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sche Schicksal der wissenschaftlichen Beschäftigung mit der Opričnina von den 20er Jahren bis zur Mitte der 50er Jahre muß eine Lehre werden; zugleich bietet es auch ein Beispiel an Mut, das S. B. Veselovskij den neuen Wissenschaftlergenerationen gegeben hat.¹⁰¹

PEASANT-BOLSHEVIK CONFLICTS INSIDE THE RED ARMY ON
THE EVE OF DEKULAKIZATION (1928–1929)*

BY ANDREA ROMANO

Among the various bodies which made up the system of bolshevik power, the Army was certainly of primary importance. The “Workers’-Peasants’ Red Army” (*Raboche-Krest’ianskaia Krasnaia Armiiia*), having guaranteed the bolsheviks’ defence of the power gained in 1917, acquired in the 1920s functions which went far beyond military ones. The mainly peasant composition of the conscripts made the Army an important instrument of Bolshevik power in the fields of political education, monitoring and control of rural youth. At the same time, the Army mirrored precisely and instantly the state of mind and the social-political attitudes of the young peasant recruits. This characteristic became clearer after 1924/1925 when the “military reform” led by Frunze, had reorganized the major part of the military units on the basis of the territorial-militia principle, as a consequence of which the Army found itself more closely linked to the civil environment.¹

The study of the Red Army as an instrument of bolshevik intervention in the countryside and as a mirror of the attitudes of the rural populations, would seem therefore to be useful as a contribution to the analysis of peasant-bolshevik relations.² In this study, I will show the first results of the research which I am undertaking on peasant-bolshevik relations within the Red Army in the period 1928–1933. There are two aspects to the question which I am trying to answer in this research: what role did the Army play in the development of collectivization and

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¹ See I. B. Berchin, *Voennaia reforma v SSSR (1924–1925 gg.)* (Moscow 1958). A. Romano, “‘Contadini in uniforme’ e potere sovietico alla metà degli anni ‘20’”, *Rivista storica italiana*, CIV-1992, pp. 730–795.

² This approach was used by the American historian Mark von Hagen in his *Soldiers in the Proletarian Dictatorship. The Red Army and the Soviet Socialist State, 1917–1930* (Ithaca–London: Cornell University Press, 1990). While there has been no other research of this kind on the history of the Red Army, the Russian Tsarist Army has been the subject of numerous political-social studies: these include J. L. H. Keep, *Soldiers of the Tsar. Army and Society in Russia 1462–1874* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), J. Bushnell, *Mutiny and Repression. Russian Soldiers in the Revolution of 1905–1906* (Bloomington: Indiana University Pr., 1985), E. Kimerling Wirtschafter, *From Serf to Russian Soldier* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).

¹⁰¹ Aus dem Russischen von Markus Wehner.

what were the consequences of this collectivization within the military units. In my work to date, I have reached the conviction that some aspects of the reactions of the military hierarchy to the comprehensive collectivization of 1930–1933 had their *raison d'être* in what had happened in the Red Army in 1928–1929, when the “extraordinary measures” put an end to the NEP and set in motion the new season of the bolshevik attack on the countryside. Therefore, in the following pages, I will describe and comment on what happened in the military units when the Soviet countryside was affected by the 1928–1929 turn-about in the party’s agrarian policy.

I will focus on the “peasant rumours” that joined the military units from the rural areas and on the soldiers’ reactions to the events of those months. The focal point of my analysis will be the “political-moral condition”³ of the Army. Therefore, I will examine the way in which the authorities in charge and the political workers in the Red Army, accepted, understood and responded to these phenomena. I am basing this study mainly on material from the Russian State Military Archives in Moscow.⁴ In particular, in examining the “rumours”, I will use the reports which the Army’s political staff regularly prepared on the life of the military units. These reports (*svodki, obzory, doneseniia*), described in detail the behaviour of the soldiers, the most significant phrases used by the young peasants and anything formed the “political-moral condition”.

This archival documentation actually leave even too much space to the “judgement” of the researcher, who finds himself in the position of having to choose from a quantity of documents produced on the basis of data provided by the political staff and often not re-drafted by the top echelons. Furthermore, one must keep in mind the goals for which the information reports were drafted. The militant features of the point of view of the bolshevik observers, engaged in daily political-social monitoring in a hostile environment, will be played down as far as possible. However, I will be making use of the marked sensitivity of the political workers themselves to the statements of discontent, which more than others demonstrated a state of mind widespread among the soldiers. The words of the peasants and soldiers which I will be quoting, will not be everything I found but only those I consider more representative of the general

³ This is the literal translation of the term *politiko-moral'noe sostoianie*, used by the Army’s political workers. As M. von Hagen very effectively explained (“Soviet Soldiers and Officers on the Eve of the German Invasion: Towards a Description of Social Psychology and Political Attitudes”, *Soviet Union/Union Soviétique*, 18, 1–3 (1991), pp. 79–101), “the concept embraced a wide range of phenomena”, as “the socio-economic background of servicemen, their level of education, their ethnic identity, Party or *Komsomol* membership” and also “any statements soldiers and officers might have been overheard to make about the Army or the political system of the Soviet Union, any registered cases of individual and collective protests”. Von Hagen therefore prefers to use the term “political attitudes and social psychology” (pp. 83–84).

⁴ The *Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Voennyi Arkhiv* (which until 1992 was called Central State Archive of the Soviet Army) contains the documents on the history of the Red Army from 1918 to 1941. See L. V. Dvoynkh, T. F. Kariaveva, M. V. Stegantsev (eds.), *Tsentral'nyi Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Sovetskoi Armii. Putevoditel' v dvukh tomakh* (Minneapolis: East View Publications 1991 (1), 1993 (2)). This guide does not contain information on the many *fondy* and *opisy*, formerly secret, which were open for consultation in 1992.

state of affairs and especially those taken from the abbreviated reports of the PUR⁵, where a special office summarized the peripheral reports using only their more relevant passages. Obviously, whenever possible, I will provide statistical data on the statements of discontent of the “peasants in uniform”.

From NEP to the attack against the countryside: the growth of disciplinary violations

Despite the important organizational changes undergone during the 20s, the Soviet Army in 1927 continued to be composed to a great extent by young peasants. At the end of 1927, according to the detailed figures from the PUR statistics office, the rank and file soldiers (*riadovoi sostav*), numbered 412.700. Of these, 74,3 % were peasants, 19,9 % workers, 4,2 % office workers (*sluzhashchie*), 1,6 % “others” (*prochie*). The percentage of those who were not included in any bolshevik organization was equal to 82,5 % of the whole, while the effective members and candidates of the bolshevik party were 4,1 % and the members of the *Komsomol* 13,4 %.⁶

In order to understand what was happening in the Red Army right from the first weeks of 1928, one must keep in mind the “political-moral condition” of the troops on the eve of these events. An examination of the documents of the period 1926–27 shows a complex situation. On the one hand, there appeared to be a clear drop in the *krest'ianskie nastroeniia* (peasant moods)⁷ of the soldiers compared to 1924–25, when the territorial-militia re-structuring of the Army had brought to the notice of the *politrabotniki* the bitterness of rural discontent which was widespread in the military ranks. In examining the summarized *svodki* of the PUR for the years 1926–27, it is not rare to come across complacent comments such as the following taken from a report of mid-1926:

The political-moral condition of the soldiers during the general gatherings of the territorial units (in the military districts of the Ukraine and the North Caucasus) has considerably improved this year as a consequence of the overall pacification of the countryside. (. . .) The attitude of the mass of recruits towards the Red Army is conscientious. It has been noted that there is less drunkenness and debauchery.⁸

On the other hand, the relative decrease in the *krest'ianskie nastroeniia* was compensated for by the increase of disciplinary violations, especially collective ones. The problem of discipline has always been a priority of the top echelons of the Red Army. Along with the expressions of social discontent, discipline was one of the indicators most frequently used by the *politrabotniki* to evaluate the political-moral condition of the troops. It was natural therefore that the

⁵ The *Politicheskoe Upravlenie Revvoensoveta* (Political Administration of the Revolutionary Military Council) was the body which ran the entire political apparatus of the Red Army.

⁶ RGVA, f. 9, op. 32, d. 3, l. 11.

⁷ The term *krest'ianskie nastroeniia* indicates, as used by the Army’s political workers, those attitudes and statements used by soldiers of peasant origin which referred critically to the condition of the countryside and to the rural policy of the bolshevik party. The *krest'ianskie nastroeniia*, with their periodic aggravation, were, right from the birth of the Red Army, one of the fundamental elements of the political-moral condition of the Army.

⁸ RGVA, f. 9, op. 28, d. 796, 11.20–22.

improvement in the *krest'ianskie nastroeniia* should make the 1927 undiscipline more conspicuous.⁹

We can find an intelligent and complete picture of this situation in the talk which Andrej S. Bubnov, head of the PUR, gave to the military delegates at the IV USSR Congress of Soviets in April 1927. After opening with a formal and ritual expression of optimism ("We can say without any doubt that the overall evaluation of the political-moral condition of the Army and Navy shows that it is sound [*ustoichivoe*]"¹⁰), Bubnov clearly explained the fall in the *krest'ianskie nastroeniia*, claiming that this improvement was due to repressive vigilance:

I categorically affirm that today the *krest'ianskie nastroeniia* do not surpass the limit beyond which one could speak about a major increase and great danger. There have always been *krest'ianskie nastroeniia* in our Army but they increased periodically and were then eliminated: but, thanks to our educational system and our entire system of running the Army, we have kept this phenomenon well under control (*v ezhovykh rukavitsakh*)¹¹

But what disturbed the head of the PUR were the collective violations of discipline and he anxiously pointed out how "in some military districts, they had appeared like a tidal wave which had invaded (*prokratilas*)" an entire category of military units".¹²

By analyzing the characteristics of this phenomenon he identified three types: "the collective expressions of protest and the collective presentations of demands", "the collective refusal to obey orders", and "the refusal of the food rations".¹³ The immediate reasons for these phenomena, according to the head of the PUR, were to be found "first of all in administrative deficiencies and secondly in a certain incapacity in staff command and an undoubted misunderstanding of the soldiers on the part of the political bodies and party organizations".¹⁴ But if the causes were essentially of a technical nature linked to day-to-day matters of military life, an eventual increase in these violations could become a political danger as Bubnov warned at the end of his talk:

⁹ To understand the importance of the question of discipline, one must remember the furious debates on the revolutionary or traditional character of discipline which marked the first years of the Red Army's activity (for the discussion on these points at the VIII congress of the bolshevik party, an authentic turning point in the building of the Soviet Army, see "Izvestiia TsK KPSS" nn. 9-10-11/1989 and F. Benvenuti, *The Bolsheviks and the Red Army, 1919-1922* (Cambridge-New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989). Even after the end of the civil war discipline was constantly at the centre of attention: in 1925, the head of the PUR, A. Bubnov, had launched a "campaign to strengthen discipline" which represented a fundamental moment in "military reform" of that period. With regard to the increase of disciplinary violations in the Red Army in 1927-1928, one must keep in mind that in those very same months even in the industrial sector the bolshevik party chiefs were complaining about a presumed worsening of discipline among the workers - in reality, the aim of this was to prepare the ground for the 1930 anti-workers measures (see A. Graziosi, Stalin's Antiworker "Workerism", *International Review of Social History*, n. 4, 40-1995. One must not exclude the fact that the increase of violations which were verified in the military units alarmed the party chiefs, inducing them to start a "preventive" operation in the factories with a view to the culminating moment of the battle for industrialization and collectivization.

¹⁰ RGVA, f. 4, op. 2, d. 276, 1.123.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 11.134-135.

¹² *Ibid.*, 11.123-124.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 1.135.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 1.137.

At present [the collective violations] are not based on any political foundation, they are all episodes without political implications: but they most certainly could have a political significance if they were to increase any further. For this reason, the phenomenon must be eliminated as quickly as possible.¹⁵

The conjectures feared by Bubnov in mid-1927 took form towards the end of the year, when collective undiscipline acquired even greater dimensions causing fear and preoccupation among the Army leaders. In January 1928, when the problems emerging within the Red Army went far beyond discipline, Voroshilov, the people's commissar for military affairs, issued a secret order which dealt explicitly with this question¹⁶, in which he referred to a trend already clearly in motion: "The collective violations of discipline (...) are continuing and their number is not diminishing." After quoting some outstanding cases of undiscipline, the order concluded with a call for repressive vigilance and the need to avoid useless and dangerous provocations on the part of the officers:

Not one case of collective violation of whatever nature should remain without a careful enquiry and a corresponding initiative. Responsibility lies not only with those directly involved, but also with those officers who through insufficient attention to the needs of the soldiers or by irresponsible orders, have fostered collective violations of discipline.¹⁷

That Voroshilov's worries were well founded was confirmed by the figures furnished by Bubnov some months later in a report in which the numbers for summer of 1927 were compared to those for winter 1927-28 (October 1927-April 1928). The picture produced by the head of the PUR was really significant:

During the seven months of this winter period (according to the PUR data, the central administration of the Red Army [GURKKA] and the military court), some 302 cases of collective violations of discipline were registered while in the five months of the 1927 summer period 69 cases were noted. The monthly average for the winter period compared to the summer showed an increase of more than 200%.¹⁸

A table then illustrated the types of violations with the monthly average and percentage increase.¹⁹

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.139.

¹⁶ Sekretnyi prikaz RVS n. 11-2, 17 January 1928, "O meropriiatiakh po bor'be s sluchaiami kollektivnykh narushenii distsipliny", in *Sbornik sekretnykh prikazov RVS SSSR za 1928 g.* (Moskva, 1928). The copy consulted is kept in the RGVA.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹⁸ RGVA f. 9, op. 28, d. 83, 1.1.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

	Monthly average summer 1927	Monthly average winter 1927–28	Percent increase
Refusal to obey orders	8.4 cases	24.8 cases	195 %
Collective declarations or complaints	2.4 cases	7.8 cases	225 %
Refusal of rations	2.8 cases	10.1 cases	260 %
Unauthorized meetings	0.2 cases	0.3 cases	50 %

The Red Army during the second half of 1927, on the eve of the “attack against the countryside”, thus was in a diversified political-moral situation. The relative drop in the *krest'ianskie nastroeniia* which was explained by the *politrabotniki* with the “pacification” of the countryside, was accompanied by a trend of rapid growth in the collective violations of discipline which began in November 1927 and spread in the first months of 1928.²⁰ We won't venture into an interpretation of this situation at the moment. It is sufficient to show how the growing undiscipline, apart from alarming the leaders of the Red Army, was considered by them as a sign of the soldiers' capacity of opposition to the insufficiencies of military life, according to an expression used by Bubnov in the report mentioned earlier: “The collective violations of discipline are nothing more than phenomena of deliberate and active opposition on the part of the soldiers (*soznatel'nym, aktivnym protivodeistviem krasnoarmeitsev*).”²¹ But when Bubnov was writing these words the problems which the Army's political administration had to deal with were very different. Those same military units, which by their undiscipline had shown themselves already to be in a state of tension, had been for some weeks reacting with unusual vigour to the ever more dramatic news arriving from the Russian countryside.

The 1928 “extraordinary measures” and the *krest'ianskie nastroeniia*

Western historiography has already re-constructed, with more or less favourable results, the principal phases of the 1928 turn-about in bolshevik agrarian policy, describing in detail the “extraordinary measures” by which the party closed the NEP and opened a new season of conflicts with the rural population. There is no need therefore to recall here the main events of that period. Nevertheless, by introducing an analysis of the reactions of the peasants in uniform to the extraordinary measures, I feel it would be opportune to recall how some of these Western historical texts had already conjectured that there could have been a severe reaction from the troops to the dramatic news arriving from the rural villages.²²

²⁰ In his April 1928 talk, Bubnov wrote: “November 1927 was the first month which saw the growth of collective violations of discipline. In December 1927 and January 1928 they remained at the same level as November” (*ibid.*).

²¹ *Ibid.*, 1.6.

²² In particular, Moshe Lewin, in his work *La paysannerie et le pouvoir soviétique 1928–1930* (Paris: Mouton, 1966), had written: “Les paysans protestaient par tous les moyens qui leur étaient accessibles, dont l'un, d'une efficacité politique certaine, consistait à se plaindre auprès de leurs fils qui

The main route by which news of the emergency in the countryside reached the barracks was by letter, the “floods of letters” (*potoki pisem*) which the peasant families sent their sons, their relatives or their ordinary fellow-countrymen doing military service. We don't have precise figures on the quantity of letters which the ranks received monthly, but certainly it must have been considerable. In fact, from the first weeks of 1928, we find alarming references from the PUR editors of the *svodki* referring to an absolute avalanche of papers, as the following extract in a January report confirms:

One can judge the size of this flood of letters by using an example from the military district of northern Caucasus where in the Novocherkassk garrison with 5000 soldiers, up to 6000 letters were received daily (*za den' poluchil do 6000 pisem*).²³

According to the PUR reports, recourse to peasant “delegates” (*khodoki*) was widespread: they were sent by the villages particularly in the territorial units, generally quartered close to inhabited centres, to inform the troops of what was happening. The same report continues: “the flood of letters was aggravated by the visit of the delegates to the units: they complained about the behaviour of the local authority (*potok pisem usugubliaetsia posesheniem chasti khodokami, prikhodiashchimi s zhalobami na deistviia mestnoi vlasti*).”²⁴ Finally, even if the reports mentioned them less frequently, the soldiers also received news from casual or direct meetings with peasants or from accounts given by soldiers returning from outings or leave.

The latter seem to be the best source for a careful description of events. At least this is the impression we receive from the account which a junior officer, just returned from the countryside, gave his soldiers, where the work of a *troika* in the village is described with details similar to those we can find in the works of modern scholars dedicated to the events of 1928:

The extraordinary commission arrived at the house. It checked the quantity of grain and stated that so many cases of grain must have been sold to the state and so many left for the peasant. It took note of how much must be consigned by the peasant within a certain date. By doing this account, it imposed certain obligations on the peasant, or it returned the following day and forced the peasant to sign, saying: “you have the money, give it to us”.²⁵

Many of the peasants' letters were also limited, right from the first weeks of 1928, to simply describing what was happening. But recounting what appeared in their eyes to be a natural catastrophe, many letters added, in the characteristic language of the peasant, comments on the reactions of their fellow-countrymen. The following are extracts from two letters sent from northern Caucasus in January 1928:

servaient dans l'armée. Aux yeux du paysan, le fils à l'armée représentait, en quelque sorte, les autorités. L'armée fut submergée par un flot de lettres de campagnards qui se plaignaient des misères que leur infligeaient les autorités. De la part des soldats, des réactions indésirables étaient à craindre et ne devaient pas tarder à se signaler” (p. 219). Lewin, in this instance, used the minutes of the plenum of the CC held in July 1928 which are kept in the Trotskii archives at Harvard and quoted from R. V. Daniels in his *The Conscience of the Revolution. Communist Opposition in Soviet Russia* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1960). Von Hagen also wrote of “grumbings of soldiers during the winter grain requisitioning” (*Soldiers . . .*, p. 309).

²³ RGVA, f. 9, op. 28, d. 68, 1.3.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.3 ob.

They arrive in every house at night and take the grain, they no longer give anything to the shops. All our people behave as though stupefied (*vse nashi khodiat, kak durnye*).

(...) In the village, the people act as though they were dead (*V stanitse narod stal priamo kak mertvyi*). Life is becoming such that we don't know how we are going to live in the future. They are taking the grain reserves. They take from everyone: they don't take money, but only say: "give us the grain". From those who don't have grain they take the horse or the cow. They take everything that is in the house.²⁶

With the passing of the weeks and the worsening of the extraordinary measures, the letters began to speak about the peasants' fears for the future and alarm about possible famine and hunger were added to the descriptions of the requisitioning. This can be seen in a letter sent to an Ukrainian soldier at the beginning of April 1928:

They are taking the last ounce of grain from us here. They give the *bedniaki* only by *funty*.²⁷ Up to now, they have imposed obligations on us in the most violent way (*obligatsii naviazvayaiut samym nasil'stvennym obrazom*); the winter grain is dead, there will be hunger (*budet golod*); (...) they are searching even for flour. When they find three *pudy*²⁸ of flour, they take two and leave one. We have already been without bread for three weeks. There are entire crowds queuing near the cooperatives: rich, poor, Russians, Jews.²⁹

Another very important subject of the peasants' letters is the memory of the difficulties suffered during the "war communism". The peasants found again in the 1928 "extraordinary measures" the signs of those years, the memory of which had obviously not been erased by the NEP parenthesis.³⁰ And even though in the villages there had been no lack of diffidence towards the more conciliatory agrarian policy followed by the Bolsheviks from 1921–1927, right from the first weeks of 1928 the soldiers received letters from relatives like the following one which refers to a recent and common past, still very vivid in the memory of both peasant and soldier:

In the eleventh year of the Revolution soviet authorities have again begun to ask for taxes like in 1921, to squeeze the peasants as they did before when they commandeered produce by *podraz-verstka*.³¹

The letters from the villages also gave news of the numerous peasant revolts which had already broken out in 1928. The soldiers' relatives mingled their complaints about what they were undergoing with accounts of revolts which they saw in person or heard recounted by others. The PUR *svodki* reported many extracts from these letters especially in April 1928, and it is interesting to note how much news there was about revolts led by women, the *bab'i bunty* which some western studies had already mentioned.³² Here are two extracts from two

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 11.3 and 3 ob.

²⁷ 1 *fun*t = 409.5 grams.

²⁸ 1 *pud* = 16.38 kg.

²⁹ RGVA, f. 9, op. 28, d. 68, 1.37.

³⁰ For memories of the war communism during "the attack against the countryside", see A. Graziosi's study "Collectivisation, révoltes paysannes et politiques gouvernementales à travers les rapports du GPU d'Ukraine du février–mars 1930", in *Cahiers du Monde russe et soviétique*, 3-1994, pp. 437–472.

³¹ RGVA, f. 9, op. 28, d. 68, 1.3 ob.

³² See L. Viola, "Bab'i bunty and Peasant Women's Protest During Collectivization", *Russian Review*, 45 (1986), pp. 23–32.

letters from April 1928 from the Leningrad military district which describe two very similar episodes:

Here where we are in the village of Verkhneural'sk, even to look around is terrible. Everyone queues to have one kilogram of bread per family, without counting how many persons are in that family (...) I don't know what will happen in the future. They say that a woman brought two children to a cooperative and left them there (...) People are saying that they came to take the grain in the village: so the women came out, some with pitchforks and some with spades and they didn't hand over the grain. Everyone has the look of a wolf (*ves' narod, kak volki smotriat*).

Brother, here is the news: five men arrived here to take our grain. But they were unable to do so: armed women (*krasnoarmiki-baby*) intervened, they took back the grain and threatened to beat up the men. There's another piece of news: in Verkhneural'sk also there has been an outbreak of revolt (*vspyshka*) for bread and the chief of police was killed.³³

Even more interesting is this letter again from April 1928 from the Ukraine military district where we are assisting at a fraternization between the women in revolt and the military.

The women get together and attack the storehouses and shops to take the flour. Now in the village of Balta the women have destroyed the shops and the police have asked for the help of a squad of soldiers. The soldiers have arrived, looked and understood the problem, have set aside their weapons and said: "give them the bread".³⁴

But perhaps the most important element of these letters as far as the soldiers' morale was concerned, was the great number of requests for help which the military units received. We find in these letters an image of the red soldier which mirrored that which was offered by Bolshevik propaganda: the peasant recognised that his relative in the army had a greater political education (and for this reason, he asked him for advice and explanations on what was happening), he considered him closer to "those in power" (hoping that he could mitigate the harshness of the extraordinary measures), and finally, he hoped for direct (armed) help against the oppressors. One can understand therefore how letters of this kind are mentioned with greater frequency in the *svodki*. We will also see how they influenced the mood of the soldiers. Here are some significant examples:

They are saying that peace will only last until April and then war will begin. Advise us on how we should behave: should we hand over the grain, set aside some goods or hide the grain.³⁵

Things are going badly with the grain. Flour is being sold at five rubles a *pud* and we peasants have no bread: all of this is due to the fact that there is no unity among the peasants, but everyone against everyone else. And if there was unity among the peasants, then things would be different, the peasants would have all the goods possible and even agricultural machinery. You soldiers, sons of peasants, should intervene at the meetings and speak out to defend your peasant fathers so that they will give us a little peace and exploit us less. I ask you once again: intervene at the meetings and in the assemblies and defend your peasant blood (...)

³³ RGVA, f. 9, op. 28, d. 68, 1.38.

³⁴ RGVA, f. 9, op. 28, d. 68, 1.4ob. I found no further references to this episode among the documents concerning the ordinary troops. A direct involvement of the regular soldiers in the repression of the peasant revolts would have been an important exception for this period (while in the first months of 1930, with dekulakization, the troops would have been engaged in operations of this nature). In this case, these could have been special troops, such as the GPU detachments or the "troops for the defence of the convoys" (*voiska konvoynogo strazha*).

³⁵ *Ibid.*

Dear Kolia, my son. We greet you and wish you well. Dear Kolia, we have become old and they are taking our corn right up to the last grain. We can only grind two *pudy* and they force us to hand over the grain to the cooperative at a low price. But why do you continue to be a soldier? Help us old people, because this winter we will probably starve.³⁶

You are the Red Army, all our hope lies in you. You are our defenders, you must defend us.³⁷

The reactions of the soldiers to this wave of letters was not long in coming. Informed by their own people from the villages on what was happening in the countryside, the young peasants who were under arms already began in January 1928 to show great restiveness. So the relative truce which the *politrabotniki* had reported in 1926 and 1927 was broken, while the PUR reports began to register a growing increase of *krest'ianskie nastroeniia*. The best introduction to the analysis of the *krest'ianskie nastroeniia* is the following passage from a report on the extent of the phenomenon in 1928 compiled by the special department of the OGPU which dealt with the Army (*Osobyi Otdel OGPU*):

The campaign for the grain procurements, for self-taxation and the enforcement of peasant taxes has led to a drastic increase in discontent among the peasants. Through the letters, in some cases by means of the delegates (sent specially into the Red Army) and directly into the territorial units, these moods quickly overflowed (*perekinulis'*) to a massive extent within the Red Army, provoking a vigorous and widespread increase of discontent on the part of the soldiers towards the latest measures taken by the Soviet power. Up to now, no event has had such effects on the Red Army.³⁸

The *krest'ianskie nastroeniia* of the soldiers confirmed the existence of close links between the military units and the villages. The contents of the peasants' letters found a precise response in the manifestations of the peasants' discontent, as a concise *svodka* from the PUR clearly showed:

The moods of the soldiers regarding the grain procurements generally coincided (*v obshchem sopadaiut*) with the moods of the rural areas: the same rumours on the introduction of compulsory requisitions, on the approach of a war. (...) On the basis of the testimonies which they received from the countryside on the grain procurements, the soldiers very often repeat the expressions of the peasants' discontent, drawing from them extreme political conclusions, setting city against countryside, working class against peasant, soldiers against officers. On many occasions, the soldiers have spoken about the possibility of revolts in the countryside.³⁹

Before dwelling on the analysis of these moods made by the political staff and top echelons of the Red Army, it would be appropriate to show the most significant phrases used by the peasant-soldiers, as they were used in the PUR and OGPU reports. We will choose a few, keeping to the same representative criteria used for the peasant letters and emphasizing some regional cases where the "extraordinary measures" had great vigour and where it was easier to follow the evolution of the *krest'ianskie nastroeniia*.

In the Volga military district (*Privolzhskii voennyi okrug*, Privo), referring to the town of Samara, already at the end of January the military units began to show signs of preoccupation because of the lack of bread and because of the news arriving from the countryside. The first conclusion reached, as suggested by the relatives' letters, is that there is a return

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 1.5.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 11.44ob.-45.

³⁸ RGVA, f. 9, op. 28, d. 824, 1.83.

³⁹ RGVA, f. 9, op. 28, d. 69, 1.5 ob-6.

to war communism. In the report of mid-February from the Privo Political administration we read:

The soldiers are saying: "In the letters they are telling us that at home they are being forced to sell [the grain] at collection points, and that they are only leaving them sufficient to eat and sow". From this the soldiers have drawn the following conclusions: "We have returned to war communism", "They are getting rid of the NEP: in fact, they are closing private shops" (...). "Despite all the speeches about our growth, we are once again living the year 1921."⁴⁰

We can also find a similar comparison with the civil war years in the north of the Caucasus, where a report from the same days summarizing the moods of the soldiers, uses as an example this phrase spoken by a soldier: "If they take the grain from me, I will take a gun and shoot everyone, because in 1919 they shamelessly took all my grain."⁴¹

Here, just like in the relatives' letters, after the memory of the years of war communism, the attitude of the soldiers reached an overall criticism of bolshevik agrarian policy, often directed against the official theory of the need for the extraordinary measures for the industrialization of the country, or against the political propaganda within the units. Once again from the Volga district here are some phrases from the soldiers:

"The state does not respect the terms established for the agrarian taxes"; "they are deceiving us"; (...) "they are telling us that the state needs grain to buy machines, but they are only deceiving us, poor peasants and working class."⁴²

In the criticism of party policy there also emerges the theme of the "place" of the peasants within the soviet hierarchy of the working classes. This was a theme which during the 20s was also the focus of the *krest'ianskie nastroeniia* which had spread throughout the Army and which, at the moment of the new attack against the countryside, re-acquired considerable force. The hegemony of the working class within soviet society, which represented a central point of the entire bolshevik propaganda, was disowned by the peasant soldiers, who opposed to it the reality of the exploitation of the countryside. From the Moscow district in March 1928 they communicated these phrases from the soldiers:

The workers working day is now divided into three shifts and they are doing very well. But how much does a peasant have to work, seeing that he has only one shift which lasts the entire day? And there is nothing to eat: why is it like this? (...) Why do they place the workers everywhere above the others? We in the Army only see peasants, while the working class number 3-4%.⁴³

What is also interesting is the reaction which the soldiers of peasant origin from the Leningrad district showed towards the strikes which were held in the city's factories in July 1928. A special report stated that "the peasant element among the soldiers affirms: 'The workers are too arrogant (*zaznalis'*), they have a good salary and yet they are not happy'.⁴⁴

The soldiers frequently answered the peasants' letters in which their relatives asked for advice on what to do and they often told them not to hand over the grain, as we are told in the March 1928 report from the Volga district:

⁴⁰ RGVA, f. 9, op. 28, d. 56, 1.174.

⁴¹ RGVA, f. 9, op. 28, d. 68, 1.6 ob.

⁴² RGVA, f. 9, op. 28, d. 56, 1.206.

⁴³ RGVA, f. 4, op. 1, d. 858, 1.17.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 1.65 ob.

Some of the soldiers answered their relatives' letters with this advice: "do not pay the taxes", "ask for an extension in payments", "do not sell the grain", "do not allow them to take the grain or to take a note of how much you have".⁴⁵

At other times, the soldiers reacted shrewdly to the propaganda techniques put out by the *politrabotniki*, using them to open the eyes of their relatives to the meaning of the ritual expressions of agreement with the Soviet regime. The following is a significant example:

In the military units in the Kiev garrison, the political workers have ordered the soldiers to write telling their families that it was necessary to hand over the grain, and to do this they gave the soldiers paper and envelopes. The soldiers sent these letters, but in the following days they sent other letters in which they said not to hand over the grain, explaining that they had been forced to write the first letters by their officers.⁴⁶

At other times, some soldiers openly intervened at the political meetings inviting other soldiers to advise their relatives not to hand over the grain. This happened in north Caucasus in February 1928, where a soldier interrupted the propaganda speech of a *politrabotnik* shouting: "Comrades, write home so that they do not consign even one *funt* of grain to the state."⁴⁷

The element which most worried the bolshevik observers was the fact that the peasants' requests for help provoked tremendous agitation among the soldiers, they were often discussed openly and the soldiers themselves threatened to intervene. At times, the direct meetings between soldiers and peasants caused these kinds of comments as we can see from the case taken from a February 1928 report from Byelorussia where

a peasant had shouted at a group of soldiers who were going to market: "Little soldiers, why are you in the Army, we are hungry, they don't give us bread". This cry led to discussions among the soldiers: some soldiers thought that the peasant was telling the truth. The soldiers asked these questions: "Why is there no bread?", "where are they taking the grain?"⁴⁸

Much more significant is the case of a direct contact between a village of peasants in revolt and a neighbouring garrison of soldiers, which we find in a June 1928 report from the Ukraine. After talking about the demonstration against the grain procurements set in motion by about 500 peasants in the village of Nikolaev, the writer of the report goes on:

The idea has spread among the peasants to call on the soldiers for help. Some sections of the garrison knew the very same day what was happening. The following day, rumours spread among the soldiers about the peasants' demonstrations, about hunger, about the fact that the grain was taken abroad. (...) During the demonstration, there were attempts to involve the soldiers. With this in mind, a group of 3-5 peasants arrived at the military camp, bringing the remaining grain with them. They spoke to the soldiers asking their help on how to act towards those responsible for distribution so that they would leave them some grain (...). It is significant that the majority of the soldiers were sympathetic and understanding, while at the same time being fearful for the condition of their own home and family.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ RGVA, f. 9, op. 28, d. 56, 1.206.

⁴⁶ RGVA, f. 9, op. 28, d. 854, 1.187.

⁴⁷ RGVA, f. 9, op. 28, d. 824, 1.95.

⁴⁸ RGVA, f. 9, op. 28, d. 68 1.5.

⁴⁹ RGVA, f. 9, op. 28, d. 85, 11.38 ob.-39.

The letters in particular, provoked widespread discussion among the soldiers. The March 1928 reports from the Volga district refer to some of them:

Discussion was noted among the soldiers and the junior officers "about the insurrection, the refusal to defend the Soviet power and the new revolution". (...) The soldiers of a company transferred to Astrakhan, after having received letters with worrying news from the countryside, gathered in groups and began to argue. (...) Two positions emerged; the first: "If they send armed units to our homes to take the grain, then all of us will leave the company with our rifles", the second: "Let's call the commissar. Let him explain if they can take the grain from the family of a Red soldier without paying for the produce."⁵⁰

Very much stronger were the expressions that we find in a report of February 1928 on the Ukraine district in which were transcribed these phrases:

If it is true that they are taking the grain in the countryside, then the soldiers must turn their bayonets against authority (...). We have rifles and for this a second revolution is needed, killing half of them.⁵¹

If these were the expressions of peasant discontent that permeated the Red Army, what were the analyses and the replies that came from the political-military leaders of the Red Army? It took some months before a general interpretation of the phenomena signaled in a large number of local reports could be formed. It is only from the spring of 1928, in fact, that the leaders seemed to take note of the news and the size of the wave of *krest'ianskie nastroeniia* caused by the extraordinary measures.

These first analyses were rather vague, and they were limited to noting the wave of discontent, relating it to the large percentage of peasants which formed the army. In their vagueness, such interpretations confirmed both the accuracy of the bond between the countryside and the military units and the speed with which the worries of the rural areas were transmitted to the army. There is an eloquent example of this in the following report from the PUR statistical department in June 1928:

The Red Army, because of the mainly peasant composition of soldiers and junior officers, inevitably reflects in the so-called "*krest'ianskie nastroeniia*" the class behaviours of the countryside. We received a very precise picture of the way in which these moods were manifested in the Red Army during the last grain procurements campaign, characterized by class pressure on the *kulaki* and on "well-to-do" peasants. This spring's sowing campaign and the difficulty in supplying grain to some regions of the USSR in recent months have also been reflected in the soldiers' attitude. The first wave of *krest'ianskie nastroeniia*, based on grain procurements, took place in December and mainly in January. The incapacity of the political bodies, the party organization and the officers to cope with these moods created the conditions whereby the soldiers at first reacted in a disorganized and spontaneous way to the moods that penetrated the military units in large numbers from the countryside through the floods of letters, delegates, etc.⁵²

As we see, these first general analyses introduce some critical elements that went beyond the simple observation of the links between countryside and the military units. This refers in particular to the "*kulaki*" and to "well-to-do" peasants, and underlines the "lack of preparation" of some sectors of the army. These were, in fact, the two directions along which analyses

⁵⁰ RGVA, f. 9, op. 28, d. 56, 11.210-211.

⁵¹ RGVA, f. 9, op. 28, d. 824, 1.95.

⁵² RGVA, f. 9, op. 28, d. 67, 11.1-1 ob.

of the *krest'ianskie nastroeniia* developed throughout 1928. Summarizing their characteristics, we can say that on the one hand the soldiers' discontent was not considered as a general phenomenon in all peasant components of the army – as in reality the simple informative reports clearly showed – but as a phenomenon limited to the kulak elements and introduced into the army by “capitalistic” elements in the countryside. On the other hand, some sectors of the army were accused directly, particularly some levels of the political staff and the junior officers' staff, of not having known how to react to the outbreak of discontent.

The bolshevik analysis of the “class stratification” of the countryside is well known because of the studies of peasant society under Soviet power made by some western historians.⁵³ These same studies also underlined the weaknesses and the contradictions of an analysis that was centred on the *bedniak*, *seredniak* and *kulak* categories, even after the furor of the civil war had swept away, if they had ever existed, the rich elements of the peasantry. The application of this analysis within the Red Army was even weaker and more contradictory. Right from the birth of the Red Army in 1918 “kulaks” had been forbidden access to the armed forces of the Soviet state, and during the following years great care was taken at the moment of recruitment to bar the way to “class-alien-elements”.⁵⁴ Despite this, one of the most recurrent explanations in the analyses that the leaders of the army made of the *krest'ianskie nastroeniia* is the accusation levelled at “class enemies” present in military units to foment discontent, attempting to carry along with them the other peasant levels. This confirmed the persistence of the bolshevik definition of the “kulak-enemy”: a definition that by now was merely a mental pattern that more and more used itself as a reference point, and had nothing in common with the instruments for analysing social reality.

The anti-kulak argument emerges from the first weeks of 1928 when the political-military leaders had still not developed any organic explanation. Already by February 3rd, 1928, for example, the “Conference of the heads of the district political departments” had pointed out the enemy which had infiltrated the military apparatus to explain the initial uprisings of the soldiers: “The grain procurement campaign has revealed the presence in the barracks, even if the numbers are not very significant, of socially extraneous elements (*sotsial'no-chuzhdye elementy*) by which the anti-Soviet sentiments of the *kulaki* are expressed.”⁵⁵

A still clearer formulation came some months later in the resolution that the Revolutionary Military Council of the USSR (RVS) adopted in June 1928 on the political-moral condition of

⁵³ Among others, see the essay by M. Lewin “Who was the Soviet Kulak?” in *The Making of the Soviet System* (London: Methuen, 1985), pp. 121–141.

⁵⁴ Since the creation of the Red Army, and in conformity with the principle of limitation of civil rights only to the working classes and thus of the right to bear arms (a principle sanctioned by the Soviet Constitution in 1918), “bourgeois” or “anti-Soviet” elements were not admitted to the proletarian army. These same people who corresponded to whom the active or passive right of vote was not recognized (the so-called *lishentsy*), were inserted during the civil war in special units of “rear guard militia” (*tylovoe opolchenie*), not supplied with arms and assigned to labour tasks in support of the fronts. This rule was confirmed in March 1924 by a government decree (see *Krasnaia zvezda*, 15 March 1924 p. 3) that provided for the insertion of the *lishentsy*, for the duration of ordinary military service, in special “service squads” (*komandy obsluzhivaniia*) without weapons, or the payment of a monetary tax for those who were physically incapacitated.

⁵⁵ RGVA, f. 9, op. 28, d. 263, 1.26.

the army.⁵⁶ After a general allusion to the link between the tensions in the countryside and the morale of the soldiers (“Not only the growth and strengthening of socialism in our country, but also the difficulties and the contradictions that inevitably accompany this growth, reflect on the condition of the Red Army”), the resolution again continues the official explanation of the difficulties that agriculture was undergoing: “At the present time these difficulties are concretely reflected in the problems of grain procurements which are accompanied by a growth in the activism of the kulak elements among the peasants.” The analysis of the *krest'ianskie nastroeniia* that followed from this premise was an explicit attribution of responsibility to the “enemy” within the military units:

It is necessary to note how, alongside a small component of workers and a mainly peasant majority, there are also some socially dangerous elements (*sotsial'no opasnye elementy*) in the Red Army, even though they have the right to vote, and also that with every call to arms, some kulak elements, deprived of the right to vote, infiltrate (*prosachivaiutsia*) the Army.⁵⁷

Blaming “extraneous elements” in the barracks as the cause of the *krest'ianskie nastroeniia* was accompanied, here as in other documents, by the vague accusation against the countryside of trying to use the Red Army to put pressure on political bodies:

The wealthy section among peasant soldiers and some kulaks who had infiltrated the army, in many cases were involved actively in trying to use the army as an instrument of influence on party policy.⁵⁸

In the course of the grain procurement campaign the rural areas attempted to have an effect on the policy of Soviet power through the Red Army (by sending complaints to the barracks, an enormous quantity of peasant letters, the dispatch of delegations, etc.).⁵⁹

Reference here was to the ties between the villages and the military units that had assumed dramatically obvious forms with the start of the “extraordinary measures”. As we have seen from the excerpts of letters received by the soldiers, it was indeed a case of an “attempt to influence” bolshevik policy, but in the sense of mitigating or blocking the methodical plundering of the countryside by Soviet power. Guided by an analysis of the countryside that impeded an understanding of the rural opposition, except for inserting it into the category of “political manifestations of class-alien elements”, even in the case of the Red Army the political apparatus reversed the meaning of the messages that arrived in ever greater numbers from the countryside.

The application of bolshevik rural sociology to the Red Army *krest'ianskie nastroeniia* did not stop nevertheless at the criminalization of the kulaks but also involved those peasants that Soviet terminology identified as *seredniaki* and *bedniaki*. Both the former, whose position in the bolshevik “system of alliances” was and continued to be changeable, and the latter, always considered by the Bolsheviks as faithful supporters of the regime in the countryside, were sometimes described as being dominated by the influence of the kulaks.

But, despite the terminology used in the documents, the picture that emerges from extracts such as the following drawn from two Spring 1928 PUR reports, is clearly that of solid opposi-

⁵⁶ RGVA, f. 4, op. 1, d. 759, 11.154–170.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 1.155.

⁵⁸ RGVA, f. 9, op. 28, d. 263, 1.3.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 1.26.

tion to the regime's agrarian measures from all the sectors of peasant society represented in the army:

The *seredniak* component often made a pact (*blokirovalas'*) with the wealthy element, and in any case paid attention to them. The *bedniak* element showed specific discontent, demonstrated a minor activism and sometimes was influenced by other peasant groups.⁶⁰

A situation was created, thanks to which the wealthy and *kulak* component of soldiers (...) were able to exercise a strong influence not only on the *seredniak* but even on the *bedniak* element among the soldiers, presenting all that happened in the countryside in a distorted light, spreading absurd rumours about the return of war communism, about the war, etc.⁶¹

As we said, analysis of the *krest'ianskie nastroeniia* was also directed toward underlining some organizational deficiencies in the Red Army. One of these represented a "classical" reasoning in some political-military spheres, and consisted in making accusations against the territorial militia principles on which the major part of the army was organized since the 1924–25 "military reform".⁶² It is not difficult to imagine that it was exactly these territorial units that showed most forcefully the *krest'ianskie nastroeniia* that were spreading throughout the army. In fact, we find in many *svodki* dedicated to the troops' political-moral condition, phrases such as "the militia troops are naturally under a greater major influence from the countryside, and their reaction to the grain procurements is even more sharp".⁶³ This type of observation was sometimes translated into open criticism of the militia model, and into a request for measures that would augment the quota of workers and communists in the territorial units to guarantee greater control of these units. This is what Iagoda, then chief of the section of the OGPU that dealt with the army said openly when speaking at a meeting of the RVS in June 1928:

Speaking of the territorial units, it should be noted that it is now absolutely obvious that the so-called "*krest'ianskie nastroeniia*" are stronger and more acute here than in the regular units (...). The questions of fortifying the territorial units (the strengthening of their political influence and other measures aimed at giving them more force) must be studied very carefully.⁶⁴

In this speech, Iagoda was pointing out a further organizational deficiency: the poor political preparation of the "junior officers" (*mladshii komsostav*):⁶⁵

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 1.3.

⁶¹ RGVA, f. 9, op. 28, d. 67, 1.1 ob.

⁶² The militia-like organization of the army, with brief and repeated periods of service carried out by citizens near their own residences, had constituted one of the objectives of European socialism since the second International. The Bolsheviks, after originally inserting this model in their own political programme of the pre-revolutionary period, had instead constructed the Red Army on regular and permanent bases. Only after the end of the civil war, and essentially for the purpose of saving money, was the Soviet army restructured with militia elements, and the territorial units already constituted 62.8 percent in 1925. The need to economize, however, did not mitigate the suspicion of large sectors of the Party toward this type of military organization in which the army tended still more to integrate itself with the peasant society. I have tried to summarize these problems in my article "La questione dell'esercito miliziano nei primi anni del potere sovietico", *Società e storia*, 61–1993, pp. 551–582.

⁶³ RGVA, f. 9, op. 28, d. 32, 1.6 ob.

⁶⁴ RGVA, f. 4, op. 1, d. 759, 1.20.

⁶⁵ As is noted, the Red Army, from its birth until 1935, did not have different ranks of officers. The command staff was globally given the title of "commander" (*komandir*). Yet, in fact, the command staff was divided into four different ranks of importance. On this basis there were: the *vysshii komsostav*, or "supreme command staff" (commanders of military districts, of army corps or divisions), the

Our junior officers do not always and not even in every situation (above all in the territorial units) show themselves to be promoters (*provodnikom*) of our influence over the mass of peasant soldiers.⁶⁶

Iagoda was referring to a phenomenon that was often emphasized in local reports on the *krest'ianskie nastroeniia*. On many occasions, the junior officers not only did not know how to control the expressions of the soldiers' discontent, but had actually agreed with them, sharing and sometimes organizing the opposition to the extraordinary measures adopted by the government in the countryside. One April 1928 PUR report showed clearly the terms of this alliance between under-officers and soldiers:

The students of the military schools and junior officers, in their own moods, have not shown great political awareness, and in some cases demonstrated even more actively *krest'ianskie nastroeniia*.⁶⁷

Interpretation of this phenomenon, yet again, tended to lay the responsibility on the peasant element and in particular on the presence of socially extraneous elements among the junior officers, as emerges from another PUR report of June:

The junior officers (72.7 % peasants) in their own moods have not distinguished themselves at all from the soldiers, despite the high percentage of members of the party and the Komsomol (41.4 %).⁶⁸ The significant component of wealthy peasants among the junior officers, as the political administration of the Ukrainian military district stresses, "has openly shown the feelings of their own social group, often showing themselves as supporters (*zastrel'shchiki*) of the kulak influence inside the military units."⁶⁹

The greatest organizational lack, however, seems to have concerned precisely the main tools the bolshevik party disposed of to exercise its influence on the mass of soldiers: the political staff and the party organization. As from the early months of 1928, the PUR reports and the documents of the top-echelons of the Red Army complain of these two apparatus' widespread and persistent incompetence in facing and managing the *krest'ianskie nastroeniia*. The main shortcomings, as states a careful report of the PUR dated April 1928, concerned the work of the inferior levels of the political staff, the ones that were in closest contact with the troops. The author of this report listed the following problems:

Untimely, slow and superficial reaction on the part of political bodies and party organizations to the soldiers' moods, insufficient control over these moods through their influence. Insufficient concreteness in explanations or erroneous explanations of certain issues, little use of the materials provided by the local organs of power, attitudes not always critical of the letters sent from rural areas, insuffi-

starshii komsostav, or "senior command staff", the *srednij komsostav* or "medium command staff", and the *mladshii* or "junior" (in practice the under-officers).

⁶⁶ RGVA, f. 4, op. 1, d. 759, 1.19.

⁶⁷ RGVA, f. 9, op. 28, d. 263, 1.3.

⁶⁸ Another statistical report of the PUR gives this data on the social and political composition of the junior officer class of the infantry troops as of January 1929: of the total 54,950 junior officers, 20 percent were workers, 2.8 percent *batrak*, 72.5 percent peasants, 3.6 percent office workers and 1.1 percent "others". 18.7 percent were members or candidate members of the Party and 22.7 percent members of the *Komsomol*. The remaining 58.6 percent were "without a party" (RGVA, f. 9, op. 32, d. 3, 1.54).

⁶⁹ RGVA, f. 9, op. 28, d. 67, 1.2.

cient preparation in political work leading in some cases to an underestimation of the importance of initiatives. (...) Poor understanding of the decisions of the 15th Congress (explanation of the party line as a passage to the line of the opposition), (...) some cases of panic, of loss (*rasteriannost'*) and even of expressions of *krest'ianskie nastroeniia* amongst the workers themselves.⁷⁰

The generally negative picture given by this text leads to two different reflections. On the one hand, it is clear that the vigour of the soldiers' critical remarks was such that it undermined political propaganda: the sourness of the *krest'ianskie nastroeniia* and the speed with which the "wave" of discontent had developed were indeed weakening the resolve of the political workers. On the other hand, it is reasonable to suppose that the lower levels of the political staff were all but unanimous in supporting the changes brought about by a fraction of the party in the beginning of 1928. Judging by this and other documents, in which the inadequacy of the political workers' efforts is confirmed, there was a substantial part of the political staff that agreed with the criticisms of the "extraordinary measures" that the Bukharin, Rykov and Tomskii group was expressing at the highest level. Certainly these shared opinions did not find their expression in an organized, well defined opposition to the decisions of the top leadership of the party, but the fact that "cases of expressions of *krest'ianskie nastroeniia* amongst the political workers" themselves were reported, was an indication of the presence of broad segments of dissent at the lower levels of the political staff.

The lack of full consensus to the changes on the part of the political organizations seriously jeopardized the readiness and timeliness of the reaction to the peasant unrest which had spread to the military. The countermeasures adopted by the leadership of the PUR in 1928 were in fact general and approximate in character. They were limited to increasing the incisiveness of the *politrabotniki* propaganda and the efficiency of checks on the *krest'ianskie nastroeniia*. Like the first interpretations, the first reactions came only a few months after the introduction of the extraordinary measures. At the end of May 1928, A. Bubnov issued a circular giving the heads of the district political administrations a series of guidelines to this effect. The document's major concern was that of overcoming the confusion that was rife among many of the political workers as regards the changes of the beginning of the year, as well as steering propaganda work against peasant rumours that complained of a return to the years of the civil war:

In explanatory work it should be emphasized that there has not been and there is no passage to the line of the opposition. The present political line of the party absolutely does not mean leaving the NEP and a return to war communism.⁷¹

The circular went on to give other "active" suggestions aimed at stopping the *krest'ianskie nastroeniia*, but which were clearly insufficient in their generality to contend with the breadth of the discontent:

All work aimed at reinforcing the political and moral condition must be developed further (...). The whole agit-prop system must be used to propagate widely the decision of the Soviet Government to introduce a special privileged fiscal regime for soldiers and soldiers' families (...). Use the positive letters received from the rural areas, as well as the answers from the local authorities to the troops'

⁷⁰ RGVA, f. 9, op. 28, d. 263, 1.4.

⁷¹ RGVA, f. 9, op. 28, d. 68, 1.31.

questions, to unmask the calumnies of the letters received from the villages. (...) Achieve a decisive upturn in the moods of the junior officers.⁷²

In the second half of the year, after the Plenum of the CC of July 1928, during which the criticism of Bukharin's group had become sharper, forcing Stalin into a partial retreat, the political and military leaders became more careful to involve military units actively in the implementation of certain agrarian policy measures. Already in August 1928, shortly after the Soviet Government embarked upon the "second state loan for industrialization", a PUR directive not only indicated the propaganda work required for the defence of the party's course of action in rural areas, but invited local political staffs to involve soldiers in gathering the loans:

Political bodies and party organizations within the military units will have the following duties: 1) to urge (*privlech'*) the soldiers and commanders to purchase obligations (...); 2) to use the soldiers' links with the countryside to popularize the objectives and the significance of the loan with the peasants.⁷³

This "active" approach, aimed at involving the troops in implementing the party initiative, became even clearer towards the end of the year and coincided with the decision to increase the grain procurement rates that was taken by the Plenum of the Central Committee in November 1928. A PUR circular of the early days of December in fact made a clear invitation in this sense:

The utmost care is necessary in explaining the importance of these measures to the peasants. At the same time we must develop the political work amongst the peasants, organizing active support (*aktivnoe sodeistvie*) of the *bedniaki* for the grain procurements, (...) overcoming the kulak's attempts to make propaganda for the grain not to be delivered.⁷⁴

The PUR's responses to the wave of peasant discontent in 1928 thus came in two phases. The first phase consisted in an attempt to vaguely reorganize political work, in crisis due to the bitterness of the *krest'ianskie nastroeniia* and the uncertainty of many political workers, by summarily inviting the *politrabotniki* to provide clearer explanations. In the second half of the year, with the intensification of the extraordinary measures, it became necessary to involve the army actively, in an attempt to forestall the discontent that was destined to spread in 1929, due to the worsening situation in rural areas.

1929 and the eve of comprehensive collectivization

During 1929, the Party's agrarian policies made the method of theft, defined in 1928 propaganda as "extraordinary measures", ever more systematic and methodical. The codification of the "ural-siberian method" as an instrument for collecting grain, the increased severity of fines and prison sentences for those who did not respect the quotas and other collateral meas-

⁷² *Ibid.*, 11.31-32.

⁷³ *Partiino-politicheskaia rabota v Krasnoi Armii: Dokumenty, 1921-1929* (Moskva, 1981), p. 476.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 496.

ures worsened the conflict between the Soviet regime and the peasantry. At the same time the project of collectivization of the Soviet countryside was taking shape at an ever increasing pace; though, for the time being, it was limited to increasing the number of *kolkhozy* and *sovkhozy* by means of various tax and production incentives offered to cooperatives.⁷⁵

In addition to the passage from the "extraordinary" nature of these agrarian measures to the first steps in a planned transformation of the rural production system, there was a parallel intensification of the Red Army's direct involvement. Since the time of the civil war, the army had been assigned the role of being an "instrument of education and training" in the Soviet countryside. If this task had been confirmed in 1928, to quell the unrest that was spreading from the villages to the military units, in 1929 the Red Army's functions progressed from those of a simple means of propaganda distribution to those of an instrument of active support in the transformation of the countryside. The Central Committee of the Bolshevik Party, in a public *postanovlenie* addressed to the command and the political staffs of the army, indicated the new training tasks that were assigned to military units, aimed at using soldiers as an extra means of promotion of *kolkhozy*. In particular the party required:

The leading authorities to improve the soldiers' preparation, in harmony with the Party's main tasks, with a view to making them conscious fighters in the armed defense of the proletarian state and to prepare them to assume the role of active organizers of socialist restructuring of the countryside.⁷⁶

In short, there were two agrarian campaigns in which the Red Army was required to provide active support: the grain procurement campaign and the kolkhoz movement promotion campaign.

The request for its collaboration in the grain procurement campaign, which was launched in June 1929 with much higher objectives and production requirements than that of the previous year⁷⁷, came from a specific directive of the PUR dated July 1929. A clear and peremptory instruction was issued to "all political bodies that they should urge the units of the Red Army to participate actively (*k aktivnomu uchastiiu*) in carrying out this year's grain procurements".⁷⁸ This participation consisted partly in propaganda work already widely used in the past, to which additional quantity and depth were added in this case. Indeed it was requested that propaganda sessions for soldiers be focused on a "report on grain procurements", that "a mass campaign be carried out with the soldiers for them to send letters to the villages to urge to hand over the grain", that "collective appeals to the villages and the districts for the consignment of grain" be organized.⁷⁹ The new approach consisted in sending soldiers and commanders directly into the villages on a propaganda mission aimed at convincing the peasants to respect the grain delivery quotas:

⁷⁵ Apart from the quoted works of Lewin, see R. W. Davies, *The Socialist Offensive. The Collectivization of Soviet Agriculture, 1929-1930* (London: MacMillan Press, 1980).

⁷⁶ *KPSS o Vooruzhennykh Silakh Sovetskogo Soiuza. Sbornik dokumentov 1917-1958*, (Moskva, 1958), p. 312.

⁷⁷ See M. Lewin, *La paysannerie . . .*, pp. 359-367 and R. W. Davies, *The Collectivization . . .*, pp. 56 ff.

⁷⁸ RGVA, f. 9, op. 40, d. 27, 1.359.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

For the explanatory work to be carried out with the population on grain delivery it is necessary to make expeditions to the fields, during military manoeuvres, to send commanders to welcome recruits of the territorial units, to organize Sunday rallies and festive excursions to the villages in the area.⁸⁰

Therefore the use of the Red Army to secure the success of the grain procurements campaign was in many ways a new thing. However the objectives remained partly those of the previous year: not only the use of extra instruments to make the procurements, but also the repression of the *krest'ianskie nastroeniia* that were foreseeable as a reaction to the umpteenth theft of peasants' resources. The PUR directive appropriately ended with an invitation to anticipate peasant discontent with a greater vigilance on the part of the political authorities:

Given the attempts on the part of the kulaks to disrupt the Red Army by writing letters to soldiers, by appeals to the soldiers when they visit the villages, by trespassing on camps and barracks, it is necessary to unmask the kulak agitation with the greatest efficiency and to adopt measures against the kulaks' attempts to infiltrate military units with the purpose of disrupting them.⁸¹

The area in which the Red Army was asked to make the greatest contribution was with the demobilized soldiers (*otpuskniki*), who were seen as potential propagandists of the kolkho-zian ideal and as real builders of the agricultural cooperatives. This too was an adaptation of a concept used in the past. The regime had always focused on the use of demobilized soldiers as cadres in the local Soviet hierarchy. At the end of 1927 the Central Committee had tabled this issue in a specific document, exhorting a greater use of ex-soldiers as presidents of local soviets, local party cadres, etc.⁸² In 1929, on the other hand, an attempt was made to turn the demobilized soldiers into genuine supporters of the collectivization campaign that was brewing.

The impetus came from the party's Central Committee, in a *postanovlenie* dated April 12 1929, inviting local political and military officials to organize "the planned use of demobilized soldiers, commanders and junior officers in the socialist restructuring [of the countryside] primarily as organizers of the building of the agricultural complexes into productive kolkhozes and cooperatives".⁸³ To this end the PUR was asked "to restructure the organization and the programmes for training demobilized military with the aim of including maximum information on collectivization issues", and "instruct no less than 15000-20000 demobilized soldiers and junior officers with the special courses on the kolkhozes".⁸⁴ Finally the last directive addressed to the PUR, the *Narkomzemy* and to the All-Union Council of Collective Farms was to prepare, in about a month, a law on the special kolkhozes to be organized by demobilized soldiers and by territorial units.⁸⁵ Few days after these directives were issued they were approved by the 16th Party Conference, which dedicated a special paragraph of the resolution "On agricultural development" to the functions the army had to assume:

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 1.359 ob.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² *KPSS o Vooruzhennykh Silakh . . .*, pp. 299-300.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 316.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* p. 317.

To support in every way the growing movement among the red soldiers for the unification of individual farms within the collective ones, reinforcing the popularization of kolkhozian edification within the Red Army and the training of the most conscious soldiers as organizers of the kolkhoz movement.⁸⁶

The party directives were received by the leading authorities of the Red Army. In May 1929 a PUR directive completely reorganized the preparation of the *otpuskniki* in view of the kolkhoz campaign, so as “to prepare no less than 15000–20000 demobilized soldiers, or 25–30 % of those that have attended a training course, for kolkhozian edification”⁸⁷, as the CC had recommended. A few weeks later, Voroshilov for the military, Muralov for the All-Union Resettlement Committee and Kaminskij for the All-Union Council of Collective Farms signed a joint directive that marked the official inauguration of the Red Army’s participation in the collectivization of the countryside.⁸⁸ The basic assumption was the singling out of the Red Army as a “powerful reserve” (*moshchnyi rezervuar*) of collectivization cadres with reference to the directives to this effect from the Central Committee and the 16th Party Conference. According to this document, the army’s participation was to take three forms: “The organization of action groups for future kolkhoz members based on the aggregation of fellow-countrymen (*na printsipakh zemliachestva*)”; the insertion of demobilized soldiers into the existing kolkhozes, “to reinforce and enlarge them”; “the organization of soldiers’ kolkhozes on uninhabited lands”.⁸⁹

However while the party leaders and the political hierarchy were perfecting procedures to enable the army to support the bolshevik agrarian policies, throughout 1929 the troops continued to show their discontent.⁹⁰ The *krest’ianskie nastroyeniia* became even more widespread and radical than the previous year, despite the repressive measures adopted by the authorities. An OGPU report dated May 1929 left little doubt as to this deterioration, listing as negative aspects of the political and moral condition of the army:

⁸⁶ *Vsesoiuznaia Kommunisticheskaia Partiiia (b) v rezoliutsiiakh i resheniiakh s’ezdov, konferensii i plenumov TsK*, chast’ II (Moskva, 1936), p. 345.

⁸⁷ *Partiino-politicheskaia rabota . . .*, p. 505.

⁸⁸ *Partiino-politicheskaia rabota . . .*, pp. 514–519.

⁸⁹ The circular referred to “military kolkhozes” (*krasnoarmeiskie kolkhozy*), a particular variety of kolkhoz made up of demobilized soldiers. The first “military kolkhozes” were started in the 1920s, in southern Russia and in Ukraine under the initiative of former communist partisans and soldiers (see *Sovetskaia Voennaia Entsiklopediia* (Moskva, 1977) vol. 4, pp. 248–249). With collectivization, the party motivated the creation of “military kolkhozes” as one of the forms in which the Red Army could participate in the transformation of the countryside, establishing them particularly in the less populated areas of the far eastern Soviet Union. In these areas the “military kolkhozes” served a dual purpose: economic production and military defense of the most distant frontiers, in a not too surprising similarity with the “military settlements” (*voennye poseleniia*) created by A. A. Arakcheev under the Tsar Alexander I.

⁹⁰ The socio-political composition of the armed forces had not changed much since 1927: among the rank and file soldiers the percentage of peasants was 68.2 % (lower than in 1927, but one should note that these statistics include a separate 3.6 % of *batraki*), of workers was 24.7 %, of office workers was 4.2 % and of “others” was 1.5 %. Those “without a party” constituted 78.4 % of the total and party and *Komsomol* members 21.6 % (RGVA, f. 9, op. 32, d. 3, 1.11).

The further increase and seriousness (*obostrenie*) of the so-called “*krest’ianskie nastroyeniia*”; the persisting intense activism of anti-soviet elements that have infiltrated the Red Army (. . .); the even more diffident attitude of the soldiers as regards the explanations of the internal situation provided by the leaders.⁹¹

The OGPU documents also provide statistics for 1929 as regards the soldiers’ expressions of discontent. The figures are limited to a few military districts and only refer to a few months of the year, but it is nonetheless appropriate to quote them if only to have a partial quantitative picture of the spread of this phenomenon. In the military district of the Ukraine, for example, cases defined as “cases of expressions of discontent on rural issues” (*sluchai vyskazyvaniia nedovol’sstva po krest’ianskim voprosam*), were 2,586 in the months of January and February 1929, while from May to July there were 6,528. In the military district of the Northern Caucasus altogether 5,876 cases were recorded from March to July. In the military district of Leningrad 1,588 cases were recorded from February to March and 2,953 from May to July.⁹² These are generally high figures, and understandably higher in regions such as the Ukraine and the Northern Caucasus where the regime’s agrarian measures created greater tensions.

The contents of the *krest’ianskie nastroyeniia*, as periodic PUR reports disclose, did not change much from those of 1928, and the dominant theme of the expressions of discontent, as well as of the peasants’ letters which continued to arrive in large quantities in the military units, were substantially similar to those examined above.

What did change was the analysis of this ferment on the part of the high echelons of the political staff. Throughout 1929, and alongside the worsening crisis in the countryside and the radicalization of the conflict within the army, interpretations of *krest’ianskie nastroyeniia* were turned increasingly against the kulaks, making the “class enemies” into the solely and genuinely responsible for the wave of discontent among the “peasants in uniform”. The weakness of this view of the peasant unrest appears even more obvious when one considers that members of the mythical “rural capitalist classes” had never joined the army, and were not about to do so especially now. The PUR’s *svodki* of 1929 outline a situation dominated by kulak plots, acts of sabotage and machinations, which by its imaginary quality effectively illustrates the accelerated spread of the unrest. A summary report by the head of the PUR’s department of statistics speaks for itself:

The so-called “*krest’ianskie nastroyeniia*” in the army, in the context of the radicalization of the class struggle in the country, have assumed a distinctly kulak character, and have substantially transformed themselves from generally peasant moods into purely kulak moods (*iz “obshchekrest’ianskikh” nastroyenii v chisto kulatskie nastroyeniia*), basically reflecting the class interests of capitalist elements in the rural areas.⁹³

The picture which emerged from the report, substituting the “kulak saboteurs” with genuine peasant soldiers, was that of a rural opposition which had grown to the point of undermining the operational capacity of the soviet army:

Unlike previous years, in the kulak uprising the accent is not on the distortion of the work of local authorities, but on criticizing soviet political authority as a whole. This is why the slogan of insurrec-

⁹¹ RGVA, f. 9, op. 28, d. 115, 1.42.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 1.27 and 1.42.

⁹³ RGVA, f. 9, op. 28, d. 78, 1.27.

tion and the overthrow of soviet power now occupies more space than before in the kulak uprising. (...) The most common forms of kulak agitation are the following: propaganda through "kulak supporters" (*podkulachniki*), kulak gatherings, meetings of disgruntled soldiers, sabotage of political meetings and assemblies, agitation within patrols and groups of soldiers where there are no Communists or members of the *Komsomol*.⁹⁴

Even the question of discipline was reinterpreted from this view-point, explaining the collective violations as expressions of conscious opposition by the kulaks. Despite the attention paid to the collective violations at the end of 1927, their number continued to be significant, showing among other things, an increase of about 3 % in winter 1928/29 in comparison to winter 1927/28.⁹⁵ The spread of the hunger strike (*golodovka*) as a form of protest on the part of the soldiers in 1929 further complicated the disciplinary situation of the army. In this case, the increase of cases was truly significant: from 25 episodes in winter 1927/28 to 101 in winter 1928/1929.⁹⁶ Analysis of this increase in military undiscipline remained nevertheless rooted in the scheme that we have described, according to which, as the Vice director of PUR Bulin declared before the RVS in October 1929, the main reason was to be found in the "growing hostile activism of the kulak elements, who used any kind of defect in the work of those in charge to organize collective violations of discipline".⁹⁷

The measures taken by the leading authorities to block the growing phenomenon of collective undiscipline were mainly repressive. It was decided to concentrate the efforts of various organisms in the fight against disciplinary violations, and to punish with particular harshness the episodes of indiscipline which explicitly originated in the soldiers' social discontent. In May 1929, Bubnov, Iagoda and Landa (Vice Head of the military court) signed a joint circular in which, after noting the constant spread of disciplinary violations, they asked:

The court, the special section of the OGPU and the military tribunals to adopt the most decisive measures so that, in every serious instance of violation of military discipline, of distortion or deviation from the political line, or other serious violations of legality, a very short-term survey might be made with clarification of all the circumstances of the case. Special attention should be made to cases associated with counter-revolutionary activity, wherever the so-called '*krest'ianskie nastroeniia*' are used".⁹⁸

This time, even the measures adopted to improve the work of the political staff were directed decisively against the "class enemies". The whole network of political work and propaganda within military units was restructured, and centred on the issue of the "limitations of the kulak influence". The containment of the *krest'ianskie nastroeniia* in the army was thus strengthened with the new phase of the battle which the Soviet regime was fighting against the peasantry: the one which, linking the spread of the kolkhozes and sovkhoses to the alienation of the more active rural components, was to flow into the violent "dekulakization" of 1930. In the army too, as subsequently happened throughout the Soviet rural world, the objective became the elimination (for the time being political, later physical) of those social figures who could have united the spontaneous opposition of rural ranks, making it organized, efficient and potentially fatal for the fate of the entire Soviet regime.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ RGVA, f. 4, op. 16, d. 3, 1.9.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 1.42 ob.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 1.9.

⁹⁸ RGVA, f. 9, op. 40, d. 25, 1.24 ob.

The Vice director of the PUR Bulin, at the same meeting of the RVS in October 1929 when the serious disciplinary situation was revealed, summarized the role which the political hierarchy had to assume in the new forthcoming phase as follows:

Our task is not to undermine, but to strengthen the class vigilance of the political organs, to increase their agility, because our subsequent attacks against capitalists will be accompanied by a stronger resistance on their part. The political organs should mobilize the mass of soldiers to a decisive attack against the kulaks.⁹⁹

As in 1928, and despite the measures adopted to improve their efficiency, the political apparatus and that of the command of many units proved incapable of dealing with the soldiers' discontent. In the past, as we have seen, local workers were accused of not knowing how to control the situation, sometimes giving way to panic before the vigour of the *krest'ianskie nastroeniia*. In 1929, a new phenomenon, rather more frightening for the political and moral control of the army was added to the difficulties of the political work. It was precisely linked to the attempt of the leaders to actively involve the Red Army in the bolshevik agrarian policy. What was indicated in the reports of the PUR as "merging between the organs of command and the elements of the hostile classes" (*srashchivanie nachsostava s klassovo-vrazhdebnymi elementami*) constituted the authentic reversal of the order given to the military troops to further the regime's agrarian campaigns. On the contrary, it happened that the local military authorities, sent to the villages to act as support, ended by sympathizing with the "enemy" recognizing the peasants' reasoning. This phenomenon was destined to have a wide following in subsequent years, when the violence of comprehensive collectivization brought many soviet officials sent to the area to direct dekulakization and expropriation operations to join forces with the peasants.¹⁰⁰

A special summarized report by the PUR effectively described what was happening to some of the army workers. After remembering the official assertion ("the influence of the Red Army through the countryside is achieved not only by means of innumerable letters, but also through the massive personal participation of commanders and soldiers in rural work"), the text accused those in command who, instead of staying on guard against the peasants, had joined them:

The contribution of the Red Army to the socialist transformation of agriculture, will only be effective when it is accompanied by a spirit of class awareness and intransigence to the class enemy. (...) There are cases in which the less reliable members of the party organizations or commands fall under the influence of or even sympathize with the capitalist and kulak elements in the countryside.¹⁰¹

This phenomenon of merging was only one of the elements which confirmed the presence among the political workers of widespread pockets of dissent with regard to the decisions of the party leaders. If in 1928, as we have seen, the leaders of the PUR were limited to criticizing the organizational failings resulting from the feeble conviction of many army workers, in 1929

⁹⁹ RGVA, f. 4, op. 16, d. 3, 1.8 ob.

¹⁰⁰ See V. P. Danilov, N. A. Ivnikskoi (eds.), *Dokumenty svidetel'stvuiut. Iz istorii derevni nakanune i v khode kollektivizatsii 1927-1932 gg.* (Moskva, 1989). In the introduction the editors wrote that, for example, 1,157 party workers in the Urals in January-March 1928 (p. 22) and 26,000 in the Northern Caucasus at the end of 1932 were deprived of their responsibilities because of "merging" with the kulaks (p. 44).

¹⁰¹ RGVA, f. 9, op. 28, d. 707, 1.42.

on the other hand, there was a harsh and decisive condemnation of any attitude that expressed uncertainty as to the “general line”. During 1929 in fact, the party’s dominating faction had defined in detail and condemned as “right-wing deviation” the criticism of Stalin’s procedures by those sectors of the party close to Bukharin’s position. In the same way, the leaders of the PUR made ample use of the category of “right-wing deviation”, to condemn those political workers who demonstrated, in the course of their political work, more than a doubt on the correctness of the attack against the “kulaks”.

However, in its harshness, this very condemnation confirms the fact that the criticism and doubts of many political workers continued throughout 1929, until just before comprehensive collectivization was introduced. At the beginning of December, shortly after the Plenum of the CC during which the definitive defeat of Bukharin’s group had been accompanied by the adoption of decisive measures towards collectivization and industrialization, a circular from Gamarnik, recently appointed as the new director of the PUR in the place of Bubnov¹⁰², dealt with these problems at length:

The struggle against the right-wing deviation in the party organizations of the army revealed the presence of rightist elements in the practice of work (merging with extraneous elements, protection of the kulaks [*zastupnichestvo za kulaka*], support of private traders, etc.) and ideological expressions of rightist ideas among less convinced members. (...) In the *svodki* of the PUR and in the military press clear examples have been noted as to how the party organizations were unable to unmask rightist moods with speed and decision, as well as how these moods did not receive a Bolshevik refusal.¹⁰³

The objective that the party organizations should strive for, Gamarnik continued, was the transformation of the fight against the *krest’ianskie nastroeniia* by a simple defensive act to an offensive one, with the redefinition of the contents of the propaganda for anti-kulak purposes:

The radicalization of the class struggle in the country requires constant proletarian class awareness in the barracks, the education of the soldier in the spirit of fighting without pity and without compromise against the class enemy.¹⁰⁴

In the new phase that was beginning, the role traditionally played by the Red Army in preparing cadres for the local Soviet hierarchies therefore had to change, making the entire military hierarchy a fundamental instrument for the collectivization of the land:

¹⁰² Ian Borisovich Gamarnik was born in 1894 in Zhitomir and took part in revolutionary activities since 1916, militant during the revolution with the group of ukrainian leftist Bolsheviks. In 1919 he had held a political and military post on the front of southern Ukraine. After working for a long time in the Soviet hierarchy of Vladivostok, at the end of 1928 he was named First Secretary of the Party in Byelorussia, where the bolshevik organization, “guided by Gamarnik, made enormous efforts to activate the masses of worker peasants and thereby to guarantee the success of the grain procurements plan” (N. I. Salekhov, *Ian Borisovich Gamarnik. Ocherk o zhizni i deiatel’nosti* [Moskva, 1964], p. 55). His appointment to leadership of the PUR (11 October 1929) could therefore have been justified by his gifts as organizer of work in the countryside. Nevertheless, it is necessary to remember that in the years of the dekulakization Gamarnik was able to express an interpretation of the role of the Red Army in the rural events, that was very different from that of Voroshilov. As is known, Gamarnik died by suicide (or murdered) on 31 May 1937, while he was about to be arrested, accused of having taken part in the “military plot” led by Tukhachevskii.

¹⁰³ RGVA, f. 4, op. 14, d. 89, 11.182 ob.–183.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 1.185 ob.

The Red Army, from whose ranks hundreds of thousands of soldier-peasants emerge each year, can and must become an enormous source of cadres, of active organizers and direct participants in the creation of kolkhozes in the villages. The rhythm and the dimensions of collectivization which were defined gave the army the main task of training the entire mass of peasant soldiers to be future organizers and participants in the creation of kolkhozes, and not merely a section, as has been the case up to now.¹⁰⁵

Towards dekulakization

To conclude, it is necessary to make some reflections on the way the Red Army was preparing to take a stand for the imminent battle of dekulakization. I am convinced first and foremost that in this respect the period 1928–1929 had for the army an importance equal to that it had for the whole collectivization process. A classic interpretation of Stalin’s group’s choice to proceed at the end of 1929 to comprehensive collectivization and to the “liquidation of the kulaks as a class” shows this to be the inevitable result of a mechanism set in motion by the “extraordinary measures” of 1928.¹⁰⁶ In the same way, the role that the Red Army was to play in the events of 1930–1933 was clearly conditioned by what occurred in the military ranks during 1928–1929 and by the experience which the political and military leaders acquired in that biennium.

In these pages I have attempted to relate this first episode of a history destined to be developed in the following three years. Thus we have seen the speed with which the uneasiness of the countryside was transmitted to the military ranks, on the morrow of the launching of the “extraordinary measures” in January 1928; and what the ripples were on the part of the political workers and the difficulties of the PUR leaders in responding to the authentic explosion of the soldiers’ *krestianskie nastroeniia*. I have then sought to describe how in the course of 1929 these responses became “offensive”, uniting an increasingly radical “anti-kulak” address to the effort to make the Red Army a means of supporting the expansion of the kolkhozes. In any case, the results were not significant, neither as regards the content of the *krest’ianskie nastroeniia* (who continued to disturb the military ranks) nor as regards the efficiency of the political work, given that in many *politrabotniki* doubts and uncertainty remained with respect to the line chosen by the leaders.

The Red Army thus appeared in the crucial year of 1930 as a body that was divided between the clear intentions of the leaders to use it in the collectivization process, and the many still unsolved problems in its basic hierarchy. At this stage of my research (of which I gave the first results on these pages) I can only anticipate the main lines on which this conflict developed. The option of some of the leaders was to force the situation, causing the Red Army to join the fray. On 30 January 1930, at the end of the month during which the Politburo had defined the dekulakization operation in detail, the RVS adopted a *postanovlenie* that was to direct the entire Army’s participation in the operation. One can read that the objective is

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.186.

¹⁰⁶ See M. Lewin *La paysannerie* . . . , pp. 423–451 and *The Making* . . . , pp. 91–120.

to prepare the whole mass of soldiers and junior officers for active participation in establishing the socialist countryside, the mass movement of the kolkhozes and the liquidation of the kulaks as a class.¹⁰⁷

Beyond the terms used in the *postanovlenie*, the first archival evidences shed light on two realities: in the first months of 1930 many military units were forced to take part in the methodical sacking in which resolved the dekulakization, and in many cases were used for the repression of the peasant revolts. All this, instead of resolving the problems left unsolved at the end of 1929, exasperated the conflict between the intentions of one part of the leaders and the existing tensions at the root of the army. Not only the uncertainty of many *politrabotniki* redoubled (while the *krest'ianskie nastroeniia* of the soldiers touched previously unknown levels), but among the military leaders themselves there were clashes that led to reconsideration of the army's role during the development of collectivization.

¹⁰⁷ *Partiino-politicheskaia rabota v Krasnoi Armii: Dokumenty, iul' 1929 g.-mai 1941 g.* (Moskva, 1985), p. 44.