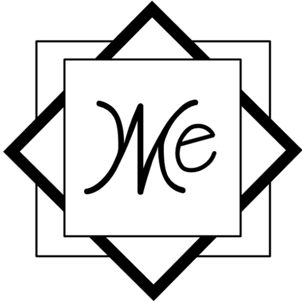

The Kazakh Catastrophe and Stalin's Order of Priorities, 1929-1933: Evidence from the Soviet Secret Archives

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Introduction

For the population of the Kazakh Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR), the years from 1928 until 1933 were a period of almost unprecedented calamity. They brought about a major ambush on traditional social, economic and cultural structures, which manifested itself in mass expropriations and large-scale deportations, and triggered widespread social unrest. Yet the scale of these repressive measures was eclipsed by the consequences of the breakdown of the Kazakh agricultural sector, which triggered a famine of horrendous dimensions, costing roughly 1.3—1.5 million people's lives from 1932-3.[1] The scale and the horror of the cataclysm that raged across the Soviet countryside at this time (and which was thus not limited to Kazakhstan, although this republic was struck particularly badly), have been described in the scholarly literature before.[2] The same applies to the main stages of Soviet agricultural policy that characterized this period, namely: the collectivization and the "dekulakization" campaigns.[3] What can be said, then, about the particular background of the disastrous developments in the Kazakh ASSR?

Martha Olcott saw their main reasons in a basic misunderstanding of the social and cultural arrangements of Kazakh society that was inherent in Bolshevik applied in this republic. She argued that the main intentions behind the Bolsheviks' moves were to introduce, through "mass education and propaganda […] the new socialist morality, as well as […] technological education," and to build "a new Kazakh society" on the basis of collective farms.[4] However, exaggerated optimism, or, more specifically, fallacious assumptions on the degree of resistance the Kazakh population, entrenched in its traditional social and cultural patterns of life, would offer to the Bolsheviks' endeavors hampered the successful completion of their plans.[5] Indeed, the Bolsheviks had encountered serious problems throughout the 1920s already, when first attempts to "sovietize the Kazakh aul[6]" were undertaken.[7] But was this misinterpretation of regional specifics the major reason for the catastrophe in the early 1930s?

Martha Olcott formulated her assessment at a moment when only limited information was available on the

concrete actions of the political agents that shaped Soviet agricultural policy. Even less was known at that time about the decision making mechanisms within the Soviet political leadership, and what information had been available to the persons involved in these. With the opening of the former Soviet secret archives, this situation has dramatically changed. In this paper, I will make use of information from these archival sources to scrutinize the nature of the policy that lead to the Kazakh catastrophe.[8] I find that it was, in the first place, Stalin, who made the crucial decisions that determined the fate of Kazakh agriculture. Analyzing his behavior, I shall argue that the policy he consistently implemented throughout this period in Kazakhstan, similar to his treatment of other parts of the USSR, reflected not the intention to form a new, socialist Kazakh society, but much simpler objectives. Stalin's actions were dominated by the goal to extract as much surplus as possible from Kazakh agriculture. It was the brutality and implacability in his application of this approach, which led to the disastrous results. In this policy, collectivization and dekulakization were not as much aims *per se*, but served primarily as tools to enforce tight control over the countryside, which was a key prerequisite for surplus-extraction.

The policy of grain procurement and its significance for Kazakhstan

The core element of Stalin's policy, adopted during the turn of the year 1927/28, and preserved throughout all following years, was the practice of compulsory extraction of agricultural production (mainly, but not exclusively grain) from the peasantry at artificially low prices, favorable to the state. Although several significant indicators of a policy change in late 1927, such as the end of the conciliatory attitude towards well-to-do peasants and a renewed emphasis that was put on the development of the model of collective farms, have been identified in the literature before,[9] it is only now that archival materials reveal the centrality and the watershed character of the shift in the grain procurement practices in full clarity. In fact, it represented the first step towards the overall shift in Soviet industrial and agricultural policies—away from the rule of market forces, albeit limited by discretionary, yet not structural or permanent interference with price-building mechanisms (as was characteristic for the period of NEP), towards the set-up of a command system in which the will of the dictator would become the predominant instance to decide over resource allocation.

After the XV party congress, the issue of adopting a policy of forced procurement was put on the agenda of the first session of the newly elected Politburo, which composition fully reflected Stalin's recent victory over the "leftist" opposition. During the following days and weeks, the party leadership's resolutions on this matter turned increasingly radical. From now on, the local party organizations frequently received directives from the center, sometimes almost on a weekly basis, in which they were urged to bring about a "turnaround" (*perelom*) in the grain collection practice.[10] The language used throughout these documents became more and more similar to wartime rhetoric. In a directive from January 14, 1928, Stalin repeated the need for "brutal" pressure (*nazhat' zverski*) to be put on the party organizations. His and the Central Committee's (TsK) actions were not confined to the issuance of sharply-worded orders, though. In the same document, Stalin announced his departure for Siberia on the same day (Molotov had already left for the Urals region), with the intent to "press on all levers in the state and party structures, everywhere." The ending of this directive left no doubt about both the crucial importance and the warlike character the grain procurement campaign had in Stalin's eyes: "The whole matter rests, as you can see, on the grain procurements. The grain procurements thus represent a fortress that we must take by all means. And we will, certainly, if we do our work in a bolshevist fashion [*po-bol'shevistski*], with bolshevist pressing."[11]

It was on these trips when the "Ural-Siberian method" was born, the prototype for the widespread use of

overt pressure and even brute force to impose the economic will of the leadership on the peasants. At this moment, the main target was still well-to-do peasants ("*kulaks*")—a distinction that over time, however, would more and more become meaningless.[12] Although Stalin occasionally paid lip service to a softer approach, as, for instance, at the TsK plenum in July 1928,[13] he in fact proved unwilling to make any concessions in this policy, continuing to use forcible grain procurement on a broad basis during the entire following agricultural year, too. When the "Ural-Siberian Method" eventually was formally adopted in March 1929—to be applied in "Kazakhstan, Siberia and the Urals," this was already, as noted by Taniuchi, "not the action of creating a novel institution, but ratification of *faits accomplis* in the eastern regions."[14]

In general, Stalin's uncompromising line about the procurement of agricultural production was to be enforced over all parts of the union with equal vigor. Threatening directions, intended to propel this undertaking, were regularly circulated among party officials across all regions. If regional distinctions were made, they related mainly to the relative economic importance of a given agricultural area. The order of treatment of various regions was not always constant, though, but could be subject to shifts: If one region failed to provide the envisaged results, the pressure on other regions was increased accordingly.[15] Yet in general, Kazakhstan, as a large grain producer and exporter, would occupy a prominent place in the TsK's new agricultural policy.

This policy reversal set in at a moment when the Kazakh agricultural sector was already struggling with difficulties. One of the reports on the grain collection campaign for 1927/28, prepared by the economic department of the OGPU by December 12, 1927, stated that, as a result of crop failure, the "question of grain supplies on the interior market of the Kazakh ASSR […] is extremely tense." This situation affected the grain markets in neighboring regions as well, as the population of Southern Kazakhstan was, in response to the lack of grain in their home regions, "wending its way […] to certain regions that did not suffer from crop failure [to acquire grain there], which ruins the prices in those regions."[16] The same problem was the subject of a telegram, sent to Stalin by the secretary of the Siberian regional party committee at the end of the year 1927.[17] Whereas this phenomenon might have appeared, to a sober observer, as a predictable and natural reaction by people facing a scarcity in vital goods, the Soviet leadership thus adopted a different stance: Not the food shortage itself, but the loss of control on the development of grain prices constituted the main concern. Stalin did not pay much attention to specific local or regional factors or problems. The fulfillment of the grain collection plan at established prices had top priority. Consequently, on January 20, 1928, during his trip to Siberia, he dispatched a telegram to Kazakh party secretary Goloshchekin, in which he fiercely attacked the increases in grain prices in northern Kazakh and adjacent Siberian regions, labeling them "gross infractions" of the official grain price policy. Stalin pledged to personally visit party secretaries at the places in question to liquidate such kind of "shocking disgrace."[18]

However, the Bolsheviks were not yet able to establish full control over the Kazakh agricultural markets. From an OGPU report dated March 10, 1928, we learn that the grain collections did not work well in Kazakhstan. Peasants were still reluctant to hand out their grain to consumer cooperatives in exchange for manufactured goods, preferring other purchasers, who, one must assume, were offering higher prices (although this issue was not even raised in the document!).[19] And after a temporary considerable increase in the sum of grain collected in Kazakhstan in 1928/29, procurements in autumn 1929 were again going "weakly" and "unsatisfactorily."[20] The factors blamed by the authors of the report were manifold—poor harvest, bottlenecks provoked by management failure, arbitrage practiced by "speculants."[21] By the end of the year, the amount of grain collected fell short of the results of the previous year, whereas the plan had envisaged a significant increase.[22] Thus there should be little surprise that Stalin was, once again, pressing on party secretaries, issuing reprimands to the regional and dis-

trict party committees in Siberia, Kazakhstan and other regions.[23] And pressure of this kind would not abate, but increase over the following years.

The Collectivization and "Dekulakization" Drives in Kazakhstan

The Bolshevik project to gain and to maintain control over the countryside necessitated the overturn of the existing ownership structures. The establishment of large collective farms (*kolkhozy*) and state farms (*sovkhozy*) would serve as the core instrument to control and to regulate, but also, as was the frequently expressed hope, to significantly increase the amount of agricultural production. The mass campaign of driving the rural population, parts of which were still adhering to a nomadic or, more often, semi-nomadic lifestyle, into these new farms, which entailed the requisition of the most part of their possessions, including livestock, material stores and agricultural instruments, was unleashed in mid-1929 already. Yet it gained full momentum only after the TsK resolutions of January 5, 1930, which, although not providing an explicit guideline for the process, gave the all-clear for the "crusade and revolution" that would follow.[24]

Over the first half of the year 1930, collectivization in Kazakhstan proceeded, at least on the paper, at breakneck speed, and more rapidly than in any other region of the USSR. Although it actually exceeded the analogous figures for the entire union, the degree of collectivization in this republic had remained at low levels until late 1929: In 46% of its districts, less than 15% of all households had entered collectives by then, and in another 26% of districts this number ranged between 15% and 30%.[25] In early March 1930, according to official data, 40% of all households in Kazakhstan had joined the kolkhozy—according to another source, the number stood even at 48%.[26] These figures went down by mid-1930 again, a tardy reaction to the reprieve triggered by Stalin's famous Pravda article ("Dizzy from success"). Within a few months, however, the collectivization drive was resumed, encouraged by an unexpectedly good harvest (mainly a consequence of favorable weather conditions[27]), as well as by well-cultivated illusions of productivity gains that would be achieved at collective and state farms.[28] Kazakhstan did not remain unaffected by this development. In February 1931, Southern Kazakhstan, "a region dominated by Kazakh nomadic and semi-nomadic sheep farmers," was earmarked, like the rest of the republic, for "reinforced sovkhoz and kolkhoz construction,"[29] and a decree of August 1931 determined that the cotton-growing area of Kazakhstan, along with the according parts of the other Central Asian republics, was due for collectivization during the year of 1931.[30] Accordingly, the collectivization quota in the republic surged again, reaching 73% in June 1932.[31]

According to the nature of the Bolshevik's collectivization program, peasants who disposed over the largest share of means of production were uniformly categorized as "*kulaks*" and identified as the core targets for expropriation. To legitimize this approach, they were depicted not only as exploiters of the poor strata of the rural society, traditionally labeled "*bedniaks*," but also, to make their exclusion from the future economic arrangement permanent, as enemies of the project of the socialist order *per se*. Hence, a 'friend or foe' discourse was generated to clearly and irreversibly delineate the 'enemy'—and to rule out any option to compromise with him. A vivid illustration of this policy was provided at the April, 1928 joint plenum of the TsK and the Central Control Committee of the Party, where problems of food supplies for the cities and the maintenance of temps in the industrialization process were discussed. Along with various measures aiming at establishing tighter party control over production and its distribution, and at securing high flows of food products from the village to the cities, attacks against "the upper classes at the villages" were passed, including the "cleansing [*chistka*] of Soviet, cooperative and party apparatus in grain-growing regions of blatantly degenerated elements not acknowledging classes at the

countryside and not wishing to fall out with the kulaks."[32]

In the livestock regions of Kazakhstan, the main target of the drive against the kulaks were local clan leaders, usually referred to as beys (*bai*). The first major assault on this group was carried out in 1928. On August 27, the Central Executive Committee and the Council of People's Commissars, the two top government bodies in the Kazakh ASSR, issued a joint decree "On the confiscation of bey households." Its single point reads as follows:

> 1. Carry out in the Kazakh ASSR, with the exception of the Adaevskii region and the cotton-growing regions of the former Dzhegysiiskii and Syr-Dar'inskii gubernii and the Kara-Kalpakskii autonomous region, the resettlement of all those large scale stock breeders from the indigenous population, who, conserving semi-feudal, patriarchal and kinship relationships, are preventing through their economic and public influence the sovietization of the aul.[33]

Although a total number of 700 households was affected by this measure, this first attempt to liquidate resistance to the planned takeover of absolute economic power in the countryside (and also to win over the support of poorer parts of the population) still fell far short, in terms of scale, of the repressions initiated by the TsK decree of February 20, 1930 on the "the struggle with the kulaks" in the "national, economically backward regions" of the Soviet Union, which targeted up to about 2-3% of the population. In fact, more than 5% of all Kazakh households would have fallen victim to "dekulakization" in early 1932.[34] In this act, the TsK specified a policy of toughness, characterized by the relentless will to apply and to enforce the simplified class schemata, and to gain absolute political and economic control over the inhabitants of every region of the union. The Bolsheviki would allow no escape from their rule. The tendency of Kazakhs to evade the pressure of collectivization through emigration across the border was to be eliminated through a tightening of border controls, but also through 'preemptive' measures, culminating in "the confiscation of the cattle and all [*sic!*] property from those households that are trying to emigrate through the border."[35] At the same time, it is telling that for regions close to the border, the conclusion of special contracts with kulak households was recommended, stimulating them to deliver their entire production to cooperatives in exchange for manufactured goods and grain—until they would ultimately become victims of the inescapable means of repression that ultimately awaited them, including imprisonment in concentration camps, and even immediate execution of "counterrevolutionary bey-kulak activists (organizers, participants and henchmen of banditry and counterrevolutionary organizations)." The document thus illustrates that the Bolsheviki were resolved to seize absolute power over the countryside, and that they stuck firmly to their doctrine, which held that such an endeavor could succeed only if their defined enemies—"kulaks" or "beys" likewise—were crushed.

However, the core motive behind the massive assault on the existing socio-economic structures remains visible: to ensure a steady and controllable flow of agricultural production to the cities and the industry. Throughout the collectivization and "dekulakization" campaigns, the procurement policies kept being enforced relentlessly. The entire amount of grain procurements in the Soviet Union exhibited a steady growth, both in absolute terms and as a percentage of the entire production, throughout the period from 1929 until 1932.[36] In autumn 1930, the Soviet leadership, facing a shortage of manufactured goods, which discouraged peasants from handing over their grain at official prices, set up significantly increased quota for an extended range of agricultural products,[37] while sticking to its policy of combining artificially low prices with coercion, thus making it "transparently obvious that the primary concern of the authorities was […] to squeeze as much grain as possible out of the peasants."[38]

Stalinist Policies in Kazakhstan in Early 1930s and their Consequences

Like in virtually every agricultural region of the USSR, collectivization and "dekulakization" in Kazakhstan were carried out by means of massive coercion. Not seldom brute force was involved, but most common was the simple pattern of the privation of peasants unwilling to join the kolkhozy or unable to hand over the required amount of agricultural production, of all their possessions. At the same time, the policy of forced procurements was firmly maintained. As archival documents reveal, the Soviet government was, at any moment, well apprised of the developments on the ground and of the consequences they had for the population as well as for the rural economy. A letter from a "society of the Urals region of the Kazakh ASSR" informed the Soviet Council of Ministers in April 1930 that

> the major burden of meat collections falls on middle and poor peasants, and [they] are not taking away surpluses, but the last bit [we have] […] The local authorities imposed compulsory wool deliveries on the population in December 1929 and January 1930. So the population sheared the wool off its rams and camels, irrespective of the bitter cold […] so that the animals […] would not withstand the icy cold any more and perished.[39]

As early as March 1930, information about incidents of hunger in several regions in Kazakhstan appeared in OGPU reports. A memo informed its reader that

> "In connection with difficulties in supply in the [Pavlodarskii] district, the sentiment among the population becomes more and more tightened. In a number of settlements many cases of hunger swelling and of consumption of [food] substitutes and of cadavers have been registered […] We dispose of declarations of kolkhoz members that they will, in the case of failure of being supplied with food, start to butcher the remaining productive sloggers to escape starvation."[40]

Similarly, local OGPU staff from the Petropavloskii district reported to the Kazakh Executive Committee: "In most cases, it is the poor who are starving."[41] The OGPU kept delivering such information, which became increasingly comprehensive over time—supply crises, hunger, resulting illnesses and starving, and, as a reaction, numerous cases of collective protest, often involving hundreds of persons, were spreading all over the republic.[42] The situation remained extremely tense as the year went on. In September, the OGPU plenipotentiary in Kazakhstan reported to the center that the process of grain collection was dragging again. One explicitly mentioned factor to explain these problems was the extremely poor state of the kolkhozy and sovkhozy, which were lacking technical working equipment as well as effective organization.[43] After a relative relaxation of the supply situation, the situation aggravated extremely after the poor harvest in 1931. According to OGPU reports, the northern parts of Kazakhstan were struck particularly badly. Among a "totally incomplete" sample of data from 232 settlements in 32 various districts throughout the republic, 1219 deaths from hunger, and 4304 cases of hunger swelling had been registered throughout the period from December 1931 until March 1932. As the report stated, "the majority of the deaths and the starving are kolkhozniki."[44]

More revealing insights into the nature of the crisis offers a letter an agronomist, working for the district kolkhoz federation (*raikolkhozsoiuz, RKZ*) in the Ubanskii district in Kazakhstan, sent to Kolkhoztsentr[45] in early February 1932. He described the situation of the kolkhoz "*Nash trud*" ("Our Work"), which, according to him, was representative for that of "all kolkhozy, without exception, in the district." Although knowing about the forlornness of such initiatives, peasants from these collectives were asking the RKZ to provide them with grain:

> the same peasants, who, after the mediocre harvest of 1930 overfulfilled the grain procurement plan, who overfulfilled the 2nd plan of bolshevist sowings and received [for this] as a present [from] Ukraine a radio receiver, the same kolkhozniki, who were, throughout the entire Kazakhstan, among the first to accomplish the construction work for the settlement of the Kazakh nomadic population, which earned the district an award […]—these kolkhozniki are now writing letters to the RKZ and pleading for grain as alms, saying: 'Why did you, our leaders, made us give away our grain, while you knew that there was crop failure this year, while you know all too well that we are lacking grain at this moment already, even with the sowing not having been done yet?!'—'The grain collection plan must be fulfilled!'—this is the answer they get.[46]

The same letter contains information about the predisposition towards the Bolshevik's agrarian policy across the two different national groups, composing the population of that district—Europeans (about 60%, mostly Ukrainians) and Kazakhs (40%): "Europeans […] are very good-natured folks […], among the Kazakhs, with the support of the European [part of the] population, things are getting settled, although with serious difficulties."

The author of the letter went on to make a strong point that the region, in general, had significant potential for economic development, especially in terms of livestock farming. But he also deplored that the newly established state meat farm [*miasosovkhoz*] at that moment disposed of just 23,000 animals, whereas just one single settlement in the district counted, shortly before, "about one and a half as much cattle as this miasosovkhoz, not counting the remaining parts of the district." Between the lines, he thus denounced the appalling loss of livestock that collectivization had already brought about, and concluded with a desperate plea to the Bolsheviki at the center not to be "that weak and ignorant" to allow such developments.[47]

From these letters we learn that nothing—neither ethnicity, nor kolkhoz membership, nor a positive attitude towards collectivization—could exempt rural dwellers from exaggerated grain collections. At the same time, they expose how the ruthless grain procurement policy disturbed the economic balance between crop farmers and the livestock-cultivating population, which traditionally had been importing grain: With the disappearance of marketed grain, a significant increase in the meat consumption by the latter was induced. To be sure, this was just one factor contributing to the disastrous outcome—the virtual annihilation of the overwhelming part of livestock in the region.[48] Other causes involved were increased livestock collections imposed by the central authorities, the confiscation of cattle for the kolkhozy and sovkhozy, and the subsequent perishing of much, if not most of the livestock affected by these two measures, as well as mass slaughters that occurred as an act of protest, the lack of fodder and, finally, the flight of Kazakhs, together with their livestock, across the border.

Altogether, the catastrophic decline in livestock was one major reason for the mass famine that broke out in Kazakhstan in 1932 and 1933, reaching a scale unprecedented by everything that had happened before. And again, as soon as the mass famine loomed, the center received information quickly and through various channels. In a letter to Mikhail Kalinin, chairman of the All-Union Executive Committee and, at the same time, politburo member, an inhabitant of the Maksim-Gorkii-district (former Pavlodarskii district) depicted the situation in his region as follows:

> In recent times, there is doom [*gibel'*] everywhere, death of the population, the sowings did not grow, all cattle is handed out to the state, the kolkhozniki are not supplied with grain from the side of the state, the population has nothing to eat […] the local activists […] once they have seen a citizen with a piece of bread, a pound of flour, a piece of meat, they take it from him and consume it themselves, [labeling it] as a handing out to the state, but in fact they gulp it themselves […] Besides that, the local authorities carry out, among the hungry population, various procurement campaigns, while the populace is unable to find food, not a single piece of bread.[49]

When the cataclysm was reaching its peak in August 1932, Uraz Isaev, chairman of the Kazakh Council of People's Commissars addressed himself to Stalin, providing an analysis of the reasons of the Kazakh crisis. Although one of his main arguments was directed against Goloshchekin, the regional party secretary, whom he depicted as unable to cope with the problems that had accumulated,[50] he nevertheless discussed other key factors that had led into the catastrophe. Among these, he identified, besides arbitrary, chaotic and disorganized rule on the level of the auls, the fact that the grain supply namely of the cattle farming population had suffered a major collapse. For this, he blamed nothing else than the continuation of the state grain collections to the full extent, irrespective of the crop failures Kazakh agriculture had suffered during precedent years. Accordingly, among the numerous actions Isaev put forward as a means to solve the crisis, he applied "to exempt Kazakhstan, for the next 2-3 years, from centralized meat collections in the collective and individual sector," and, furthermore, "to exempt all cattle farming regions with ancillary crop farming from centralized grain collections."[51]

Were these suggestions, which would have meant a reversal of the core element of Stalin's agricultural policy, which they, in veiled terms, identified as a major reason for the disastrous results in Kazakhstan, taken into account? On the one hand, the TsK appears to have made a limited concession in September 1932, reducing the plan figure for grain collections for Kazakhstan by 3 mls. pud and postponing the payment of additional 5 mls. pud from a credit until the following year, so that the new plan as of October 1932 equaled 46 mls. pud (or 753,477 tons), three-fourths of which was to be collected from the kolkhozy.[52] On the other hand, such amendments of the initial, preliminary plan figure were a rule rather than the exception in the Soviet planning system, and simultaneously with granting a limited reduction in the procurement plan (which was far less than Isaev had claimed) the TsK categorically obliged the Kazakh party leadership and government to fulfill this new plan.

However, given the shattered state of Kazakh agriculture, these targets were still unachievable. In 1932, starving masses were moving around in the Kazakh countryside. The frequency and scale of mass unrests and riots had increased dramatically. Groups counting up to several hundreds, or even thousands of persons were trying to obtain food through raids of collective farms or meat factories. In many cases formal party members were involved in such hunger revolts, which, in OGPU reports, figured uniformly as "counterrevolutionary" acts.[53] The mass unrests along with the depopulation of the collective farms and the still continuing reduction of the remaining livestock made, all ruthless pressure and force that was exerted notwithstanding, the fulfillment of the grain collection plan illusory.[54] As soon as this became obvious, Stalin would abide by his well-known principles. On November 8, 1932, the party committee and the SNK of the KASSR received a joint telegram from Stalin and Molotov:

> Regardless to the warnings of the SNK [the Council of People's Commissars] and TsK [of the USSR / Communist party], the grain collections in the republic continue to decline. References to numbers on the harvest, [provided as] reasons for the nonfulfillment of the passed plan, cannot be taken into account by the TsK and the Council of People's Commissars as these numbers are clearly understated and aim at cheating the state. […] The TsK and SNK warn you that, in case there will not be organized a real breakthrough concerning the grain collections in the republic in the most immediate future, they will be forced to resort to methods of repression, analogous to the repressions in the North Caucasus.[55]

Not surprisingly, three days later the recipients of these unequivocal threats finalized a wide range of coercive methods to force the kolkhozy in the republic to fulfill the grain collection quota. In another telegram he sent two weeks thereafter, Stalin would explicitly advise the leadership of the Kazakh communist party to resort to repressions against communist activists and party officials in order to make sure that the grain requisition plan would

be fulfilled by all means. Since the plan was already "maximally cut," he argued, the logical answer to falling yields from the procurement campaigns should be to "strike, in the first place, the communists in the regions and below, who are totally captured by petty-burgeois elements […] It is obvious, that, under these circumstances, the SNK and the regional party committee could not act in any different manner, than switch to the track of repression."[56]

Again, we see Stalin's unshakable resolve to fulfill the procurement quotas, even at the costs of repression. In fact there can be little doubt that his action was not just a punitive measure, directed against supposedly unreliable party activists, but also intended to directly translate into even more ruthless pressure exercised on the population. Stalin's thinking was unamendable to any possible compromises, even—or should one say: more than ever—at a moment when reports not only on hunger and starvation, but also on the collapse of many of the new, shaky kolkhoz structures were reaching the center. At the united plenum of the TsK and the Central Control Commission (TsKK) in January 1933, Stalin once again revealed his order of priorities: "What is the main deficiency in our work at the countryside over the last year, 1932? The main deficiency consists in the fact that the grain collections were carried out with greater difficulties in this year, than in the previous year. This cannot be explained by a bad harvest at all, since our harvest was not worse, but better than in the previous year."[57] It is important to note, though, that, the Central Administration for National Accounting (TsUNKhU) had consistently been delivering data, according to which the harvest in 1932 was expected to yield 67,1 mls. tons of grain, which would not only have been less than the figure for 1931 (68,9 mls tons), but also much lower than in all previous years of the first Five-Year Plan, throughout which the annual yields had been, partly significantly, higher than 70 mls. tons. The deviation from the extremely ambitious plan figure for 1932 (85,3 mls. tons) was even more drastic. As the end of the year was approaching, the TsUNKhU kept working with and publishing its low estimate, until the Politburo would bar it, under the threat of repressions, from using these numbers. Hence there is strong evidence that Stalin was not telling the truth when describing the harvest of 1932 as better than the previous one, and that he was consciously and deliberately doing so.[58] Instead, he would stress the need for the party to take full control over the kolkhozy, and to make sure that the grain collection had absolute priority over every other use of grain: "the first precept—the fulfillment of the grain procurement plan, the second precept—the sowings, and only after the fulfillment of these conditions can the grain trade within the kolkhozy begin and develop."[59]

In the case of Kazakhstan, it was just during the course of the year 1933 that this uncompromising policy, which was, to a significant extent, responsible for the death of over one million people and a complete devastation of the entire economy, was finally revised.[60]

The Role of the Regional Party Leadership

Filipp Isaevich Goloshchekin served as party secretary in the KASSR from 1925 until 1933.[61] Throughout his entire tenure, his function entailed regulating the procurement of agricultural production, as well as the collectivization process in Kazakhstan. He gave out orders, directions and instructions and controlled the actions of subordinate party structures. On the one hand, one might therefore argue that he bore a distinct share of the responsibility for the policy implemented in Kazakhstan. However, Goloshchekin was, like his colleagues in other republics, held personally responsible for the fulfillment of tasks and plan targets defined by the center, so that his leeway for independent action was limited.

Documents from the former Soviet central archives can shed some light on the role regional party officials

played over the course of the collectivization through information on their behavior in decision making processes at the center in which they occasionally were involved. Since the end of 1929, Goloshchekin was a member of the so-called "Iakovlev commission," established by the Politburo on December 5, 1929 and assigned with the task of planning the stages of the collectivization campaign in the various regions of the USSR.[62] In addition, he was included in the commission that was expected to develop "measures concerning the kulaks," which was set up six weeks later.[63] Archival documents reveal that Goloshchekin was among those members, who pleaded for more moderate temps in the collectivization drive—initially with some success, although amendments made to the crucial legislative documents, arranged by Stalin, would later foil some of these reservations.[64] He also tried to connect his approval of the collectivization in Kazakhstan with explicit claims for resources. According to a regional party official, he held and articulated, by the end of 1929, the opinion that "comprehensive (*sploshnaia*) collectivization [in Kazakhstan] can be realized if you [the center] give us 180 mls. Rb., many thousand tractors and so on."[65]

As to the grain collection plans, other archival materials show him trying to minimize the burden for his republic. On the Central Committee plenum, October 28-31, 1930, where grain collection quota for all regions for the year 1931 were discussed, numerous regional party representatives expressed concern over or outright objections against the proposed amount of grain to be collected in their region or republic. Reacting to these criticisms, Stalin summoned a special gathering of all regional secretaries, where the plans for several regions were lowered as compared with the initially proposed plan (for others, there were increases, but in sum the decreases were more significant). We do not know what arguments were exchanged at these talks. What we do know is that, as a result, the collection quota for Kazakhstan was lowered from an initial level of 65 mls. pud (1,065 mls. tons) to 55 mls. pud (900,000 tons).[66] Yet Goloshchekin considered this lowered figures still much too high, and openly declared so at the subsequent plenum: "In any case, I must say that 55 million is impossible."[67] This time, his repeated demur would earn him nothing more than a sharp rebuff by Anastas Mikoian, People's Commissioner for Supplies, and also one of Stalin's most loyal allies—the plan figure remained unchanged. However, it is worth noting that the first documented plan, presented in June 1931, had fixed a grain collection total of 1,428 mls. pud for Kazakhstan.

Finally, Goloshchekin also tried occasionally to minimize, in the eyes of the leadership, his responsibility for failures to fulfill the plan targets, blaming his own subordinates instead.[68] Altogether, Goloshchekin exposed all behavioral features, characteristic for a classical principal-agent relationship. Exposed to high pressure from above, he was trying to negotiate outcomes that would be favorable to him. His bargaining power was limited, though, as the discussions around the procurement quota exhibit. The asymmetric distribution of power led to results that reflected Stalin's will to a far greater extent than Goloshchekin's. Without considering miscalculations and wrong decisions the latter might have made, this suggests that he was not the driving force behind the Soviet agrarian policy that was implemented in Kazakhstan. This policy was made in Moscow, not in Alma-Ata.

Conclusion

In this paper I have demonstrated that the policy leading to the Kazakh catastrophe was formulated by Stalin himself. It had one single objective: maximizing the extraction of agricultural production at artificially low prices. For Stalin, collectivization and "dekulakization" were not primarily an endeavor to create a new society. He saw and used them as an instrument to establish absolute control over the countryside in order to ensure the steady flow of agricultural "surplus,"needed for his larger project to industrialize the country. As a general rule, this pol-

icy was uniformly applied throughout the entire Soviet agriculture, without respect to regional specifics of individual republics. Regional party officials had little leeway to amend it—until 1933, the center would not accept such reasons or, at the most, grant marginal concessions. If problems became overwhelming, Stalin's answer was equally simple and uncompromising, consisting nearly exclusively in the application of repression against both the population and the party apparatus that was supposed to carry out his orders. The Kazakh tragedy was thus the result of a simple, brutalized policy, defined by Stalin, that prioritized procurement aims, and used utmost pressure as a means to enforce it.

Indeed, the fact that the specific structure of the Kazakh society, culture and economy was largely ignored exacerbated the scope of the results. In the republic, the degree of (often destructive) resistance was particularly high, and the Kazakh livestock farmers were struck particularly badly. To a certain extent, it might therefore appear appropriate to talk about miscalculations in Stalin's strategy, as Martha Olcott proposed. However, archival sources also reveal that ample evidence on the disastrous consequences of the Bolshevik's policy in Kazakhstan reached the center promptly and through various channels. Yet even with this information available, Stalin's order of priorities was not shaken. He stuck to the policy of forcedly extracting agricultural production even after it had become obvious that this was thwarting any effort to create stable, functioning collective production structures in the countryside, and that it was even destroying those at places where they previously had been set up. Even less did he seem to care about the mass starving that went on in many regions, including Kazakhstan. Stalin made no effort to find a smart way of molding a new model of rural society, based on Soviet ideology, not to talk about the even more sophisticated task of turning a traditional, semi-nomad population in places like Kazakhstan into socialist farm workers. Instead, he was waging a war to achieve full control over the agricultural sector, with the ultimate aim to achieve the extraction of the resources he needed, and he was fully aware of it. If he has miscalculated something, then this were the costs and the benefits of this strategy. Economically, the collectivization campaign was a failure: Over the period of the first Five-Year Plan, no net resources could be extracted from the countryside.[69]

Notes

1. Figure as used by Robert W. Davies and Stephen G. Wheatcroft: *The Years of Hunger: Soviet Agriculture, 1931-1933* (The Industrialisation of Soviet Russia, 5), Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2004, p. 412.
2. As the most prominent publication can be considered: Robert Conquest: *Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivization and the Terror Famine*, London: Hutchinson, 1986. The situation in Kazakhstan is described on pp. 189-198. It must be noted, however, that Conquest, in his remarks on the background of the Kazakh famine, heavily relies on Olcott's work (Martha Brill Olcott: "The Collectivization Drive in Kazakhstan," in: *Russian Review*, Vol. 40, No. 2 (April, 1981), pp. 122-142). Besides that, some of his references to works by third authors are obviously also adopted from Olcott's article, where they appear in an identical fashion.
3. For an early, yet, until present, largely unchallenged overview, see: Alec Nove: *An Economic History of the USSR*, Middlesex: Penguin, 1969, pp. 148-186. Besides this, one has to point out the classical studies by Robert W. Davies: *The Socialist Offensive: The Collectivisation of Soviet Agriculture, 1929-1930* (The Industrialisation of Soviet Russia, 1), Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980; *The Soviet Collective Farm, 1929-1930* (The Industrialisation of Soviet Russia, 2), Cambridge, HUP, 1980. Davies / Wheatcroft, *The Years of Hunger*, represents the sequel to these two titles.
4. Olcott, p. 125.
5. Ibid., pp. 123, 139.
6. The "aul" represented, according to Martha Olcott's definition, the "migratory and basic residential unit of the Kazakh people" (Olcott, p. 125).
7. In a cautious way, this argument has been made by A.P. Kuchkin in: Sovetizatsiia kazakhskogo aula, 1926-1929 gg., Moskva: Izd. Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1962. For the bare mention of problems that had occurred and of "mistakes" that had been made throughout this

period, the author was subjected to harsh, ideologically motivated criticism by his Soviet colleagues—even though he still certified the Soviet authorities in Kazakhstan that, in 1929, “the task of the sovietization of the aul […] was, in general, completed” (p. 384).
8. The sources used throughout this paper are documents that have been published in two recent editions: *Nasil'stvennaia kollekitizatsiia i golod v Kazakhstane v 1931-1933 gg.: Sbornik dokumentov i materialov*, Almaty, 1998; *Tragediia sovetskoi derevni: kollektivizatsiia i raskulachiavanie, dokumenty i materialy v 5 tomakh*, 1927-1939, ed. by V. Danilov, R. Manning, L. Viola et al., vol. I-III, Moskva: ROSSPEN, 2000/2001 (quoted as: TSD).
9. Davies, p. 38.
10. TSD, vol. 1, pp. 108-9, 111-3.
11. Ibid., p. 147.
12. Davies, p. 57.
13. Yuzuru Tainiuchi: “Decision-making on the Ural-Siberian Method,” in: *Soviet History, 1917-53: Essays in Honour of R. W. Davies*, ed. by Julian Cooper, Maureen Perrie and E. A. Rees, Houndmills, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995, pp. 78-103, here: p. 80.
14. Ibid., pp. 83, 85.
15. In winter 1928, Anastas Mikoian, then People’s Commissar for Trade, would advise the SNK that the prospective underfulfillment of grain collections in certain regions (Central Black Earth Region, North Caucasus, Ukraine and the Tatar Republic) called for the achievement of an overfulfillment of the plans in other regions, namely in the Urals, in Siberia, Kazakhstan and the Bashkir Republic. TSD, vol. 1, p. 476.
16. Ibid., p. 105.
17. Ibid., p. 780.
18. Ibid., pp. 159-160.
19. Ibid., p. 217.
20. Ibid., pp. 692, 695.
21. Ibid., pp. 709-710.
22. TSD, vol. 2, p. 93.
23. TSD, vol. 1, p. 697.
24. Davies, pp. 194-203, 205.
25. TSD, vol. 2, p. 53.
26. The lower number is given for March 7 (TSD, vol. 2, p. 289), the higher one refers to March 10 (ibid., p. 571). Olcott quotes the work of a Soviet historian, who, in turn, refers to “archival sources” according to which this percentage had reached 56,6% of the population at the same date (Olcott, p. 129). Assuming that the numbers are quoted correctly in both sources, one might infer from the difference that the number of persons in households (reportedly) joining the kolkhozy was higher than average, or interpret it, along with the unlikely increase by 8% within three days, as an indicator of a certain inaccuracy in the reporting of such figures.
27. Nove, p. 173.
28. Davies, p. 332.
29. Davies / Wheatcroft, p. 3.
30. Nove, p. 174.
31. Davies / Wheatcroft, p. 322.
32. *Nasil'stvennaia kollekitizatsiia*, p. 25.
33. Ibid., p. 28.
34. TSD, vol. 2, p. 256. For the 1932 figure, see Davies / Wheatcroft, p. 322.
35. TSD, vol. 2, p. 253.
36. Paul Gregory and Robert Stuart: *Russian and Soviet Economic Structure and Performance*, Boston: Addison Wesley Longman, Inc., 2001, p. 77.
37. Davies, p. 373.
38. Ibid., p. 354.
39. TSD, vol. 2, p. 389.
40. Ibid., p. 353.
41. *Nasil'stvennaia kollekitizatsiia*, p. 72.
42. TSD, vol. 2, pp. 477-8.
43. Ibid., p. 604.
44. TSD, vol. 3, p. 335.
45. “Kolkhoztsentr” was the federal organization in charge of setting up new kolkhozy and providing them with assistance.

46. TSD, vol. 3, p. 259.
47. Ibid., p. 260.
48. Between 1928 and 1933, the percentage decline was as follows: horses: –87%; cattle: –77%; sheep and goats: –89%, camels: –93%. Davies / Wheatcroft, pp. 321-2.
49. *Nasil'stvennaia kollekitizatsiia*, p. 111.
50. Ibid., pp. 159, 162.
51. Ibid., pp. 160-1.
52. TSD, vol. 3, pp. 484, 501.
53. For some examples, see *Nasil'stvennaia kollekitizatsiia*, pp. 62-71.
54. TSD, vol. 3, p. 338.
55. *Nasil'stvennaia kollekitizatsiia*, p. 193.
56. TSD, vol. 3, pp. 548-9.
57. Ibid., pp. 629-630.
58. Ibid., pp. 851-2.
59. Ibid., pp. 629-630.
60. Davies / Wheatcroft, p. 326.
61. Mikhailov, Valerii: *Khronika velikogo dzhuta: Dokumental'noe povestvovanie*, Alma-Ata: "Interbuk," 1990, pp. 13-4.
62. TSD, vol. 2, p. 35.
63. Ibid., p. 116.
64. Ibid., p. 9.
65. Ibid., p. 68.
66. Davies / Wheatcroft, p. 476, TSD, vol. 3, p. 206.
67. Davies / Wheatcroft, p. 91.
68. See, for instance, *Nasil'stvennaia kollektivizatsiia*, p. 51.
69. James Millar: "Soviet Rapid Development and the Agricultural Surplus Hypothesis," in: *Soviet Studies,* vol. 22, no. 1 (July 1970).

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