

**OPTING OUT UNDER STALIN AND KHRUSHCHEV:
POST-WAR SOVIETIZATION IN A BORDERLANDS
MAGYAR VILLAGE**

An NCEEER Working Paper by

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Executive Summary

This paper is part of a broader project devoted to understanding the evolution of state-society relations in an East European village under a series of different regimes: fascism, state socialism, and market democracy. The village, called Kisszelmenc by its Hungarian-speaking inhabitants and Solontsy by Soviet cartographers, consists of a single street that ends abruptly at its western edge at a barbed wire fence. The fence marks an international border: it once enclosed the western limits of Soviet space; today, it guards the eastern edge of the European Union.

This paper addresses a critical juncture in Solontsy's trajectory, as the Soviet Union emerged from war, extended its influence westward, and struggled to regain control over a population reeling from destruction, hunger, and loss. The paper attempts to establish some of the basic parameters of political economy in this period and place. It finds, just a few hundred yards inside the heavily guarded western cordon of newly occupied Soviet territory, a population that strategically deployed its labor resources and selectively, but regularly and openly, thumbed its nose at state demands. The people of Solontsy did so, this paper suggests, not out of any explicit political conviction, but in order to protect the economy of individual households.

Introduction

The 1965 local elections in the village of Solontsy would seem have to signaled, like the elections of previous years and those of years to come, a demonstration of complete civic compliance with the demands of the Soviet state and the Communist Party. Solontsy was in many ways an unexceptional village in the Ukrainian SSR, save for the fact that its westernmost household happened to sit flush against the heavily guarded border between the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia. As in other villages from the Danube to the Pacific that year, Solontsy's party organizers had no trouble mustering the entire population to the polls. So in the first dark hours of a cold December day at one of the farthest western edges of the Soviet empire, all 210 voters who lived along Solontsy's single dirt road had cast their ballots before eight o'clock in the morning.¹

The apparently tight hold of the state on the population had not begun with that election, nor with elections twenty years before, when the Red Army had first delivered Solontsy and the surrounding region from the grip of Hitler's and Horthy's soldiers—only to thrust that part of the European countryside into a new period of colonization and control. During the early years of Stalinist occupation, Soviet functionaries came to know Solontsy and every other village in the region of Zakarpattia in intimate detail, as they enumerated and harnessed every available resource to the lumbering cart of the state.

Bureaucratic conduits of information in the post-war years extended from Kremlin halls all the way to village stables, where collectivizing rural communities newly absorbed into the Union kept minute records of property movement from household to *kolkhoz*. In 1948 the local

Note on sources: Abbreviations for locations of archival sources are given in the form fond.opis.delo (year). Oral testimony refers to statements made outside the context of a formal interview.

commission for a collective farm in Solontsy's district recorded that, for example, among the items contributed by the Gregus family was a plow in good condition, valued at 145 karbovantsiv.² The same commission had conducted an exercise of valuation for every other farm implement in the village. They recorded not only the numbers, breed, and birth years of animals from every household, but also the nicknames of all forty-three village horses—among them Lizi, Bandi, Kati, Shari, Tsigan' ('Gypsy'), Dani, Lenke, and Lazar.³

One might be tempted to think that, with such a wealth of information at their fingertips a mere three years after the end of a war of terrifying destruction, not to mention a security apparatus unparalleled in the world at the time, Moscow's emissaries in the Sovietizing periphery would wield a concomitant control over the population. But in the rural hills and valleys south of the Carpathian mountain range, this was not the case. Even as events like the elections described above may convey an image of a population prostrate before the quotidian demands of the Communist Party, Soviet officials in the western margins of the empire struggled to control the labor of the people living within its boundaries.

We know a great deal about the construction of Soviet power in the eastern expanses of steppe, discursively and physically emptied of indigenous civilization, where Soviet cities sprung up like Minervas in the early momentum of building state socialism and modernist political economy.⁴ Likewise, recent scholarship has shed light on the Soviet state's efforts to reassert its power in the Soviet territorial core after the war. But how did these processes unfold in the

¹ DAZO (Derzhavynyi arkhiv Zakarpats'koi oblasti) 784.1.213 (1965).

² DAZO 1741.1.8 (1948). Zakarpattia had been part of occupied Hungary, not the Reichskommissariat. However, in newly Soviet Zakarpattia, collectivization records note the value of goods in karbovantsiv (=10 Reichsmark), the currency in circulation in the Reichskommissariat during German occupation.

³ DAZO 1741.1.9 (1948).

⁴ For example, Kate Brown, "Gridded Lives: Why Kazakhstan and Montana Are Nearly the Same Place," *The American Historical Review*, 106:1 (February 2001) and Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995.

western periphery, where villages, vineyards, and churches that had for centuries formed a part of European civilization suddenly became a Soviet frontier? And what did interactions with the state mean for people in this periphery during the years in which the Soviet Union emerged from World War II to take the world's stage as an imperial superpower?⁵

What Moscow's emissaries would discover in this particular stretch of newly occupied territory was that first, a tightly controlled perimeter offered no guarantee of order within it; and second, that the population would act strategically in its interaction with the state: compliance with its demands in one area of life did not suggest or ensure they would cooperate in any other. The borderlands village at the center of this account was within literal shouting distance of the boundary between the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia; its population, while regularly participating in elections, steadfastly refused to fully cooperate with Soviet power in productive economic activity.

Method, Context, and Sources

The study of Sovietization in this particular periphery is illuminating in part because of the immanent presence of the border. Solontsy was, in the post-war years, subject to tight physical control and unrelenting surveillance. The border itself, with its barbed wire, watchtowers and soldiers, and sentry points—as well as the watchful and vindictive neighbors who would report to the police those who dared to approach the narrow band of no-man's land between Solontsy and its sister village of Vel'ke Slemence (or Nagy Szelmenc)—was everywhere in people's field of vision and action, an unavoidable fact of everyday life. With

⁵ On meaning of this particular historical moment for the longer Soviet *durée*, see Fitzpatrick's conclusion in Fürst, ed. *Late Stalinist Russia: Society between Reconstruction and Reinvention* (London: Routledge, 2006) 277, and A. A. Danilov and A. V. Puzhikov, *Rozhdenie sverkhderzhavy. SSSR v pervye poslevoennye gody* (Moscow: Olma-Press, 2002) 296, as cited in Fitzpatrick.

such surveillance in place, we might imagine that if Soviet authorities were to succeed in establishing control over the population anywhere in the new territories of the Union, it would be here.

The evidence presented in this paper draws upon thousands of heretofore largely unexplored documents from the regional state archives in Zakarpats'ka region of Ukraine, as well as upon participant-observation and interview research in villages along the border conducted at intervals between 2004 and 2010 in Russian, Hungarian, and Ukrainian. The documents in question—reports and minutes of meetings of village councils and collective farms, letters between local and regional officials, petitions to join collective farms and valuations of private property, *kolkhoz* maps, and other records generated at the local level—focus not only on Solontsy, but also on clusters of villages situated close to the border between the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Romania. Thus, the arguments presented in this paper can be said to describe a swathe of territory that extends well beyond the village of Solontsy, though they may or may not apply to the new post-war Soviet territories further to the north.

This paper treats the period known in the literature as “late Stalinism” and the following decade as part of a continuum. This choice is driven by the content of archival documents, in which the recorded structure of local political economy shifts somewhat less as a function of party leadership as such than of demographic change and environmental *forces majeures*—drought, flood, disease, and the other challenges that rural people face.

The advantage of including both the immediate post-war years and the late 1950s in a single analysis is that it allows us to see that the insecure hold of the Soviet state on labor in this region was not solely a product of post-war chaos or weak control during the early years of

Sovietization. Rather, the first post-war years mark the beginning of a prolonged period in which representatives of the state in the countryside found their authority constantly challenged.

The archival documents that form the evidentiary basis for this paper were produced in the 1940s and 1950s and present their own particular challenges: they were written in often unheated offices in chemical pencil, ink, or, much later, a typewriter, on whatever paper could be had--often the reverse side of unused forms dating from the period of wartime Hungarian occupation or Czechoslovak rule. They were sometimes compiled in haste or exhaustion and almost always composed by someone for whom the language of record, whether it be Hungarian, Ukrainian, and Russian, was a second or third language. They capture the details of village life: who worked where and when; the status of crops through the growing season and harvest; the condition of local infrastructure; the cultural activities of rural communities; local land disputes; and a host of other subjects.

If the challenges of life in this period are read solely through archival documents, interaction between state and subject might seem to be the primary drama of the post-war years. Oral accounts collected for this project tell a somewhat different story. Economic insecurity brought on by injury and illness is as much a central trope of village residents' narratives as the fear introduced by border guards and nosy neighbors. The materiality of power suffuses such accounts: above all, the basic conditions of life and everyday political economy shape people's evaluations of what it meant to live in the Soviet periphery.

Post-war Political Economy

Most Solontsy households had survived fascist occupation and war by tending to their homestead gardens and fields: people planted and harvested wheat, raised geese and other animals, and studiously avoided the soldiers on horses who patrolled the area.⁶ However, in the wake of war's destruction, the lack of a functioning surrounding economy constrained villagers' ability to procure inputs for their gardens and livestock. Soldiers on surrounding roads and a lack of transportation infrastructure other than horse-driven carts meant that the city, and its produce markets, was further away than ever. In border zones, the economic situation was made worse for rural households by increasingly rigid surveillance regimes that prevented peasants from crossing into Hungary for wage labor in fields there, as they had before the war's end.⁷

Once Soviet authorities had established a foothold in and around Solontsy, and as the border that separated new Soviet territories from Czechoslovakia was demarcated and secured,⁸ some aspects of rural life in the borderlands underwent deep transformation. In certain respects, the political economy of Solontsy's region in the first post-war years resembled the situation elsewhere in the Union, where rural populations struggled with increasing tax obligations while workers in industry fled to the countryside in droves (where they were often protected by village institutions), and party functionaries fought to maintain or regain control over major social and bureaucratic institutions.⁹ As the Soviet state attempted to reestablish collective farms, the population of which declined by 3.3 million people in the four years before Stalin's death in pre-

⁶ Interview, villager born c. 1920, Solontsy, May 24, 2004.

⁷ DAZO 14.1.22 (1944).

⁸ See V.V. Mar'ina, *Zakarpatskaia Ukraïna (Podkarpatskaia Rus') v politike Benesha i Stalina 1939-1945 gg. Dokumental'nyi ocherk*. Moscow: Novyi khronograf, 2003.

⁹ Elena Zubkova, *Russia after the War: Hopes, Illusions, and Disappointments, 1945-1947*. Translated and edited by Hugh Ragsdale (Sharpe, 1998); Fitzer, *Soviet Workers and Late Stalinism* (Cambridge University Press, 2002); Chris Ward, "What is History? The Case of Late Stalinism," *Rethinking History* 8:3 (September 2004) 439-458; and Jean Lévesque, "'Into the Grey Zone': Sham Peasants and the Limits of the Kolkhoz Order in the Post-war Russian Village, 1945-1953," in Juliane

war Soviet territory,¹⁰ new territories to the west were being collectivized for the first time.

Soviet cadres lost no time in post-war state building projects in Zakarpattia. They immediately set about to reestablish decimated livestock herds,¹¹ organize agricultural machinery,¹² regulate fuel prices, distribute coke to villages, and conduct statistical comparisons of harvest years.¹³ Villagers had experienced livestock requisitions under Hungarian rule¹⁴; now, the Red Army provided cattle to village households.¹⁵ But in the minutes of regional council meetings and in Soviet journalistic propaganda distributed in the region, the authorities' immediate and central preoccupation was land. As soon as the region had been absorbed into the Ukrainian SSR, debates about post-war land redistribution, which had started before the war was over, took on new momentum and intensity.¹⁶

The first years after the war arguably saw more debate than action over land reform, as authorities offered economic incentives to peasants who were largely unwilling to “colonize” previous estate land as smallholders.¹⁷ However, by 1950, most residents of Solontsy and neighboring villages had submitted handwritten declarations requesting admission to the local collective farm. The uniformity of their written statements suggests a dull routinization that belies the underlying economic violence of the process. Villager after villager handed over land, farm implements, and some of their household animals, promising to “honestly undertake...to

Fürst, ed. *Late Stalinist Russia: Society between Reconstruction and Reinvention*. London: Routledge, 2006, 103-119.

¹⁰ As noted in Zubkova, 65, citing a July 1953 report of the Soviet Ministry of Agriculture and Procurement, “O nedostatках v sel'skokhoziastve i merakh po uluchsheniiu del v kolkhozakh i sovkhozakh.”

¹¹ DAZO 14.1.486 (1945).

¹² DAZO 14.1.451 (1945).

¹³ DAZO 14.1.451 (1945).

¹⁴ DAZO 94.1.3814 (1941).

¹⁵ DAZO 14.1.78 (1945).

¹⁶ DAZO 14.1.22 (1944).

fulfill all the needs” of the collective.

Why did the ranks of the newly Soviet countryside join collective farms with such numbing regularity, with little obvious sign of protest other than abstention by a few in the initial years of collectivization? Collectivization in Zakarpattia differed from analogous processes elsewhere in the Union. Unlike the campaigns of the 1930s to the east, which had been backed by an extensive system of state violence, collectivization in Zakarpattia was made possible by the destruction of the war. Rural people entered collective farms not at the barrel of a gun, but because there were few other choices that would have allowed the survival of village households in the first hungry years after war. Primarily, people needed a means to pay the taxes levied upon the post-war rural population, and the collective provided a way to do this.¹⁸

Collective farms rapidly became the primary institutions structuring economic and social life in the countryside. Even non-sedentary groups sought shelter in *kolkhoz* infrastructure; by 1956, the Roma communities in and around Solontsy likewise had applied for *kolkhoz* membership.¹⁹ However, membership in the collective farm did not mean that households would cooperate with intensifying state demands on their labor.

From a standpoint in the metropole, collectivization meant the forcible pooling of common labor and material resources in the service of state projects. From a vantage point in the village, however, the transformation of local political economy constituted less a wholesale shift from household to collective production than the addition of onerous labor and tax obligations to an existing household economy—not unlike the situation typically faced by populations colonized

¹⁷ DAZO 14.1.22 (1944). The pattern of smallholder-based land reform followed by collectivization echoes that of post-war East Germany. See Arvid Nelson, *Cold War Ecology: Forests, Farms, and People in the East German Landscape, 1945-1989*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005.

¹⁸ This assertion is based on local residents’ recollections of and narratives about that time. Oral testimony, Solontsy and Palad’ Komarovtsy, August 2009 and August 2010.

¹⁹ DAZO 784.2.80 (1956).

by European powers in the late 19th and early 20th century. Under Soviet rule after the war, rural people in Solontsy gave both of their labor and the fruits of it. For decades after collectivization, the village households of Solontsy, like those elsewhere in the district and throughout the Soviet Union at the time, functioned both as peasant homesteads and as a labor pool for state collectivizing projects.

Solontsy households were busy. Small-scale household livestock husbandry alone would have occupied the full-time labor of at least one adult per village household. In 1957, nearly ten years after initial efforts at collectivization in the region, members of the 221 *kolkhoz* households (all but forty-six of the households in Solontsy's village council jurisdiction at the time) tended 183 cows, 91 heifers, 40 calves, 533 pigs—in addition to numerous chickens, geese, and goats who, perhaps because of their relatively small size or (in the case of the goats) at times uncooperative behavior, managed to elude the gaze of state enumerators.²⁰

In a time and place without running water, prepared mixed fodder, gas heat, or even a constant supply of electricity, holding livestock meant continual work for the human population and required humans' constant presence. The village community and collective farm could help with feed, pasturing, and inoculation, but a milking cow required the presence of the same human morning and evening, seven days a week, ten months of each year. Watering a cow involved drawing dozens of buckets of water from a well every day. Those buckets, the smallest of which weighed at least 25 pounds when full, had to be transported from well to stable.²¹ The

²⁰ DAZO 784.2.99 (1957). The absence of the population of fowl in the historical record is also explained by the fact that the state did not place limits on villagers' holdings of birds. *Prymiryi statut sil's'kohospodars'koiu artily*, Uzhhorod 1948. DAZO 874.1.1 (1948). According to villagers alive today, as the years wore on the authorities kept track of only large stock (cows and oxen). Oral testimony, Palad' Komarovtsy, August 2010.

²¹ Roberta T. Manning's particularly vivid account of the travails of pre-World War II Soviet milking practices gives something of an idea of what this experience can be like, albeit in an earlier, more highly industrialized setting. Manning, "Women in the Soviet Countryside on the Eve of WWII, 1935-1940," in Beatrice Farnsworth and Lynne Viola, *Russian Peasant Women*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992, 217.

labor involved in milking alone was considerable: one had to draw water from a well; wash one's hands, preferably with soap (a commodity sometimes in short supply); clean a bucket; carry the water and the clean, empty bucket to the cow; feed the cow and clean and dry the teats; milk the cow; and clean and dry her teats again.

As research on later periods of Soviet and post-Soviet history has shown, systems of production at the household and enterprise level were often imbricated in an obligate symbiosis, with household agriculture acting as a crutch that stabilized the precarious social and economic balance maintained by collective production, and collective farms providing agricultural inputs to the household.²² Here, the two were also in ongoing competition with one another for labor and other resources. In Solontsy, villagers maintained an economy of self-sufficiency parallel to the *kolkhoz* throughout the years of Soviet rule. Arguably, it was precisely this local household economy that posed the greatest challenge to the full consolidation of state control in the countryside.

Village Households and the Soviet State

Even as soldiers patrolled the international border that skirted the grape arbors of houses in Solontsy and extended along the pastures and hayfields where villagers worked, and even in the presence of surveillance regimes that made the border seem like, as some villagers later described it, “the end of the world,”²³ everyday life in Solontsy and neighboring villages

²² See Jessica Allina-Pisano, “Land Reform and the Social Origins of Private Farmers in Russia and Ukraine,” *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 31 (April/July 2004) 3/4, 489-514; Diana Mincyte, “Subsistence and Power in Brezhnev’s Lithuania,” paper presented at the 7th Annual Young Researchers Conference, Havighurst Center, Miami University, October 25-27, 2007.

²³ This phrase was used in 2004; since then, a pedestrian border crossing has been opened in the village and Solontsy, or Kisszelmenec, has become a shopping destination for Slovaks. See Jessica Allina-Pisano, “From Iron Curtain to Golden Curtain: Remaking Identity in the European Union Borderlands,” *East European Politics and Societies*, 23:2 (Spring 2009) 266-290). In 2010 some people still referred to the village as “the end of geography.” Oral testimony, Solontsy, August 2010.

proceeded with a degree of relative autonomy and normality. People went about their business, tended their gardens, thought about how to meet tax obligations, sent their children to school, and borrowed books from the library. On Sunday, some of them walked to church. All the while, they spoke Hungarian at work and at home, and cadres sent from the outside learned the language in order to get along better in the village.²⁴

People in Solontsy and neighboring villages responded to demands of the Soviet state by engaging in labor substitution tactics common to many colonial settings. At times, they declined entirely to participate in collective farm projects.²⁵ Where people faced onerous labor obligations on the part of the occupying power, they sought ways to conserve their most valuable labor resources for households, and they had the cooperation of key *kolkhoz* figures in doing so.

On the collective farm that drew its labor from Solontsy and the neighboring village of Palad' Komarovtsy, for example, a collective farm brigadier noted in 1959 that “there are very few *kolkhozniki* capable of work, mainly old men (*stariki*) and it's not so easy for me to work with them.”²⁶ Such statements may very well have referred to the population that made itself available for work, but they did not reflect the labor pool physically present in the village at the time. Village census figures at the time instead suggest a very different picture, in which young adults predominate and where old men make up less than one-sixth of the population of working age on the *kolkhoz* (see Table 1)—a fact of which this brigadier, who lived in Palad', would have been well aware.

²⁴ Oral testimony, Palad' Komarovtsy, August 2010.

²⁵ I call attention to colonial parallels here both to emphasize certain similarities between the structure of local political economy in the post-war Soviet periphery and that of areas of Africa and Asia under British, French, and Portuguese rule and because “colonization” is the term people in Zakarpattia use today to describe the Soviet period. On the first point, brief references to this parallel can be found in Francine Hirsch, “Toward an Empire of Nations: Border-Making and the Formation of ‘Soviet’ National Identities,” *Russian Review* 59:2 (April 2000) 204 and Yuri Slezkine, “Imperialism as the Highest Stage of Socialism,” *Russian Review* 59:2 (April 2000) 9.

²⁶ DAZO 1745.1.200 (1959-60).

Table 1. Villagers working on collective farm, Palad' Komarovtsy village council, 1958²⁷

Kolkhoz population	Age						Total
	11 or <	12-19	20-39	40-49	50-59	60 or >	
Male	89	63	139	50	54	54	449
Female	71	57	145	53	58	70	454
Total	160	120	284	103	112	124	903

Were young and middle-aged adults simply avoiding any kind of work? Village records routinely address questions of drunkenness, vandalism, or hooliganism when such incidents arise, but documents from these years do not record much activity of this type in Solontsy and Palad' Komarovtsy; there is no indication that people refused to engage in homestead work. Instead, they seem simply to have refrained from providing labor to state economic institutions. In other words, collective farm leaders' problems raising labor were not a product of villages still decimated by war, but rather of a population that made careful decisions about whose labor it would allow the *kolkhoz* to take.

Periodically, the documentary record shows that villagers in Solontsy and Palad' Komarovtsy went further than labor substitution, and instead systematically refrained from participation in Soviet economic institutions. One such episode arrived in January 1959, when the members of the recently renamed *kolkhoz* "Path to Communism" were meant to process its tobacco harvest. During that period, according to the farm agronomist, half of the people in the second and third *kolkhoz* brigades (the brigades normally working in the tobacco fields) were not working anywhere and had taken exception to (*obezhaiutsia na*) the production norms.²⁸ The

²⁷ DAZO 784.2.99 (1957).

²⁸ DAZO 1745.1.199 (1959).

brigade made up of residents of Solontsy was drawing only 20 of its 100 members to work. The rest, village council documents note, were staying home. In all brigades, local officials complained, people were not mobilizing during their free time to process tobacco.

Such a state of affairs was not unusual. Village council and *kolkhoz* records document similar absenteeism from the fields during previous years. The 1949 minutes of Solontsy collective farm meetings had included repeated resolutions concerning labor discipline for all on the *kolkhoz* except for those who were ill.²⁹ Other instructions include a resolution to “forbid *kolkhozniki* to go the bazaar. Improve labor discipline.”³⁰ Village council minutes note, for example, that during the fall, *kolkhozniki* in the second brigade [Solontsy’s] normally are busy with their own household plots. In 1956, when the *kolkhoz* had still been called “Stalin’s Path,” absenteeism had reach a sufficient pitch that members who failed to provide sufficient man labor days (*trudodni*) had been threatened with the loss of some of their personal land or, in extreme cases, potential expulsion from the collective farm—and possible loss of pasturing rights for their cattle.³¹

While threats of punishment for non-participation targeted the household economy—an indication of its importance for village households’ survival—actual punishment hardly ever enters the annals of local governance. Criticisms and threats are plenty: collective farm members who do not come to work should be fined; brigadiers lack discipline; and management is unorganized and slow in adopting innovations. The local party secretary at one point notes simply that, “in our collective farm people do not fulfill the orders of brigade leaders.” Consequences for such choices, however, were minimal. In 1959, for example, the head of

²⁹ DAZO 827.1.7 (1949).

³⁰ DAZO 827.1.12 (1950).

³¹ DAZO 1745.1.153 (1956).

Solontsy's brigade is simply reprimanded, warned that if he does not organize all free *kolkhoz* members to process tobacco for the state, he will be punished more severely. Meanwhile, one speaker present at a meeting of the village council plainly explained that, "on our collective farm, *kolkhozniki* are neither awarded nor punished."³²

Local officials avoided measures that would have compelled compliance from village residents. Rather than punishing those who privileged homestead production, local officials sought to reason with the village population: the *kolkhoz* leadership was to gather all farm members "free from work," explain the developing situation regarding tobacco processing to them, establish quotas for adults and teenagers, and mobilize them to complete the work.

It may have been that Solontsy villagers stayed home from state work because it was impossible for them to do what *kolkhoz* leaders had demanded: the two communal buildings in the village where tobacco processing was to take place had no electricity—and thus no light—in the evening, when some of this work was meant to be done. Further, collective farm members from Solontsy who worked in tobacco cultivation had written a formal declaration that the chairman had been absent ("not there") for the entire period of tobacco processing.

Some villagers go further than absenteeism and enter the documentary record as seemingly unconcerned with even feigning compliance with the demands of local representatives of the Soviet state. They express their personal preferences for how they wish to spend their time and frankly state their disagreement both with local proposals and pressures emanating from Moscow. During the years of collectivization, the minutes of the general meetings of the peasants of the village of Solontsy note numerous complaints about groups of "idlers" (*lodarei* (sic)) who "set off in an organized fashion" to a neighboring village to obtain medical documents

³² DAZO 1745.1.199, 1745.1.200 (1959); 784.2.103, 784.2.114, 784.2.115, 784.2.116 (1959).

from a folk medicine practitioner (*fel'dsher*) who would “indiscriminately” (*bez razbora*) excuse them from work on the collective farm.³³ Those prominent villagers accused of being *kulaki* (Magyar petty nobility are distinguished by a single initial in front of their name used throughout the Soviet period) are defended by their neighbors and most have the charges rescinded, and those individuals continue to appear in documents as village leaders through the following decades.³⁴

Librarians and other Soviet cultural workers in the village are repeatedly singled out for shirking work, as well as for being spotted shopping in town when they were supposed to be working. Non-agricultural employees, like their counterparts working in the fields surrounding Solontsy, sometimes did not come to work or execute the tasks asked of them. When they did, they did not pretend to like it if they did not. A librarian criticized by members of village council for not producing enough posters for an upcoming election in 1954 formally responded that, “I can’t write slogans because I don’t have paper or ink.”³⁵ The same librarian explained her lack of diligence in expanding readership by noting that she “didn’t like” the village. A shopkeeper expresses her dissatisfaction with her job, going as far as to note that “I started working in the village of Solontsy on August 5, 1953. To tell the truth, I didn’t work as I should have (*tak kak nuzhno bylo*) during the first two months. Because I wasn’t familiar with the work and I didn’t like the place.”³⁶

When in November 1953, a village council deputy noted that the village store had been closed for six months and villagers had nowhere to buy basic goods because no one could be found to staff the store, a former store manager who lived in the same building as the store was

³³ DAZO 827.1.7 (1949).

³⁴ *Kulak* identification begins with DAZO P-827.1.6 (1949).

³⁵ DAZO 827.1.34 (1954).

asked to return to the job. Seemingly unconcerned with community reaction or with pressure from local institutions of governance, the former manager replied that, “I do not want to and cannot return to that job because I have already worked there for five years and that is enough for me.”³⁷

By the late 1950s, after more than a decade of post-war reconstruction and around the time of the undeclared tobacco strikes described above, open discussion of absenteeism and misappropriation, as well differences between records and reality, had become a central topic of discussion in village council and *kolkhoz* meetings.³⁸ The management of Solontsy’s collective farm struggled, in the language of the day, with the squandering of *kolkhoz* property, theft, poor accounting, and serious problems with labor discipline as people arrived late to work on the *kolkhoz* after tending to their own garden plots and caring for their animals. The problems enumerated in the minutes of such meetings, together with the issue of insufficient feed and shelter for livestock, had led the collective farm to rank last in the district, and in February 1959 new elections were called to change its management personnel.³⁹ Here, in a rural setting with a tightly controlled perimeter and heavy border security, collective farm managers had been unable to secure the cooperation of the rural population.

Election of new management did not seem to change the situation appreciably: over time, villagers not only continued to prioritize homestead agriculture over *kolkhoz* labor, but also chose to patronize local, Hungarian-language cultural activities rather than Soviet ones. In the neighboring village of Palad’ Komarovtsy, a debate simmered among the members of the village council executive in January of 1960: while some present at meetings expressed satisfaction at

³⁶ DAZO 827.1.29 (1953).

³⁷ DAZO 827.1.29 (1953).

³⁸ DAZO 1745.1.200 (1959-60).

the efforts of Soviet cultural workers in the village, others objected, noting that even though 178 lectures had been given, what result could be expected “when the young people go to church on Sundays?”⁴⁰ The relative absence of Moscow’s projects in both economic and cultural rural life during this period could be observed not only in field and homestead labor, but in homes: fifteen years after the arrival of Soviet troops in Solontsy, the village council registered complaints that preschool instruction was ineffective—the teacher did not speak Hungarian.⁴¹

Conclusion

Why did the people of Solontsy participate in the election of December 1965 and all others that preceded it while they systematically did not participate in the collective economic activities organized by the same regime at the same time? One possibility that emerges from this analysis is that people in this periphery cooperated with Soviet power strategically, selectively participating in some obligatory activities and refraining from others. Participation in elections did not substantively take away from the business of life, which revolved around the homestead courtyard and garden. From that perspective, people had little reason not to go to the polls. The labor demands imposed by the collective farm system, by contrast, removed minds and bodies from garden plots—the place where labor was most valuable to many households.

³⁹ DAZO P-1745.1.200 (1959-1960).

⁴⁰ DAZO 784.2.130 (1960). The village church that was in operation at the time was Calvinist (*Református*), and services were conducted in Hungarian. The other house of worship in Palágy Komoróc was Greek Catholic; during the first decades of Soviet rule, it was used as a granary. It is worth noting that in the following years, rural Soviet cultural workers continued to be objects of party complaints regarding labor discipline. In November 1966, the head of the village club in Palad’ Komarovtsy appeared in letter of complaint to the Uzhhorod division of culture. His absence from work and the region (*oblast’*) for 3 days is noted, as well as the fact that he was “preparing nothing for the district festival of amateur performance in honor of the 50th anniversary of the Great October [revolution].” Others in the region, beyond Solontsy and Palad’ Komarovtsky’, were similarly rebuked (DAZO 784.1.221 (1966)).

⁴¹ P-784.2.103 (1959).

How might we interpret the actions of the villagers of Solontsy? Much of the work in English on late and early Stalinism, as well as on later periods of Soviet history, frames similar action as forms of resistance to Soviet rule—thus, as Anna Krylova has pointed out, imagining the existence of a liberal subject.⁴² Some might argue that the ways in which the population of Solontsy avoided and refused participation in Soviet projects could be cast in such a mold. Indeed, this is precisely how their behavior, like the behavior of others across the Union who were lackadaisical in their work collective farms and in factories, was encoded in the official discourse of the period: as subversive anti-Soviet activity.⁴³

However, there is little evidence to suggest that Solontsy residents understood the repertoire of tactics they used to avoid collective farm work as conscious, principled resistance or dissent.⁴⁴ Instead, living lives that centered in their homes and household gardens,⁴⁵ they were selective in ways that reflected the economic needs of households. It is possible, even likely, that the choice of the population not to do certain things for the Soviet state did not reflect principled refusal so much as a calculation of what was needed to maintain a degree of

⁴² For example, Marta Craveri, “The Strikes in Norilsk and Vorkuta Camps and their Role in the Breakdown of the Stalinist Forced Labor System,” in Tom Brass and Marcel van der Linden, eds. *Free and Unfree Labor: The Debate Continues* (Berlin 1997); Hiroaki Kutomiya, “Political Youth Opposition in ‘Late Stalinism’: Evidence and Conjecture,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 55:4 (2003) 631-638; Juliane Fürst, “Re-examining Opposition under Stalin: Evidence and Context—A Reply to Kuromiya,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 55:5 (2003) 789-802. For critiques of the “resistance” paradigm, see Anna Krylova, “The Tenacious Liberal Subject in Soviet Studies,” *Kritika* 1:1 (Winter 2000) 119-146 and, in the same issue of *Kritika*, Jochen Hellbeck, “Speaking Out: Languages of Affirmation and Dissent in Stalinist Russia,” 71-96.

⁴³ The “second dekulakization” decree of 1948, “On the resettlement in remote regions of persons maliciously refusing to work in the agricultural economy and leading to a parasitical form of life hostile to the public weal,” provides one example. As cited in Zubkova, *Russia after the War: Hopes, Illusions, and Disappointments, 1945-1947*. Translated and edited by Hugh Ragsdale (Sharpe, 1998), 66. Viola writes, “The struggle for subsistence, for survival, surely took precedence over the *political* act of resistance in these years. Yet the results were implicitly acts of resistance, *if only according to official definitions and perceptions*. In the context of Stalinist political culture, an effort by the peasantry to defend itself economically and attempt to maintain a living level of subsistence became implicitly an act of resistance, tantamount to a criminal act, sabotage, and even treason.” (Lynne Viola, *Peasant Rebels under Stalin: Collectivization and the Culture of Peasant Resistance*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998, 209).

⁴⁴ As in the repertoire of “weapons of the weak,” cf. James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985.

household economic autonomy.⁴⁶

There is a broader lesson that might be drawn from the experience of Solontsy under the first decades of Soviet rule, and that is that the success of strict state control in one domain should not, necessarily, lead to the inference that such control—and the fear such control may instill—carried over into other parts of life. Moscow invested heavily in the human resources and infrastructure that kept the people of Solontsy inside Soviet borders⁴⁷ and successfully encouraged them to participate in political rituals. However, those tools did little to ensure societal compliance with Soviet economic and, in some cases, cultural projects. People participated where they saw fit, and otherwise they stayed home. In this part of the newly conquered Soviet periphery, despite the development of social institutions and economies of scale, opting out of active participation in state projects remained, for twenty years after war's end, an option for some.

⁴⁵ Diana Mincyte makes a similar claim about the structure of rural political economy in Soviet Lithuania. Mincyte, "Subsistence and Power in Brezhnev's Lithuania," paper presented at the 7th Annual Young Researchers Conference, Havighurst Center for Miami University, October 25-27, 2007.

⁴⁶ For a critique of the use of resistance as a concept in other colonial contexts, see Eric Allina-Pisano, "Resistance and the Social History of Africa," *Journal of Social History* 37:1 (Fall 2003) 187-198.

⁴⁷ On the long human tradition of using borders and walls to keep populations in (rather than, primarily, protecting against outsiders), see James C. Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009.