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THE KOMSOMOL AND YOUNG PEASANTS: THE DILEMMA OF RURAL EXPANSION, 1921-1927

by
Isabel A. Tirado

Executive Summary

This essay is part of a larger work in progress on the rural Komsomol, a subject which has been neglected by historians of the Soviet Union despite the central role played by the Komsomol in training generations of Soviet leaders. It is based on research done in the Komsomol's Central Archive, which was first open to Western scholars during the latter part of the Gorbachev years. Especially crucial to this paper are the materials from the plenary sessions of the Komsomol Central Committee and those pertaining to that body's rural commission. I gained access to the materials of the rural commission in the summer of 1992.

The essay focuses on the controversy surrounding Komsomol recruitment of peasants. It begins with a look at the pattern of Komsomol organization building in Central Russia during the early 1920s, in particular the types of rural cells, competition within the Komsomol, and peasant reception and rejection of the Komsomol. It then looks at the polemic over rural expansion, and at the various layers of that debate. The discussion covers those aspects of rural expansion most troubling to the leadership, in particular the spontaneous and massive growth and autonomy of rural cells. It ends with the resolution of the controversy and the defeat of the anti-peasant bloc, or Opposition, within the Komsomol leadership.

The Communist Youth League (Komsomol) was founded in 1917-18 in urban
centers. During the Civil War (1918-1921) its members fought for the Soviet republic and served in a variety of government and public institutions. Those formative years defined the League's relationship to the Party: as its youth auxiliary, it functioned as a filter which selected the most talented young Communists for eventual transfer to Party, government, and military work. More broadly, the Komsomol served as the political educator of the first generation to reach adulthood in Communist Russia. That dual role required the Komsomol to have close organizational links to the Party and accept the Party's leadership and guidance. To join the Komsomol meant joining a Party organization. In the 1920s this meant adhering to whatever line and group became dominant within the Party. The Komsomol would not be allowed to remain isolated from Party debates and polemics, let alone take an independent stand on major controversies within the Party.

The Civil War experience fostered the League's militant and vanguardist identity. At the outset of the New Economic Policy, or NEP (1921-1928) the youth leadership strove to assert the organization's working class identity while keeping at bay peasants, students, and white collar workers who wanted to join. Industrial workers, hard-hit by massive unemployment and economic dislocation, showed little interest in joining the League. Their participation in the strike waves in early 1921 forced the leadership to admit that it did not know, let alone, represent, the economic and political interests of young industrial workers.

The Komsomol's troubled perception of the peasantry and its quest to maintain a high proportion of workers in the membership created an impediment to expansion in rural areas. In the name of class purity, much of the leadership and activists opposed the blanket admission of all but the poorest peasants into their midst, the so-called proletarian and semi-proletarian sectors. They feared that the League's core of young workers would drown in a flood of new peasant ("petty-bourgeois") members.
Yet demographic realities made the Komsomol's outreach to the young peasant imperative. Peasants made up 80 percent of the Soviet population; their children and adolescents nineteen years of age or younger made up half of the rural population in the mid-1920s. More important, the state and Party needed an effective youth organization in the countryside to integrate into the Communist structure those peasants sympathetic to the state. The state and the Party had pulled out of the village at the end of the Civil War, and the Komsomol found itself pressured to meet its personnel needs, especially in outlying areas. But before it could perform those functions, it would have to overcome those forces within the organization that virulently opposed more amicable relations with the peasantry.

The Party intervened and purged the anti-peasant Komsomol leadership (the "Opposition) centered in Leningrad; however, this was not a turning point in Party-Komsomol relations, but a reaffirmation of a pattern of intervention that had been forged during the Civil War. Neither were the coercive methods employed against the Opposition new. What was novel was the extent of the Opposition's popularity, the animus that characterized the polemic, and the willingness of the Party and the Chaplin camp within the Komsomol leadership to gut a major regional organization.

Later, many members of the defeated 1925 Opposition would give their wholehearted support to the radical, pro-industrial policies of the Stalin Revolution. Realizing the depth of discontent with the conciliatory policies of the NEP, Stalin appealed precisely to those who had been suspicious of the individual, petty producer of agricultural goods, and to those envious of the most efficient and prosperous farmers. He appealed, as well, to those who felt in the mid-1920s that the NEP had turned the working class into the Revolution's stepchild, exploited by the peasant, the NEP-man, and the bureaucrat.

The rural Komsomol offered the possibility of limited peasant autonomy within the
Communist power structure. To what extent was this a serious alternative to the subsequent destruction of peasant life and economy? It is clear that the debate on the peasant was limited in a fundamental way. Despite their differences, both sides agreed on the need to forestall the possibility of peasants creating their own political structures, either as independent groups or within the Komsomol itself. This line of thinking showed the dilemma of the Komsomol's policy in rural areas: the rural Komsomol could not be too successful, lest peasants organized within the Komsomol become a counterforce to the Party and to the Komsomol hierarchy. On the other hand peasants could not be allowed to organize their own independent structures.

This conception of a dual problem with relation to the peasants--they could neither be within the Party structure nor outside of it--was prevalent in both Komsomol and Party circles throughout the 1920s. Years earlier, when V. V. Osinskii proposed a peasant union, it was precisely to enable the Party to exert its influence over the peasant masses while keeping them at arms' length organizationally. Lenin's cautious response at that time reflected the fear of an independent, organized peasant mass, even if politically sympathetic. This attitude informed the debate on the peasantry throughout the first decade of Soviet power.

The popular definition of class politics, which categorized the peasant as politically unreliable at best, doomed the conciliatory policy toward the countryside as an ideological retreat. The defeat of the Komsomol Opposition marked only a lull in the longer war on the peasant begun during the Civil War and resumed by the Stalin Revolution. Fed by economic problems and social animosities, the prevalent interpretation of class politics created a chasm that prevented the conciliators from building a viable bridge between the Russian countryside and the city. Those animosities and the perception of "escalating class conflict" inspired
many to embrace the Stalin Revolution, and in part explain their enthusiasm for forced collectivization, the destruction of the traditional rural order, and the concomitant annihilation of millions of Soviet peasants.
THE KOMSOMOL AND YOUNG PEASANTS:  
THE DILEMMA OF RURAL EXPANSION, 1921-1927  

Isabel Tirado  

*Introduction*  

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¹ Tuzhilkin, "Na perevale, " *Iunyi proletarii*, 1921, no. 5-7, p. 5.
The Komsomol's troubled perception of the peasantry and its quest to maintain a high proportion of workers in the membership created an impediment to expansion in rural areas. In the name of class purity, much of the leadership and activists opposed the blanket admission of all but the poorest peasants into their midst, the so-called proletarian and semi-proletarian sectors. They feared that the League's core of young workers would drown in a flood of new peasant ("petty-bourgeois") members.

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The present article will focus on the controversy surrounding peasant recruitment. It will begin with a look at the pattern of Komsomol organization building in the Central Russia during the early NEP, in particular the types of cells, the Komsomol's competition, and peasant reception and rejection of the Komsomol. It will then look at the polemic over rural expansion, and at the various layers of that debate. The discussion will proceed to those aspects of rural growth most troubling to the leadership, and will end with the seeming

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resolution of the controversy and the defeat of the anti-peasant bloc within the Komsomol leadership.

This article is part of a larger work in progress on the rural Komsomol. It is based largely on research done in the Komsomol’s Central Archive, which was first open to Western scholars during the latter part of the Gorbachev years. Particularly crucial to this discussion are the materials from the plenary sessions of the Komsomol Central Committee and those pertaining to that body’s rural commission.

1. First Efforts in the Countryside

The earliest rural cells were established by radicalized, demobilized soldiers returning to their villages in the period between October 1917 and May 1918, and after the Civil War. Or, they were organized by secondary school students in provincial towns. Young workers fleeing the city’s unemployment and hunger also established some Komsomol cells. The Civil War (1918-1920) depleted the Komsomol as its members volunteered into the Red Army or became active in state service. In the wake of the Civil War the League was plagued by a shortage of activists as many young veterans went off to study, or, disillusioned by the ideological retreat embodied in the NEP, left the organization. As a result, its activities in many rural areas came to a virtual standstill.

The Komsomol began to make inroads in the countryside towards the end of the civil war. While it had 2,308 cells with 138,474 members in January 1920, four months later those numbers had more than doubled to 5,660 organizations with 319,989 members, excluding the many rural organizations that had not been counted. By October 1920 the numbers reached 12,313 cells and close to half a million members nationwide. The

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Komsomol *apparat* could not cope with this influx.⁴

The leadership's reaction to post-civil war expansion in the countryside was cautious. At the First and Second All-Russian Conferences (June 1921 and May 1922) and the Fourth National Congress (September 1921) the leadership stressed the need to strengthen the League's factory cells and its "proletarian core." In rural areas the League would consolidate already existing peasants organizations, but not expand them.⁵ The number of permanent salaried workers at the provincial level was reduced.⁶ Throughout 1921 and 1922 a significant number of rural cells disbanded; especially hard hit were those cells considered to have a "cultural" orientation, as opposed to those that had a more administrative character, and whose members participated in various government functions, such as tax collection.⁷ Between 1921 and 1922 the Komsomol lost approximately half of its rural cells.⁸ In 1922 the Central Committee was forced to admit that it was paying scant attention to the rural organization, and that the leadership was not familiar with the village.⁹

The Komsomol was a newcomer to the countryside. Before World War I and continuing during the Civil War and the early NEP, rural teachers and other village *intelligenty* established youth clubs, often called *kul'turki*, which sponsored dances, games,

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⁵ *Knovoi rabote. Itogi Vserossiiskoi Konferentsii RKSM sostoiavsheisia 15-go maia 1922 g.*, Moscow, 1922, p. 5.

⁶ TsA VLKSM, f. 1, op. 3, d. 3, p. 235, 8 July 1922.

⁷ TsA VLKSM, f. 6, op. 5, d. 32, pp. 6-7.


drama circles, and presentations with movie projectors and slides. They brought books to the village and fought illiteracy and alcoholism. In general, these groups performed cultural functions that were not filled by other institutions in the early 1920s. Though little has been written about their activities, the groups were not universally hostile to the Soviet government. Komsomol activists identified these popular clubs as undesirable, not serious enough for their puritanical taste, the object of derision and contempt, and harassment. But in the early 1920s they did little besides asking Party provincial and district (uezd) committees and Politprosvet departments to supervise the remaining Komsomol cells to prevent them from falling under the influence of the kul'turki.

Gradually, as the Komsomol gained strength in the countryside, it would seek to establish itself as the sole youth organization in the country. In the ensuing rivalry between the kul'turki and the Komsomol, the latter, a bona fide Soviet organization, had the upper hand, and flexed its institutional muscle by resorting to such means as calling on the rural politprosvet committees to deprive kul'turki of literature and kerosene. The Central Committee took the position that the circles should be eliminated, but preferably, not through coercion (only in exceptional cases). Ideally, the Komsomol cells would become cultural centers, and would subject the existing cultural circles to the League's influence. The League would use the circles' most valuable members in political, cultural, and social activities.11

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10 L. Risnovich, "Bor'ba s kul'turnikami," Smena, 1921, no. 5, p. 2; Shatskin, "O proidennom," Iunyi proletarii, 1925, no. 2, p. 48. M. Pravdin, "Zakrepit' i ispol'zovat'," Iunyi kommunist, 1924, no. 3, p. 42. I. Mokhov argued that the uezd zemstvo and local teachers had been able to do more cultural work in the village than the Komsomol was doing so far. See his "Prekratit' razgovory o kul'turke," Iunyi kommunist, 1923, no. 3, p. 16.

11 TsA VLKSM, f. 6, op. 5, d. 32; Risnovich, "Bor'ba," p. 2.
The kul’turka in Sergievskii uезд, near Moscow, had been organized in 1915 and functioned until 1922, when the health department converted their meeting place into a clinic. In order to hold on to a meeting place, the kul’turka decided to become a Komsomol cell, despite the peasants’ opposition. In 1923 a former Red Army soldier transformed the group into a Komsomol cell. In Aniskinskaia, in Moscov uезд, a kul’turka existed until 1923, when three rabfak students came from the city to talk to them about the Komsomol, and shortly thereafter "transformed" the kul’turka into a League cell, telling its members that the League would give them more than just shows and dances.12

The cultural circles paved the way for Komsomol organizations. In some cases the kul’turki were forced to disband and its members went into newly created Komsomol organizations. During those transitions, the original cultural circles seemed to have been decimated and only a fraction of their members appeared to have transferred into the newly created League.13 Despite the Komsomol’s war on them, the kul’turki continued to sprout throughout the villages in the early part of the NEP and continued to worry both local activists and the national leadership. In the process, the Komsomol learned from the kul’turki’s success that it would have to sponsor more interesting activities than its usual lectures on Communism and the revolution.14

Komsomol activists did not mask their disdain for the peasant, whom they saw as backward and uneducated; the peasants, in turn, saw the Komsomol as urban intruders,

12 MK, RLKSM, Rabota komsomola v derevne. Stenograficheskii oitchet soveshchaniia sekretarei derevenskikh iacheek Moskovskoi organizatsii RLKSM (20-24 oktiabria 1924 г.), Moscow, 1924, pp. 20, 46.

13 M. V. Domrachev, Shel parnishke v tu poru..., Moscow, 1965, p. 74.

14 M. Pravdin, "Zakrept’ i ispol’zovat,'" p. 42.
bookish people interested only in reading newspapers and making boring reports.\textsuperscript{15}

Peasants opposed their children's participation in Komsomol activities and the organization enjoyed little authority and respect in the village. Their vision of the Komsomol as "robbers" was colored by their members's participation in the dreaded food requisition brigades of 1919 and 1920. During the Civil War the Komsomol provided some of the most committed fighters and civil workers to the new state.\textsuperscript{16} In 1922 all existing rural cells were still expected to support the local soviet authorities in preparing lists of tax payers, calculating amount of arable land, and collecting the tax.\textsuperscript{17} Many Komsomol members had fought against the Whites and the Greens, and, after the Civil War, against the armed bands that roamed the countryside. Peasants associated the Komsomol with the most intransigent Communist positions. They took particular offense at the atheist character of the Komsomol program and activities. In one village, League organizers were met by a group of peasant women, who blocked the group's efforts to recruit the village's teenagers into the Komsomol.\textsuperscript{18}

Parents were leery of the generational tensions which cropped up with Komsomol organizational efforts. Generational conflict was sharper in the countryside than in the city, where young people tended to lead a more autonomous existence. The redistribution of the land after the Revolution, by making land allotments contingent on family size, together with

\textsuperscript{15} A. Shokhin, \textit{Komsomol'skaia derevnia}, Moscow, 1923, p. 11.


\textsuperscript{17} TsA VLKSM, f. 1, op. 3, d.3, pp. 243-44.

\textsuperscript{18} \textit{Rabota komsomola v derevne. Sten. otchet (1924)}, p. 59.
the disruption of industrial production, kept young peasants from going to the cities in search of a livelihood and supplemental income for the family. With young men staying to work with their family, everything they produced and consumed was seen as part of the family's common funds, which was closely guarded by the male head of the household.

Inadvertently, the Revolution had strengthened some aspects of the peasant family's patriarchal character.19

From the point of view of a peasant father who pulled himself to the status of middle peasant through his own efforts, and who by dint of his hard work helped his son improve his situation, his son's joining the Komsomol meant trouble. At best, the young man felt pulled by the organization's need for stable, consistent work on the one hand, and the family's need for intensive labor during the agricultural season on the other. At worst, the young man would leave agriculture to the detriment of the family's well being.20 The typical rural Komsomolite was a young man embroiled in family fights. The family saw him as inveterate and "doomed," an idler who neglected his farming in order to do political work.21 In reality he lived the conflict between his family's intense need for labor, which coincided with the state's goals for agricultural production, and the Komsomol's need for independent, devoted members who would put League needs before family ties. An activist recalled how his mother scolded him and cried, convinced by her neighbors that he, who sat around writing for the local newspaper, would not be able to support her in her old age.22

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19 V. Ershov, "Komsomolets v sem'e," Komsomol v derevne, p. 119.

20 Ibid., p. 114. See also, A. Gagarin, Khoziastvo, zhizn' i nastroeniia derevni, Moscow-Leningrad, 1925, p. 39.

21 Shokhin, Komsomol'skaia derevnia, p. 11.

The Komsomol was also hindered by the overbearing, domineering style (*nachal'stvo*) and coercive practices adopted by many of its rural members. There were cases of rural Komsomol chairmen holding their positions permanently, without the benefit of elections. According to the Komsomol leader, Nikolai Chaplin, many members had not shed the Civil War mentality, and as a result, peasants saw them as a sort of armed militia.\(^23\) Prospective members referred to their eagerness to join the Komsomol in order to bear arms, conduct searches, and destroy moonshine distilleries; the head of the local militia was often a Komsomol.\(^24\) There were cases where the Komsomol, instead of working with a community, alienated it by pursuing such arbitrary actions as discrediting and removing an elected chairman of the village soviet.\(^25\) Worst of all, the Komsomol was tainted by its cooperation and participation in the Cheka.

To overcome peasant resistance to them, Zinoviev called on the Komsomol to change their public image and become, in the eyes of the peasants, "the bravest, most competent, most honest and selfless, the most steadfast and disinterested, the best educated and most intelligent" elements in the village.\(^26\) The Komsomol must cultivate a new image: no longer would they be "loafers-would-be-commissars, isolated from their community," but the


\(^{25}\) Chaplin, *Ocherednye zadachi*, p. 20.

Party's right hand.27

2. The Debate on the "Peasant Question"

Zinoviev was voicing the Party's new conciliatory policy towards the peasantry called "face to the countryside" (litsom k derevne). In 1924-25 the Communist organizations, including the Komsomol, split into pro-worker and pro-peasant groups in response to that policy. Sectors of the Komsomol national leadership were especially bitter at the Party's perceived goal of transforming the League into a peasant organization while maintaining its own proletarian character. The Leningrad organization, which controlled the Komsomol Central Committee, led the pro-worker group.

The controversy constituted multiple conflicts, and was framed by the League's relationship to the Communist Party. First, much of the leadership and rank and file rejected the compromise with the peasantry and petty capital inherent in the NEP. Second, the youth organization, because of its radicalism and vanguardism, was very sensitive to the bureaucratization of the Party and its isolation from the working class, and of the growing separation of the Komsomol leadership from the rank and file. Third, the Komsomol became enmeshed in the struggle over Lenin's succession. Finally, the undemocratic practice of transfers and other administrative measures, which had blossomed since the Civil War, pitted major regional organizations against one another. In 1923-24 the Leningraders had won enemies when they replaced many of the Trotskyists purged from leadership positions in

Moscow, Byelorussia, the Urals, the Donbass, Siberia, and throughout the country.\textsuperscript{28}

The Komsomol Central Committee had split over peasant recruitment at the time of the Trotskyists' defeat in the spring of 1924. The Trotskyists had agreed with the majority that the League should base its rural work on the poorest layers of the peasantry. Speaking for the Trotskyists, P. G. Petrovskii, head of the Moscow Committee, warned his colleagues in the Central Committee that, without integrating the most progressive and active young seredniaki in its ranks, the League would not be able to fulfill its dual function as the Party's reserves and as the political educator of the young masses. Petrovskii felt that a broader recruitment effort among peasants would serve as a corrective to the preponderance of students and white collar workers in the provincial organizations. The Leningrad majority and their allies, though they paid lip service to the need for broader recruitment, wanted to orient recruitment exclusively to the poorest sectors of the peasantry. Both Trotskyists and the majority distrusted the seredniak. The Trotskyists believed it was best to channel the energies of the most active and progressive seredniaki within the Komsomol network, while the majority wanted to keep them outside the organization. The polemic over the recruitment of seredniaki continued to simmer within the leadership well after Petrovskii and other Trotskyists had been removed from their positions.\textsuperscript{29}

The general economic and social recovery and the stabilization of the political situation contributed to rapid growth of the Komsomol's membership. In the second half of

\textsuperscript{28} TsA VLKSM, f. 1, op. 3, d. 11, 1924. See also G. Zinoviev, "Soiuz, kotoryi dolzhen vospitat' lenintsev," in N. Bukharin, G. Zinoviev and N. Krupskaia, \textit{Partiia i vospitanie smeny}, Leningrad, 1924, p. 22.

\textsuperscript{29} TsA VLKSM, f. 1, op. 3, d. 11, l. 230, 235-237, 15 apr 1924. See Tarkhanov's and Petrovskii's opposing remarks in "Soveschanie po voprosam raboty sredi molodezhi pri TsK RKP," \textit{IUK}, 1924, no. 4, pp. 54-60.
1922 many regional organizations doubled in size.\textsuperscript{30} Much of the growth took place in rural areas, where it outpaced the organization's capacity to consolidate its new cells. By October 1922 the Komsomol's membership was almost half peasant (48 percent) and only one-quarter working class; almost two-thirds of all Komsomol cells were rural. Much of the growth at the village level seemed to have been spontaneous, the expression of the peasants' desire for education and information about the world outside their village.\textsuperscript{31} Young peasants were eager to improve their economic situation and some saw the Komsomol as a means to that end, an attitude which led class purists to suspect would-be-members of opportunistic motivation.

To redress this trend, in many areas the Komsomol closed off admissions to non-proletarian "elements." In 1922 and 1923 provincial and district committees forbade the recruitment of peasants, notably in such peasant provinces as Kursk, Samara, Tula, and Saratov.\textsuperscript{32} As a result, by the end of 1923 the League's membership reached 500,000 members and candidates, 38 percent of whom were workers and 43 percent peasants. Frustrated young peasants reacted bitterly and pressured the Komsomol to admit them and live up to its claim to be a workers' and peasant organization.\textsuperscript{33}

\textsuperscript{30} M. Zorkii, "Soiuz rastet," \textit{Komsomol'skaja nedelia}, 1 February 1923, p. 2; Selivanov, Sotsial'no-politicheskoe razvitie sovetskoi derevni posle perekhoda k nepu, pp. 21-22.

\textsuperscript{31} N. Chaplin, "Chego my zhdem ot XIII s"ezda?" \textit{IUK}, 1924, no. 5, p. 98; Selivanov, Sotsial'no-politicheskoe razvitie, pp. 24, 28.


\textsuperscript{33} TsA VLKSM, f. 1, op. 23, d. 1329.
In the meantime, throughout 1923 Party memos urged the Komsomol to prepare and integrate the rural Komsomol into public and political life. Komsomol cells working in villages lacking Communist Party cells were encouraged to assume government functions.\(^{34}\) The Third Komsomol Conference (June 1923) complied by committing the Komsomol to organize peasant cooperation with Soviet institutions, to educate the best young peasants to become Party members, and to undertake the political and cultural education of its own members and of the peasantry in general. The Komsomol would make itself "useful" by helping the rural soviets to raise agricultural productivity, by explaining soviet law to the peasants, by building and improving the schools, and by participating in the cooperatives and mutual aid committees.\(^{35}\) To appease the "depeasantizers,"\(^{36}\) who opposed the policy of rapprochement, the delegates insisted that all rural work must focus on the proletarian (batraki) and poor peasant (bedniaki) strata in the village, thus excluding the middle peasant (seredniak), who made up the majority of the peasantry.\(^{37}\)

For its part, the Party needed the Komsomol to promote the Communist cause and to cultivate the sympathy and collaboration of the rural population.\(^{38}\) Zinoviev became one of

\(^{34}\) Zinoviev, "K piatiletiu Komsomola," *Iunyi kommunist*, 1923, no. 10, p. 1; Selivanov, *Sotsial'no-politicheskoe razvitie*, p. 27.

\(^{35}\) "Vekhi na god," *Iunyi kommunist*, 1923, no. 5, p. 2.


\(^{37}\) Zorkii had argued that the Komsomol had to welcome the poorest peasants while remaining cautious towards the rest. See his, "Soiuz rastet," *Komsomol'skaia nedelia*, 1 February 1923, p. 2. Also, Altaev, "Nuzhno posporit'," *Iunyi kommunist*, no. 3, p. 15.

\(^{38}\) TsA VLKSM, f. 1, op. 3, d. 6, p. 78, 87-89, June 1923; f. 1, op. 3, d. 11, p. 13, March 1924.
the strongest proponents of rural expansion and called on the Komsomol to recruit two million young peasants: "...the Komsomol must think not only about organizing all young workers in Leningrad, but...must spread in the countryside and...gather the young generation in the village..."39 The "scissors' crisis" in the fall of 1923 heightened the urgency of this plea to court peasant support. At the end of April Zinoviev admonished the restive Leningrad Komsomol for trying to replicate the Party's class composition.40

In agriculture, the peasant Komsomol was urged to become an innovative, small scale farmer, to use new methods and technology, and to inspire neighbors to adopt more efficient and productive techniques. It would act as a cultural and educational vanguard, sponsoring literacy courses, providing personnel for the village reading rooms, and generally representing the secular, communist culture of new regime. The Komsomol was asked to consolidate itself in the new institutions, particularly the village soviets, the cooperatives, and the mutual aid committees. The League's primary function would be to train a pool of young peasants who would not be admitted into the Party formally, but who would be politically reliable and could fill positions in local government.41

The tensions generated by the prospects of a growing peasant sector within the organization were temporarily defused at the time of the "Leninist Levy" in early 1924, when large numbers of industrial workers were recruited into the Komsomol and Party


41 TsA VLKSM, f. 1, op. 3, d. 6, pp. 78, 87-89; TsK VLKSM, IV Vsesoiuznaia Konferentsiia RLKSM. Proeka Rezoliutsii. t. 4: O rabote RLKSM v derevne, Moscow-Leningrad, 1925, p. 4; Rabota komsomola v derevne. Sten. otchet, p. 18.
organizations.\textsuperscript{42} By March 1924 Komsomol memberships was 41 percent working class and 40 percent peasants.\textsuperscript{43} To accomplish this, local organizations had been authorized to admit all workers and 

\textit{batraki} without recommendations; they were merely confirmed \textit{en masse} at general meetings (\textit{batraki} were counted as workers).

In March 1924 a plenary session of the Komsomol Central Committee discussed expansion in rural areas. The leadership was split: the plenary adopted a resolution criticizing "peasant phobia" and asking the organization "to absorb the most progressive layers of poor and middle peasants."\textsuperscript{44} But the majority, led by Oskar Tarkhanov, amended it into a radical, anti-\textit{seredniak} version. Tarkhanov was apprehensive that once in the Komsomol, the \textit{seredniaki} would turn their local organizations into anti-Soviet bodies.\textsuperscript{45}

Tarkhanov's victory was short lived. In July 1924, Nikolai Chaplin, secretary of the Komsomol Central Committee, ousted Tarkhanov at the behest of the Politburo. Tarkhanov threatened Party-Komsomol relations in an article in the theoretical journal \textit{Pod znamenem kommunizma} in which he questioned the Party's substituting itself for the working class. He challenged the line that the League's proletarian essence could be guaranteed only by preserving a strong Party leadership within it. He opposed the Party's plan to turn the Komsomol into a mass organization while retaining an elite and exclusively proletarian character for itself. Tarkhanov and the Leningraders constituted the majority within the

\textsuperscript{42} Tarkhanov, "Za 20 mesiatsev," \textit{Molodaia gvardiia}, May 1924, pp. 185-86.

\textsuperscript{43} "Chego my zhdem ot XIII s'ezda, IUK, 1924, no. 5, p. 98; Tolmazov gives the figures of 42 percent worker and 29 percent peasant for Leningrad province as of February, 1924. "Otchet Gubkoma. Doklad tov. Tolmazova," \textit{Smena}, 21 June 1924.

\textsuperscript{44} TsA VLKSM, f. 1, op. 3, d. 11, pp. 213-214, March 1924.

\textsuperscript{45} "Soveshchanie po voprosam raboty sredi molodezhi pri TsK RKP," \textit{IUK}, 1924, no. 4, p. 58.
Central Committee; his ouster poisoned relations between Chaplin, a newcomer, and that body. After his ouster the Leningraders continued to try to tie the League’s rural growth to the recruitment of young workers.\footnote{Chaplin, Tseitlin, and Faivilovich constituted the secretariat. TsA VLKSM, f. 1, op. 2, d. 15, p. 138; f. 1, op. 2, d. 9, p. 9; f. 6, op. 6, d. 38, p. 1. Bubnov’s criticism of the Komsomol’s anti-peasant stand, in von Hagen, Soldiers, p. 235.}

The workers’ bloc found a mighty opponent in Nikolai Chaplin. The twenty-one-year-old had already distinguished himself as a troubleshooter in Tiumen (1920), in Ekaterinburg (1921), and in the Caucasus, where he distinguished himself in the campaign against the Trotskyists. He served in the Caucasus from 1922 until April 1924, when the Party Central Committee appointed him secretary of the Komsomol Central Committee.\footnote{TsA VLKSM, f. 1, op. 2, d. 15, p. 141; Deutscher, Prophet Unarmed, p. 117; A.N. Moskvichév and N.D. Sokolov, Nikolai Chaplin, Tula, 1969, pp. 18-19, 32-34, 42.}

In 1922 Chaplin had identified himself with the conciliatory policy towards the peasants in an article in which he outlined the Komsomol’s rural tasks as the fight against the triple evils of illiteracy, religious obscurantism, and obsolete farming methods. He did not mention socialized agriculture; he expected that peasant Komsomols would become the progressive individual farmers of the near future. To effect that transformation, the rural Komsomol would have to rely on the help of teachers and secondary school students, its former class enemies, suddenly-turned-allies.\footnote{Chaplin, “Na sluzhu soiuzu,” îunyi kommunist, 1922 (no. 13-14), pp. 5-6.}

The Leninist Levy’s stress on the proletarian core came to an abrupt end that spring, when in a policy-making article Lazar Shatskin pointed out that the Komsomol could not exclude peasants under the pretext of class purity. In contradistinction to the Party, he argued, the Komsomol could afford to encompass greater numbers of peasants within its
membership. In effect, if the Komsomol sought to act as the sole representative of Soviet youth, it would have to relinquish its exclusive working class ethos and educate all young citizens. This was particularly important at a time when the state sought to establish peaceful relations with the peasant population.

In May the Party's Thirteenth Congress designated the Komsomol "the shock workers that will help....strengthen the political union of workers and peasants," the so-called smychka, the core of the NEP. The resolution on youth exhorted the Komsomol to expand existing cells and to create new ones, and criticized the Komsomol's use of artificial constraints to rural growth. The Komsomol must eschew its narrow class approach; otherwise, it would relinquish its leadership over "young bourgeois elements." The "great rural campaign" announced by the Party at its Thirteenth Congress was met with less than enthusiasm by the Komsomol leadership. Bukharin's first draft of the resolution on youth proclaimed the recruitment not only young workers and poor peasants but of the "most progressive" forces in the village, including seredniaki and intelligency. But after negotiations with Komsomol delegates the theses finally read: "The League should help progressive young peasants to live and work in the new style." Dropped was any


50 Smena, 21 June 1924.

51 VKP, Trinadtsaty S'ezd Rossiiskoi Kommunisticheskoi Partii (Bol'shevikov). Stenograficheskii otchet, Moscow, 1924, pp. 677, 707; M. Kalinin, "Komsomol v derevne," IUK, 1924, no. 3, pp. 4-5; the Party's Theses were published as "O rabote sredi molodezhi," IUK, 1924, no. 5, pp. 103-110.


53 "O rabote sredi molodezhi," Iunyi kommunist, 1924, no. 6, p. 190.
suggestion that they would recruit those peasants under the Komsomol banner.

The Komsomol adopted the Party's "face to the countryside" at its Sixth Congress in July 1924. As part of the "great Komsomol campaign" in the village the Komsomol established target figures for its membership: 40 percent workers, 45 percent peasants, and 15 percent "others." In an article in the theoretical journal *Iunyi Kommunist* Kasimenko declared that whereas the League had made impressive inroads among city youth, having recruited over half of all workers in some areas, its recruitment of peasants was infinitesimally small. To encompass only 10 percent of the country's young peasants, the League would have to recruit an additional 1.5 million peasants. Frenetically, students and workers descended on the villages, sent by their city cells to organize new rural cells in the summer of 1924.

During the remainder of 1924 the decision to expand in rural areas continued to meet resistance. Many activists felt bewildered by the sudden, rapid growth of peasant cells and dreaded the possibility that, given demographic realities, peasants would swamp the organization. They were even more distressed by the Party's sudden *volte face*, and felt..."betrayed" by the new openness towards the seredniak. Rural Komsomol cells

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55 Slepnev, "Leninskii nabor v Komsomol i partiiu," *Iunyi kommunist*, 1924, no. 6, p. 178; Selivanov, *Sotsial'no-politicheskoe razvitie*, p. 34.


57 First hand accounts by city activists are found in Ts A VLKSM, f. 1, op. 23, d. 273, pp. 21-35.

voiced their opposition to the Party's new conciliatory line. According to Chaplin, rural Komsomols could not accept the Party's new rural policy, in particular, the emphasis on winning the peasants' trust through conciliatory means. Chaplin was highly critical at the Party's refusal to open up its membership to rural Komsomols, which only added to the tensions between the two organizations. He felt this refusal was motivated by the reluctance of rural Communists to share power at the local level with Komsomol/Party members. As a result, under 5 percent of the rural Komsomols were also Party members (as of late 1925).\footnote{Opponents of the conciliatory policy towards the peasantry included both city Komsomols and older rural activists, many of them Red Army veterans, whom Nikolai Chaplin accused of holding on to an "uncompromising Civil War mentality."}

At the September 1924 plenary session of the Komsomol Central Committee a compromise was reached by which maximum percentages were re-established for each social class within the Komsomol: 40 percent for workers, 50 percent for peasants and 10 percent for all other classes.\footnote{At the September 1924 plenary session of the Komsomol Central Committee a compromise was reached by which maximum percentages were re-established for each social class within the Komsomol: 40 percent for workers, 50 percent for peasants and 10 percent for all other classes.} Because rural cells could not accommodate the demand, especially of middle peasants, who wanted to join, provincial and local committees used these percentages as a way of stemming the tide, or they simply refused to confirm new cells. In Voronezh, Pskov and other areas Komsomol cells closed admissions to peasants.\footnote{Because rural cells could not accommodate the demand, especially of middle peasants, who wanted to join, provincial and local committees used these percentages as a way of stemming the tide, or they simply refused to confirm new cells. In Voronezh, Pskov and other areas Komsomol cells closed admissions to peasants.} The Komsomol had a history of artificially "managing" admissions, and many in responsible positions resorted to quotas to restrain growth.

\footnote{Opponents of the conciliatory policy towards the peasantry included both city Komsomols and older rural activists, many of them Red Army veterans, whom Nikolai Chaplin accused of holding on to an "uncompromising Civil War mentality."}

\footnote{For figures: TsA VLKSM, f. 1, op. 23, d. 488, p. 36. Chaplin's remarks in TsA VLKSM, f. 1, op. 23, d. 309, pp. 106-107; Chaplin, Ocherednye zadachi, p. 20.}

\footnote{Selivanov, Sotsial'no-politicheskoe razvitie, p. 35.}

\footnote{TsA VLKSM, f. 1, op. 23, d. 309.}
3. The Perils of Peasant Autonomy

The Party and Komsomol leadership recognized the growing political activism of young peasants and feared that a restrictive admissions policy would lead young peasants to organize rival non-Communist groups. In fact, kul’turki continued to grow at an alarming rate. Far more troubling were the "red" groups, also known as initiating or collaborative groups, which emerged in the countryside under such names as Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebnecht clubs. The majority of those groups of sympathizers wanted to be confirmed as League cells, though a substantial number were content to maintain an independent existence. Both the desire to become a cell or to remain separate were problematic for the Party and the Komsomol.

Despite the resistance of notable sectors of the Komsomol leadership, rural expansion had its own dynamic. A delegate to the Third Conference (June 1923) depicted peasants walking 30-40 versts to the nearest committee to ask to have their cell certified. The central leadership had not issued instructions and the local committees felt at a loss, not knowing whether to allow further expansion or simply let the rural network wither away. Two years later there were still tales of young peasants repeatedly asking for permission to

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62 RKSM. Leningradskii Gubernskii Komitet, Desiatyi Gubernskii S"ezd Leningradkoi organizatsi RKSM, Leningrad, 1924, p. 120; see Bukharin's speech on youth at the Thirteenth Party Congress, VKP, Trinadtsaty S"ezd Rossiiskoi Kommunisticheskoi Partii (Bol'shevikov). Stenograficheskii otchet, Moscow, 1924, p. 548.

63 TsA VLKSM, f. 1 op. 5, d. 4, pp. 70-71. Stenographic account of conference of rural cell secretaries held on 25-26 October 1924. See also, P. Biriulin, "Usilit' rabochee iadro! (po Kurskoi gub.)," Iunyi kommunist, no. 3, p. 26.

64 Of forty-four initiating groups in Tula, thirty wanted official recognition as cells. "Nedel'naia svodka no. 4," (12 January 1925), TsA VLKSM, f. 1, op. 23, d. 314, p. 12.

65 Istimol TsK VLKSM, Tret'ia vserossiiskaia konferentsia RKSM. Stenograficheskii otchet, Moscow-Leningrad, 1929, pp. 90-91.
organize Komsomol cells, but being refused because of the lack of activists. The Central Committee's memo of May 1924 calling for the creation of new cells only aggravated the problem.

The local organizations lacked the resources to incorporate the vast numbers of political groups that sprang up throughout the country either spontaneously or sometimes on the initiative of Party or Komsomol members. Though the groups lacked supervision and guidance, many considered themselves to be Komsomol cells. Some uezdy had as many as twenty such groups, some provinces had hundreds of them. The decision to expand tapped a groundswell of peasant support, but many local organizations resisted the pressure for fear of losing control over the movement. Just as the kul'turki served the cultural needs of young peasants, the collaborative groups expressed the political strivings of a segment of the rural population. In the words of a pro-peasant writer, "The young peasant is knocking persistently at our League door." The proponents of rural expansion argued that to turn him away would mean alienating a potential ally and turning him into a possible political enemy.

In 1924-25 the pro-peasant bloc favored incorporating all members from such

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67 Katalynov's comments in, Desiatyi Gubernskii S"ezd, p. 67.

organizations into the Komsomol, except, of course, for young kulaks.\textsuperscript{69} The Leningrad activist, Rumiantsev, proposed, instead, subsidiary peasant organizations, which would allow the cells to remain exclusive while exerting some influence over those who remained outside the Komsomol. Rumiantsev's proposal sought to politically neutralize \textit{seredniaki} and \textit{intelligentsy}. This suggestion, which was extremely popular in many circles, was rejected by the pro-peasant bloc.\textsuperscript{70} In December 1924 the Central Committee ordered the disbandment of the collaborative groups and the incorporation of its members into the Komsomol on an individual basis.\textsuperscript{71} By then the rural network had expanded sufficiently to absorb many of the sympathizers.

After the Sixth Congress the rural network grew so rapidly that by 1925 it stood on the brink of becoming an autonomous political organization. In the weeks after the congress, village cells called youth meetings to pave the way for provincial conferences of young peasants. In Tula alone fifty-six district conferences were held in the fall of 1924. Up to seventy or eighty youths participated in these district conferences. Three-quarters of the participants were male, and most were poor peasants. Such conferences were followed by mass applications for membership.\textsuperscript{72} Within a year, the organization in Kostroma grew 300 percent; that of Tambov over 150 percent; in other areas cells grew ten to fifteen times their

\textsuperscript{69} TsA VLKSM, f. 1, op. 2, d. 9, 1924, p. 272.

\textsuperscript{70} TsA VLKSM, f. 1 op. 5, d. 4, p. 95; f. 1, op. 23, d. 438, pp. 81-85; f. 1, op. 23, d. 440, p. 69; f. 1, op. 23, d. 309, pp. 65-66.

\textsuperscript{71} "Desiatidnevaia svodka-obzor," TsA VLKSM, f. 1, op. 23, d. 303, pp. 40,41, 45-46. Local compliance with this Central Committee directive was described in Komsomol and Party documents. "Svodka po Tsentral'no-Promyslennomu raionu" (for Riazan), TsA VLKSM. f. 1, op. 23, d. 303, p. 79; TsPA, f. 17, op. 67, d. 136 (for Orel).

\textsuperscript{72} "Raionnye konferentsii krest'ianskoi molodezhi," \textit{Iunyi kommunist}, 1924, no. 15, p. 18.
By January 1925 the Komsomol membership passed the one million mark. Two-thirds of its almost 40,000 cells were rural. In the first three months of that year 92 percent of all new cells were rural. If in January 1924 the Komsomol had 14,065 rural cells with 178,000 members, by April 1925 it had 32,970 rural cells with 659,000 members. Almost three-quarters of all Komsomols were new members, having joined the League in 1924.

The scarcity of Communist Party cadres and the lack of strong organizational ties with the central Komsomol organs gave the rural cells a surprising degree of autonomy in relation to the Party and to the Komsomol center. Some districts had only two or three salaried League instructors, each of whom served over twenty cells and an area of over 500 versts (or, over 300 miles of often impassable roads). Rural cells were similarly cut off from the Party, which they generally outnumbered, in some areas eight to one.

By 1924 cell secretaries juxtaposed the rural Komsomol cells to the local Party committees. They conceded that the Party was the guiding force in the entire country, but they argued that the Komsomol was more adept at doing practical work in the village because of its closer ties to the countryside. Though the Komsomol was in theory the Party's "assistant," circumstances led many cells to dismiss that role as purely formal and to

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73 Izvestiia TsK RKP (b), 1924, No. 4, p. 5; Molodoi bol'shevik, 1925, No. 2, pp. 69 and 72 (cited in Selivanov, p. 37).

74 Chetvertaia Vsesoiuuznaia Konferentsiia RLKSM, p. 172.


76 Ibid., p. 223; see Desiatyi Gubernskii S"ezd, p. 68; Bukharin, "Partiia i vospitanie smeny," Iunyi kommunist, 1924, no. 6, p. 155. Selivanov states that in April 1925 the Komsomol had twice as many rural cells and three times the number of rural activists than the Party. Selivanov, Sotsial'no-politicheskoe razvitie, pp. 69-70.
see the two organizations as "equals." To the question whether his cell had a Party representative, a Smolensk secretary responded, "why would we need one?" In Tula the Komsomol asked a Party base organization not to meddle in League affairs. In Orekho-Zuevo, near Moscow, the Party cell had not allowed Komsomols to attend cell meetings on the ground that they chewed seeds, joked around, and did not know how to behave. The Komsomol cell retaliated by not permitting the Party to send its representative to League meetings.

Already in 1924 there was talk among rural Komsomol that the League had become a peasant organization, quite independent of the city. The rural Komsomol, they argued, though not in leadership positions at the national or even provincial level, all the same was in direct contact with the peasant masses. Rural Komsomols began to call themselves the "salt of the peasant earth," masters of the village. This led to intolerable situations from the point of view of the Party and the national Komsomol leadership. In Zvenigorod the Party did not consult with the Komsomol cell before running its own candidate for the district soviet. The Komsomol went ahead and ran its own candidate, a native from the village, who won the election against the Party candidate, a drunkard who had no authority with the peasants. This incident, which seemed to have repeated itself in other areas, was not seen as just a contest between a good or bad candidate; to defeat a Party candidate and the Party line was


78 TsA VLKSM, f. 1, op. 23, d. 428, p. 10.

79 TsA VLKSM, f. 1, op. 23, d. 301, p. 67.

80 TsA VLKSM, f. 1, op. 23, d. 440, p. 57.
an anti-Party act. 81 The rural Komsomol had to tread a thin line: on the one hand they were told they had to integrate themselves into peasant life, on the other they could not become "salt of the earth." 82 Some de-peasantizers pointed to cases where the rural cells adopted anti-Soviet positions. Kolmakov referred to a cell in Gomel' that presented the local peasants' demand for lower taxes before the government and Party. 83 In Tula some Komsomols-Party members declared at the time of tax collection that the Party was keeping the peasants as ignorant as the priest had kept them before the Revolution. 84

Rural activists resisted the dominant position of the urban Komsomol organizations. They also openly resented the benefits that their urban comrades enjoyed, particularly access to education and other cultural benefits, which in turn gave them access to leadership positions. 85 Many activists felt that young workers had their own organization, but peasants did not; they suggested ways of turning the Komsomol into both a proletarian and peasant league. In Tambov, a peasant province, three-quarters of all provincial, uezd, and district level activists were young workers, yet peasants held only one-quarter of the leadership positions. Rural activists wanted the Komsomol to train more peasants and send them to

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82 See Matveev's opening remarks to the first gathering of rural cell secretaries in Moscow province. MK RLKSM, Rabota komsomola v derevne. Stenograficheskii otchet soveshchaniia sekretarei derevenskich iacheek Moskovskoi organizatsii RLKSM (20-24 oktiabria 1924 g., Moscow, 1925, p. 3.

83 TsA VLKSM, f. 1, op. 2, d. 11, p. 37.

84 TsA VLKSM, f. 1, op. 23, d. 303, pp. 12-13.

85 TsA VLKSM, f. 1, op. 23, d. 313, p. 63.

86 TsA VLKSM, f. 1, op. 23, d. 440.
schools and *rabfaki* with stipends. At conferences and congresses they formed a bloc, demanding peasant control of district and provincial committees and replacing city candidates with their own. They wanted to be sent to national congresses, where the voice of the peasant at the plow was never heard. This anti-city sentiment was mixed with anti-centralist feelings. "For far too long the city folk have decided what the village needs without consulting the peasants."

Peasant envy of city dwellers was a recurrent theme at Komsomol gatherings. Rural members felt that the Revolution had been good to workers, but had given the peasant nothing. While workers wore boots the peasant went about in *lapti*. Peasants were upset at taxes and at the perception that the government was not doing enough for them. The dictatorship of the proletariat meant the workers' state gave orders and the peasant fulfilled them.

Bauman, a League activist, saw in those differences the roots of the political peasant separatism embodied in the Samara "workers' and peasants' Communist party" (RRKKP), which sought to establish "equal rights" in a workers' and peasants' state. That dreaded peasant party was founded in the village of Chernovka by the Komsomol secretary. His cell had displayed animosity towards the urban Komsomol leadership, primarily because their

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87 *Chetvertaia Konferentsiia RLKSM*, p. 193.

88 TsA VLKSM, f. 1, op. 23, d. 313.

89 Quoted by Mil'chakov's in his impressions of a district conference, TsA VLKSM, f. 1, op. 23, d. 433, pp. 24-25.

90 "Obzor o vaimnootnosheniakh mezhdu rabochei i krest'ianskoi chas'tiu Souza," TsA VLKSM, f. 1, op. 23, d. 428.

91 TsA VLKSM, f. 1, op. 23, d. 315.
village organization was not receiving adequate help. Even the activists complained of the
discrepancy in the everyday life of city and village dwellers. The Samara episode, which
caused so much consternation in Komsomol and Party circles, seemed to confirm those who
claimed that there was little difference in the political views of the rural Komsomol and the
peasants at large.

4. The Defeat of the Depeasantizers

Depeasantizers resented the shift of resources into the rural network to the detriment
of city cells. They attempted to focus the League’s attention on the NEP’s devastation of the
young generation of workers. Beginning in 1921 and continuing through 1922, massive lay-
offs of teenage workers led to a precipitous decline of young workers in industrial cells in
Petrograd and other cities. The Leninist levy increased the proportion of industrial workers
briefly, but the decision to step up peasant recruitment augmented rural membership by close
to 400 percent in the period between January 1924 and April 1925. Between October and
December of 1924 85 percent of all newly created cells were rural. By the summer of 1925
rural cells accounted for almost three-quarters of the entire national organization. The
anti-peasant bloc contended that the League was not promoting the interests of young
workers nor recruiting them.

Depeasantizers were upset that throughout the rural network there were cells without

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92 TsPA, f. 17, op. 67, d. 142, pp. 62-68. For Bauman’s remarks, see Rabota komsomola
v derevne. Sten. otchet, p. 65.

93 N. B. Lebina, Rabochaja molodezh’ Leningrada; trud i sotsial’nyi oblik, 1921-1925 gody,
Leningrad, 1982, pp. 103-104; Selivanov, Sotsial’no-politicheskoe razvitie, pp. 28, 39; VLKSM. TsK, Komsomol v derevne: Po materialam
vyborchnogo obsledovaniia derevenskih iacheek 1 janvaria 1925 g., Moscow, 1925 (vyp. 4), pp. XIII-XV.
a single Communist to educate new members. Expansion had an unplanned, chaotic character to it, and the League lacked the apparatus to offer the most rudimentary political training to the newcomers. There were few *batraki* and *bedniaki* members in leadership positions, but many students and white-collar workers. While the kulak exerted his influence over peasant cells, they argued, a whole generation of workers was growing up without having ever worked in a factory because of unemployment. (The Komsomol was not doing enough to reverse this trend.) Many were suspicious of the *seredniak*, whom they accused of anti-urban and pro-kulak sentiments. Just as ideologically intolerable were the political concerns of peasants, who often questioned why the state spent money on revolutions abroad, rather than on improving agriculture?

In January 1925 the depeasantizers attempted to strengthen their position in the Central Committee by increasing the number of representatives from their city and from Ukraine and thus reinforce the position of Faivilovich and Kasimenko against Chaplin. Simultaneously, Faivilovich and Dmitrii Matveev, who headed the Moscow organization, clashed over latter's systematic transfer of Leningrad supporters out of the capital. The pro-peasant faction, led by Chaplin, Matveev (a former Left SR), and Aleksandr Mil'chakov,

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94 TsA VLLKSM, f. 1, op. 2, d. 11, p. 71; *IV Konferentsiia RLKSM*, pp. 117-119; Faivilovich, "Rost v derevne," *lunyi kommunist*, 1924, no. 14, p. 536; I. Chernia, "Chto dal'she?" *IUK*, 1924, no. 16, pp. 2-3.

95 *Chetvertaia Konferentsiia RLKSM*, pp. 211, 220.

96 The leaders of the Leningrad Opposition were Gessen, Rogov, Minaev, Faivilovich, Fedorov, Katalynov, Kolmakov, Tarkhanov, Tarasov, Teremiakina, Tseitlin.

97 TsA VLLKSM, f. 1, op. 2, d. 15, 16-17 March 1925.

98 TsA VLLKSM, f. 1, op. 2, d. 15, 16-17 March 1925.
routed the Leningraders. 99 They were supported by Andreev, who spoke for the Party Central Committee, and accused the Leningraders and their allies of two "Trotskyist" deviations: underestimating the peasant and lacking faith in the Party. 100

Chaplin conceded that nationwide the Komsomol had recruited only about half of all young workers, and that the "face to the countryside" had been accomplished at the expense of working class centers. The proportion of workers to peasants had declined. 101 Nonetheless, Chaplin and others supported a broader admissions policy and the integration of all independent peasant leagues into the Komsomol, rejecting the artificial barriers against peasants. 102 Chaplin decried the panic that overtook many of the organizations following the September 1924 plenary, when many rural organizations enthusiastically applied the figures and percentages established by the Leningrad-controlled Central Committee to brake rural expansion. To the alarm voiced by many organizations that they were being overrun by peasants, Chaplin warned that it would be worse if the peasants' organizational activities grew outside the League and even against the League. Chaplin was concerned that in some organizations the bedniaki predominated, especially in Ukraine, but little was being done to recruit seredniaki. 103

The peasant bloc criticized the urban Komsomol's feelings of political and cultural superiority and dismissed the majority's analysis of class differentiation in the village as a

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99 TsA VLKSM, f. 37, op. 2, d. 5, p. 118.
100 TsA VLKSM, f. 1, op. 2, d. 10, January 25-27, 1925.
101 Chetvertaia Konferentsiia RLKSM, p. 44, 124.
102 TsA VLKSM, f. 1, op. 2, d. 11, p. 50-53, January, 1925.
103 TsA VLKSM, f. 1, op. 2, d. 10, pp. 53-61. The Ukrainian leadership, much of which was urban Russians and Jews, was decidedly anti-peasant.
characteristic misjudgment on the part of city activists who did not know the
countryside. They called for an end to practices offensive to the peasantry, especially
the antireligious campaigns.

The majority of the Komsomol Central Committee and their local supporters indeed
opposed the Party line. The Ukrainian Pavlov questioned the Party’s insistence on a broader
admissions policy on the Komsomol’s part. Worse resentment was expressed by Rogov,
who spoke of cases where the Party organization had twenty members, and all did nothing
but administrative functions while the Komsomol organization had to do all public and
political work. “We have such a situation in which the Komsomol district committee
secretary knows more than the secretary of the Party committee. Yet the latter is likely to
expel the Komsomol secretary....” His comments suggested open clashes between anti-
peasant Komsomols and pro-peasant Party activists at the local level. The Party decided
to intervene.

The opportunity came at the end of the plenary session of January 25-27, 1925, when
Seredokhin suggested including the Ukrainian Pavlov and the secretary of the Leningrad
provincial committee, Tolmazov, in an enlarged bureau. Chaplin, who was outvoted, resigned
from the secretariat and asked the Party to intervene. On February 12, 1925 a Party
commission removed the major Leningraders, Ukrainians, and their supporters from their

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104 TsA VLKSM, f. 1, op. 2, d. 11, p. 59.
105 TsA VLKSM, f. 1, op. 2, d. 11, pp. 91-92.
106 TsA VLKSM, f. 1, op. 2, d. 10, pp. 89-90.
107 TsA VLKSM, f. 1, op. 2, d. 11, pp. 97-98.
108 TsA VLKSM, f. 1, op. 2, d. 11, pp. 97-98.
Komsomol positions throughout the country.\textsuperscript{109} The conflict continued to simmer at the local level but the pro-worker bloc had been removed from the national leadership and from policy making.

At the Fourth Komsomol Conference (June 1925) Bukharin justified the action on the grounds that the greatest danger facing the country and the Party was the rift between workers and peasants. Because the economy had become more dependent on the agricultural sector, the relationship between town and country, between worker and peasant could not be antagonistic, but, rather, reciprocal.\textsuperscript{110} The Komsomol played a doubly important role because of the higher percentage of peasants in its ranks and its more immediate presence in the village. Given this, the Party had to replace the Komsomol Central Committee, "otherwise you will destroy yourself and drag us with you."\textsuperscript{111} Taking Bukharin's lead, Chaplin, back in power, asserted that the Komsomol was proletarian "in essence," not in actual composition. The League could only guarantee continued proletarian influence within its growing peasant ranks to the extent that the Party exerted its leadership over the League.\textsuperscript{112}

Thereafter the Komsomol sought to show the peasant that he had no reason to distrust the Komsomol, who only wanted to help those who strove to improve their

\begin{footnotes}
\begin{enumerate}
\item TsA VLKSM, f. 1, op. 2, d. 15, pp. 2, 9, 16-17; Chetvertaia Konferentsiia RLKSM, p. 56.
\item Chetvertaia Konferentsiia RLKSM, pp. 19-22.
\item TsA VLKSM, f. 1, op. 2, d. 15, pp. 18 and 22-23 (Bukharin's report); Chetvertaia Konferentsiia RLKSM, p. 58.
\item Chetvertaia Konferentsiia RLKSM, p. 5.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotes}
farming. The *seredniak*, who constituted the majority of the peasantry, was now courted by the same organization that had excluded him from its ranks. And it was that same *seredniak* who was most interested in introducing the new farming methods touted by the state as the path to prosperity.

Chaplin enjoined the rural Komsomol to shun its penchant for arbitrary actions with relation to the peasants, such as insisting on their own candidates for the sel’soviets, for participating in illegal distilleries of *samogon*, for appropriating the functions of the militia. The Komsomol had to prove to the peasant that it was willing to listen to him, help him to improve his economic situation, and even learn from him. To win peasant trust, continued Chaplin, the Komsomol must work in the sel’soviets, to prove to the peasants their capabilities. The peasant would learn that Komsomol representation in the village soviets was a form of apprenticeship, not a way of coercing the rural population. The goal would be to train future cadres of authentic village leaders, who would enjoy the confidence and trust of their peasant neighbors.114

**Conclusion**

Looking back at the controversy, Chaplin said in 1927 that the defeat of the Opposition had permitted the Komsomol to integrate young peasants into the Communist political structure: it allowed the new state to politicize the new generation as a whole, and to train future rural cadres in particular. Arguably, this process might have taken a slower course had the Opposition triumphed. The victory allowed the incorporation of the **seredniak**

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113 Resolutions of the fifth plenary session of the Komsomol Central Committee (1925), TsA VLKSM, f. 1, op. 2, d. 25, p. 37.

into political life, thus winning over the critical mass of young peasants, and preventing them from becoming an independent political force.\footnote{Chaplin, "Komsomol i vnutripartiinaia diskussiia," in VLKSM. TsK, Orvet na klevetu; fakty i tsifry protiv oppozisionnykh izmyshlenii o komsomole, Moscow, 1928, pp. 4, 15, 18.} In 1925 the number of seredniaki members grew twice as fast as the number of poor peasants. In a very short time the rural Komsomol was transformed from an organization primarily of bedniaki to one heavily influenced by seredniaki. This was especially true of those cells established after 1923.\footnote{Selivanov, Sotsial'no-politicheskoe razvitie, p. 27; VLKSM. TsK. Statisticheskii pod"otdel, Komsomol v derevne, vyp. 10, p. 7.}

But to what extent had seredniaki "been won over," as Chaplin claimed? Undoubtedly, the rural Komsomol of the mid-1920s offered politically sympathetic, ambitious, young peasants the possibility of integrating themselves into an acceptable political structure that at the same time allowed them some autonomy at the local level. Peasant Komsomols seized the opportunity the organization gave them and ran in sel'soviet elections, participated and initiated cultural and educational activities, and adopted more productive farming techniques. Demographically, the organization became a peasant league.

From 1924 until 1927 the League pursued an aggressive recruitment effort in the rural areas that led to rapid growth of its peasant sector. By the end of 1925 peasants accounted for 56 percent of the membership. During that year the number of peasant members almost doubled, from 527,576 to 920,100.\footnote{Ibid., p. 15; VLKSM. Stat. Pod"otdel, Komsomol v derevne. Po materialam vybornogo osledovantia, vyp. X, p. 7.} In a short time the League's influence extended to almost half of all hamlets and most large villages. Though there were 25,600,000 young peasants in the country and only 920,000 or 3.7 percent of them were in the Komsomol, the League claimed to touch a far larger population than its membership suggested. The
Komsomol's rural organ, Zhurnal krest'ianskoi molodezhi, reported that fewer and fewer peasants were being chased out of their homes for being card-carrying "godless Komsomols." Peasant parents had begun to accept their children's participation in the Komsomol.

Years earlier, at the outset of the NEP, N. Osinskii, who headed the Ministry of Agriculture (Narkomzem), had foreseen the need for a peasant union, whose broad functions would include political, cultural, educational, and economic activities. Osinskii predicted that the growth in economic activity would motivate peasants to create their own organizations. A peasant union would channel that organizational drive into a form acceptable to the Party, without forcing the Party to accept more peasants into its ranks. Osinskii's proposal was never implemented. Lenin felt it was premature, though he also suggested that the Politburo should "prepare the way" for the eventual creation of such a union. Osinskii used the Komsomol as his model for his proposed peasant union. Like the Komsomol, the peasant union would be "formally a non-Party organization, but under the ideological and organizational hegemony of the RCP." The rural Komsomol of the 1920s filled many of the functions of Osinskii's proposed peasant union.

Chaplin's victory marked the ascendancy of a sector within the Party and the Komsomol, headed by Bukharin, that favored ending coercive and voluntarist practices in the rural areas. These conciliatory policies, expressed in Bukharin's vision of socialism, sought to pave the way for greater peasant autonomy, and "for the 'peaceful' solution of class
problems in the transitional period." Yet there were serious limitations. In defeating their opponents, Chaplin and his allies used the same authoritarian, undemocratic practices for which the Komsomol leadership had been criticized since 1920. The Leningrad organization was decimated. Bukharin called the Opposition a *Fronde*, and accused them of regional pride, thus validating vicious attacks on the Leningraders. It was open season for the organization's rivals. The Moscow Committee led the onslaught, calling an extraordinary meeting on a Sunday in order to condemn the Leningraders prior to a scheduled plenary session of the Central Committee.122

The schism was perceived within days of the Party's decision to intervene.123 Clearly, the Leningraders continued to enjoy much support at the Fourth Conference: when a delegate said that those who attacked the Leningraders reminded him of a gang of bullies he was applauded.124 Many activists and rank and file left the organization in protest. They were disillusioned with the poor situation of young workers and with the Party's meddling in Komsomol affairs.125 The Opposition continued to wage a struggle throughout the country for some time thereafter. In Vyborg district, there was talk that only the Komsomol, and in particular, its Leningrad branch, could save the Communist Party from "the peasant deviation." The battle raged for over two years. Factory activists lost their jobs. But they


122 TsA VLKSM, f. 1, op. 2, d. 20, p. 56.

123 TsA VLKSM, f. 1, op. 23, d. 314, pp. 16, 20, 21; f. 1, op. 23, d. 313, p. 26.

124 Chetvertaia Konferentsiia RLKSM, p. 100.

125 TsA VLKSM, f. 1, op. 23, d. 503, pp. 55 and 100; f. 1, op. 23, d. 507, pp. 53-54. TsPA f. 17, op. 67, d. 143.
continued to fight, and when they were defeated by administrative means, they left behind broken windows and phones, and destroyed offices in what had been the oldest and strongest regional organization.\(^{126}\)

More important in retrospect, already in March 1926 Katalynov raised the specter of Stalinism when he criticized Chaplin's conduct in the Leningrad affair. Unable to work with the Central Committee majority, Chaplin had turned to the Party for support, thus stilling discussion. Katalynov decried the impact this process was having on Komsomol members.

_There is being instilled in them this kind of psychology: Whom are you for? A Stalinist or a non-Stalinist? If he's not a Stalinist, push him down, suppress him, put him where he can't make a peep. We must fight against such a psychology. This kind of thing in our League has nothing in common with Leninist upbringing, and it must be made clear that our League is not Stalinist but Leninist._\(^{127}\)

What did Katalynov mean in his critique of "Stalinism"? Certainly, he could not have meant the Party's sledgehammer approach to the Opposition. The Party intervened when Tarkhanov and the Leningraders challenged the Party line on the peasantry, when the local depeasantizers resisted implementing the policy change, and when the peasant Komsomol seized the initiative and threatened to create a proto-party. Yet this was not a turning point in Party-Komsomol relations, but a reaffirmation of a pattern of intervention that had been forged during the Civil War. Neither were the methods employed against the Opposition new. What was novel was the extent of the Opposition's popularity, the animus that characterized the polemic, and the willingness of the Party and Chaplin camp to gut a major

\(^{126}\) TsA VLKSM, f. 1, op. 2, d. 29, pp. 10, 18.

\(^{127}\) Quoted in Ralph T. Fisher, _Pattern for Soviet Youth_, p. 120.
Ironically, many members of the defeated 1925 Opposition would give their wholehearted support to the radical, pro-industrial policies of the Stalin Revolution. Realizing the depth of discontent with the conciliatory policies of the NEP, Stalin appealed precisely to those who had been suspicious of the individual, petty producer of agricultural goods, and to those envious of the most efficient and prosperous farmers. He appealed, as well, to those who felt in the mid-1920s that the NEP had turned the working class into the Revolution's stepchild, exploited by the peasant, the NEP-man, and the bureaucrat.

The rural Komsomol had offered the possibility of limited peasant autonomy within the Communist power structure. To what extent was this a serious alternative to the subsequent destruction of peasant life and economy? It is clear that the debate on the peasant was limited in a fundamental way. Despite their differences, both Right and Left agreed on the need to forestall the possibility of peasants creating their own political structures, either as independent groups or within the Komsomol itself. To prevent the formation of a young peasants' party, Chaplin opposed the admission of peasants older than the Komsomol age limit. This line of thinking showed the dilemma of the Komsomol's policy in rural areas: the rural Komsomol could not be too successful, otherwise peasants organized within the Komsomol might become a counterforce to the Party and to the Komsomol hierarchy. Peasants could not be allowed to organize their own structures.

This conception of a dual problem with relation to the peasants--they could neither be within the Party structure nor outside of it--was prevalent in both Komsomol and Party circles throughout the 1920s. When Osinskii proposed a peasant union, it was precisely to

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enable the Party to exert its influence over the peasant masses while keeping them at arms' length organizationally. Lenin's cautious response embodied the fear of an independent, organized peasant mass, even if politically sympathetic, which colored the debate on the peasantry in the first decade of Soviet power.

The popular definition of class politics, which categorized the peasant as politically unreliable at best, doomed the policy "face to the countryside" as an ideological retreat. The defeat of the Opposition marked only a lull in the longer war on the peasant begun during the Civil War and resumed by the Stalin Revolution. Fed by economic problems and social animosities, the prevalent interpretation of class politics created a chasm that prevented the conciliators from building a viable bridge between the Russian countryside and the city. Those animosities and the perception of "escalating class conflict" inspired many to embrace the Stalin Revolution, and in part explain their enthusiasm for forced collectivization, the destruction of the traditional rural order, and the concomitant annihilation of millions of Soviet peasants.¹²⁹

¹²⁹ Lewin, Political Undercurrents, p. 43.