Chapter 5

Soviet Russia

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Introduction

This chapter treats the connection between the development of political protest in the USSR into a social movement, on the one hand, and changes in Soviet society on the other. The first part contains a short summary of the phases of historical development of resistance, dissidence and political protest. The second part is centred around the sociological analysis of the Soviet human rights movement from various perspectives. This movement will first be considered as a phenomenon of the specific sociological generation termed in the Russian literature the Soviet generation of the Sixties. The activities of this generation led to alternative thinking (inakomyyslie) becoming an informal norm in extensive parts of Soviet society, and to the social movement later called the dissident movement coming together from scattered, unconnected appearances of political protest. The dissident movement of the last three Soviet decades will also be treated from a second perspective, observing it in connection to changes in the structure of the public sphere in the USSR.

This essay is based primarily on historical-sociological research undertaken at the beginning of the 1990s. The empirical basis is formed by biographical interviews and conversations with activists from the movement as well as written questions posed to former dissidents (return: 385 questionnaires) (Voronkov, 1992, and 1993). For the analysis of the intellectual debates on dissidence and the generation of the Sixties, numerous documents from private and public resources were also examined. The collections of and the source editions published by the central department of the Memorial Society in Moscow and the Memorial Research Center in St. Petersburg proved particularly important for the research; they analyzed, among other things, numerous files from the archives of the CPSU, the KGB and the Ministry of the Interior, resources which after 1993 became more difficult to access or were sealed again altogether.

It is only really possible to consider opposition against the regime as a social movement in the period from 1956 onwards. The Twentieth Party Congress of the CPSU marked the end of the epoch of totalitarian Stalinist rule. Khruščev’s ‘Thaw’ not only stimulated the spread of alternative thought, but also of alternative action. There were, to be sure, numerous examples of nonconformist thought and action before then. In the 1930s through the early 1950s, however, resistance was expressed only in isolated activities; it had a highly episodic character and exerted
little influence on the development of the consciousness and political culture of broader social groups.

The dissidents of the period between 1956 and 1983, in contrast, must be seen as a unified social movement, since they had, their ideological heterogeneity notwithstanding, a common goal – the destruction of the ideological monopoly of the CPSU and the struggle against the arbitrary rule of the regime. The first phase of the movement was characterized by occasional protest actions not coordinated with one another carried out by groups or individuals against arbitrary state measures. The second phase was connected to the creation of the Samizdat bulletin ‘Chronicle of Current Events’. With the construction of an expanded network of information and contacts around the editorial staff of the ‘Chronicle’, a collective political actor, clearly exhibiting the traits of a social movement, formed from the end of the 1960s onward in the milieu of the critical intelligentsia.

**Historical Overview**

Resistance against the Communist system went along with the entire history of the Soviet state. The simplest form of expressing political dissatisfaction was in daily discussion and in the passive avoidance of participation in official political events. In some periods of Soviet history, the proportion of the population unsatisfied with those in power reached 90 per cent (Shinkurchuk, 1995, p. 72). From the triumph of Stalin over his rivals from the ‘founder generation’ of Bolsheviks and the establishment of his totalitarian regime until the start of Perestroika, however, active resistance and open protest always remained a phenomenon of a small minority of the population.

In post-Soviet journalism as well as in the Western reception of the history of the Soviet opposition, the protests of the 1960s and the dissident movement of the 1970s achieved widespread attention. In so doing, the activists of the Sixties are often characterized as ‘Revisionists’ or ‘liberal conformists’, who were then replaced in the 1970s by ideologically independent opponents of the regime, the ‘Dissidents’. This conception is mistaken. First, the emergence of the dissident movement had already begun in the mid-1960s; this movement is, I will show, essentially a phenomenon of the specific generation of the Sixties. Second, the Reform Communist ideology and the ideological rejection of the system always existed side by side until the 1980s, and both ‘currents’ had corresponding antecedents in the Stalinist era.

**Resistance in the Era of Totalitarianism**

The history of political resistance in the 1930s and 1940s has long been known only in fragments. After the fall of the Soviet Union, there were few survivors from this period who could have been asked to speak about it. Documents from private sources are much less frequently available than for research on later decades. And the records of the security organs and the courts are at best only contingently usable, as it can hardly be determined today which ‘political crimes’ were described accurately and which were fabricated by the organs themselves.

In the 1930s and 1940s, the security organs registered a steadily increasing number of protest actions in the form of handwritten flyers, circles of conspirators and spontaneous strikes, largely criticizing those in power along two lines of accusation: They either pilloried the material privileges for employees of the party and state apparatus and the concomitant violation of the principle of social equality,’ or they attacked the ‘un-Russian’ character of the nomenklatura, which is to say in many cases the ‘Jewish predominance’ in the apparatus.’ Both ideological orientations were always latently widespread in Soviet society, as was made manifest at the end of the 1980s in two political mass movements – in the creation of egaliitarianist ‘Democratic Popular Front movements’ on the one hand and the founding of numerous ‘patriotic’ and national-chauvinist organizations on the other.

Ideas of liberal modifications to real Socialism were already in evidence at the beginning of the 1930s. The shock of collectivization led at first to the formation of groups within the Communist Party calling for inner-party democratization. The groups around Mikhail Ryutin and Sergei Syrtsov and Vissarion Lominadze are well known today (Starkov, 1990). Later, oppositional groups rose up outside of the Party as well, in particular among the new youth born after the Revolution of 1917. The two groups shared common perceptions of Socialism and Soviet power – in contrast to the opposition of the 1920s – as a fait accompli without alternatives, and generally limited themselves to calls for improvements to Socialism. The ‘programins’ of the various ‘Marxist’ anti-Stalinist youth groups of the 1930s through the early 1950s differentiated themselves from the conceptions of later Reform Communists particularly through their frequent connection of the goal of a democratization of Socialism with an orientation towards a revolutionary uprising against the Stalinist regime.

Little is known about the number of persons involved, but documents from political trials from the period between 1940 and 1955 attest that such groups were active not only in Moscow and Leningrad, but also in Yalta-Abad, Tashkent, Saratov, Chelyabinsk, Voronezh, Magadan and other cities. Although the reports of political terror suggest a quite large number of oppositional activities, this resistance could never form a movement under the conditions of totalitarianism. The groups were of a conspiratorial character almost without exception and carried out agitation in isolation from one another. Only in a small number of cases were they active over an extended period of time; in general, they were uncovered and liquidated by the security organs shortly after their founding or their first actions.

With the death of Stalin in 1953 and the events of 1956, ambivalent changes took place in the circumstances for oppositional activities. For its part, the Twentieth Party Congress of the CPSU unleashed a wave of social optimism among young people. Hopes for the political evolution of Soviet order in favor of a democratization of the structures of power were strengthened further by the events in Poland and Hungary and the first reports of the founding of workers’ councils and of the liberalizations taking place in those countries. At the same time, the lowering of the level of repression in the USSR reduced the barriers for protest and
nonconformist behaviour. The subsequent defeat of the Hungarian uprising by Soviet troops and the realization that repressive measures would remain strong, if no longer universal but rather selectively applied against political ‘deviationists’, quickly extinguished hopes among large segments of the youth. There was, to be sure, another uprising in underground political activities in 1957, attested by numerous political trials, among other sources (Iofe, 1996). It became increasingly apparent, however, that the conspiratorial form of resistance as well as the radical orientation towards the toppling of the regime, had become obsolete under the new circumstances.

Two underground political platforms from 1964 particularly mark this turning point – the All-Russian Social Christian Union for the Liberation of the People by Igor Ogurcev and Evgenii Vagin (VSChSON, 1975) and the program of the group Kolokol (The Bell), written by Valerii Ronkin and Sergei Khakhava and titled ‘From the Dictatorship of the Bureaucrats to the Dictatorship of the Proletariat’ (Ronkin and Khakhava, no year; Peskov, 1978). Both texts judge Soviet order to be bureaucratic and unreformable. And both groups call for the fall of the regime along the lines of a popular revolution after the Hungarian model and for the construction of a social order that would be freed from the negative aspects of both capitalism and bureaucratism.

Both cases have a borderline character. They capture the lack of perspective on a reform of the existing order ‘from above’ and at the same time reveal the fact that political radicalism had become unpopular and obsolete. Although there was already a relatively broad scene of underground literature at the time, such platforms found no resonance even among the active and protest-ready youth. Conspiratorial groups of a similar kind did continue to appear occasionally into the early 1980s, but with the character of sectarian circles distant from the Zeitgeist and which had little to do with mainstream oppositional engagement. The coming generation of dissidents broadly declined to propose ideological or political concepts for a future alternative political system, orienting itself instead towards fighting for, under the conditions of the time, the rights and freedoms of the individual and the expansion of the spaces for a self-determined way of life.

Social Change and Cultural Dissent

The social change following the death of Stalin that began in the mid-1950s was marked by three processes of change to be of essential importance for the development of critical milieu and which objectively made possible the cultivation of the dissident movement. The first change affected the character of the regime and the manner of the exercise of political dominance. In the course of the Stalin era, the Communist leadership was forced to realize that a personalized monopoly on power and uncontrolled blanket terror affected more than just the opponents of the regime. It not only weakened the administrative elites and burdened the population, but ultimately became an existential danger to the political elite itself. Khrushchev’s quasi-public criticism of the ‘cult of personality’ and the excesses of Stalinist terror, the strengthening of the collective character of the party leadership, and the limiting of the power of the repression apparatus that marked the transfer to a post-totalitarian mode of Communist rule were thus all self-preservation measures, attempts to damp up the self-destructive potential of the political system. A central trait of this transition was the partial retreat from the state’s claims to control over daily life. Political protest did continue to be suppressed, but repressionary measures were only directed against targeted persons who had publicly broken the rules, whereas the risks accruing to critical statements and nonconformist behaviour in the unofficial sphere declined considerably.

The second important change was in the cultural opening of large segments of Soviet society, in particular among the youth in the larger cities and the intelligentsia. On the one hand, the Khrushchev leadership, cognizant of the deep legitimation crisis it had unleashed with its public criticism of Stalinist crimes, sought to credibly demonstrate the ‘openness’ of its new politics by relaxing restrictions in the region of culture. On the other hand, this opened whole new horizons to many people whose entire lives previous had been marked by the ubiquity of ideological propaganda and indoctrination and by being hermetically sealed off from all international influences. In this regard, a key event was the World Youth Festival in Moscow in 1957. For many people, young people in particular, this was the first opportunity in their lives to speak with foreigners, learn something about life in other countries and continents, and to become acquainted with other cultures and political views. This festival, as well as other measures taken by the Khrushchev leadership, led to a growing new interest in other cultures and new, unorthodox ideas, in particular among the young. Young people began independently to study foreign languages so as to be able to read the limited supply of newspapers from other Socialist countries, which were in certain respects more informative than the Soviet press, and which placed emphasis differently in some of their interpretations. In certain circles it became the norm to listen to Western music, jazz in particular. With time, it became usual to listen to broadcasts from Western radio stations. Hemingway and Remarque came into fashion in literature. Urban young people began to grow enthusiastic about the West. This new openness was an essential precondition for the creation of anything like a protest movement.

A third trait of the change took place in a partial reorientation of economic policies. Various economic reform experiments and new industrialization and urbanization projects generated, after years of depression, a climate of optimism for some time in which individual initiative appeared to be called for within certain bounds. An extensive program for increasing production of consumer goods was instituted shortly after Stalin’s death, which not only simply eased existence but also improved the conditions for the independent structuring of daily life. A particular importance in this context was an extensive program of apartment construction, the result of which was not only to improve, but to change the character of, the living arrangements of many millions. From the early 1930s onward, the predominant type of living in the major Soviet cities was the communal apartment, the so-called ‘Kommunalka’. The principle was that individual persons and families each received a room in an old apartment that they had to share with others, mostly strangers. The kitchen and bathroom were shared by all. Residents were thus effectively under permanent social control. On moving
into their ‘own’ apartments, a majority of Soviet citizens gained for the first time the opportunity to have any ‘private life’ at all. At the same time, there opened a space for social communication largely beyond undesired supervision, a matter which we will return later. At this point it should be noted that these changes created the preconditions for the spread of alternative thought and for the communication of new ideas and critical views through society to be possible.

Dissidence as a social phenomenon had its origins in the realm of culture. The first attempts at a cultural underground are already noticeable in the late 1940s, at the same time as the first appearances of the term Samizdat (Daniel’, 2000, p. 41). The young urban intelligentsia of the post-war years developed an ethically and aesthetically grounded aversion to ‘politics’ and the official ‘Soviet reality’, seeking to express themselves outside the official ‘orthodoxy’. This was done through new cultural ‘counterconcepts’, but rather in literary and artistic forms. Human solidarity, inner freedom and creativity were the central values of this ‘movement’, described in the Russian literature as freethinking (vol’nodumstvo). Art and literature were the first area in which Khrushchev’s ‘Thaw’ liberalizations opened limited possibilities to live according to these values. At the same time, efforts grew to espouse these values openly as the general level of repression declined. The criticism of the young intelligentsia of the 1950s was thus directed first and foremost at the state control and ideological regimentation of cultural affairs. On the one hand, writers and editors of literary journals sought, through persistent and intricate efforts, to expand step by step the boundaries of the officially allowed and to bring through the censors works previously ‘impossible’ or already banned once; they had, in certain cases, remarkable success. On the other, a growing number of artists – in contrast to this ‘cultural opposition from within the system’ – decided to make themselves independent of official norms and institutions and to realize their claims of artistic freedom in the private and unofficial spheres. In Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev, and other cities, independent artists’ communes formed at the end of the 1950s that organized private exhibitions and readings. The Samizdat, which had previously consisted of the circulation of individual manuscripts and illegal translations distributed by the authors themselves, abruptly took on a new quality when Aleksandr Ginzburg founded the first independent periodical, the almanac Sintaksis, a collection of poems by various authors which had been banned or never submitted to the censors. The real space of cultural dissidence, from which the political dissident movement later emerged, was created in these underground activities (Daniel’, 2000).

In front of this background, open discussions took place with increasing frequency that threatened to place the existing boundaries of the officially allowed seriously in question. Among the outstanding events to influence the future dissidents were the discussions around Vladimir Dudintsev’s novel ‘Not by Bread Alone’ (Ne kharcho ednym), an impressive polemic against the bureaucracy, in the Union of Writers in Moscow and Leningrad and at a conference at the Leningrad University, the official propaganda against Boris Pasternak, the author of the banned novel ‘Doctor Zhivago’, the debates on the literary journal ‘Novyi Mir’ (The New World), and a Picasso exhibition at the Hermitage, which caused an attempted protest on Arts Square in Leningrad (Gidoni, 1980; Trofimenko, 1990). In many universities and institutes, conferences of the Communist youth organization Komsomol became public forums for uncontrollable criticism of cultural policies, and independent wall newsletters and illegal magazines appeared criticizing official art (Memorial, 2001; Prischchena, 1998).

The second field in which the ‘Thaw’ liberalizations released a significant spread of nonconformist behaviour was in the practice of science. The academic and cultural milieu were closely intertwined. Playing an important role in this was the general sense of progress and optimism, as well as the high esteem Soviet natural and applied sciences then enjoyed, in state and society, resulting from their spectacular successes. Here need only be mentioned, with Sputnik in 1957, the first successfully launched satellite into space, and the first manned space travel in 1961. Aleksandr Piatigorski, a member of the academy, in an interview: ‘Science came almost explosively into fashion. Not being interested in science was actually frowned upon. It was not only an intellectual interest, but a science mania. (...) The Russian mania for science idealized the Academy – back then, there were no critics of the Soviet Academy of Sciences. The Academy was the only place where one could not only exist, but exist well (...). I was present when a high-ranking KGB officer said: “We will always need the Academy. Do what you want, but better here than elsewhere”’ (Piatigorski, 1995, p. 5). The high degree of libelarity that the practice of science enjoyed at the time was not least among the factors reflected in the high proportion of academicians in the future dissident movement. It is symptomatic that Andrei Sakharov, a well-known physicist and prominent member of the Academy of Sciences, became the leading representative of this movement.

When the critical efforts of the cultural and scientific intelligentsia against political authority threatened to get out of control, the Party leadership responded with the time-honored approach – an intensification of repression. In 1959, the KGB took so-called ‘prophylactic measures’ against critical students and intellectuals, including various extra-judicial steps, which could include official warnings, expulsion from universities, termination of employment, or measures still more severe (Daniel’, 2000, p. 43). From the beginning of the 1960s on, critical intellectuals were again increasingly brought to trial. The trials against the writers Mikhail Narysta in 1961, Yuri Belov in 1963 and Iosif Brodski in 1964 were particularly well known. It was a defining characteristic that these judicial measures were directed most strongly against the circulation of uncensored literature and contacts abroad, in particular the publication of literary works with Western publishers.

The Soviet Human Rights Movement

The key event for the creation of the political dissident movement was the 1965 trial against the writers Andrei Sinyavskii and Yuli Rustem, who were sentenced for unapproved publication of their texts in the West. Whereas earlier trials against literary figures may have been perceived as ordinary acts of state despotism against ‘innocent’ citizens, the critical intelligentsia judged this case to be a regression into Stalinist cultural politics, one that fundamentally questioned the liberalizing progress of the ‘Thaw’ period and thus seriously threatened the essential collective
interests of the intelligentsia (see Daniel’, 2000, p. 45). At this moment, nonconformism ceased to be predominantly a ‘youth movement’. Step by step, members of the middle generation, established artists and academicians who were in a position to overcome fears of repression and muster at least minimal resources for open protest, took the initiative. In reaction to the sentencing of Sinyavski and Daniel’, 22 open letters of protest were made known, signed by a total of 80 persons, including 60 members of the Union of Writers. When the lawyers of the two writers also began to be persecuted by the authorities in 1967, leading intellectuals felt themselves called upon to go beyond limited claims for artistic freedom and increasingly engage themselves to put on the agenda the more general question of the rights and freedoms of the individual. Soon thereafter, young activists smuggled materials on the trial of Sinyavskii and Daniel’ to the West: Aleksandr Ginzburg had already published via Samizdat the statements of their wives from the court proceedings. Public protests of their sentencing in the 1968 "Trial of Four" in Moscow were signed by more than 700 people. In the latter half of the 1960s, there were public demonstrations of protest in multiple cities against infringements of human rights and political trials, in defense of the minority rights of the Soviet Germans, the Crimean Tatars, and the Jews, as well as against the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia.

The expansion of the claims of artistic freedom to demands for more general freedom of opinion and legal security marked the transition from cultural to political dissidence. In the years that followed, well-known intellectuals founded initiatives for human rights in a number of cities, which over time networked with each other across the country and formed into a social movement. At the start, the groups concentrated on demanding that the state respect the rights of citizens as formally guaranteed in the Soviet constitution. Later the groups grew to depend less on Soviet law, calling increasingly on internationally valid human rights, first the 1948 UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and then from 1975 above all on the Helsinki Accords, which had been signed by Moscow. A further trait was an orientation toward maximizing the openness of the actions, which was not unrelated to the simultaneous expansion of the Samizdat. Correspondingly, an increasing number of initiatives turned to the international public and to Western governments and media, something that had been wholly impossible for earlier groups.

Of decisive significance for the consolidation of the human rights movement was the founding of the independent bulletin ‘Chronicle of Current Events’ (Khronika tekuushchikh soobstvii), whose first issue appeared on April 30th, 1968, at the peak of the repressive measures against the signers of the aforementioned letters of protest. For the next fifteen years, the ‘Chronicle’ was at the centre of the Samizdat and the dissident movement. At the same time, it was a model for dissident communications and public relations policy that was later replicated in a number of variations inside and outside the USSR, such as by the Czechoslovakian Charta 77 (Beyrou, 2003, p. 34), the publication ‘Supplementary Materials’ in Estonia (see Ruusoo, in this volume) and the ‘Chronicle of the Catholic Church of Lithuania’. Within a short period of time, the ‘Chronicle’ spread to all major cities in the country. Generally, the editors released 10 to 12 copies, which were then retyped and sent onward countless times. Via the same channels through which the bulletin was distributed in the country, new information flowed from the provinces back to the editors, in that way making them a sort of central office of the dissident movement. Among the most important themes of the publication were, at first, the repressive measures surrounding the political trials of the 1960s, then later the state of the ethnic minorities deported by Stalin, the situation of political prisoners, the activities of the human rights initiatives, and information on the literary Samizdat. The ‘Chronicle’ appeared more or less regularly until 1983. The first editor was Natal’ya Gorbanevskaia; Anatoli Yacobson took on the role after her arrest in December 1969. In 1972, the KGB began a massive campaign against the Samizdat and the ‘Chronicle’ above all. There were numerous arrests, and with each new issue, the state took ‘hostages’ from the dissident milieu, including people who had nothing to do with the production or distribution of that issue. In view of the situation, the editors decided to abandon production. After a full year’s interruption, the bulletin resumed regular publication from May 1974 onward. After a total of 64 issues, it ceased activities definitively in 1983 amidst the final wave of repressive measures against the entire human rights movement. Among the most prominent human rights groups acting in the orbit of the ‘Chronicle’ were:

The Initiative for the Protection of Human Rights in the USSR (Initiativnaya grupp za ches伊olovek v SSR), the first Soviet human rights group. It was created in 1969 and practiced a form of protest that was to become the most important instrument in the repertoire of activities of the Soviet dissidents – that of the collective petition and the public letter of protest. Over a period of three years, the group, which had 15 members, predominantly from Moscow, sent numerous letters to the UN and other international organizations denouncing violations of human rights in the USSR; all the letters remained unanswered, however. The names of the members and their activities nevertheless became known domestically through the news services of Western radio broadcasters. Between 1972 and 1974, several members were arrested, and the group was dissolved soon thereafter.

The Committee for Human Rights in the USSR (Komitet prav ches伊olovek v SSR), founded in Moscow in November 1970. The eight founding members included well-known literary figures and scientists, among them the Academy of Sciences member Andrei Sakharov and the writers Aleksandr Galich and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. In contrast to the 'Initiative', which had been an informal group, the Committee had a formal system of rules for its members. It was the first precedent for an independent formal association of citizens. The Committee became a member of the International League for Human Rights and maintained close contacts with foreign human rights groups. It analyzed the state of human rights in the USSR, produced theoretical works on human rights questions, and worked on the clarification of legal questions and legal counseling. At the end of 1973, the Committee ceased its activities amidst massive repressive measures and the loss of its two most active members, Valeriya Chalidze and Andrei Tverdokhlubov.
The Assistance Group for the Implementation of the Helsinki Accords (Grupa Sodeistvia Vypolneniyu Khel’isinskikh Soglasheniy v SSSR), also known as the Moscow Helsinki Group (MHG), was the best known and most effective Soviet human rights group. Its founding by eleven activists on May 12, 1976 opened a new stage in the development of the Soviet dissident movement, one marked above all by a significant professionalization of human rights work, one that also resulted, however, in its increasing isolation from the cultural Samizdat and the interests of the broader milieu of intellectuals. Its leader was Yuri Orlov; founding members included Lyudmila Alekseeva, Elena Bonner, Aleksandr Ginzburg and Anatoli Chernianski, among others. The official task of the group was ‘cooperation in the fulfillment of the Helsinki agreements by the Soviet state’. The MHG supported the formation of additional human rights initiatives auxiliary to it, collected information on violations of human rights, and offered concrete assistance to citizens threatened by repression. It organized press conferences with foreign news correspondents and succeeded in making all of the information it compiled publicly transparent. Its most important characteristic was its close connections to organizations abroad; the MHG was in effect the initiator of the international Helsinki movement. Nearly all members of the MHG were arrested by 1981, and in 1982 the group announced the termination of its activities. In 1989, there was a ‘resurrection’ of the MHG. The organization is still active today, and several activists from the 1970s are still involved.

The Relief Fund for Political Prisoners and Their Families (Fond pomoshchi politzakluichennym i ikh sem’yam) was created in 1974 on the initiative of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and Aleksandr Ginzburg. The goal of this group was to organize financial and legal support for political prisoners and their families. This form of dissident activity, practiced here for the first time, also took on the character of an example later adopted by dissidents in other countries. The most prominent example of this was the Committee for the Defense of Workers, or KOR, founded in Poland in 1976 (see Sonntag, in this volume). The resources of the Relief Fund were financed in part by donations from the founding members, though predominantly by funds from abroad. After the arrest of Ginzburg in 1974, new donors came to the aid of the organization. The funds were used to found branches of the organization in multiple cities. This made it possible for the group to continue its activities longer than any other human rights group under the conditions of the heightened repressions of the Andropov period. In 1984, however, it, too, was forced to end its activities.

Considerable difficulties inhere in any attempt to judge the total number of dissidents. The estimates of experts diverge a great deal. Between 1967 and 1971, the KGB registered 3,096 ‘groups of a politically harmful character’ and documented ‘prophylactic measures’ in this period against a total of 13,602 members of these initiatives. Broken down, the data (Aksyutin et al., 1995, p. 244) appear as follows:

- 1967: 502 groups encompassing 2,196 members;
- 1968: 625 groups, encompassing 2,870 members;
- 1969: 733 groups, encompassing 3,130 members;
- 1970: 709 groups, encompassing 3,102 members;
- 1971: 527 groups, encompassing 2,304 members.

According to data from Arsenii Roginskii, however, a total of 58,298 persons in the USSR were subject to a ‘prophylactic measure’ between 1967 and 1970, as were an additional 63,108 persons between 1971 and 1974 (quoted in Bezborodov, 1998, p. 13). And according to calculations by Roy Medvedev, approximately 10,000 persons were arrested on the basis of ‘purely political’ sections of the law between 1967 and 1982. In addition, there were multiple tens of thousands of people imprisoned as ‘Nationalists’ or as followers of banned religions, for violations of the passport laws or as ‘socialis’ (quoted in Bezborodov, 1998, p. 13).

Although these data allow little information on the activities of the persons repressed to be revealed, and although not every one of the prisoners included here can be classified as an active dissident, one may nonetheless assume that the milieu of political dissidence, with the human rights groups forming its core and most visible and active segment, encompassed multiple thousands of people over the course of years.

The aforementioned dissident groups registered by the KGB between 1967 and 1971 were spread across the Russian cities of Moscow, Leningrad, Sverdlovsk, Tula, Vladimir, Omsk, Kazan’, and Tyumen’, as well as the Ukraine, Latvia, Estonia, Belarus, Moldavia, Kazakhstan, and the Transcaucasian Republics (Aksyutin et al., 1995, p. 244). The cluster of leading activists, to whom no more than a dozen persons are ascribed, was heavily concentrated in Moscow, however. Leningrad did have its own rich history of protest events, indeed, more such activities occurred there than in Moscow at least through the mid-1960s. Yet the Moscow human rights activists became the spokespeople for the entire country, and their activities definitively connected such groups nationwide and made it possible for such a movement to be formed. The predominance of the Moscow dissidents then declined significantly, however, in the course of the 1970s. In 1968, 70 per cent of the signers still came from the capital; in 1977/78, by contrast, this was the case for only 27 per cent of the signers of the letters protesting the arrest of the MHG members (Alekseeva, 1992, p. 258).

In general, all active members of human rights groups were sooner or later arrested, imprisoned, sent to work camps, committed to psychiatric institutions, sent into exile or stripped of their citizenship and expelled from the country. After completion of the punishment, the authorities generally denied the affected persons the right to live in a large city and only allowed them to move to such cities when they were at least 100 km from Moscow, Leningrad and other centres of activity. In 1988, following the Soviet army’s march into Afghanistan, the regime once again heightened repressions against all independent activities in society. Protests against the war were, in fact, only occasionally to be seen. Developments in Poland
nonetheless demonstrated how swiftly an organized, active political underground could, under certain conditions, mobilize a broad social movement that could threaten seriously the monopoly on power of the Communist party. In front of this background, the leadership of the CPSU decided to break the independent initiatives entirely. In January 1980, Andrei Sakharov was exiled from Moscow to Gorki. The majority of the other leaders of the Moscow human rights movement emigrated abroad or were expatriated, and numerous other activists were arrested. None of the prominent figures of the human rights movement survived this wave of repression in freedom. By 1983, the ideological 'cleaning' of the country was essentially complete; effectively none of the dissident groups that had arisen in previous years remained active. The shutting down of the 'Chronicle of Current Events' in 1983 marked the end of the Soviet human rights movement. In 1984/85, the last trials for the distribution of banned political and religious literature took place in Moscow and Leningrad. The social and political mass movement that emerged in 1987 had an entirely different character. It was created under circumstances that were changed wholly; viewed programatically, organizationally, and personally, it had few if any connections to the prior dissident movement. This movement opened a new chapter in Soviet history, one outside the focus of this article.

Analytical Perspectives

The Sociological Generation of the Sixties

In the investigation of social change, sociologists frequently have recourse to the concept of generations. In the tradition of the subject-oriented approach of Karl Mannheim (1970), a sociological generation is understood to be a community of persons of approximately the same age, with similar cultural and social orientations and models of behaviour. Such orientations are formed in the process of socialization. Principal differences in the socialization process can, however, lead to differentiation and the formation of clear social boundaries within one and the same age cohort. It is therefore always only a certain portion of the members of an age group to produce a generation in the sociological sense: namely, those who are moved by the same social problems, develop a common value system and corresponding models of behaviour, and thereby unite themselves into a specific social unity. Based on these assumptions, we define a sociological generation as a community of people who (i) are marked by common experiences of socialization, (ii) share certain cultural value-orientations and realize them in their cultural practices, (iii) create for themselves a common field of communication and interaction, and (iv) identify themselves — in contrast to other contemporaries and in contradistinction to earlier or later generations — as members of the generation in question, and recognize each other mutually as such.

The generational approach opens up a perspective on the dissident movement that goes beyond its definition as a political movement, a grouping of people who engage themselves for certain political goals. It offers a specific insight into the social circumstances that made this political movement possible. In the Soviet, or rather the Soviet-Russian, case, the dissident movement is a phenomenon of a specific sociological generation that developed under special circumstances that did not apply to earlier or later generations. As described in the first part, non-conformist and oppositional behaviour also existed in earlier periods. An oppositional movement first arose in the 1960s, however, and it continued to exist over a longer period of time in which the circumstances for non-conformist behaviour once again became more restrictive. This persistence can only be explained if one takes into consideration the factors that made possible the relatively strong social cohesion among the participants. In order to make this connection clear, I will examine more closely below the generational character of the Soviet dissident movement.

The so-called Sixties (sixtiesiatniki) — the sociological generation from which the Soviet dissident movement emerged starting in the mid-1960s — took on a central significance in the 1990s in Russian literature, which was engaged with the analysis of the social dimension of the 'Thaw Period'. In this process, the determination of boundaries and the criteria of belonging presented special difficulties. On the one hand, it is generally agreed upon that the Sixties made up only a minority within their age cohort. But many authors tend to extend the temporal boundaries of this generation excessively to include members of other age cohorts who shared the values of the Sixties (Basina, 1994). Based on the results of my own empirical investigations on the self-image of the dissidents, especially regarding the question of which historical events were perceived as definitive, we do not consider this extension to be justified. As mentioned above, a generation is integrated around the common experience of significant events that take place in the period of their political and cultural socialization, i.e. in the age between 16 and 25 years (Mannheim, 1974; Shuman and Skott, 1992). For the overwhelming majority of the participants in the dissident movement, this was — as for the majority of people their age — according to my own information, the events of the year 1956 — the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU, the Hungarian popular uprising and its suppression by Soviet troops, and the protests in Poland. This distinguished the Sixties clearly from the previous generation, whose members identified the Second World War as the most important event of their lives. 'We are children of the Twentieth Congress' (Marchenko, 1993) — this was the typical self-description of many well-known dissidents. 'Khurshchev's speech hit like a bomb and at the same time nourished the hope that everything would become different. But in the same year, Khurshchev sent troops into Hungary in order to put down the revolution. And all illusions, all hopes disappeared' (Popova, 1994).

The core of the generation of the Sixties was made up of people born from 1931 to 1940, who experienced the events of 1956 between the ages of 16 and 25. While the boundary separating this generation from the previous 'War generation' can be drawn with adequate clarity, the boundary separating it from the following generation is more blurry. This is due to the fact that the 'Thaw' period in the USSR lasted for several years and the reform politics introduced in 1956 were of central importance through the mid-1960s for the socialization of many members of younger age groups, approximately up until the birth year 1945. Some authors
thus assert that the ‘Epoch of the 1960s’ spanned the time from 1956/57 to 1967/68 (Bibler, 1994; Glezer, 1994).

Even though the same events influenced the entire Soviet youth of this period, one can nonetheless include only a minority of this age group in the generation of the Sixties. The reason for this is that these events were perceived quite differently depending on the social environment in which the socialization processes took place. In Soviet society of this period, the social class differences were relatively small, but there were powerful social and cultural differences in the social-spatial dimension: between metropolis and province, between town and country, among the different levels of the strictly hierarchical structure of settlement. This explains why social innovations arose almost exclusively in major cities, to a large extent in Moscow and Leningrad, and affected other parts of the country only over a longer period of time and with much less intensity. While in Moscow, for example, the dissident scene acted relatively publicly at the end of the 1960s, held open assemblies and published petitions, it was predominantly conspiratorial groups covertly circulating flyers acting at this time in provincial cities – a stage that the capital had already passed by then. ‘The “Thaw” and the new patterns of behaviour were first and foremost the property of the Muscovite’ (Vysokovskii, 1994, p.8). Access to current information, the possibility of contact with foreigners and meetings with prominent people – all of these possibilities were to a large extent limited to Moscow. Nearly all people from the provinces of importance in the fields of science, culture, and the arts made their way to Moscow, where they found better working and living conditions and the control by the authorities less rigid. Moscow thus offered the most favorable circumstances for the formation of the specific atmosphere of freethinking (vol'nodumstvo), which formed fertile ground for political protest, and the ‘second culture’. The Sixties were therefore above all a phenomenon of Moscow and Leningrad, whose further influence remained limited to a limited number of groups of intellectuals in a few large Soviet cities.

The Soviet dissidents represent only one portion of the politically ambitious Sixties, who began to differentiate themselves ideologically soon after their formation. First, the ‘True Leninists’ separated themselves from those who took the path towards the dissident and human rights movements. Later, an agrarian-conservative element (pochvemishi) split off (Lipovetski, 1991, p. 226). In spite of the ideological differentiation that finally led its members into opposing political camps, however, the Sixties retained its ‘generational unity’ (Mannheim) until the end. This was based on a well-defined collective consciousness and a strong symbolic-cultural integration, which was reproduced above all through legendary writers (Evtašenko, Voznesenskii, Brodskii, Rozhdestvenskii) and bards (Okudzhava, Galich) and presented itself in the heroic figure of the ‘Physicist’, the romanticized representative of technological progress. The first reference group always remained ‘our people’, the members of their own generation. Only they were really trusted; they shared the same rules of the game and a trans-political, generation-specific ethos. That the dissidents remained defined by their membership in this generation was especially clear in the years of Perestroika. Even at that time, when pressure from the authoritarian regime, which had willed

the generation together over the years, diminished rapidly, they preferred to cooperate with political rivals from the ranks of the Sixties than with politically sympathetic members of younger generations who were culturally foreign to them. This may help to explain why the liberal-democratic intellectuals, despite their initially high popularity, rapidly lost much of their political importance during Perestroika and afterwards in particular.

The Social Structure of the Dissident Movement

The constitutive importance of the Sixties generation for the dissident movement is confirmed by the empirical data I have collected via a survey of 385 activists from the dissident movement who suffered acts of repression between 1956 and 1985 (Voromkov, 1993). The selection includes several age cohorts.

Table 5.1   Age structure of the dissident movement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Birth year of the respondents</th>
<th>Share in per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1925 and earlier</td>
<td>11.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1926-1930</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931-1935</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1936-1940</td>
<td>29.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941-1945</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1946-1950</td>
<td>11.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951-1955</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1956 and later</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The birth years 1931-1945, in which the generation of the Sixties are to be included, make up the overwhelming majority among the dissidents, at 59.5 per cent. At first glance, one could get the impression that the members of the age group born from 1946-1950 were more eager to protest than those of the previous cohort. But this impression is deceptive, because birth rates during the war were far below the level of the postwar years; in reality, protest activity among the few children of the war years was thus far higher than that among the later age groups.

That it was the Sixties who formed the backbone of the dissident movement for over three decades is also revealed in the fact that the majority of victims of political persecution up until the 1980s were members of this generation. The proportion of those under thirty among the total number of first-time imprisonments thus sank clearly in the course of the years: from 83 per cent in the years from 1956 to 1960 to 25-30 per cent in the first half of the 1980s. At the same time, the average age of active dissidents increased: from 26 years in the 1950s, to 30 years in the 1960s, to 37 years in the 1970s.
Table 5.2  Dissidents according to level of education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of education</th>
<th>Share in per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University degree</td>
<td>51.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incomplete university education</td>
<td>20.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary school and vocational training</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary school</td>
<td>15.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incomplete primary school education</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

70 to 80 per cent of the dissidents who belonged to the Sixties had completed a course of study at a university or college. In the later age cohorts, this percentage sank to 45 per cent. The high percentage of the group with unfinished higher educations can be best explained by the fact that students who participated in dissident activities were usually expelled from their university or college studies. Among some age groups, this percentage was especially high; among those born during the war, it reached 41 per cent. Every fourth respondent born between 1936 and 1950 was a student at the time of his or her arrest. At the same time, one must take into consideration that arrest was as a rule preceded by so-called ‘prophylactic measures’, which included expulsion from the university. All these numbers show that the generation of the Sixties students played a prominent role among the dissidents. Students comprised only ten per cent, by contrast, of dissidents born after 1950.

Table 5.3  Social stratification

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social strata</th>
<th>Share in per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Humanitarian intelligentsia</td>
<td>29.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineers, technical professions</td>
<td>19.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>16.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skilled workers</td>
<td>13.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unskilled workers</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skilled service jobs</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military personnel</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unskilled service jobs</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Assigning individual persons to certain social categories, however, presents certain problems. For one thing, the persons’ official statistics after imprisonment often give a distorted picture. Many dissidents could no longer work in their own fields after ‘prophylactic measures’, but had to pursue an occupation requiring much lower qualifications instead. The share of authentic workers may therefore have been lower than that given in Table 5.3. At the same time, the data show that the dissident movement was supported largely by the intelligentsia and above all by cultural and humanitarian intellectuals. Half of the dissidents of the generation preceding the Sixties belonged to this class; among those of the Sixties, it was 30 per cent; among the postwar generation, only 10 per cent. The younger dissidents, who only became active at the end of the 1970s, reveal a completely changed social structure. Every sixth one of them worked, higher education notwithstanding, in positions requiring few qualifications. This cohort describes a marginalized group, one defined by precarious social integration and relative deprivation. Here is shown once again that the Soviet dissident movement was highly influenced by the generation of the Sixties, and that it was defined by the limits of this generation.

Dissidence and Structural Change of Public Sphere

The formation of a critical milieu and the emergence of the dissident movement were closely linked to the development of new spaces of social communication, in the course of which the relationship between public and private changed significantly. The usual distinction between a public and private sphere is without doubt a product of Western European social development. As is often the case with other social-scientific models, the underlying concept cannot be easily applied to state-socialist societies. Under Communist rule, there was no systematic space for the public sphere in the classical republican understanding of the term – as a political sphere of private citizens who come together as a public in order to raise their concerns for the public interest, outside of the state (or against it), and in this way to seek to wield influence on the will of the state and the making of laws (Habermas, 1981 and 1990). Also, dichotomous models, which assign all social phenomena either to the public or to the private sphere, seem unsuited for societies of the Soviet type. 10 There were nonetheless different spaces of communication in the Soviet Union as well, which were, however, differently constructed than those of Western societies.

The first of these spaces of communication, the character of which changed in many of its nuances, but not in its essential function, until the beginning of Perestroika, can be described as an ‘official public sphere’. This was the social sphere in which formal law applied and which was almost completely regulated and controlled by the party state. All other spheres were regulated by norms of everyday behaviour, which had the character of an informal law of custom. Formal law, to be sure, protected these spaces from state intervention weakly or not at all. The actual capabilities of the state to control social communication outside of the official sphere, however, declined significantly with the extension of these spaces.

In official public discourse, the life of the Soviet citizens corresponded to the idealized image of the ‘Soviet way of life’, a utopia that the party persistently defended, even when it did not correspond in any way to everyday experience. In this sphere, the problems of ‘real life’ were taboos whose violation was punished with harsh repression. The official public sphere was thereby hermetically sealed off from other social spheres – in permissible themes and interpretations as well as in the formal regulation of language. The majority of citizens considered things
said in official media or assemblies to be ritualistic ‘empty words’ with no validity outside the public sphere. Observing the lines of demarcation between the official and unofficial spaces of communication was part of the everyday routine of the Soviet citizen, since confusing the varying rules of each could have serious consequences. He had to adjust his way of communicating and take on a role appropriate to the situation according to whether he was representing an opinion inside or outside of the official sphere – a phenomenon often addressed in the literature of Communist studies as a doubling of the standard of communication and as the ‘social schizophrenia’ of the homo sovieticus.

The Stalinist period was characterized by the fact that social communication was to a large extent dominated by the official-public sphere. The private sphere was at best rudimentarily developed. From the perspective of the ideology of the collective way of life, it was considered hardly worthy of protection. This was manifested not least in that problems of personal life, such as marital or partner conflicts or ‘poor life habits’, which are elsewhere considered exclusively private affairs, were often made objects of public discussion in official bodies – a conspicuous theme in the Soviet literature of this time. The intimate, personal sphere was to a large degree subject to the arbitrary rule of institutions of state control, and this was not only determined by weak legal protections. Even the living circumstances in the ‘Kommunalka’, the forced cohabitation in communal apartments that was, due to the housing shortage, the most widespread form of urban living in the Stalin era, allowed the individual almost no opportunity to retreat into a private space, but rather subjected him to more or less constant social control (Gerasimova, 2002). Free communication was thus linked to significant risks here as well, because the risk of denunciation was effectively everywhere. Under these circumstances, no other public sphere could arise alongside the official-public realm. Social communication proceeded mainly according to official rules in the state-regulated public sphere; otherwise, it remained limited to the most intimate public sphere. In this lies one of the reasons why acts of political resistance in this period were almost exclusively of a conspiratorial and isolated character.

This constellation began to change in the mid-1950s in the wake of the politics of repression and the end of the communal apartment as the predominant form of habitation. With the move from the ‘Kommunalka’ into one’s ‘own’ apartment, there emerged for the first time in the Soviet cities for many citizens a physical space that allowed for a private sphere in a real sense, a realm that was closed off from the sight of neighbors, accidental visitors and all others than the closest family members.

On the other hand, the new ability to retreat at any time into privacy now allowed one’s own living space to be opened for others within self-determined limits, and to invite over friends, acquaintances or colleagues from work. In the new residential areas of the cities, a new lifestyle developed, one characterized by a high degree of sociability. In this way, a multiplicity of socialized partial spaces, which had thoroughly ‘public’ characteristics, gradually emerged from the private sphere. It is not possible, to be sure, to speak here of ‘freedom of association’, the essential basis of bourgeois public space. There developed a sphere, however, in which people not only spoke about personal matters but which also offered a space for political discussions that extended beyond the immediate personal sphere. It was precisely the closed-off nature of the individual apartments that made possible the development of a ‘private-public sphere’, which functioned as a kind of intermediate space between the official and the purely private, familiar sphere, in that it offered a space for the development of political opinions that neither copied the official positions of the party nor had to remain in the realm of purely private argument. In this ‘private-public’ space, practically everything could be discussed, because it was barely controlled by the authorities, or rather controlled less and less with time. It formed the sphere regulated by everyday norms, the so-called ‘secondary public space’, whose ideal topographic locus was, at the beginning of its existence, the legendary ‘Kitchen of the Intelligentsia’.

However, this ‘other’ public space must not be confused with the so-called ‘second society’, which is often discussed in the scholarly literature on dissidence in Eastern Europe. The private-public sphere was not the exclusive field of communication of a certain milieu. It was part of the everyday life of every Soviet citizen, who learned in the course of his life to distinguish carefully between that which he could confide in his friends and circle of acquaintances, the fassade of his official statement, and that which he had to keep to himself. But it was the social space in which different subcultural and politically alternative milieus could be created and in which the communication structures could be developed that made possible the replacement of isolated, conspiratorial resistance with the formation of a quasi-public protest movement.

The following sketch illustrates how the relationship of the spheres of communication to each other changed across the individual periods of Soviet history.

Figure 5.1 The private-public sphere in Soviet society

A clearly defined border always existed between the private-public sphere and the official public sphere during the entire course of the three post-Stalinist decades. Yet the ‘secondary public sphere’ was increasingly extended over the course of this time to the detriment of the official sphere, whereby the conditions for the
stability of the regime, especially its ideological legitimacy, were latently but enduringly undermined. While Soviet citizens had to accept the ideological background music in order to deal with their everyday lives, the state added to it an enormous number of laws, prohibitions and rules of behaviour, whose enforcement would have caused ever-greater expenses. The state therefore tolerated insubordination resulting from strain and frustration as long as it did not cross the line into official public space. There arose in this way a silent ‘agreement’ between the citizens and the state to mutually respect the border between the two public spheres. Violations of this border were not only punished by the authorities, but also condemned by many citizens.

The great mass of Soviet citizens, including the Sixties, always observed these rules. But within the private-public sphere, the Sixties made a fundamentally critical attitude towards the actions of the state – such as previously could not have been expressed even in the private sphere without running a high risk of state persecution – into an effectively predominant norm. At the same time, they succeeded – thanks to the presence of their members on the editorial staffs of literary journals and other cultural institutions as well as the support of some relatively liberal functionaries, such as the future Gorbachev supporter Aleksandr Yakovlev, in expanding significantly the space for discussions not initiated by the state, even within official public space. The success of these efforts remained limited, to be sure, and in the Brezhnev era, such free spaces were again reduced. The original state of affairs, however – the complete exclusion of reality from the official sphere – was never recreated.

Starting in the mid-1960s, it was possible to observe regular and multiplying attempts to violate purposefully the boundary between the private-public and the official-public sphere. This marks the real beginning of the dissident movement. Even the demand made on the authorities to respect the state-declared constitution and formally codified civil rights (‘Respect your laws!’) was in principle a violation of the unwritten, but generally accepted rules of the game. From this perspective, it seems to be an important characteristic of the dissident movement that it attempted to transfer the rules that its own generation had established in the private-public sphere onto the official public sphere. Its slogan, ‘Don’t live with lies’, was synonymous with the demand that identical rules be introduced in both public spheres. The dissidents therefore did not violate the line of demarcation as such; their demand that the problems of ‘real life’ be discussed in the official public sphere amounted to a demand that this boundary be demolished. In this way, they shook at one of the pillars of the stability of the Soviet regime, because the removal of this boundary would have meant opening the official sphere for the seeds of a civil society: independent citizens’ associations, which began to develop in the private-public sphere above all through the initiative of the dissidents. When the regime recognized this danger as a realistic one, it suppressed the dissident movement thoroughly.

Concluding Remarks

A significant characteristic of the social change of the ‘Thaw’ period, which produced the generation of the Sixties and with it the rise of the dissident movement, was that it opened for a specific social group the possibility of choosing between different life perspectives. This new possibility of choice stimulated intellectual activity, the search for one’s own path. This did not apply to the majority of the population by far, however. Above all in the provinces, the social circumstances only seldom allowed the borders of ideological dogmas and well-rehearsed behavioural stereotypes to be broken. Not everyone saw the possibility of a choice. The Sixties either came from the milieu of metropolitan students, who were able to free themselves from the norms of their earlier social environment during the ‘Thaw’, or from the few families in which the parents had kept alive a rebellious spirit.

The generation of the Sixties only encompassed a small proportion of the population, and the dissident movement always remained limited to a much smaller circle of people. Only a minority of the members of this generation actively took part in political protest. The objective possibilities for alternative political action were always limited and the price for participation in political protest was always very high – even in times of selective and relatively weak repression. Still, it was this specific generation that produced the necessary preconditions for the later revolutionary processes of change.

The dissident movement and the later political movements in the period of Perestroika differed significantly. These differences were caused foremost by a major transformation of the political opportunity structure caused by the opening of the regime, a process which in turn was pushed forward by growing protest. The pioneers of the early protest movement paid the highest price, in that they created political possibilities for following generations that only became active later. In the years of Perestroika, new generations took the stage. The more radical these new movements became, the more the Sixties and its dissidents diminished in importance. They received almost none of the fruits of the revolution, which only serves to confirm a universally accepted historical rule.

Notes

1 The authors thank Mrs. Irina Flige for the preparation of documents and manuscripts from the papers of her husband Veniamin Iofe, the director of the Memorial Research Center in St. Petersburg, who died in 2002; these materials were a valuable aid to us in the writing of this article.

2 On the situation of the Soviet archives and the status of sources on protest and repression, see Kozlov and Lokteva, 1997.

3 On September 9, 1930, for example, workers in Moscow and Podolsk submitted a resolution to the Politburo members Mikhail Kalinin and Aleksei Rykov demanding social equality, the democratization of political life, and the removal of Stalin from the country’s political leadership (GARF – State Archive of the Russian Federation, Fund 5352, op-3, d. 806, published in Ogonek, no. 23 (1989), pp. 10-11).

5 A total of 384 persons were sentenced for ‘anti-Soviet propaganda and agitation’ in the USSR in 1956. 1,964 persons were sentenced in 1957. The number declined continuously thereafter – 1,416 persons in 1958, 750 sentences in 1959 (APRF, 1995).

6 Various new underground groups formed in the camps as a consequence. Materials on this may be found in the Memorial Archive in St. Petersburg.

7 The cases worthy of mention include among others the ‘Socialist Party’ in Leningrad (1969), the ‘Revolutionary Workers’ Party’ in Sverdlovsk (1970), the group ‘Revolutionary Communist’ in Leningrad (1979), and the group around V. Artsimovich in Tomsk (1982). There were similar circles in the 1970s in Ryazan’, Saratov, Petrozavodsk and Tyumen’.


9 According to data from Andrei Amal’rik (1991, p. 651), the signers were comprised of 45% scientists, 22% artists, 15% members of the technical intelligentsia, 9% employees of publishers, doctors, teachers, and jurists, 5% students, and 6% workers (predominantly former students). In this period, a total of approximately 1,500 people publicly took part in protest actions (Bogoraz et al., 1991, p. 310).

10 A facsimile of the founding document may be found in Eichewde (2000, p. 219).

11 What seems to be more appropriate is a three-part model, similar to that worked towards by Hannah Arendt (1958), in which she introduces into the analysis of modern societies a ‘social sphere’ between public and private realms.

12 The distinction relates rather to periods than to precise points in time. The penetration of privacy through the official sphere began in the late 1920s, along with the take off of the so-called ‘cultural campaigns’ and the ideologization of ‘public’, i.e. socialized housing units which lacked any personal niches (doma obshestvennogo byta). The emergence of the private-public sphere coincides with Stalin’s death and the subsequent period of ‘Thaw’.

13 In Western societies, too, there are different legal regulators. While common law there in the everyday sphere represents a source of law alongside codified law and is not extended at the expense of the latter, but is limited instead (at least historically), in Soviet society the sphere of everyday norms was extended successfully in the last three decades to the detriment of the sphere subject to formal laws.

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Chapter 6

Estonia

Rein Ruutsoo

Introduction

For a long time, scholars of Soviet Studies perceived the European part of the Soviet Union – the Baltic republics, Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine, and Western Russia – as a more or less homogenous entity. Sooner or later, this perception proved to be misleading. Compared to the other European Soviet republics, the Baltic Societies had particularities that undermined the Soviet regime right from the beginning. They could draw upon a large variety of pre-Soviet national symbols that were embedded not only in long cultural traditions but also in memories of national independence. At the same time, the general conditions for dissent and opposition against communist rule also differed from those in Eastern Central Europe (ECE). The main difference can be defined as the level of autonomy of the formally sovereign administrations in relationship to Moscow.

First, in the Baltic states, the Soviet model was more brutally imposed than in ECE, without any regard of local traditions. The annexation of the Baltic States in 1940 in co-operation with Nazi Germany meant that Moscow could establish ultimate power through its one-party system and its repressive organs without any political camouflage and post-war ‘transition’ period. In most ECE states, more or less authentic ‘Popular Fronts’ or ‘People Democracies’ played a significant role in shaping the political regimes (Berghlund and Dellebrant, 1994).

Second, the legitimacy of the local communists was much weaker than in ECE. This is especially true of Estonia. The central role local communists played in organizing fake elections for a new ‘parliament’ and in committing NKVD style atrocities in the first year of occupation (1940-41) almost totally discredited them. Thus, when the Soviets re-occupied the country in 1944, they found hardly any support. The official discourse of ‘liberation from the Nazis’ never gained popularity.

The impact of the first year of Soviet occupation on post-war resistance was of long-term significance. In 1944, approximately one half of the Estonian elite (politicians, academicians, priests, administrative staff, etc.) escaped to Scandinavia. This way, Estonia lost a large number of people who would have been able to organize more sophisticated and long-term forms of resistance and to establish an alternative elite in the post-Stalinist period.
Dissent and Opposition in Communist Eastern Europe
Origins of Civil Society and Democratic Transition

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ASHGATE