: Vol.4, 403].

The key word in this quote is 'only': Andreev saw the OGPU reports not as false, but as misleading: they made one think that conditions were much worse than they actually were overall. The Russian scholar Sergei Zhuravlev, writing in the 1990s, made the same point: in his introduction to a recent document collection, he explained that the OGPU documents emphasized the negative events, and that the documents are not 'the whole story' [Viola, 1998: ix, xvi].

If Soviet officials and at least some post-Soviet Russian scholars agree that these documents provide an incomplete picture of rural conditions, then we must be very careful in generalizing from them. For example, many scholars in the resistance interpretation draw far-reaching conclusions about resistance from remarks by peasants overheard and reported by the OGPU. Yet one of these scholars, Sheila Fitzpatrick, asserted that peasants conventionally interpreted Soviet policies in the worst possible way [Fitzpatrick, 1994: 288, 291]. If so, such anecdotal citations of peasants' views become problematic. If a peasant standing in a group of peasants, for example, said he hated the *kolkhoz* (collective farm) and would refuse to sow, his statement might not reflect his actual intentions, let alone his actions. In addition, Fitzpatrick cited sources indicating that once peasants joined a *kolkhoz*, they came to identify with it and defended it against attacks by non-collectivized peasants [Fitzpatrick, 1994: 156ff]. If *kolkhozniki* (peasant members of a collective farm) developed such a sense of 'kolkhoz patriotism', which they remembered many years later, how representative or meaningful were the anecdotes of resistance, and how valid is scholarship based only on isolated reports of resistance? A pattern of 'kolkhoz patriotism' would imply a much greater degree of peasant adaptation to the system, and perhaps even of the system's accommodation to the peasants, than the resistance interpretation allows.

These problems are characteristic of social historical studies of developing societies, especially under authoritarian governments. Understaffed governments, large dispersed and oppressed rural populations, and a censored press make data gathering difficult and subject to distortion, which makes it almost impossible to obtain evidence that is genuinely representative of overall conditions. Miles Fairburn, in his methodological study of social history,

identifies this as the fundamental problem of fragmentary and anecdotal sources: with certain exceptions there is no direct way to determine how representative this evidence is [Fairburn, 1999, chs.2-3]. Since OGPU evidence is mostly anecdotal and, as noted above, biased towards particular types of information, the resistance interpretation could easily be a fallacy of generalization from an unrepresentative sample, and this article will present evidence and arguments supporting such an evaluation [Fischer, 1970: ch.IV]. While this evidence provides us with considerable amounts and new categories of information about Soviet social history, it also has basic limitations.

This article approaches the issue of peasant adaptation to collectivization through a re-examination of the resistance interpretation. It begins by explaining why collectivization can be considered primarily a reform rather than an attack as the resistance interpretation assumes. It then considers peasant responses in two areas: the process of collectivization, specifically the rebellions during the early 1930 collectivization campaign, and peasant work in the *kolkhoz*, with particular attention to the 1931-33 famine. It then outlines an alternative interpretation of peasant adaptation to collectivization that provides a more complete and valid interpretation of peasants' responses to it during the 1930s and afterwards.

In this discussion I also use the OGPU sources, among others, for certain topics, but I present them on the basis of an awareness of the problem of generalizing from an unrepresentative sample. My argument in almost all cases is not with the sources themselves, but with the ways in which scholars have used them and the conclusions scholars have drawn from them. My main criticism against their use of these sources concerns not whether the source is true, but whether any generalization can be made validly from that source to any other people or places, in other words whether that source is really representative. In writing about resistance, scholars would naturally seek out evidence that demonstrates resistance, and would thus use a selection of sources biased towards resistance from a source base that was already biased in that direction, which inherently makes their sources unrepresentative. To demonstrate the limits of generalization from such a source base, I will examine crucial pieces of this evidence in detail, and also cite evidence from these sources showing that other responses took place. I also present more general evidence that contradicts the resistance interpretation on key points.

COLLECTIVIZATION AS A REFORM

Virtually all studies of collectivization, and even most works that simply discuss it, describe it as a means to exploit agriculture for industrialization,

usually referring to Evgenii Preobrazhenskii's concept of 'primitive socialist accumulation'. This conventional wisdom holds that the regime began collectivization in response to the 'grain crisis' of 1927-29, in which peasants allegedly withheld grain from markets mainly because of low prices and created a shortage in the towns despite a good harvest. The regime undertook 'extraordinary measures', requisitions, to obtain grain from the villages, and Stalin decided to impose collectivization because it would enable the government to obtain grain more easily and cheaply. The defeat of the Right Opposition of Bukharin and his associates, who opposed this policy, freed Stalin to implement this programme (see, among others, Erlich [1955]; Viola [1996: 20ff]; Lewin [1985c: 92-9]).

I will briefly discuss these points to show that they omit crucial aspects of the agricultural context of the 1920s and misrepresent the motivations of Soviet leaders in undertaking collectivization.³ This discussion is important because these two topics provide an important context for understanding peasants' responses.

This conventional interpretation omits the central agrarian context of famine. The Soviet regime came to power in part because of a famine in the towns, a crisis that Stalin described in 1917.⁴ As this famine worsened during 1918-20, the Bolsheviks, like their 'White' opponents, requisitioned food from peasants to feed soldiers and townspeople.⁵ The urban famine of the civil war merged into the even larger famine caused by two years of severe droughts in 1920-21, for the relief of which the USSR obtained more than 718,000 tons of food from the American Relief Administration, and other substantial imports [Fisher, 1927: 554; Khenkin, 1988]. Soon after recovery began, another serious drought struck in 1924, and the regime again imported food. The 1925 and 1926 harvests were better, but those of 1927-29 were worse, leading to a famine in Ukraine in 1928-29, for which the government organized relief, and to shortages and rationing in towns by 1929. The Soviet government had begun implementation of the first five-year plan in this period, which brought massive peasant migration into towns and industrial sites and exacerbated the food supply problems. This crisis again forced the regime to import food despite the needs of the five-year plan [Chase, 1990; Hoffman, 1994; Manning, 2001; Poliakov, 1958; and Tauger, 2001a].

Soviet leaders blamed the urban famines of 1917-21 on 'speculators', traders and peasants withholding food in order to obtain a higher price, who thereby created famine without a shortage. They viewed famines that developed from crop failures, however, as results of the backwardness of traditional peasant agriculture. Aleksei Rykov (head of the Soviet government administration in the 1920s and a Politburo member along with Stalin), writing on the 1924 famine, described Soviet agriculture as

'Asiatic'. Hrihorii Petrovskii (head of government in Soviet Ukraine), wrote in 1928 that unlike French or American farmers, who fed their countries and exported, Soviet peasants could not even reliably feed themselves. Stalin pointed out in 1926 that Soviet agriculture could not grow without industrial development to provide necessary equipment [Rykov, 1925: 1; Petrovskii, cited in *Tauger*, 2001a: 170; and *Stalin*, 1946–51: Vol.8, 117–19]. Both of these interpretations of famine have much in common with present-day views.⁶

It was in this context that the Soviet leadership decided to undertake collectivization. The initial step in that policy was a plan to establish several dozen *sovkhozy* (large mechanized state farms) in the eastern regions of the USSR, implemented in 1928 on Stalin's initiative but with much discussion by specialists and the Central Committee. These farms were set up on non-peasant land in the eastern regions of the USSR (Siberia, Kazakhstan, the Volga basin and other regions had vast areas of remote unpopulated arid lands), and thus these *sovkhozy* were not established to exploit the peasants. These *sovkhozy* were to produce 1.5 million tons of marketable grain. The plan, modelled explicitly on Thomas Campbell's totally mechanized farm of more than 60,000 acres in Montana, was implemented rapidly during 1928–29; by 1930, according to the confidential report by the agency in charge of these farms, these *sovkhozy* produced double the planned target amount of grain.⁷

Soviet leaders were certain that large-scale mechanized farming was more modern and productive than traditional peasant farming; the *sovkhoz* project showed that large-scale mechanized farms could work in the USSR.⁸ These leaders explicitly envisaged this programme as a test project for collectivization, and on this basis they spent tens of billions of roubles over the next decade on agriculture, a point that advocates of the extraction argument also usually overlook.⁹ Thus, while the leadership certainly had other objectives in collectivization, the *sovkhoz* project and the massive expenditures on agriculture during the 1930s and afterwards show that their primary goal was increasing food production by using what seemed to be the most modern and reliable methods available at the time.

The process of collectivization was disruptive and often violent, especially the cruel forced movement of population – dekulakization – employed to accomplish it.¹⁰ It was also by no means the only or necessarily the best means to achieve the regime's objectives. Still, this evidence and many more sources show that officials from Stalin on down who implemented it saw themselves as undertaking a modernizing programme and not as re-creating serfdom or committing genocide. Stalin in particular repeatedly denied that the regime sought to exploit peasants in collectivization.¹¹

PEASANT RESPONSES TO THE COLLECTIVIZATION PROCESS

This section focuses on the initial collectivization campaign of winter 1929-30, during which by far most of the protests occurred.¹² The resistance interpretation holds that peasants opposed collectivization from the start and fiercely resisted the collectivization campaign of 1929-30. Recent monographs and document collections about the USSR and specific regions have documented significant and widespread resistance during 1929-30 [Viola, 1996; Ivnitskii, 1994; McDonald, 2002; Danilov et al., 1999-2002; Viola et al., 1998; Vasil'ev and Viola, 1997]. The most important document is a long OGPU report from March 1931, which lists 13,754 peasant protests during 1930. The document specifies that the OGPU had data on the number of people involved in only some 10,000 of these events, and these data totalled approximately 2.5 million people. If we extrapolate on the basis that there were about one-third more protests than those for which data are available, we can estimate that approximately 3.3 million people may have been involved in all of these protests in total. The total may have been fewer because the data may have been lacking for some protests because they were simply too small to be worth an estimate. Nonetheless, clearly many more people protested against collectivization than against any agrarian policy since the civil war of 1918-21.

Yet the rural population of the USSR, according to the 1926 census, exceeded 120 million, of whom more than 70 million people, approximately 60 per cent, were over 15 years of age, and these numbers increased by 1930. The approximately 3.3 million protesters attested in the OGPU document thus comprised about five per cent of the adult rural population. Yet more than half of rural households had undergone some degree of collectivization, more than 60 million people in all and more than 35 million adults [Viola, 1996: 103; Danilov, 1988: 42, 47]. What happened to the other tens of millions of households already collectivized and the nearly 50 per cent outside the *kolkhozy*? To the extent that this document is correct, and even if it understates the total number of protesters, it indicates that the vast majority of Soviet peasants, some 95 per cent based on the data in this document, did *not* engage in protests against collectivization. In this way, in other words, this key document actually supports Viola's point that resistance was 'likely a small part' of a continuum of societal responses to Soviet policies.

A recent regional study confirms the rarity of protests. McDonald noted in her article on the Pitelin rebellion that there were 34 'mass disturbances' among the more than 6,350 villages in Riazan *okrug* (a territorial unit between province and district in size), involving some 175 villages, fewer than three per cent, and none of these were on the scale of the Pitelin case,

which also involved only a few villages [McDonald, 2002: 100]. Even in regions where protests were more widespread, with few exceptions protests involved a small minority of villages and even of peasants in many rebellious villages.¹³ McDonald argues that rebellions were rare because local officials often protected many villages from the harshest aspects of the collectivization campaign, by implementing policies incompletely or more moderately. There is, however, more to the story.

In order to evaluate this evidence of peasant protests, we need to ask: to what exactly were peasants responding in the protests? According to the March 1931 OGPU document, 68 per cent of protests from February to April 1930 were against collectivization (the remainder protested against the anti-religious campaign, grain procurements, food shortages and other problems), and by far most took place in March 1930. At least one-quarter of the disturbances in 1930 involved women only or mostly women; the others included women as a large minority. In anti-collectivization disturbances, protesters usually demanded and took back livestock, crops and equipment that local officials or emissaries had 'socialized' for the *kolkhoz*. In some cases protesters attacked officials, emissaries and 'activists' in the village, or destroyed property.

In these actions peasants responded first of all to officials' or emissaries' use of coercion in organizing a *kolkhoz*, ranging from threats of classifying peasants as 'enemies of Soviet power', to criminal violence, like rape or beatings, or arrests and confiscation of property and expulsion from the village. Peasants also responded, as noted, to anti-religious actions against local churches and clergy, and to rural food shortages and starvation.¹⁴

The abuses described above must have shocked and offended many peasants; the 'socialization' must have enraged many of them by threatening their survival, judging by the anger they expressed in reclaiming their property. Yet, according to data on 307 women's protests, all that were available to the writers of this OGPU document, 213 were resolved through 'explanation and persuasion', and in 57 of them officials gave in to the protesters. The authorities used force to settle only seven (two per cent) of these protests. Also, Soviet personnel in many rural regions were already rationing food to poorer peasants in 1929; officials may have offered to extend such aid to placate some protests.¹⁵

The overall data from the 1931 OGPU report show the same pattern. Of the 13,754 'disturbances' listed, only 150 of them, according to the document, were 'insurrections', involving military action by armed protesters. This was of course a large number of rebellions, and did represent serious resistance, but it was still only a small fraction of the total number of protests. The OGPU forcibly suppressed a larger share, but still a small minority, as can be seen in Table 1.¹⁶

TABLE 1
PEASANT DISORDER SUPPRESSED BY FORCE, FEBRUARY-MARCH 1930

Month	Total Disorders	Suppressed by Force	Percentage
February	1048	108	10.0
March	6528	807	12.4
April	1992	56	2.8

Source: Danilov *et al.* [1999-2002: Vol.2, 805].

In other words, it would be wrong to interpret this document as showing that peasants responded to collectivization with 13,754 *rebellions*. Considerably more than 90 per cent of these events were small scale and non-violent, and judging from the 307 cases of women's protests mentioned above, most were resolved peaceably and often in the peasants' favour.

The chronology of these protests also helps us to interpret them as well. By far most protests occurred in March, with many fewer in April and even fewer in February. This suggests that in February, peasants protested against the most flagrant abuses and the most impossible situations in the new or expanded collectives. The vast increase in protests in March and April, however, followed and must have reflected the publication on 2 March 1930 of Stalin's article 'Dizzy with Success', which condemned local officials for excesses and stated that collectives had to be formed voluntarily. Many sources show that peasants all over the USSR read this article, since it was published in virtually every newspaper, and because of it many of them upbraided local officials for forcing them to join *kolkhozy*, left the farms, and protested [Davies, 1980a: 270-72].

A historical perspective on peasant protests suggests an explanation for this sequence of events. In a recent article, the Russian historian Iurii Bokarev analysed peasant rebellions during 1826-49 and found no significant statistical correlation with external events like crop failures or oppressive policies [Bokarev, 1996]. He argued that peasants often tolerated abuse by lords and officials, but rebelled under three conditions: when authorities forced them to act in a manner inconsistent with their traditions; when they were forced to do something that they did not comprehend; or when some source indicated to them that a decree or other directive which they found offensive was false or contained a component in their interest that the authorities had tried to conceal from them. While rural Russia had changed significantly by 1930, much evidence shows that many, perhaps most peasants were still very traditional in their attitudes [Moon, 1999: 325-55]. On another level, however, the application of this analogy does not require us to assume peasant traditionalism as much as peasant subordination. Bokarev's arguments, and my use of them, are less cultural explanations

than precedent, examples of the kind of rational explanations that peasants could devise to understand their relations to outsiders. The situation in March and April 1930 resembled this precedent in basic ways.

First, collectivization was a programme most peasants did not understand. Resistance scholars have documented the bizarre rumours that spread through the villages in early 1930. Whatever else those rumours indicate about peasant *mentalité*, they clearly reflected a misunderstanding of collectivization. Even peasants' identification of collectivization as serfdom distorted the policy (as discussed above).¹⁷ Their confusion may explain why the vast majority of the protests, as the 1931 OGPU report indicated, were resolved by explanations and persuasion.

OGPU reports from the central Russian province of Riazan provide further examples of this pattern: when *kolkhoz* organizers conducted sufficient explanatory work, collectivization proceeded successfully. In one village, organizers forced the *kolkhoz* on the peasants and they resisted, while in a neighbouring one, organizers explained it at length and peasants joined. In another case women peasants came to the village meeting intending to disrupt it, but when they found out what a *kolkhoz* actually was, they joined [Viola et al., 1998: 134–5, 170]. Of course, we cannot know how representative such anecdotal reports were, especially because most sources were concerned with problems rather than favourable events. But these sources do document that some peasants responded with adaptation rather than resistance. And the 1931 OGPU report's evidence that most protests were not violent rebellions, and its implication that resistance was not the majority response of the peasants, both imply in turn that such adaptive responses must have been at least as widespread as resistance, if not more widespread.

Second, Stalin's article 'Dizzy with Success' was a classic example of a document that showed that officials' actions were wrong and that officials had kept information from the peasants that was in their interest, especially when officials tried to conceal the article from the peasants.¹⁸ Stalin wrote the article on the basis of secret reports on excesses and peasant protests during collectivization and appeals by regional officials, including Ukraine's Petrovskii (as mentioned above the head of government in Soviet Ukraine), to take measures to correct the situation. Thus peasant statements and actions were among the sources for Stalin's letter [Danilov et al., 1999–2002: Vol.2, 832–3]. The Politburo published Stalin's letter in the hope of averting even greater rebellions. Sergo Ordzhonikidze, a top Soviet official and associate of Stalin, wrote from Ukraine in late March, after the suppression of three rebellions, that without Stalin's article and the TsK (Communist Party Central Committee) decree that followed it, 'we would have had very intense complications in Ukraine' [Danilov et al., 1999–2002: Vol.2, 368–9; Vasil'ev and Viola, 1997: 233]. Since most of the protests took place *after* Stalin's

article was published, however, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that the article, because it matched peasant suspicions about concealed documents and because it was based partly on their demands, stimulated many of the protests in the same way that it led peasants to leave *kolkhozy*. It is also at least conceivable that if the article had not been published, some of the peasants who protested or left farms would have simply acquiesced in the *kolkhoz*.

Thus, while the protests of early 1930 were direct responses to officials' violence and abuses, they also seem to have reflected a traditional pattern of protest which the regime provoked by imposing a policy the peasants did not understand, and then by reversing itself and discrediting the actions of its officials, which fit peasants' expectations in a manner similar to the 'myth of the tsar' common among peasants in the past [Field, 1989: 1-30]. This in turn suggests that while peasants did not join *kolkhozy* voluntarily, their protests and departures from *kolkhozy* may often have been a reaction more to the way officials imposed the *kolkhoz* than to the *kolkhoz* itself.

Finally, what about the other 90 per cent of peasants who did not rebel? Some peasants did not reject collectivization and even supported it. In March 1929 peasants suggested at a meeting in Riazan *okrug* that the Soviet government should take all the land and have peasants work on it for wages, a conception not too distant from the future operation of *kolkhozy*. An OGPU report quoted one middle peasant in Shilovskii *raion* (district), Riazan *okrug*, in November 1929 to the effect that 'the grain procurements are hard, but necessary; we cannot live like we lived before, it is necessary to build factories and plants, and for that grain is necessary' [Viola et al., 1998: 14, 81]. In January 1930, during the campaign, some peasants said, 'the time has come to abandon our individual farm. It's about time to quit those, [we] need to transfer to collectivization.' Another document from January reported several cases of peasants spontaneously forming *kolkhozy* and consolidating their fields, which was a basic part of collectivization [Viola et al., 1998: 120, 121]. Bokarev's analysis summarized above suggests a reason why many peasants did not rebel against collectivization: the *kolkhoz* in certain ways, especially in its collectivism of land use and principles of egalitarian distribution, was not all that far from peasant traditions and values in corporate villages throughout the USSR. In any case, this example, and the evidence that the vast majority of peasants did not engage in protests against collectivization, clearly disproves Graziosi's assertion cited above that the villages were 'united' against collectivization.

A similar but more complex analysis can be made of the subsequent history of collectivization, as peasants left and rejoined *kolkhozy*, and of the meaning of the 'private plot' sector in the *kolkhozy* and *sovkhhozy*. For reasons

of space and clarity, however, I will move on to the second main area of the resistance argument, peasant work in the new system.

FARM LABOUR RESISTANCE AND FARM PRODUCTION

The second main component of the resistance interpretation concerns peasant passive resistance within the collective farm system, often viewed using the categories popularized by James Scott: 'everyday resistance', the 'weapons of the weak', and 'hidden transcripts' [Scott, 1985; Colburn, 1989; Scott, 1990]. Several scholars have discussed this resistance in general terms and in case studies using new archival materials. Their studies cite many anecdotal examples of peasants' threats of resistance, for example claiming they would not sow or harvest crops, and actions, for example theft, or refusing to work despite officials' demands, or when fields appeared ready for harvesting [e.g. Lewin, 1985b; Viola, 1996: 213; Fitzpatrick, 1994: 129; Penner, 1998: 27–68; and Tauger 1991a: chs.3–6].

Such anecdotal reports are problematic, as discussed above, because it is impossible to determine whether they are representative. One way to evaluate this evidence would be to compare the actual historical record with what we might expect to have happened had such resistance been the typical pattern, for example in agricultural production. Scott has argued that everyday acts of resistance 'multiplied many thousandfold ... may in the end make an utter shambles of the policies dreamed up by their would-be superiors in the capital' [Scott, 1985: 35–6]. As we have seen, the main goal of the Soviet regime in collectivization was increased crop production, and all of the resistance scholars claim that peasant resistance had disastrous effects on farm output [e.g. Viola, 1996: 211; Penner, 1998; Fitzpatrick, 1994: 70]. On some of the problems with these arguments, see Tauger [2001b: 26]. Yet grain harvests in the 1930s, in Table 2, which none of the resistance scholars discuss in any detail if at all, tell a different story.¹⁹

The statistics in Table 2 are based on the annual reports from more than 77,000 collective farms in 1932 (40 per cent), more than 154,000 in 1933 (60 per cent) and increasing to more than 235,000 (98 per cent) in 1937. Data for

TABLE 2
APPROXIMATE SOVIET GRAIN HARVESTS AND YIELDS, 1930–39 (MILLION
METRIC TONS)

Year	1930	1931	1932	1933	1934	1935	1936	1937	1938
Harvest	67	54	48	68	67	75	56	97	73

Sources: Tauger [1991b: 76, 84; 2001c: 41–2; 1991a: 289]; Davies *et al.* [1994: 286].

1930 and 1931 are drawn from other archival and published sources. The 1931–38 data definitely, and the 1930 data possibly, are genuine harvest data, the only data of that sort available for this period, recorded and calculated by the farm personnel themselves after completion of farm work. Official Soviet statistics published in Stalin's time were pre-harvest projections prepared by government officials who conducted highly questionable sample surveys, often called 'biological yields'. These were inflated in part under political pressure because they, and not the annual report data, served as the basis for calculation of the grain procurements and other in-kind payments that farms had to make to government agencies for later sale in towns and export. Post-Stalin scholars and Western scholars corrected the Stalin-era data downward 20 per cent or more on the basis of the archival annual report data.²⁰

The data in Table 2 show that Soviet grain harvests in the 1930s varied greatly from year to year. Based on the 'resistance interpretation', one might assume that the small harvests reflected peasant resistance, but how would one explain the large harvests of 1935 and 1937? Farmers' attitudes certainly affected their work: one archival source noted that when in April 1936 the regime allowed Cossacks to serve in the Soviet army, some Cossack-*kolkhozniki* exultantly farmed much more land than they ordinarily did [Danilov et al., 1999–2002: Vol.4, 318, 751].

Despite this and despite the anecdotal evidence that resistance scholars present, however, clear and substantial evidence shows that harvests varied in the 1930s primarily and mostly from environmental factors. Serious droughts reduced the harvests of 1931 and 1936 drastically (despite the efforts of those Cossacks) and those of 1934 and 1938 moderately, and a complex of natural disasters made the 1932 harvest the lowest of the decade and a primary cause of the famine of 1932–33.²¹

While peasant resistance did take place in the 1930s, it is extremely difficult to document its effect on production. In 1931, for example, peasants sowed a record area; although some was sown too late, under better weather conditions the crop would have been much larger. By the same token, the improved harvest of 1933, and the good harvests of 1935 and 1937, resulted first of all from favourable weather.²² Other scholars have emphasized the primary importance of environmental factors in the 1930s, showing for example that soil exhaustion, drought and other circumstances reduced harvests in 1931–32. A Russian scholar showed in a recent study of *kolkhozy* in the Urals that the most important influence on *kolkhoz* labour productivity was climate [Wheatcroft et al., 1998: 98ff; Tsyganov, 1991: 68, 69, 77].

To see how these harvest data contradict the resistance argument, consider Fitzpatrick's argument that in the early 1930s peasants expressed resentment about collectivization by 'a general unwillingness to work on the *kolkhoz*'. This author cites a press report that 'peasants' in Dnepropetrovsk *oblast* in

Ukraine in spring 1933, claiming that the regime 'will take the grain anyway', refused to begin sowing even when they were allotted emergency seed aid. On this basis, Fitzpatrick asserts that peasants generally tried to reduce production by planting a smaller area [Fitzpatrick, 1994: 71]. Yet archival and even some published sources, drawn from reports from the majority of *kolkhozy* in 1933, clearly show that the peasants planted more land and, as indicated in Table 2, produced substantially more in 1933 than in 1932, despite the famine – indeed because of the famine, as will be discussed below. In particular, in Dnepropetrovsk *oblast kolkhozy* on average sowed 884 hectares in 1932 and 977 hectares in 1933, in other words ten per cent more during the famine.²³ That press report from Dnepropetrovsk, therefore, did not represent most peasants' views or actions in that year, and is highly misleading as an indication of peasants' responses for the entire 1930s. For the same reasons, all such anecdotal citations from OGPU documents of peasants refusing to work are at best problematic and often meaningless as overall indicators of their actions and the consequences of them, and no generalizations or conclusions that most or all peasants resisted work in the farms, are valid if drawn from such evidence.

In such extreme versions, the resistance interpretation would lead one to expect that the *kolkhoz* system could not have functioned: peasants would have avoided work, committed sabotage and subterfuge, and produced little or nothing. Writings in this interpretation rarely indicate that peasants actually performed any agricultural work; from these studies it appears that virtually all that peasants ever did was show resistance. Even when these scholars describe peasants as 'adapting' to the new system, they seem to use that term and related concepts to mean that peasants developed new ways to resist the system.²⁴ The harvest data for the 1930s, however, demonstrate that this interpretation is not compatible with the results of the system's work. Many if not most peasants adapted to the new system and worked hard in the crucial periods every year. When conditions were favourable, harvests were adequate and sometimes abundant; when unfavourable, the results were crop failures, and famine if harvests were especially low. Most notably, harvests were larger in the years after natural disasters and crop failures (1933, 1935, 1937), indicating that many peasants worked under very difficult conditions, even famine, to produce more and overcome the crises. This means that in addition to its problems of evidence, the resistance interpretation, at least in its extreme versions, is one-sided, reductionist and incomplete. Peasants' responses to the *kolkhoz* system cannot be reduced to resistance without serious omissions and distortions of actual events. A more complete and accurate interpretation has to take more than resistance into account. The following discussion outlines an alternative interpretation, beginning with an evaluation of the place of peasant resistance in the overall agricultural situation.

Peasants' responses to the *kolkhoz* system varied by location, time period, environmental and economic contexts, and in response to changing Soviet policies. A more complete and objective analysis would attempt to describe all of their responses, but would have to contend with the crisis-orientation of the sources discussed above: in some places or periods the full spectrum of peasants' responses may be impossible to document. Such a survey would also have to guard against the tendency to exaggerate the 'resistance' content of the sources and to minimize content that does not show resistance. When one reads that peasants refused to work 'in certain *kolkhozy*' or 'in a series of *kolkhozy*', sometimes one begins to think that those phrases are euphemisms or a code for 'everyone', 'everywhere' and 'always'. In fact, of course, OGPU personnel did write 'everywhere' and 'always' when they meant it. This focus can also lead the researcher to inflate the concept of resistance to include actions and attitudes that were understandable and temporary responses to natural disaster, mismanagement or other problems, and not attacks on the system.

Since we know that many peasants worked hard enough to produce harvests, even in famine years, and that sources tend to focus on problems, one way to document the array of peasant responses to collective farming would be to examine a sample of sources in a more critical way than works in the resistance argument ordinarily do. Instead of simply citing anecdotes of resistance, we can try to determine why peasants were resistant in particular cases, or what their resistant behaviour actually meant. We can also find evidence of hard work by peasants; while such cases are often anecdotal, so are most examples of labour resistance. Finally, we can examine a unique source that provides a holistic view of peasants' actions in a particular but representative case.

First we need to address the meaning of resistance. Scholars often cite OGPU reports of peasants not going out to work, or of only a few *kolkhozniki* working. These reports have to be understood in the context that in 1930, and for years afterwards, most collective farms had a labour surplus. An investigation in April 1930 found that *kolkhozy* in the North Caucasus would employ only 60 per cent of their available labour, and those in the Urals only 50 per cent; an extensive survey at the end of the year found labour utilization in *kolkhozy* in the Middle Volga, Central Blackearth *oblast*, and Ukraine even lower, from 25 to 31 per cent [*Sots. zem.*, 2 April 1930, p.3; 16 December 1930, p.2]. This low labour use in 1930 does not appear to have reduced farm work done: for example, a nearly complete survey in mid-1930 in the Middle Volga found that sowings in *kolkhozy* increased more than six-fold over 1929, and included one-third of the region's sown area even though *kolkhozy* had only 22 per cent of the region's households.²⁵ Farms could increase crop areas despite low labour turnout because collectivization eliminated the

traditional interstripping of allotments, the typical pattern of landholding in Soviet villages. This pattern constrained many peasants' capabilities, particularly because the population growth in the 1920s resulted in smaller allotments.²⁶ Once this basically medieval system was eliminated, many fewer peasants could cultivate all the village land. For years farms had more labour than they could employ, despite dekulakization and recruitment of peasants for industrial labour.²⁷ A low turnout for work, therefore, may not have been a sign of resistance as much as a result of the real demands of work in the *kolkhozy*.

Then, often *kolkhozniki* would not show up for work because of the income distribution plans in the *kolkhoz*. Apparently most *kolkhozy* in 1930 and many in 1931 distributed income in an equalizing manner, despite directives to distribute by work done (in 1931 according to the labour-day system). Many *kolkhozniki* thought that they should earn equal amounts, but not all: in a *kolkhoz* in the Urals some peasants rejected equalizing, saying 'we all work the same because each of us fears to earn more, so as not to outdistance the other'.²⁸ When some *kolkhozy* began work with plans to distribute jobs and remuneration on an equal basis, peasants stopped showing up for work. Then the farms announced that they would remunerate on the basis of the amount each member worked, and everyone showed up for work, even (in one case) members who had submitted doctors' notes that they were not labour-capable.²⁹ Admittedly these are anecdotal sources, but they do suggest an alternative interpretation of some of the other anecdotal sources used to document resistance.

In other cases, peasants sent their adolescent children to work in the *kolkhoz*. An investigation in 1930 found adolescent and even child labour to be a valuable reserve for *kolkhozy*. Adults in some farms studied refused to work because of food shortages, so adolescents performed important jobs like sowing and weeding. They wanted to work and would work for prolonged periods until they were stopped: 'There's nothing for us to do at home', they said, 'we do not want to nanny sisters and brothers and drag water, it is better to work more here than to chase the dog.'³⁰ In other cases, however, refusals to work forced some farms, even with a labour surplus, to hire peasants from outside the *kolkhoz* to work for wages.³¹ The sources do not indicate whether these were non-collectivized peasants or *kolkhozniki* carrying out a subterfuge to get paid more.

Even more important is the issue of how peasants worked. The resistance interpretation coincides with older views that *kolkhozy* could not provide sufficient incentives in the form of higher pay. Certain scholars have attributed the 1932–33 famine itself to peasant labour resistance, in the sense that since peasants did not have incentives to work hard, they did not produce enough [Penner, 1998; Solovei, 1958: 27–9; Kul'chyts'kyi, 1991: 190, 196,

206]. These studies did not take into consideration the environmental factors that reduced the 1932 harvest, if they discussed them at all. One scholar addressed the issue of how peasants could produce a larger harvest in 1933 than in 1932 and attributed their work to increased state control [Penner, 1998: 46-8].³² The following sections, on farm work in 1932 and during the famines of 1933 and 1936-37, show that these arguments exaggerate and oversimplify the situation: peasant work in the farms was a crucial part of their adaptation to them, and peasants had incentives that these studies do not adequately take into consideration.

Kolkhozy in 1932 faced extremely difficult conditions. The 1931 harvest was extremely low, despite a large sown area, primarily because of drought, but also because of organizational and supply problems [Tauger, 1991a: ch.6; Kul'chyts'kyi, 1991: 150-216]. The low harvest and grain procurements left many farms with little or no food by early 1932, especially in the drought regions of the Volga, Kazakhstan, the Urals and Ukraine. This led many peasants to flee their villages seeking food. Reforms in February 1932 tied remuneration more closely to work and prohibited equalizing income distribution, but many farms misunderstood or ignored them, or implemented them incorrectly, and famine conditions encouraged equalizing distribution. The regime issued food aid and seed loans, but these were often delayed and insufficient.

As a result, peasants were hungry, often starving and angry at the regime and its officials. Foreign observers witnessed scenes of outright hostility toward officials [Carynnyk et al., 1988: 40, 42, 71, 94-5, 106-7]. OGPU reports and other archival sources report numerous cases of peasants refusing to work. Some *kolkhozniki* in eastern Siberia refused to work until the government provided seed, which it did in May 1932, and peasants made similar demands in many other places. In Ukraine at that time, according to OGPU reports, refusals to work had a 'mass character', and in many farms only adolescents and women, or 'activists', dedicated Communists, planted crops [RGAE, f.7486, o.37, d.235, ll.142-37, 168-64]. Often peasants did not have enough seed, their horses were weak, their tractors broken down, or they had not received their earnings for 1931, because procurements had taken too much from their *kolkhozy*. Nonetheless, tens of millions of hectares were sown; officially the grain sown area in 1932 was 99 million hectares, only slightly less than the area sown in 1931.

During the 1932 harvest season Soviet agriculture experienced a crisis. Natural disasters, especially plant diseases spread and intensified by wet weather in mid-1932, drastically reduced crop yields. OGPU reports, anecdotal as they are, indicate widespread peasant opposition to the *kolkhoz* system. These documents contain numerous reports of *kolkhozniki* faced with starvation, mismanagement and abuse by *kolkhoz* officials and others, and

desperate conditions: dying horses, idled tractors, infested crops, and incitement by itinerant people [RGAE, f.7486, o.37, d.235, ll.263-47, 216-15, 283-77, etc.].³³ Peasants' responses varied: some applied to withdraw from their farms, some left for paid work outside, some worked sloppily, intentionally leaving grain on the fields while harvesting to glean later for themselves.

Based on these sources, however, the peasants' most frequent form of 'resistance' was to divide up *kolkhozy* into individual fields to harvest. These actions were stimulated in some cases by a rumour of a secret state decree to dissolve the *kolkhozy*; one North Caucasus peasant urged division of his *kolkhoz* because (he thought) *kolkhozy* in Ukraine had been dispersed [RGAE, f.7486, o.37, d.235, ll.205-199]. In this case as in many others, however, peasants' actions did not have the quality of opposition or sabotage, of a clandestine attempt to undermine the state. Their demands were open, sometimes formalized in a petition to higher authorities, and honest: to be allowed to work in the way they thought best. In several cases peasants urged division of the *kolkhozy* to save the harvest and to provide higher procurements for the government [RGAE, f.7486, o.37, d.235, ll.263-47, 205-199]. These demands and actions do not fit easily into the resistance interpretation because peasants explicitly stated that they intended their actions as a means to fulfil the government's demands to produce more and to meet the procurement quotas.

Even besides these cases, and despite or because of the crisis conditions in summer and autumn 1932, many peasants tried to work within the system. During early 1933 OGPU and other personnel investigated villages to determine the extent of the famine for relief efforts. Invariably their reports showed that while famine affected mostly peasants who did not earn many labour-days, it often struck peasants who had earned hundreds of labour-days, and highly productive, successful *kolkhozy* [Rudich et al., 1990: 390-94, 397-8, 401-6, 406-13, etc.]. Clearly, since many *kolkhozniki* were hard working and successful until the procurement campaign of autumn 1932, resistance is far from the whole story.

By early 1933 the USSR was in the throes of a catastrophic famine, varying in severity between regions but pervasive. After efforts in January to procure more grain, the regime began desperate efforts in February to aid peasants to produce a crop. The political departments (*politotdely*), which the regime introduced into the state farms (*sovkhozy*) and the machine tractor stations (MTS) in early 1933, played a crucial role in these efforts. These agencies, composed of a small group of workers and OGPU personnel in each MTS or *sovkhoz*, removed officials who had violated government directives on farm work and procurements, replacing them with *kolkhozniki* or *sovkhoz* workers who they thought would be more reliable, and organized and

otherwise helped farms to produce a good harvest in 1933. They were supported by draconian and coercive laws enforcing labour discipline in the farms in certain regions, but also by the largest allocations of seed and food aid in Soviet history, 5.76 million tons, and by special sowing commissions set up in crucial regions like Ukraine, the Urals, the Volga and elsewhere to manage regional-level aspects of organization and supplies to the farms.³⁴

Peasants in the famine regions were weak, and estimates are that between four and seven million people died of the famine in villages and towns. Yet, somehow, on the whole peasants worked harder in 1933 than in 1932. By 1 June 1933, the farms had sown a larger area than by that date in the previous three years (1930-32). The German agricultural attaché Otto Schiller drove 6,000 miles through the main agricultural regions in summer 1933 and described a greatly strengthened and consolidated *kolkhoz* system. He attributed this both to administrative pressure and hunger as a motivating force, and also to effective management and labour organization.³⁵ Reports from all over the USSR indicated that peasants who had avoided working in the *kolkhoz* now competed with each other to work, and had a 'better attitude' towards work in the *kolkhoz* than before [Tauger, 1991a: 457-8]. And the result, as documented in Table 2, was a dramatic increase in the harvest in 1933. The annual report data, as noted, came from more than 77,000 *kolkhozy*, 40 per cent, in 1932, and more than 154,000 *kolkhozy*, 60 per cent, in 1933, from every region of the USSR [Tauger, 1991b: 78; 2001c: 54]. Thus there can be no doubt that the general pattern of intensified work, improved conditions and higher output evident from these statistics was in fact representative of conditions throughout the country.

To provide an inside view of this change, we can examine a case study of peasants' responses to the famine: the long report of a regional political department (*politotdel*) administration chief to central authorities about the work of the political departments and the *kolkhozy* they managed during 1933. This report, dated 22 December 1933, came from the Central Blackearth *oblast* (CBO), which was highly collectivized, a primary grain region, and also a famine region: the report twice refers to mass famine deaths, people with famine oedema and cannibalism.³⁶ Thus the CBO can be taken as a reasonably typical region of the USSR in this crisis period. No previous study, including Soviet and post-Soviet publications, has ever examined one of these reports in detail. This source is especially important because it presents a holistic description of peasant work during a crucial year, based on thousands of reports from many dozens of *politotdely* in machine tractor stations and *sovkhozy* throughout the region during the year. It is thus a much more inclusive and general source than the anecdotal reports of isolated events found in the OGPU documents and the press. Consequently, even though this report deals only with one region, that

region was an important and highly representative one, and the report reveals better than all of the OGPU reports taken together the whole spectrum of peasants' responses to the crisis, and especially concerning peasant work in the *kolkhozy*.

The report first describes the crisis conditions of early 1933: peasants starving and dying, horses exhausted, dying and neglected, tractors repaired poorly or not at all, labour discipline weak among *kolkhozniki*, tractor drivers and individual peasants, with frequent cases of refusals to work and avoidance of responsibility. The *politotdely* began by talking with and organizing the *kolkhozniki*, and by purging *kolkhozy*, MTS, and other local agencies of what it termed *kulak* and counter-revolutionary elements. According to the report *kolkhozniki* participated in these actions and developed enthusiasm for work from them. With *politotdel* help, MTS and *kolkhozy* finished sowing 15 days earlier than they had in 1932, and sowed 3.4 million hectares instead of the 2.85 million hectares they had in 1932. They used fertilizer for the first time and sorted seed, they treated more seed against plant diseases, they weeded crops sometimes two and three times, and they took measures against insects. They completed harvesting grain crops in 65 days, versus 70 in 1932, and threshing in December 1933, a process that in 1932 had lasted in the region into March 1933. They completed grain procurements in November 1933 (those of 1932 had lasted like threshing into spring 1933), paid off all of their seed loans, formed the necessary internal funds in *kolkhozy* and still managed to distribute to *kolkhozniki* much more in labour-day payments than the previous year, thereby ending the famine in the region. The *kolkhozniki* also provided all their livestock with basic fodder, and built granaries, livestock shelters, clubs and other buildings [RGASPI, f.112, o.26, f.21, ll.229–205, 204–197].

As a result of these efforts, the CBO harvested some 24 per cent more grain in 1933 than in 1932 [Tauger, 1991b: 81]. While weather conditions played a role in these successful results, clearly peasants worked harder and differently in 1933, during the peak of the famine, than they had earlier, and management by the *politotdely* contributed to this. Lest this description seem unrealistic, we should consider some of the obstacles peasants encountered and some of their other responses that the *politotdel* chief recorded. As noted above, my argument is not to deny that resistance took place, but to deny that it was the only or even the main peasant response to circumstances in these years: such resistance as did occur must be understood accurately and in context.

During their work on the farms in the CBO in 1933, *kolkhozniki* had to deal with horses dying and tractors breaking. Many peasants were extremely weak with starvation; in one *kolkhoz* people died at the rate of ten a day for a period, and hundreds died in other districts. In at least four MTS districts

counter-revolutionary organizations formed with plans ranging from withholding grain to the overthrow of the Soviet government. There were many bandit gangs who stole grain from threshing floors and plundered peasants' huts, and many armed attacks and murders of activists and others. There was theft of grain and other food products in all *kolkhozy* (this was a case in which a document specifically referred to a type of resistance in all farms). *Kolkhozniki* often faced what the writer called a 'dilemma' of either going to work on the fields and dragging everything from home to prevent theft or staying at home and losing the harvest.³⁷ There were *kolkhozniki* who worked slowly or not at all, which the writer described as an '*ital'ianka*', and even whole *kolkhozy* where the majority of members earned fewer than 100 labour-days, and there were cases where activists and hard-working *kolkhozniki* were fined and warned against performing 'shock work' or over-fulfilling output norms. There were *kolkhozy* in which 'members' had private plots three hectares in size and hired labourers to work on them, and where only 40 per cent of *kolkhozniki* showed up for work (although as noted above this may not have been a major problem) [RGASPI, f.112, o.26, d.21, ll.164-44].

Nonetheless, the report insisted that most peasants' attitudes towards work had changed in 1933. Where in 1932 *kolkhoz* managers had to go to peasant huts in the morning to get them to work, and the peasants who decided to work would show up at eight or nine in the morning, in 1933 once sowing was underway peasants showed up on their own at dawn or earlier. They spent much less time taking breaks, smoking and arguing, and worked more carefully, with fewer missed areas and losses. Where in previous years equalizing distribution was dominant and good workers had received little recognition if at all, in 1933 in all *kolkhozy* (another case where the source specified 'all') shock workers won prizes, recognition and authority, while 'loafers' were subjected to social condemnation [RGASPI, f.112, o.26, d.21, ll.137-31].

This document thus describes in a microcosm of *kolkhoz* work in 1933 the 'continuum' of responses, from resistance to support, which as Viola argued occurred in Soviet society. This evidence also suggests that the famine and the regime's policies in response to it had changed many peasants' attitudes towards the *kolkhoz*. Many who hated the new system and the regime for forcing them to join *kolkhozy*, and who were starving as a result of procurements, in 1933 somehow reconciled themselves to the system enough to work in it. Without question, however, many other peasants had worked willingly during the whole period, earning many labour-days and siding with the system. As an example of this, we can consider peasants' views of the notorious 7 August 1932 law on socialist property, which authorized arrests of people for thefts and imposed capital punishment in some cases, and under

which more than 100,000 people (mostly peasants) were arrested. An OGPU study of peasant attitudes towards this law in Ivanovo *oblast* found that most peasants supported it and even considered it overdue, because of numerous outrages and scandals involving theft that they had witnessed and could not prevent [Danilov et al., 1999–2002: Vol.3, 479].

This example, incidentally, shows one of the main empirical problems of the resistance argument, especially in its application of Scott's theories regarding peasants' use of 'weapons of the weak' and their 'hidden transcripts' of opposition. One could construe theft 'from the *kolkhoz*' by one group of peasants as exemplifying these theories if that theft is interpreted as an attack on the government and reflected attitudes shared among most or all of the peasants. If another group of peasants sees that theft as taking resources to which they also had a claim, however, then the theft changes from a kind of political statement to a simpler type of theft in which the first group are really engaging in criminal action that harms their fellow peasants much more than it undermines the Soviet government.

A later example further documents many peasants' commitment to the system. In 1936, drought sharply reduced farm production, and a milder repetition of the resistance of 1932 recurred in many regions of the country. Rumours spread that farms would be dissolved, some peasants stole grain from fields or storage in anticipation of famine, some refused to work [Danilov et al., 1999–2002: Vol.4, 808, 816, 842]. The very favourable conditions of 1937, however, brought an unprecedented harvest, and the output per labour-capable *kolkhoznik* doubled even in comparison with the previous favourable year of 1935. In the Urals the 1936 harvest was 2.59 million tons, the 1937 harvest 13.2 million tons, or five times larger; the average able-bodied *kolkhoznik* earned 204 labour-days in 1936 and 245 in 1937. The source does not explain this increase [Tsyganov, 1991: 68–77]. The drought, however, destroyed whole fields of crops, making harvesting impossible and preventing peasants from earning more labour-days, while in 1937 they had more work than ever before because of the favourable conditions. Consequently, the fewer labour-days *kolkhozniki* earned in 1936 were at least partly the result of the smaller harvest rather than the cause of it. These Urals peasants earned many of their labour-days in 1937 under very difficult conditions at least reminiscent of 1933, and their doubled output in 1937 resulted much less from harder work that year than from environmental conditions over which they had no control, like most other farmers in history.

In light of these cases in 1933 and 1937, the argument that collective farming did not provide incentives or adequate incentives has to be qualified. At first it may seem superficial or manipulative to describe the motivation to survive a famine as an 'incentive'. When we recall, however, that peasants in the USSR had endured many dozens of famines in their history, that the

famines of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were within living memory in the 1930s, that famines had always motivated peasants to desperate efforts to obtain and especially to produce food, and that the late 1920s and early 1930s (as discussed above) were generally a period of famine, then the use of the term 'incentives' to describe the prospect of a good harvest that motivated peasants in the CBO in 1933 and the Urals in 1937, as well as many others, does not seem far-fetched. Perhaps these are not the usual types of incentives that motivate urban people in well-off capitalist countries, but the prospect of overcoming a famine provided incentives for millions of peasants in the Russian empire repeatedly for centuries to work hard despite considerable sacrifice and suffering to overcome crises [Kondrashin, 1996].

All of this is not to deny that some peasants in the 1930s, especially in famine years, used the 'weapons of the weak' against the *kolkhoz* system and the Soviet government. The issue is how representative evidence is of peasants generally, which is another way of asking how important such incidents were. Certainly resistance was greater and more important in 1930 and possibly 1932. But any analysis of this must also take into account natural disaster, the diversity of peasants' responses, and overall results of their work. Studies conducted in the mid-1930s found that *kolkhozniki* actually worked harder than non-collectivized peasants had worked in the 1920s, clear evidence of significant adaptation to the new system [Tsyganov, 1991: 90].

CONCLUSION: THE DIVERSITY OF RURAL RESPONSES TO COLLECTIVIZATION

The resistance interpretation has dominated recent literature on peasants. These studies have made a valuable contribution by presenting and analysing new evidence of some of the peasants' responses to collectivization and related policies. According to these studies, the peasants resisted and tried to undermine the collective farm system, and the result was famine and failure. Yet these studies minimize or ignore the actual harvest data, the environmental factors that caused low harvests, the repeated recovery from the famine and crop failures, the large harvests of the 1930s, the mechanization of Soviet farms in these years, Soviet population growth, and the long-term increases in food production and consumption over the Soviet period. It is an overstatement to describe the Soviet agricultural system as a failure [Wegren, 1998: 60].

Given the accomplishments of Soviet agriculture, and Soviet *kolkhozniki*, during the 1930s, particularly in overcoming disastrous crop failures and famines, resistance does not exhaust peasant responses to collectivization,

any more than it does popular responses to most other aspects of Soviet society and history. To focus so exclusively on resistance, especially as extreme versions of the resistance interpretation do, in light of Soviet peasants' repeated production of good harvests in the wake of serious crop failures and famines, misrepresents most peasants' actions and omits their accomplishments, and therefore presents an incorrect interpretation of Soviet rural life. To encompass all, or at least more, of the peasants' varied responses to collectivization, both resistance and adaptation, we need a more general, flexible and realistic interpretation than the resistance one.

We can begin with the recognition that collectivization was a programme to achieve a clearly necessary goal – to increase food production in a country plagued by famines – and that it was implemented after the apparently successful experiment of the *sovkhoz* project and with substantial governmental investments. On the other hand, however, the regime implemented collectivization coercively, violently and without adequate appreciation of or concern for its disruptive consequences. Collectivization was thus fundamentally ambivalent as a policy, with good sides and bad. Peasants' responses to this were also ambivalent, including of course significant resistance but also many other attitudes including significant adaptation and support. And in the peak of crisis, peasants repeatedly demonstrated their ability to put aside their objections, to overcome adversity even at great cost, and to produce harvests that ended famines.

In other words, the 'trope' that I propose here to encompass and understand all of the peasants' responses to collectivization is not that of heroic but futile resistance against a totally wrong system, the noble peasants fighting with the weapons of the weak, which refers only to a fraction of the peasants, but rather one of bitter and ambivalent heroism, desperate but often successful efforts by some peasants despite natural disasters, the ineptitude and harshness of the regime, and the scorn and hostility of some of their neighbours. This conception corresponds much better to the concrete results that in most years fed the growing population of the USSR.

This interpretation also avoids a one-sided conception of peasants as only resistant, which can lead the reader to a stereotyped, condescending, even potentially derogatory impression of them as gratuitously and stupidly resistant. The resistance interpretation seems to be an example of theory-driven or even politically motivated scholarship, in which scholars selected evidence to fit preconceived theoretical assumptions or express their hostility to the Soviet regime, but did not consider how representative and realistic their evidence actually was. The resistance interpretation, in its extreme versions at least, is actually deeply unrealistic: peasants, like other people, had different attitudes and responses to the events that affected them. Just consider the wide array of views of some former peasants who came to

positions of prominence in early twentieth century Russia and the USSR: from radical communists like Stalin, Khrushchev and Brezhnev, all sons of peasants, to quite middle-of-the-road economists like Kondrat'ev and Chaianov, to fiery opponents of the Soviet regime like General Lavr Kornilov and peasant rebel A.S. Antonov. Given such a spectrum of perspectives from former peasants, we should expect and seek out a variety of views in the evidence, rather than assume that all peasants were resistant and attribute to all of them the views of a minority.

GLOSSARY

- CBO (Central Blackearth *oblast'*) – large territory south of Moscow and directly north of Ukraine
- district – territorial division of the USSR, comparable to a small county in the US
- GPU (*Gosudarstvennoe politicheskoe upravlenie*) – 'state political administration', the name for the Soviet secret police from 1922 to 1923. Also a colloquial term for OGPU (see below)
- kolkhoz* (*kollektivnoe khoziaistvo*) – collective farm
- kolkhozniki* – peasant workers on a *kolkhoz*
- kraikom* – Communist Party organizational structure at the *kray* level
- kulak* – literally 'fist', term for well-off peasant
- labour-day – unit of work accounting in *kolkhozy*, calculated according to state-established output norms. *Kolkhozniki* were paid at the end of the year based on their labour-day earnings
- MTS (*mashinno-traktornaia stantsiia*) – machine tractor station, a warehouse and staff group who stored and maintained mechanized farming equipment and performed mechanized farming operations on neighbouring *kolkhozy*
- NKVD (*Narodnoe komissariat vnutrennikh del*) – 'people's commissariat of internal affairs', the name for the secret police from 1934 until after the Second World War
- oblast* – territorial unit of the USSR, comparable to a province
- OGPU (*Ob'edinennoe gosudarstvennoe politicheskoe upravlenie*) – 'unified state political administration', the name for the secret police from 1923 to 1934
- okrug* – territorial division of the USSR, smaller than *oblast*, comparable to a large county in the US
- Politotdel* (*politicheskoe otделение*) – political department, staff of personnel including workers and OGPU officials sent to MTS and *sovkhozy* in 1933-34 to remove oppositional personnel and revive production during the famine

raion – smaller administrative unit inside a *kray*, *oblast*, or republic; often referred to as a district

Sots.zem (*Sotsialisticheskoe zemledelie*) – main Soviet agricultural newspaper

Sovkhoz (*sovetskoe khoziaistvo*) – Soviet farm or state farm, usually large and specializing in one branch of agricultural production

TsK (*Tsentral'nyi komitet*) – Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party

NOTES

Note: all archival sources are indicated by acronym, followed by the numbers of the *fond* (the main holding unit for a particular government agency or individual), the *opis'* (the inventory of files on a particular topic), and *delo* (the particular file), usually followed by the *list'* (page number in the file).

1. For such a catalogue of peasant responses, see Viola [1996].
2. Dekulakization was the policy of arrest, removal and usually exile of the alleged 'well-off' peasants or *kulaks* from villages. The Soviet regime implemented this policy during 1930–31 during the first phase of collectivization, and then a few more times during the later 1930s.
3. A more complete exposition of these issues is in Tauger [2003].
4. Stalin [1946–51: Vol.3, 331–4]. The food crisis in 1917 is well documented in the secondary literature on the Revolution, for example Lih [1990].
5. The Bolshevik requisition policies are better known than the similar or harsher policies by the Whites; see Kenez [1977] and Smele [1996].
6. Their attribution of famines to speculators has much in common with Amartya Sen's [1981] concept of 'exchange entitlements', in which increased prices make it impossible for poor people dependent on the market to purchase the food they need. For analyses that discuss crop failures and backwardness, see Devereux [1993], Arnold [1988] and Golkin [1987].
7. RGASPI f. 17, o. 3, d. 809, l.23, report by Zernotrest to the Politburo, 7 Jan. 1931. An example of scholarship that minimizes the significance of this *sovkhoz* project is Lewin [1975: 254–5, 276–7] and Lewin [1985a: 100–101]; both were published before archival access that made this report available.
8. On the *sovkhoz* project as a test project for collectivization, see Kalinin's speech to the April 1928 plenum introducing the project [Danilov et al., 2000: Vol.2, 453ff]. Stalin connected the *sovkhoz* project with collectivization in his November 1929 speech 'The Year of the Great Turn' and his December 1929 speech on agrarian questions that announced the policy of dekulakization, Stalin [1946–51: Vol.12, 124–5, 154–7].
9. Soviet expenditures on agriculture increased from 714 million roubles in 1928/29 to 2.9 billion roubles in 1931, 3.9 billion in 1932, 6.4 billion in 1934, 9.5 billion in 1937 and 13.3 billion in 1939, and those expenditures remained a more stable part of the budget than industry [Davies, 1958: 296].
10. The Stalinist group in the Soviet leadership assumed that the *kulaks* were the leaders of 'class struggle' against the communist government, stood behind all peasants' resistance to Soviet policies, and would rally peasants against the regime during collectivization [Lewin, 1975; Davies, 1980a]. Certain Soviet leaders, in other words, also inclined towards a 'resistance interpretation' of their own.
11. A good discussion of the views of Soviet leaders during collectivization is Davies [1980a], especially chapter 4. Stalin in particular argued in 1929, at the beginning of collectivization, that that programme would allow the regime to eliminate the 'scissors' (the imbalance of prices) between agriculture and industry that existed in the 1920s [Stalin, 1946–51: Vol.12,

- 160]. In 1934 he specifically rejected the assertion by Nikolai Bukharin that Soviet heavy industry developed by 'devouring' agriculture [Danilov et al., 1999–2002: Vol.4, 201].
12. Many peasant rebellions took place during the last years of the revolutionary period, 1920–22, and may have involved comparable numbers of peasants.
 13. For example, in Ukraine from late February to early April 1930 there were 1,716 protests among a rural population of more than 24 million, and more than one-third of these took place in four border *okrugs* (out of 41 total in Ukraine) [Vasil'ev and Viola, 1997: 251].
 14. The best survey of officials' actions against peasants is Viola [1996]. OGPU reports refer to many cases of 'provisions difficulties' in this period.
 15. On food rationing in villages, see Viola et al. [1998: docs. 1–15]; on famine relief during the Ukrainian famine of 1928–29, see Tauger [2001a: 146–70].
 16. I do not mean by this to minimize the violence involved in these actions: the OGPU reported in July 1931 that during all of 1930 it processed 179,620 people through its 'repressive organs', dozens of times more than in previous years, and sentenced 18,966 of these people to execution [Danilov et al., 1999–2002: Vol.2, 809].
 17. On the rumours as indicative of peasant *mentalité*, see Viola [1996: 45ff, 58ff], Fitzpatrick [1994: 67].
 18. The situation resembles the Bezdna protest after the 1861 serf emancipation, when one peasant read the word '*volia*' (liberty) in the statute and persuaded many others that the nobles were concealing the truth from them [Field, 1989: 31–113].
 19. Fitzpatrick claims that peasants, trying to lower procurement quotas, 'habitually' understated harvests to local authorities, and that they in turn rejected their subordinates' claims only to incorporate them in their own reports to their superiors. She also claims 'The peasants, for their part, were doing their best to find out what was the lowest level of deliveries they could get away with – if necessary, by lowering total production' [Fitzpatrick, 1994: 70–71]. This implies that peasants acted against their own interests and risked the survival of their families in order to play a game of 'chicken' with the authorities. She documents none of these claims, which are contradicted by many published and archival sources [Tauger, 2001c: 53ff].
 20. Soviet agricultural statistics are discussed in detail in Tauger [2001c]. See also Tauger [1991b], which was the first demonstration using annual report data from archival sources showing that the 1932 harvest was much lower than officially acknowledged and that the famine of 1932–33 resulted from that small harvest. See also Wheatcroft et al. [1998].
 21. On 1931 and 1932, see Tauger [2001b]; on 1931 and 1936, Rudenko [1958] and Danilov et al. [1999–2002: Vol.4, 831, 851, 856, 857, 862]; on local famine conditions in 1934, Danilov et al. [1999–2002: Vol.4, 196ff, 302, 337, 346].
 22. On 1931, Tauger [1991a: 290–95]; on better climate conditions in 1935, Danilov et al. [1999–2002: Vol.4, 638]; on 1937, see below.
 23. A NKZ publication reported dramatic increases in grain production in 1933 over 1932 [Tauger, 1991b: 82]. A study of *kolkhozy* in key grain regions in 1932 and 1933 by the statistical agency under Gosplan (the Soviet State Planning Commission) found improved production in 1933 from higher yields and larger sowings than in 1932 [RGAE, f. 1562, o. 77, d. 70]. For other scholars' acceptance of the low 1932 and higher 1933 harvests, see Wheatcroft et al. [1986: 282–3], Danilov et al. [1999–2002: Vol.3, 863]. For further explanation, see Tauger [1991b: 80 for the data on Dnepropetrovsk *oblast'*] and Tauger [2001b: 1–3]. It is characteristic of the resistance interpretation that Fitzpatrick used the OGPU source cited in the previous note without comparing it to the actual results of work documented also from archival sources in Tauger [1991b: 80].
 24. See for example Viola [1996: 206–7], Penner [1998: 45ff]. Certain scholars, such as Peter Nolan, dismiss collectivization in general as a failure because in his view it destroyed all motivation for work [Nolan, 1988: Introduction].
 25. RGAE [f. 7486, o. 37, d. 49], Decree of the Middle Volga regional party committee, 21 Sept. 1930, ll.138–7, Danilov et al. [1987–89: Vol.2, 190].
 26. Soviet officials and scholars called this problem 'agrarian overpopulation' (see Lewin [1975: 28–36]).

27. See for example the decree of the Labour Commissariat in March 1930, which specified that 'industry will have to obtain labour from *kolkhozy*', and outlined procedures for organizing labour recruitment (*orgnabor*), *Sots.zem.*, 5 March 1930, p.4, as well as numerous other articles on this theme. Fitzpatrick [1994: ch.3] discusses the movement of peasants to towns.
28. Vylytsan *et al.* [1982: 259–60]. On income distribution, see Davies [1980b: ch.7], and Tauger [1991a: chs.4–6]; the latter dissertation subscribes in part to the resistance argument, but contains the only detailed study of Soviet policies and practices of *kolkhoz* labour organization and remuneration.
29. *Sots. zem.*, 16 July 1930, p.3; RGAE [f. 7446, o. 8, d. 46, ll.154, 165].
30. RGAE [f.7446, o.8, d.157, ll.1–4]. Adolescents could be very effective workers: former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev won a prize for his work as a combine operator at the age of 18.
31. For examples: Rudich *et al.* [1990: 126–9, 216–20], *Sots. zem.*, 23 Oct. 1930, p.2.
32. On the character and significance of environmental factors as causes of the 1932–33 famine, see Tauger [2001b: 26–36].
33. On the weather and yield declines, see Tauger [2001b].
34. On the MTS Political Departments see Zelenin [1965: 52ff.], Miller [1970: 224ff] and Tauger [1991a: ch.7]. On aid, see Tauger [1991b: 73–4].
35. D. Zlepko [1988: 197, secret report to German embassy by the Agricultural Attaché Otto Schiller, 'Die Hungersnot in der Sowjetunion'].
36. The following is based on RGASPI [f.12, o.26, d.21, ll.231–54]; on famine conditions, ll.229, 164]. This source is one of many indicating that famine conditions prevailed outside Ukraine (see Danilov *et al.* [1999–2002, Vol.3: 634–78]).
37. It should be noted that this is a common dilemma in many developing countries; see for example the description of Indian peasants guarding fields before the harvest in Beals [1962: 7].

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