Integration of Denunciations As an Accepted Practice in Early Stalinist Humorous Discourse (1928-1929)

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Abstract

Since coming to power after the fight with the Left and Right Opposition in 1928-1929, Stalin and the bureaucratic apparatus prepared Soviet citizens to accept and justify the need for purges in the 1930s. Humor, utilized in the prominent Soviet satirical journal *Krokodil* (*The Crocodile)*,[1] became the perfect tool to promote the idea that "enemies of the people" were disrupting socialist society. In response, the Soviet government was therefore obliged to cleanse these "enemies" from society, with the help of "average people." As *Krokodil* was controlled by the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks), it supported their agenda by constructing social categories labelled "pests," or "alien elements." The purpose of these categories was to help citizens identify who to denounce, and understand why denunciation should be considered an essential feature of Soviet civic consciousness and civil identity.

Publicists and caricaturists of *Krokodil* were deliberate in the construction of the textual and visual narratives of denunciations. These narratives paint a holistic picture of the actors of the denunciations (those who wrote them) and their victims. Furthermore, *Krokodil* illustrates the societal context and circumstances surrounding the denunciations, revealing the justifications for denunciations and their consequences for both the actors and the victims.

Krokodil reflected all of these elements through the lenses of class belonging, behavior, labels of "suspicious" characteristics, and images of the "enemies of the people," enabling Soviet citizens to recognize them on sight. Essentially, the journal shaped the official humorous narratives, defining what was deemed acceptable to laugh about; and

[1] I will use the original Russian title of the journal *Krokodil* in my dissertation.

simultaneously providing the tools to discern political "signals" from the authorities. In this way, the party shifted responsibility for determining who exactly should be punished from the state to the people.

The author also concludes that the satire in *Krokodil* was symptomatic of the political process that evolved in the USSR from 1928 up to 1938. For instance, the journal lampooned key party political figures such as Nikolai Bukharin and Lev Kamenev in 1928-1929; they were subsequently prosecuted in the Moscow Show Trials, during the Great Purge of 1936-1938. In this context, laughter redeemed the power and influence of such "enemies of the people" in the eyes of the citizens, as Christie Davies, Natalia Jonsson-Skradol, Serguei A. Oushakine, and other historians noted. Moreover, the emotions and feelings expressed by the perpetrators and victims of denunciations were embedded in the narratives of *Krokodil.* This resonated with the genuine fear, admiration, persuasion, and other emotions shared by various groups of Soviet citizens. Hence, this research, conducted for a Master's degree in Comparative History, contributes a new perspective on the context of denunciations through the analysis of official humorous discourse, reflected and formed in the journal *Krokodil*.

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Introduction

1. Historical Context

a. Why to Denounce? The Motifs of the Soviet State and Soviet Citizens in Denunciations During Early Stalinism

For modern people, the idea that neighbors, colleagues, or even friends could, or would, denounce them seems nonsense. For the Soviet people, this was an ingrained part of a reality framed by communist ideology in the Bolsheviks' interpretation.

The system of denunciations, which involved the penal state institutions and Soviet citizens as actors in the denouncing process, was intended to protect the evolving and reforming socialist Soviet state from the "pests," called "vrediteli" in Russian. The Soviet authorities regarded them as people seeking society's destruction.[2] Therefore, official propaganda imposed upon the citizens the obligation to be actively engaged in politics and, in conjunction with the party leaders, decided who were the "enemies" of the "proletariat and poor peasantry."

Denunciations served both as an effective means to ruin the lives of the "enemies of the people" and exclude them from society, and to support citizens who "preserved" the society from them. On the one hand, denunciations could destroy someone's business or reputation in the party; on the other hand, they often provided a specific solution for an acute problem, such as estate distribution.[3] The arrest of a person opened up an opportunity

[2] François-Xavier Nérard, *"Pyat Procentov Pravdy": Razoblachenie i Donositelstvo v Stalinskom SSSR* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2011), 156.

[3] Natalia B. Lebina, *Sovetskaya Povsednevnost'. Normy i Anomalii. Ot Voennogo Kommunisma k Bol'shomy Stiliu* (Moscow: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie, 2015), 110.

for those who denounced him to occupy the living space of the prosecuted. Moreover, the authorities encouraged people to report complaints and any kind of misconduct of local authorities through journals and magazines, such as *Rabochaya Gazeta*, and *Raboche-Krestyanskii Listok.*[4] People were supposed to denounce corrupt or unscrupulous officials, and later on, "class enemies", to unmask them.[5]

From the state's viewpoint, denunciations were considered "an exemplary act of civic virtue motivated by altruistic concern for the public good."[6] The Criminal Code of 1926 classified non-denunciations as a crime, which carried a sentence of imprisonment or death in addition to the confiscation of property, or exile with diminished citizenship.[7] In this way, the legal system was designed to force Soviet citizens to denounce each other, although not all were inclined to do so. Furthermore, denunciations themselves became the proof of "political reliability," as Russian researcher Natalya Lebina described, signifying absolute loyalty to the authorities, as well as the new norm of social behavior.[8] In any case, it is not an easy task for historians to discern what percentage of the Soviet population did not participate in denunciations.

b. The Socio-Political Atmosphere of The Early Stalin's Era

The history of emotions might better illustrate the socio-political atmosphere of Soviet society during Stalin's prewar governance. Catriona Kelly, a British expert on

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[4] François-Xavier Nérard*, "Pyat Procentov Pravdy": Razoblachenie i Donositelstvo v Stalinskom SSSR* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2011), 156.

[5] Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Signals from Below: Soviet Letters of Denunciation of the 1930s", *The Journal of Modern History* 68, no. 4 (December 1996): 831.

[6] Ibid., 834.

[7] See in the "Terminology" part.

[8] Lebina, *Sovetskaya Povsednevnost*, 111.

Russian cultural history, wrote that the existence of the "right" emotions in the meaning of acceptable to the state and society is tightly connected with the right to feel and share these emotions. Namely, it was more about the social acceptability and relevance of who could feel the emotions, and how to express them, depending on the social status of the person.[9] Soviet people could see how the emotions and feelings, depicted in the imagery and texts of the Soviet media indicated the social hierarchy and the consequent norms of behavior; i.e., who was able to criticize and laugh, and who was not.

In the late 1920s and the whole of the 1930s, Joseph Stalin used "signals" to bureaucrats of all levels and population about the forthcoming socio-economic and political changes, even for campaigns such as collectivization.[10] Bureaucrats who did not understand such signals, embodied in vague instructions, e.g. "diminish kulaks as a social class," became the perfect objects for criticism. They became the scapegoats of Stalin's regime, to whom the party assigned the whole responsibility for mistakes in Stalin's policy. As Sheila Fitzpatrick mentioned, the speeches or articles of Stalin in *Pravda* (the key magazine of the Soviet Union), show trials of bureaucrats who were tightly connected to the current political direction—each of these forms could comprise the signals that Stalin sent indirectly to the submissive authorities for promotion.[11]

However, Fitzpatrick did not mention that *Krokodil* might also be considered an instrument of Stalin's signaling, via editors, publicists, and caricaturists sent to the audience and local authorities as well. The punishment for incorrectly understanding the signals

[9] Catriona Kelly, "The Right for Emotions, Right Emotions: Managing Feelings in Russia after the Enlightenment," in *Russian Empire of Feelings. Approaches to Cultural History of Emotions*. (Moscow: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie, 2010): 74.

[10] Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Povsednevsnyi Stalinism. Socialnaya Istoria Sovetskoi Rossii v 1930-e: gorod* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2008), 36.

[11] Ibidem.

might have scaled from the mockery of average Soviet citizens to a veiled danger in humorous form, with the major consequences for such serious political errors of discrepancy with Stalin's vision.

2. Primary Sources Characteristics

The journal *Krokodil* (*Crocodile*) was one of the prominent satirical journals of the Soviet era. According to John Etty, "…*Krokodil* visualizes the construction of an ideological attitude, inviting readers to recognize and remove their own ideological blinders."[12]

Russian researcher Galina Ryabova characterized *Krokodil* from the point of its distribution, the forms of governmental support, and the major issues that local communities in the USSR stumbled upon. The number of copies increased from 1922 to 1927 several times, and in 1927, there were more than 175,000 copies.[13] In this sense, it was one of the most widespread satirical journals in the USSR, especially after the critique by the Press Department of the Central Committee of the Party. The end of the relative diversity and freedom in the NEP (New Economic Policy) went after 1927 which could not strengthen the position of *Krokodil* and its influence on the readers.[14]

If to rely upon the analysis of the Soviet humorous periodicals of the 1920s made by Ryabova, the central topic of *Krokodil* in the late 1920s and early 1930s slightly changed since the beginning of *Krokodil* publication in 1922. "Corruption, bribery, excessive

[12] John Etty, *Graphic Satire in the Soviet Union. Krokodil's Political Cartoons* (Jackson: University of Mississippi, 2019), 7.

[13] Galina N. Ryabova, "Humour and Satire in Everyday Life in 1920s Soviet Society," *The European Journal of Humour Research* 9, no. 1 (2021): 138-139.

[14] Ryabova, "Humour and Satire," 139.

bureaucracy, and alcoholism were the major problems of the new regime. These topics were castigated in almost every issue of the central and provincial press."[15]

Ryabova mentioned that Soviet citizens sent a lot of messages to press publications such as *Krokodil*, especially with the criticism of minor officials, to air their complaints about the bitterness of Soviet everyday life, e.g. hunger or scarcity. Many were never to be published; only topics connected with bribery, clergy, and local authorities, as well as alcoholism and everyday life problems, ever made it to print.[16]

Not only textual but also visual narratives in *Krokodil* made it so attractive and understandable for the readers. Satirical portraits of the figures or problems as part of Soviet reality made them recognizable mostly because of the context: workers could observe the ridiculous images of the local bureaucrats whom they might have hated or disrespected due to bribery, nepotism, or other things. Russian historian Aleksandr Golubev noted that for illiterate or semiliterate peasants, the role of illustrations in official journals was vital, though they did not always understand the symbolic meanings of the simplified caricatures.[17] Every element of the image created the hidden hints of whom to blame through the laughter it caused; and every detail, even the short text beneath, made sense. In this light, the target audience of *Krokodil* was extremely broad and might embrace all the people in the Soviet communities, even illiterate peasants and workers, which made the source valuable for the research of the formation of the humorous discourse and the presence of other social practices inside.

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[15] Ibid., 143.

[16] Ibid., 144-145.

[17] Aleksandr V. Golubev, "Sovetskaya politicheskaya caricatura 1920-kh-1930-kh.," *Rossiiskaia Istoriia*, no. 6 (2018): 90.

Another primary source examined in this research is the Criminal Code of the RSFSR of 1926, with updated articles from later in the 1930s. It will allow me to demonstrate the consequences of the denunciations for both actors and victims, and what punishments they could expect. All sources I will examine are digitized and accessible in electronic form. Unfortunately, due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the ongoing war caused by the Russian government, there were no opportunities for me to visit archives in Moscow or Saint-Petersburg to analyze the correspondence between the editors, publicists, and caricaturists with the authorities.

3. Historiography Review

For the last two decades, debates in current historiographies have examined the occurrence of humor in totalitarian regimes, and its use by authorities in the attempt to achieve political aims and control. To start with, the classification of humor in socialistic states is offered by British sociologist Christie Davies. He identified three categories of laughter (political humor) in the socialist states:

1. "a cruel ridicule that could be employed with impunity by the socialist elite;"
2. "the centrally controlled <…> published ridicule provided by the professional humorists serving the socialist state;"
3. "the massive spontaneous ridicule of their rulers by the ordinary people through jokes and anecdotes."[18]

Paradoxically, there are also several types of works that can be divided by the objects of investigation, based on principles outlined above. According to Davies, the first category of

[18] Christie Davies, "Political Ridicule and Humour Under Socialism," *European Journal of Humour Research* 2, no. 3 (2014): 2.

humor relied on the idea of using humor directly, with Soviet political elites literally designing jokes and selecting topics of public mockery themselves. During Stalin's rule, "the cruel ridicule" of political elites occurred against the regime's enemies, such as Nikolai Bukharin or Grigory Zinoviev during the Moscow Trials in the Great Purge of 1936-1938. Mockery reflected the anti-Semitic and chauvinistic masculine views of Stalin and his allies that framed these humiliating jokes, usually connected with the religious context or background of the social groups to which his political opponents belonged. Davies also highlighted this in his article, in which he derived his categories of Soviet humor from the analysis of the state's mockery of Nikolai Bukharin during the Moscow Trial of 1937.

Prior to Davies' analysis, Natalia Skradol of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem described Soviet humor as a "consolidating force" of the people who belonged to the powerful ranks of society, or whom wanted to pretend to belong to the elite.[19] She emphasized the role of humor as a means provided by the state to laugh at the opponents, in which light we might see the applicability of this argument to the materials published in *Krokodil*. Her analysis also highlights another function of humor—it could be constructed to consolidate people by laughing at the "enemies of the people," to reshape their identities into a mentality of "us" and "them."

In my opinion, humor in this point is reminiscent of the plot of Franz Kafka's *The Process*—the victory of the state's crude power, expressed in through a trial, over a ridiculous, and miserable offender who did not even realize his fault in the view of the state. Mocking them signified the complete support of public sentiments for the state campaign against the "enemies of the people." Later on, Skradol quoted Slavoi Žižek about the

[19] Natalia Skradol, ""There Is Nothing Funny about It": Laughing Law at Stalin's Party Plenum," *Slavic Review* 70, no. 2 (Summer 2011): 344.

absurdist trial from *The Process* and attempted to apply it to Bukharin's case. Her work led me to the conclusion that humor and laughter became a state instrument á la Damocles' sword; an ever-present threat of intimidation, hanging over those who might reveal their faults in front of the state and society. The novelty of Skradol's research can be demonstrated also in the way she applied Mikhail Bakhtin's vision of 'carnival' as the key element of the social perception–and even lifestyle–to the Moscow Trials, comparing such show trials with the performance or spectacle.

Russian historian Alexander Kozintsev referred to M. Melnichencko and A. Arkhipova's research about Soviet anecdotes and their collection of materials, proposing that a large amount of jokes told by Stalin, members of Politburo and the Central Committee, as well as by Soviet ordinary people originated from older anecdotes from the 18th and 19th centuries, or even earlier. The core of the anecdotes concerned the behavior of protagonists as archetypes, uprooted even in Christian narratives.[20] Aside from analyzing this theory of humor and its applicability to Stalin's joke-telling culture, his argument addressed the skeptical view of the anecdotes as a means of reconstructing Soviet reality. None of the other authors reached this conclusion; however, this question is relevant to raise in the context of the anecdote's nature as a primary source. If the anecdotes are taken as reflecting the subconscious emotions of those who created or recounted them to others, this field of research might be considered 'emotional history,' depicting the social tense or atmosphere of Stalin's USSR in general. Kozintsev added another original idea to the historiographical debate: the distinction between jokes and satire.[21] The genuine character of jokes, according

[20] Alexander Kozintsev, "Stalin Jokes And Humor Theory," *Russian Journal of Communication* 2, no. 3/4 (2009): 3.

[21] Kozintsev, "Stalin Jokes," 10.

to Kozintsev, is negating "the ways reality can be represented"; in contrast with satire, which refers to reality itself.[22] If so, *Krokodil* should have reflected the Soviet reality, albeit through the eyes of the Politburo and Central Committee as a tool to impose this vision on readers.

The second layer of humor is identified by the cluster of the authors, i.e. caricaturists and publicists, who are involved in the production of humor in journals and magazines. To be more specific, the official narrative of satire is demonstrated in films (e.g. comedies and musicals written by G. Alexandrov), novels (e.g. Ilf and Petrov's works, M. Zoshenko novels), journals (e.g. *Krokodil*), and newspapers (e.g. *Pravda*, *Literaturnaya gazeta*). Focusing speficially on *Krokodil,* my thesis tackles this category of humorous discourse. It is no secret that laughter and humor proved to be an effective tool for imposing propaganda and directives to be obeyed on Soviet citizens.

Professor of Anthropology from Princeton University, Serguei Oushakine, developed the idea of balance in times of crisis between "inappropriateness of laughter" and "strong perception of laughter as a key indicator of one's ability to manage and even to overcome the condition of crisis."[23] This balance can be applied to Stalin's era of the 1920s and early 1930s, but from the perspective of Soviet authorities in their work to control the situation in the whole USSR by constructing a common humorous discourse that would embrace the state. As a result, the historiographical tendency to connect the lack of genres in humor to political jokes and other forms of laughter that the Soviet state was trying to suppress, is

[22] Ibidem.

[23] Serguei A. Oushakine, "Red Laughter": On Refined Weapons of Soviet Jesters," *Social Research* 79, no.1 (Spring 2012), 190.

now considered outdated, as Oushakine proved. Though his article was published in 2012, the tendency still reappears, as we will see later.

In the article ""Red Laughter": On Refined Weapons of Soviet Jesters,"" Oushakine reframed the whole idea of the ability of Soviet authorities to form socialist humor across several genres—comedy musicals, satirical novels, and journals.[24] The main obstacle in this way for the authors who created the Soviet humor ("jesters," as Oushakine calls them), was to correctly interpret the signals made by the vozhd', to identify what should be ideologically correct to laugh at, and the best ways to express it.

Ideologically, theories of Soviet humor and its usage had been constituted in the works of several well-known party leaders; for example, Anatoly Lunacharsky, People's Commissar of Education in the 1920s. To rephrase Lunacharsky's idea, Oushakine mentioned, "laughter is a type of weapon that is necessary to ultimately disable the enemy when the major blood work has been already done."[25] However, the author of this thesis would like to reconsider this argument and put forward another idea: laughter could *anticipate* and predate the work that had to be done in the confrontation of political enemies. Although the concept of "strength" and "power" in humor intersected with liberating and cleansing functions of humor, neither Lunacharsky in the original text, nor Oushakine proved it in their selected cases and examples.

At the same time, Oushakine mentioned the text "Why We Are Unable To Laugh" by the 1923 *Krasnaya Pechat* journal publication, and argued that it is essential to use various comic genres to recognize social vices and to eliminate them through denunciations.[26] This

[24] Ibidem.

[25] Ibid., 195.

[26] Ibid., 196.

reference supports the argument that *Krokodil* might be a tool of such usage to direct Soviet people without explicitly stating who to laugh at and why they should be denounced. This article is dated to a year prior to the first publication of *Krokodil;* meaning that technically, the main primary source of this research may have been an experimental tool to prepare people for destroying such "social evils." This article in *Krasnaya Pechat*, in the short review of Oushakine, predicted the tendency of demonstrating who were the main enemies of the Soviet people—bureaucrats.[27] As well as in *Krokodil*, one might see that more than half of the stories are dedicated to them and their hidden or direct critique. Taking into account the number of questions that Oushakine's research raised, this article became the fundamental basis for reconsidering the theoretical background of Soviet humor in the 1920s and the functions of satire and laughter itself for Soviet bureaucrats.

Amongst historians and social science researchers, Natalia Skradol and Aleksandr Golubev investigated the Soviet newspapers and their satirical narratives, and refined the conceptual definitions of laughter from the comparative analysis of propaganda, and how the connection of state power and authors was exposed through humor.[28],[29] Skradol focused on the concept of humor as a form of social interaction between "the leadership of the country and the broad audience" which did not involve the real political participation of the citizens.[30] Her research directed the author of this thesis to the idea of laughter as a way of creating an "imagined community"—people could feel that they belonged to the Soviet culture and society through this ability to laugh, share laughter, and avoiding being the

[27] Ibidem.

[28] Aleksandr V. Golubev, "Sovetskaya politicheskaya caricatura 1920-kh-1930-kh.," *Rossiiskaia Istoriia*, no. 6, (2018): 84-102.

[29] Natalia Skradol, "Laughing with Comrade Stalin: An Analysis of Laughter in a Soviet Newspaper Report," *The Russian Review* 68, no.1 (January 2009): 26–48.

[30] Ibid., 27.

subject of laughter. Skradol mentioned that Soviet citizens were not allowed to speak out, but they *were* permitted to mock the socially acceptable and state-approved people or situations that appeared on the pages of satirical journals or newspapers.[31]

Russian historian Galina Ryabova primarily analyzed *Krokodil* through the prism of the problematic issues of Soviet society in the 1920s and 1930s (such as bribery, corruption, and alcoholism) which concerned even the party, not only Soviet citizens.[32] Though her article did not produce a new perception of the issue outside of what Skradol had already picked up, her commentary about the active interaction between the editors, writers, and readers of the journal, as well as the taboo on touching the serious problems like hunger and scarcity of goods, is valuable addition to this research.

The third category of consideration is the history of joke-telling and underground humor as a hidden form of escape from reality, or a way of rethinking it with a hint of critique of the bureaucratic system. Researchers pointed out the correlation between the social atmosphere and acceptance/non-acceptance of repression, with emotions like fear or anger changing with admiration of Stalin felt by Soviet citizens who recounted these jokes. Among the most prominent historians and anthropologists there were Robert W. Thurston, Christie Davies, Serguei Oushakine, and Alexander Kozintsev.

The concept of anecdotes as a remedy during times of repressions, as well as a means for attachment to socialism and the regime itself, was elaborated by Serguei Oushakine in the article "Jokes on Repression."[33] He wrote: "In a sense, this laughter is a laughter of

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[31] Skradol, "Laughing with Comrade Stalin," 36.

[32] Galina N. Ryabova, "Humour and Satire in Everyday Life in 1920s Soviet Society," *The European Journal of Humour Research* 9, no. 1 (2021): 139.

[33] Serguei Oushakine, "Jokes of Repression," *East European Politics & Societies* 25 (2011): 655.

reconciliation, an acoustic and bodily analgesics—a socially acceptable painkiller that modifies the perception when the perceived situation cannot be changed."[34] The reality of the late 1920s and the whole 1930s was impossible to change for the average Soviet citizens, as they did not have enough power to eliminate the process of evolving repressions, and many of them even supported it as a necessity to 'cleanse' society. Although those who opposed the repressive mechanism of state functioning may have handled the situation with the psychological help of humor, what about others? Despite the satire made by "court" caricaturists and publicists, jokes could reveal the direct purpose of having fun, rather than creating a space for signals about the "enemies of the people" and alienating them from society.

Many authors have attempted to categorize political anecdotes of the 1920s-1930s and to measure the interference of politics in the private sphere of citizens. Robert Thurston, from the University of Miami, examined the traditional argument that joke-telling was a hidden form of Stalin and Politburo critique and, concurrently, admiration.[35] He conducted his research on a collection of interviews held in the 1950s with Soviet emigres, mostly from older generations, containing jokes that were widespread in the 1930s.

Most intriguingly, he found out that in 1938, the Central Committee of the party proclaimed that it was essential to search for "masked enemies," who were "the "careerist-communist"; those who tried to advance or cover his/her own mistakes by denouncing others."[36] The peak of repressions combined with an evolving sense of fear among citizens,

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[34] Ibidem.

[35] Robert W. Thurston, "Social Dimensions of Stalinist Rule: Humor and Terror in the USSR,1935-1941," *Journal of Social History* 24, no. 3 (Spring 1991): 541-562.

[36] Ibid., 554.

although Thurston did not determine whether an analysis of the anecdotes would be ever possible with non-dated oral sources. If, in the case of anecdotes Soviet citizens, laughed "to make their fears manageable," the state-approved humor via *Krokodil* might have expressed the same idea, though radically different from the point of whom or what to be afraid of. [37]

Christie Davies utilized a similar framework of considering humor as a form of protest, though mentioning both layers of it—jokes and satire.[38] He compared jokes narratives in the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR) and other Soviet republics, as well as socialistic satellite states during and past the late Stalinist era, from the point of anti-Russian sentiments. In addition, he illustrated the anti-bureaucratic character of Soviet-Russian satire. According to Davies, they became the central figure of mocking in official satirical journals like *Krokodil*. However, Davies made a mistake in speculating that no high-level officials were depicted as subjects of laughter, though he quoted scholars of the 1960-1980s, e.g. Jacquin Sanders and others.[39] Quite to the contrary, in the issues of *Krokodil* in 1928, one can see on the front page the satirical image of Nikolai Bukharin, who was considered to be the last prominent Stalin's political opponent and the supporter of the New Economic Policy (NEP); as well as Lev Kamenev, an old Bolshevik with the influence in the Red Army.

British researcher Jonathan Waterlow attempted to answer the question of what Soviet people laughed at, and how they expressed it, during the 1930s. In contrast with Kozintsev's understanding, he insisted on the power of jokes as an indicator of social life, world

[37] Ibid., 555.

[38] Christie Davies, "Humour and Protest: Jokes under Communism," *IRSH* 52 (2007): 291–305.

[39] Ibidem.

perception, and identities of Soviet people.[40] At the same time, he repeated Ouskaine's hypothesis in the debate on the functions of humor as a method of relief and escape from the tough reality. His idea of joke-telling as a way of social protest, in the absence of other opportunities to express a pluralism of opinions, overlapped with Christie Davies's argument.

What is new in this debate Waterlow brought up is that narratives of jokes could represent the ambiguity of the attitudes that Soviet people shared, from the dissent to the affirmation of the regime.[41] To be more precise, Waterlow supposed that joke-telling could indicate the level of trust for non-denunciation on the person who recounted the anecdote, and it was a "sense of quiet power" over the regime symbols.[42] It is noteworthy that in jokes, as Waterlow noticed, the most common subjects of attack were Stalin and the Central Committee, as well as Politburo members, such as Sergei Kirov or Sergo Ordzhonikidze; whereas I found in my research of *Krokodil* that local bureaucrats were the main victims of ridicule rather than higher officials, (though there were exceptions–see Chapter 1). For the historian, jokes especially 'toilet humor,' signify dissatisfaction with the authorities and acknowledgment of their weakness, even giving the illusion of the power to judge them.[43]

Michelle Smirnova shared Waterlow's opinion—that the culture's humorous culture can be seen to represent the life and views of Soviet citizens under the repressive regime.[44] She inserted new terminology in the research of Soviet humor—"cultural consciousness,"

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[40] Jonathan Waterlow, *It's Only a Joke, Comrade! Humour, Trust and Everyday Life Under Stalin (1928-1941)* (Oxford, 2018), 2.

[41] Ibid., 5.

[42] Ibid., 37.

[43] Ibid., 49.

[44] Michelle Smirnova, "What is the Shortest Russian Joke? Communism. Russian Cultural Consciousness Expressed Through Soviet Humor," *Qualitative Sociology* 37 (2014): 323–343.

meaning the genuine sense of belonging to the collective culture and memory; and sense of homeland, and how it opposed the official paradigms of the Communist Party.[45]

Smirnova considered anecdotes to be a part of public discourse that constituted collective identities in the USSR, applying critical discourse analysis to the corpus of anecdotes to reconstruct the broader context of the identity-making interactions between the regime and society, and citizens' cognitive ability to reflect the socio-political processes.[46] This is a new approach in the historiographical debate, around the creation of humor "from beneath." She concluded that anecdotes demonstrated and even reframed the "wholeness" of national identity for Russians in the Soviet era, while simultaneously excluding other ethnic groups such as Ukrainians or Jews, along with social groups such as women, from joining the collective identity.[47] Her idea about the ambiguity of Soviet Russian anecdotes absorbed the traditions and representation of official propagandist discourse, meanwhile, the other group of anecdotes formed a major avenue of critique and even rejection of the party's propaganda.

Another group of researchers in Soviet humor concentrated on the graphic narratives of *Krokodil* and other forms of satire. Stephen Norris wrote an article on Boris Efimov's caricatures, considered to be an ideological "weapon" against the "enemies of the people."[48] He pointed out that Efimov was primarily responsible for constructing the social vision of these "enemies" in the caricatures of *Krokodil*. The genealogy of his illustrations can be traced back to Russian representations of the "aliens" in the Crimean War- and, later in the

[45] Ibid., 323.

[46] Ibid., 327.

[47] Ibid., 335.

[48] Stephen M. Norris, "The Sharp Weapon of Soviet Laughter: Boris Efimov and Visual Humor," *Russian Literature* 74, no. 1–2 (1 July–15 August 2013): 31-62.

19th century, foreign foes. He also drew from German caricatures, among the most fabulous being the fat and well-dressed capitalists.[49] Revolutionary traditions became widespread at the beginning of the 20th century; after 1917, Efimov had great teachers in the likes of painters such as Dmitry Moor.

Russian philologists Olga Kiyanskaya and David Feldman rebuilt the history of *Krokodil*, particularly focusing on the evolution of the journal during the period under Michail Manuilskii as chief editor in the 1920s and 1930s.[50] They show to readers insights into the inner workings of the main satirical mass media; revealing the authorities' fluctuating support for publishing and conflicts among the editorial staff, including writers and caricaturists.[51] Researchers persuasively demonstrated that denunciations engulfed even the board: several authors and editors were victims of denunciations and even were sentenced to death.[52]

Moreover, the author of this thesis also considered the literature tracing the intellectual and social history of Stalin's Soviet society, its atmosphere, and the process by which denunciations became common practice, supported not only by the state but also by the people themselves. Historian of France's Sorbonne François-Xavier Nérard proposed an original hypothesis in the debate over the roots of mass free-will denunciations made by thousands of Soviet citizens that precipitated the Great Purge. In his book "Five Percent of Truth: Exposure and Denunciation in Stalin's USSR (1928-1941)," he proposed that denunciations and complaints were the only opportunities left in the Stalinist Soviet Union

[49] Norris, "The Sharp Weapon," 34.

[50] Olga I. Kiyanskaya, Dmitrii M. Feldman, "K istorii sovetskoy satiricheskoy pechati 1930-h godov: zhournal "Krokodil,"" *Vestnik RGGU. Seria: Literaturovedenie. Yazykoznanie. Kulturologia* (2014): 71-85.

[51] Kiyanskaya, Feldman, "K istorii sovetskoy satiricheskoy pechati," 76.

[52] Ibid., 78.

in the 1930s to express dissatisfaction with the authorities and regime, where no other chances for social protest existed.[53] Nérard deconstructed the build up of the whole practice of denunciations as follows: the right to denounce became a duty, and failure to denounce by a person potentially aware of a crime was made punishable under the Criminal Code.[54] This dismal "rule" was one of the most common crimes prosecuted during the "Great Terror."

The main task of the state in this sphere is to instill the idea that the system of denunciation itself is necessary for existence, because the state is in a stage of reformation and needs to be protected from external enemies.[55] Nérard did not mention satirical sources of control; however, he explored the mechanisms for building a system of denunciations as everyday practice: the Criminal Code of the USSR, self-criticism at the party's meetings, and among the mass media.

Sarah Davies reconsidered the articles of the Criminal Code of 1922, which contained severe punishment for anti-Soviet agitation that limited the freedom of speech of all citizens.[56] Since the beginning of the Soviet state in Russia, the Bolsheviks defined the potentially dangerous tools to overthrow their power as "spreading of false information and rumors about Soviet power, the Red Army, and the enemy."[57] The question she considered was: when, and under what circumstances, were such articles used for prosecution? She demonstrated that the reasons why Soviet citizens might be prosecuted included but were not limited to: being in possession of anti-Soviet bourgeois literature, telling anecdotes,

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[53] François-Xavier Nérard, "Pyat procentov pravdy": razoblachenie i donositelstvo v stalinskom SSSR" (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2011).

[54] Ibid., 128.

[55] Ibid., 156.

[56] Sarah Davies, "The Crime of Anti-Soviet Agitation," *Cahiers Du Monde Russe* 39, no. 1-2 (1998): 149-167.

[57] Ibid., 149.

voicing counter-revolutionary expressions while being drunk and cursing, and defacing the portraits of higher members of the political elite.[58] In the evolution of punishment and the definition of counter-revolutionary agitation, the implementation of the repressive policy changed, with some ranges of behavior inside the hierarchy of non-acceptable acts to be tolerated to a certain extent.

4. Aims and Hypothesis

Key research question:

The key research question of my M.A. thesis will be to examine the discourse of humor in the context of an evolving process of finding the "pests of the society" or "alien elements" to prepare the stage for future repressions. I consider how denunciations were depicted in the main satirical Soviet journal *Krokodil,* whether it reflected the idea of "good" denunciations and their necessity for society, and how it influenced the transformation of denunciations into a socially accepted practice of the period when Joseph Stalin came to power.

My hypothesis:

Stalin and the bureaucratic apparatus he selected, were preparing the Soviet citizenry to accept and justify the need for repressions when he finally took power in the regime from 1928 to 1929. It was necessary to establish the population's acceptance of the inevitability of searching for the "enemies of the people" through denunciations as an obligatory feature of Soviet civic consciousness and even civil identity.

[58] Ibid., 156.

In this way, denunciations became a preparatory tool for the population's acceptance of the regime's later repressions. One of the forms of promotion of this denunciation practice was satire, such as a prominent Soviet journal *Krokodil* (*Crocodile*), controlled and sponsored by the VKP (b) (All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks). Political aims, embedded into humorous culture "from above," shaped the agenda of *Krokodil* but also served to unite the Soviet people, reframing their civil and national identities via the understanding of the "enemies of the people," or "alien elements", and identification of whom to denounce. At the same time, through *Krokodil* the authorities shifted the responsibility of denunciations to the Soviet citizenry who were expected to discern the signals from the authorities, even in humorous form, of who was to be traced and excluded.

Main research questions:

1. Were the practices of denunciation shaped "from above" through *Krokodil*?
2. If yes, what was the image of the actors of denunciations (the ones who denounced), state institutions (where denunciations were to be considered), and the victim of denunciations?
3. Who were the "enemies of the people" and how they were depicted on the pages of the journal?
4. Who became the victims of denunciations in the USSR during the late 1920s and 1930s? How did it correlate with the images of the "enemies of the people" in the journal?
5. How were the process of writing denunciations, as well as the doubts of both actors and victims about the propriety of their actions, depicted in *Krokodil*?

6. How did the authors of *Krokodil* represent the fear of denunciations or other emotions, both shared by people, or imposed by the government? Was it a common practice, perceived as the "norm" of Stalin's time?

7. Did *Krokodil* help to escape from the fear of repressions and denunciations, although this was not their direct aim?

The chronological period examined across all chapters of this thesis will be from 1928 to 1929. This period characterized the transformation of political tendencies when Joseph Stalin was finally able to destroy the political reputation and influence of his competitors, such as Nikolai Bukharin and Leon Trotsky after the defeat of the "Left Opposition" and the "Right Opposition." In 1928, the beginning of the future show trials can be seen when the first such display—the Shakhty Trial and the prosecution against engineers in Shakhty town—marked a turning point of the regime's repressions. The year 1929 characterized the ending of the NEP period, and the ideological beginnings of industrialization, the Five Year Plans, and the exile of Leon Trotsky from the USSR.

In the broader context, I will consider whether Stalin planned the massive cleansing of the VKP (b) and the following repressions against "class enemies;" and how, if so, satire propagated such ideas. The beginning of the "witch hunting" of different categories of Soviet citizens in the above-mentioned period shifted responsibilities for the social catastrophe, caused by the higher leaders of the party, onto the "enemies of the people," thereby creating a mentally unified space for the Soviet citizens. I argue that these processes started before the culmination of the repression and the end of the Great Terror (defined according to the highest amount of people sent to the Gulag and shot), and directly led to it.

5. Methodology and Chapter Framework

I plan to employ historical-genealogical methods and the comparative method, as well as the tools from the "history of emotions" field as the research basis for my Master's thesis. The first mentioned method will serve in analyzing the evolution of the narratives of denunciations in *Krokodil* in 1928-1929, and also to trace the genealogy of the images of the "enemies of the people". The comparative method will assist in considering the connection of those images in *Krokodil*, to the reasons, circumstances, and consequences of denunciations on both actors and victims and the real practices, according to the historians. They will be used for the analysis of the primary sources in the context of the humorous discourse, to identify any connections between it and denunciation practices, on the way to building the acceptance and justifications for Stalin's repressions by the USSR population.

I will also utilize discourse analysis to examine the socio-political context of Soviet society and its changes under the influence of propaganda and Stalin's cult of personality. This method originates from linguistics, and will serve to identify the key categories of the Central Committee of the Communist Party's agenda, e.g. the "enemies of the people", "self-criticism", etc.

In Chapter 1, I will attempt to create an outline of classifications of "enemies of the people" on whom Soviet citizens were expected to denounce, and their behaviors and other signals given to identify them, based on the material of *Krokodil*. I hope to reconsider the existing textual and visual analysis of the Soviet caricatures of that period that exist today in Western and Russian historiography, and to understand the evolution of such images, depending on the political and socio-economic, and cultural processes. I aim to reveal the actors of denunciations, their victims, and the representation of both categories within the

discourse, as well as the elements of repressions that came into the mind of viewers after reviewing them. Chapter 2 will be dedicated to the narratives of denunciations, namely, the context of reasons, circumstances, and consequences of denunciations built in *Krokodil*.

6. Terminology

In this part of the introduction, I will consider all terms that are used in the research as the key categories of the analysis. There may be confusion created by the translation process into English, with a higher resultant risk of embedding unintended misconceptions and/or losing the discourse of the usage in Russian language in Stalin's time. In the Master's thesis, the following meanings are implied:

- Denunciations–1) "public criticism of something or someone"; 2) "the act of accusing someone in public of something bad."[59]

Collins Dictionary also refers to the second meaning.[60] In modern English, the meaning is close to the Russian word "donos" ("донос"). In the Big Soviet Encyclopedia of 1931, only the definition of "false denunciation" exists.[61] It defines "false denunciation" as, "knowingly making a false report to a judicial or investigative authority or other competent or official entitled authorities to prosecute an offense that has been committed or is about to be committed." A person who made a false denunciation could be sentenced to prison for up to two years.

[59] "Denunciation," *Cambridge Dictionary*, accessed May 30, 2022, https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/denunciation.

[60] Ibidem.

[61] "False Denunciation," *Big Soviet Encyclopedia*, 1st edition, vol. 23 (1931): 268-269, accessed May 30, 2022, https://vk.com/doc173179909_622313047?hash=D3ErIago7HreDZrUl8uG1LWlfibx8fsbkDdLm8rR6c8.

In the pre-revolutionary times, Brokgauz and Efron Dictionary defined it as "a report by a private person to the relevant authority about a crime committed by someone, to trigger a judicial investigation."[62] Denunciation is distinguished from a police report by the fact that it contained an intrinsic political aspect. Even the obligation of the Soviet people to denounce and was mostly committed by the Soviet citizens for personal gain. According to the Criminal Code of RSFSR of 1926, non-denunciation of potential crimes will lead to imprisonment for no less than one year.[63]

- Discourse—"the use of language in speech and writing in order to produce meaning."[64] The definition of the Oxford Learner's Dictionary can be applicable in combination with the modern paradigm of postmodernism established after Michel Foucault.

I will use it in the following manner: one might develop the logic of the bilateral relationship of power and knowledge in the sense that it embraced the practices of social and governmental institutions and interrelation with the power-to-people structure, and vice versa. Humorous discourse reflects the mental categories that were the products of the above-mentioned connections and socio-political and cultural transformation, transmitted through visual and textual narratives in satire.

- "The enemy of the people"—the category that is similar, if not the same, to the "enemy of working people" ("vrag trudyashikhsya") that was used as a juridical

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[62] "Denunciation," *Encyclopedic Dictionary of F.A. Brokgauz and I.A. Efron* (Saint-Petersburg: Brokgauz-Efron, 1890-1907), accessed May 30, 2022, https://dic.academic.ru/dic.nsf/brokgauz_efron/38112/Донос.

[63] The Criminal Code of RSFSR, Article 58-12, 1926, last modified November 16, 2018, accessed May 30, 2022, https://ru.wikisource.org/wiki/Уголовный_кодекс_РСФСР_1926_года/Редакция_05.03.1926.

[64] *Oxford Learner's Dictionary*, accessed May 31, 2022, https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/american_english/discourse_1#:~:text=discourse-,noun,political%20discourse%20at%20the%20meeting.

term in the Criminal Code of RSFSR of 1926. The 58th Article of the Criminal Code contained the public crimes against the Soviet state.

Some of the crimes within this category included: migration or fleeing from the country, espionage, or communication with representatives of alienated states with "counterrevolutionary" aims (58-2 till 58-6). Sentences could include capital punishment, along with the confiscation of property, or designation as an "enemy of the working people" with the consequent deprivation of citizenship and exile from the USSR with the confiscation of the property.

What is more interesting, Article 58-12 included that the non-denunciation of an accurately known counter-revolutionary crime being planned or committed was also punishable by imprisonment for a term of not less than six months. But the most repressive measure in the Criminal Code was in Article 58-14 about counterrevolutionary sabotage.[65] Even the clarification of this article was obscure: "the deliberate failure of someone to perform certain duties, or the deliberate negligent performance thereof for the express purpose of weakening the authority of the government and the activity of the state apparatus" might have meant anything and everything, especially in the context of elaborating self-criticism campaign in the late 1920s.[66]

It is difficult to find another source for the term "enemies of the people," other than in Vladimir Lenin's articles and speeches.[67] Historians usually describe it as "a term primarily [referring] to disgraced Communists who had formerly held responsible administrative

[65] *The Criminal Code of RSFSR*, Article 58-14 (1926), last modified November 16, 2018, accessed May 30, 2022, https://ru.wikisource.org/wiki/Уголовный_кодекс_РСФСР_1926_года/Редакция_05.03.1926.

[66] Ibidem.

[67] Evgenii Sukharnikov, "Kratkii kurs istorii. Vrag naroda," *Istoriya.RF*., December 29, 2017, https://histrf.ru/read/articles/kratkii-kurs-istorii-vragh-naroda .

positions."[68] I will utilize this definition in reference to the main victims of denunciations in the late 1920s up to the mid-1930s, who were blamed for unacceptable deeds or behavior. Soviet citizens were encouraged to report them to the party organs, secret police like NKVD, or even newspapers. In *Krokodil*, the usage of the "pests," "alien elements" or "parasites of the society" (or just "parasites") incorporated the notion of "enemies of the people" and, potentially, the legal consequences for those who were claimed to be as such.

7. Novelty and Relevance of the Research

The Russian invasion of Ukraine on the 24th of February 2022 became a humanitarian catastrophe in Ukraine, and also began a new cycle of repressions inside the Russian Federation against everyone who speaks out about the reality of the situation—describing it as a war, not "the special military operation," and opposing it by any and all means. Moreover, it has marked the turning of the Russian state towards a possible totalitarianism in the modern day, making it hard not to compare with Stalin's Soviet Union of the late 1920s and 1930s.

Denunciations reshaped the reality of Russian society: at the time of writing, recent showed reports of middle school students who had denounced their teacher voluntarily for her antiwar views and statements about the Russian state's catastrophic mistake in starting this war.[69] This is not the only case; for modern antiwar demonstrations, or any "public dissemination, under the guise of reliable reports, of knowingly false information containing data on the use of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation to protect the interests of the

[68] Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Signals from Below: Soviet Letters of Denunciation of the 1930s," *The Journal of Modern History* 68, no.4 (December 1996): 831-866, 834, in *Practices of Denunciation in Modern European History, 1789-1989*.

[69] "V Penze ucheniki donesli na uchitelya za vyskazyvania o voine v Ukraine," *Radio Svoboda*, April 1, 2022, https://www.svoboda.org/a/v-penze-ucheniki-donesli-na-uchitelya-za-vyskazyvaniya-o-voyne-v-ukraine/31780944.html.

Russian Federation and its citizens and to maintain international peace and security" a sentence up to three years of imprisonment is carried, according to Russian law enforcement.[70] I believe that historians bear the responsibility to produce and promote the knowledge to resist the propaganda, by examining the justifications of Stalin's repression the evolution of denunciations as a mass accepted practice.

From a historiographical perspective, nobody among the researchers considered in the field has examined the denouncing practices in the humorous discourse. It is valuable to explore how the satirical journal *Krokodil* embodied a powerful tool of propaganda, used to shape the Soviet people's public sentiments of the "enemies of the people" as the main obstacle to the better way of living and building socialism as fast as possible.

Humor is a non-obvious sphere of social life to use as a lens for examining the practice of denunciations and its narratives. It rebuilt the civil identity of Soviet citizens by constructing exclusions, not only of social classes like the bourgeoisie, priests, and kulaks but also by prompting a search for the enemies amongst ardent communists or average workers and employees. Reflections and commentary about denunciations in satiric form mirrored the intention of Soviet people to accept or oppose the repressions, and the commitment of the government to purge the party and the society in general. That is why this research is not only novel, but valuable to undertake.

[70] Federal Act "On Amendments to the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation and Articles 31 and 151 of the Criminal Procedure Code of the Russian Federation," March 4, 2022, http://pravo.gov.ru/proxy/ips/?docbody=&nd=602900891.

Chapter 1. The Categories of the "Enemies of People" in *Krokodil*: Actors and Victims of Denunciations

The main aim of the chapter is to catalogue the emergence of denunciations in satire, primarily based on the journal *Krokodil* as the prominent satirical journal published by *Pravda*—a governmental publishing house from 1928 to 1929.[71] As an introductory chapter, it will help to understand how Stalin's government created the vision of denunciations as a socially accepted practice to start the mass repressions of and struggle against "the enemies of people". In this chapter, I will focus on how the "enemies of the people" were categorized, and who comprised both the primary victims and actors of denunciations in Soviet society during the above-mentioned period.

The key questions this chapter will consider are:

- who was included in the category "enemies of the people," that was to be purged and chased away from the VKP (b) and communist organizations, or to be imprisoned for other reasons?
- how were they visually depicted? What kind of phrases and symbols did the authors used to caricaturize both victims and actors of denunciations?
- what crimes did the victims commit or were accused of committing?
- how were the victims intended to be "weeded out," i.e., and what did the process of cleansing look like?

[71] Electronic archive of the satirical journal *Krokodil*, accessed 12.03.2022, https://croco.uno/ .

1.1. Attacks On The "Class Enemies":

From Bourgeoisie to Priests, From Noblemen to Kulaks

The range of the "class enemies" is well-known to the researchers of the Soviet humorous culture which included not only satirical journals but also anecdotes and joke-telling traditions, comedy shows, and more. This thesis will focus solely on the cluster of satirical journals, namely, the materials of *Krokodil*. The key question is how these "enemies" of the Soviet state were integrated into, or excluded from, the everyday life represented in *Krokodil*.

From the beginning of 1928, *Krokodil* contained visual materials and a one-sentenced description beneath each of the images that demonstrated the inner and outer "enemies" of the Soviet state. In the first issue of *Krokodil*, the British imperialists headed by Lord Chamberlain offered to play with other angels with weapons.[72] This narrative reflects the agenda—the threat of Anglo-Soviet war and the consequent severance of diplomatic relationship. There was also a place for inner enemies that Soviet power wanted to diminish. The primary ones were priests. For instance, they could be depicted as looking at the books, and the books were visually separated from them. This depiction was supposed to reveal the contradiction between progress (manifested in books) and regress (religion), as was drawn by D. Melnikov.[73] Another type of the 'enemies' were bourgeois intellectuals who were depicted standing literally separately from the workers, discussing the latter in disguise.[74]

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[72] Yu. Ganf, "Mirnii prazdnik," *Krokodil*, no. 1 (1928): 5.

[73] D. Melnikov, "Na kul'turnom fronte," *Krokodil*, no. 1 (1928): 4.

[74] M. Khrapkovskii, "Zavoevanie," *Krokodil*, no. 1 (1928): 6.

These cases show three key patterns. First of all, there is a deep contrast between the visual and textual narratives—the images portrayed visually both outer enemies of the Soviet Union, acknowledged as such by the Soviet authorities, and the "enemies of the people." Meanwhile, texts embraced mostly stories from everyday life with the critique of local bureaucrats or others. This could be connected with the illiteracy of the majority of the Soviet population by 1928, despite the Likbez (Likvidatsia bezgramotnosti ("Liquidation of Illiteracy") campaign launched in 1919. Hence, it was easier to widespread the idea of whom to evaluate as the suspicious "Other", non-Soviet, through imagery. Secondly, no punishment was described yet for the "hidden enemies" of the Soviet state, e.g., NEPmen (new bourgeoisie who appeared in the Soviet Union in the 1920s) or bourgeois intellectuals. However, they were depicted in a very different way than workers and peasants—prosperous, having attributes of a decent level of life. This aimed to create the discourse of their detachment from the journal's mass audience. The authors of these images developed the idea that these people (priests or NEPmen) did not have any common interests with Soviet people, in reverse—they challenged the Soviet system. Thirdly, the shortcomings of the bureaucratic machine became the pinpoint for criticism in the issue; the key objects to laugh at were middle-level principals such as the head of the cooperative (*zaveduyushii cooperativom*) or the head of the city board (*predsedatel' gorsoveta*). Finally, there were no hints for the denunciations noticed in this issue. Although there was one exceptional case that can be interpreted in this light: the head of the city council reported wrong greeting and treatment to the police, and the police composed an indictment in the name of the complainant.[75] The consequences became worse for the person who denounced, and *Krokodil* blamed the head of the city board.

[75] "Obizhennyi "vel'mozha,"" *Krokodil*, no. 1 (1928): 10.

Figure 1 Yu. Ganf, "Kulatskaya snorovka," *Krokodil,* 1928.

Kulaks were the enemies of the Soviet state in the eyes of propaganda for the reason they interrupted the collectivization process and establishment of full control over peasants by the Bolsheviks. Evidently, *Krokodil* represented kulaks as the "pests" of the Soviet society. They were usually depicted fat—from eating well and hiding crops from the government. On the first caricature, one might see a well-fed kulak.[76] From the depiction and text below, the viewers could understand that he killed someone, bribed some local bureaucrat, got another man drunk, and became the head of the village council as a result of his activity. Everything he did was aimed to achieve career promotion—to be the head of the village council. The readers were supposed to see how the kulaks corrupted party members and were ready for everything in order to save individual benefits and wealth. *Krokodil* insisted the readers on being accurate and ready to suspect even their comrades from the party or local authorities in the villages ("predselsovet") because "enemies" could present themselves unnoticed. The moral "lesson" from the series of images on this caricature was that kulaks' behavior and values were depicted as inappropriate and distinguishing from how Soviet people should have behaved and acted.

[76] Yu. Ganf, "Kulatskaya snorovka," *Krokodil*, no. 44 (1928): 8.

The other category of people who would be later in the 1930s persecuted was the daughters and sons of the "class enemies of the workers and peasants," i.e. of nobles (*dvoryane*) and merchants. Satire showed them as full of their class prejudices and superstitions, as religiousness or bad luck, that was extremely difficult to eradicate, even if they had proper Soviet education and party influence. Their beliefs could be even contagious to the "true Soviet party workers," as Vasilii Lebedev-Kumach, the author of the short story, explained to the readers in the plot.[77] This piece raises the question of whether it is possible to redeem an individual with "wrong" class belonging and upbringing. Since the Bolsheviks took power in October 1918, they proclaimed the idea that class enemies could "purify" themselves with collectively helpful deeds and right beliefs in accordance with the communist ideology.

In addition, *Krokodil* refrained from doubts about the communist dogmas. As Russian historian Oleg Khlevnyuk wrote, the state was not limited in its deeds and was never mistaken because it was the medium for the highest achievement of historical progress, as Soviet citizens were to believe. After all, the class struggle, namely, the war with inner and outer enemies turned into the key method of individual and collective oppression.[78]

Krokodil mostly represented local authorities ("secretaries" or "predsedateli"—the heads of the city board, state departments, region board), factory workers, black marketeers ("spekulators" in Russian), tradesmen and businessmen (NEPmen) who should be laid off or placed under control of special committees. Critique of such "anti-Soviet elements" was demonstrated in the stories like the following: in Blagoveshensk on the Far East, the Union

[77] Vasilii Lebedev-Kumach, "Primety," *Krokodil*, no. 2 (1928): 2.

[78] Oleg Khlevnyk, *Stalin. Zhizn' odnogo vozhdya* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2015), 38.

of hunters did not want to donate money to charity, except for their maid; in the story, an unnamed author indicated that it makes sense to send the "cleaner" to the Union.[79] Evidentially, it was intended to wipe out all "anti-Soviet elements" in various forms, but the exact methods were not clearly portrayed. Noteworthy, almost in every visual or textual story, *Krokodil* did not specify how the society should prosecute such greedy bureaucrats or lazy workers. Indirectly, the possibility of being laid off or imprisoned coupled with public condemnation was highlighted in all the issues of the journal in 1928, so the local communities and division of the VKP (b) should have taken charge of what to do with the "enemies of the people."

Mostly, in the stories in *Krokodil,* class struggle was camouflaged by satire and prevailed as the main topic in the 1928 issues of the journal. The government acknowledged kulaks, priests, and "international bourgeoisie" as the "enemies of the people,"[80] and, underlining this, the authors of the journal demonstrated how their interests were intertwined, how they shaped the common front to impede the prosperity of the Soviet state. *Krokodil* represented the "enemies of the people" in an exaggerated manner: fat men with visible attributes of their class belonging—NEPmen,[81] "international bourgeoisie,"[82] in fashionable clothes imported from abroad; Muslim, Orthodox, and Judaic priests with the symbols of their denominations. Caricaturists often depicted them together and mostly as they intended to counterpose the progress and development of "the state of proletariat and poorer peasantry."

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[79] "Neubrannyi khlam," *Krokodil*, no. 10 (1928): 10.

[80] It can be proved across some issues of 1928, for instance, the whole issue 48 was dedicated to the critique and mocking on the priests and all domain religious denominations that existed in the USSR.

[81] Yu. Ganf, "Kak by ne proigrat,'" *Krokodil*, no. 2 (1928): 5.

[82] Joli, "Son kapitalista," *Krokodil*, no. 9 (1929): 9.

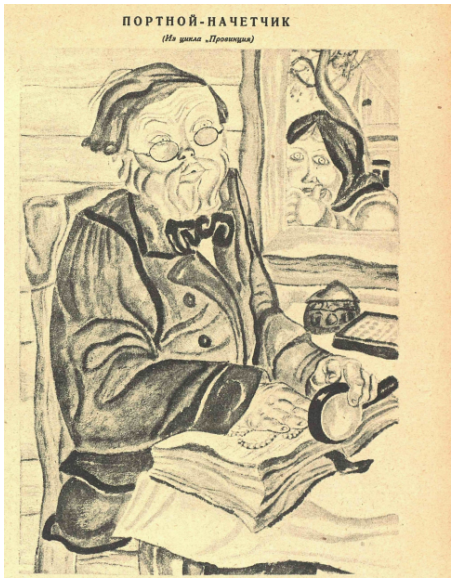

Figure 2 V. Lebedev-Kumach, "Portnoi-nachetchik," *Krokodil,* 1928.

Among them, priests received special attention. The anti-religious campaign periodically appeared on the pages of *Krokodil* to show that "religion is the opium of the people" which should be opposed only through communist ideology and science. In the caricature below, there is a visible juxtaposition of priests to books or radio, symbols of progress.[83] However, literacy and communist ideology could help to resist religious beliefs and denominations that were obviously connected with the backward tsarist Russian Empire—that was the message of *Krokodil* to its audience. Even workers like tailor Feoktist could not only believe in God and practice their religion but also propagate it to the others, i.e., non-educated female peasants, as illustrated on the caricature "Portnoi-nachetchik" ("Tailor-Reciter").[84] His image imposed the thought on the necessity to detect such anti-Soviet activities that interfere with common communist beliefs.

Krokodil included in the plot references to the most outstanding satirical publications of the late 1920s—the one by Ilya Ilf and Yevgeny Petrov. In 1928, their famous novel "Twelve Chairs" was published and had a roaring success among Soviet readers. The protagonist, Ostap Bender, was a con man, a trixter, and an adventurer whose character and deeds completely contradicted the officially propagated vision and ideas of appropriate behavior. In issue 37, the protagonist Khlestakov embraced two characters—Ostap Bender and Ivan Khlestakov from the Russian-Ukrainian classic author Nikolai Gogol's satirical

[83] D. Melnikov, "Na kul'turnom fronte," *Krokodil*, no. 1 (1928): 4.

[84] Vasilii Lebedev-Kumach, "Portnoi-nachetchik," *Krokodil*, no. 29 (1928): 3.

play "The Government Inspector." The character from *Krokodil* publication was a scammer who cheated Soviet citizens by presenting himself as a foreign tourist to borrow money from officials and workers, under the false pretense of willing to observe Soviet factories and hospitals.[85] The moral of this story is easy to understand—Soviet people, regardless of their occupation, should not have been gullible nor trusted "foreign tourists" who could potentially be foreign spies and enemies of the communist state. This story might also be relevant in connection with the Shakhty trial—several of the prosecuted engineers were German specialists, who were accused of being agents of "international bourgeoisie" who planned to destroy Soviet industry. The intersection of different types of the "enemies of the people" with cultural code from Russian and Soviet literature, and reality made the message of the state clear—enemies could hide anywhere. The references to well-known authors demonstrated that Krokodil was tightly interwoven with the Soviet discourse.

In the context of the potential war between the Soviet Union and the United Kingdom, *Krokodil* highlighted categories of the "enemies of the people" as the allies of "foreign enemies" of the Soviet state. They included Soviet NEPmen and engineers from the Shakhty show trial along with foreign diplomats and politicians. The journal attacked the representatives of all states who did not contain communist ideology and opposed the USSR somehow. The negative image of the Weimar Republic with "weak" socialist democrats, as well as of fascist Italy ruled by Benito Mussolini, appeared on the pages of *Krokodil*, alongside English and French politicians. Still, the number of 1928 issues where they were mentioned at least once, was much less than the the inner "enemies of the people" like kulaks and bourgeoisie. Regardless of the presence of the "foreign enemies," local officials and incompetent higher rank party members were the main objects of harsh critique.

[85] Vl. Simushenko, "Khlestakov puteshestvuet," *Krokodil*, no. 37 (1928): 7.

In 1929, this tendency had slightly altered: authors of *Krokodil* started to create more on the topic of international relations. Some issues were fully dedicated to it, like issue 7, with the caricature about the Kellogg-Briand Pact.[86] Each issue, starting from the second one, contained brief reviews with jokes on the "hot" topics of global politics, spreading geographically from Afghanistan to France, from Turkey to China. The format of the journal changed, editors introduced a monthly column named "S miru po strochke" ("Line by Line From the World"), where publicists touched upon those issues.

More states became objects of mockery in *Krokodil*, which now included Serbia, Romania, Poland, China, and "enemies" from 1928: France, the UK, Germany, and Italy.[87] For instance, in issue 4, authorities in Berlin and Warsaw were illustrated as depending on France, unable to defend their own stance.[88] Bucharest and Belgrade were incriminated with committing illegal things: Belgrade violated the constitution, Bucharest occupied Bessarabia. No wonder, the United States had a positive outlook while importing new tractors into the Soviet Union.[89] This case proved the argument that *Krokodil* fully reflected, in a humorous form, events of inner and foreign politics on the agenda of the Central Committee and Politburo.

The idea that the "enemies of the people" were among the Soviet people and they needed to be unmasked, preventing them from hiding, had been repeated in the issues of 1928 and 1929. Especially attempts to look better in the eyes of the electorate right before the election in the local soviets were to be mocked and uncovered, as the authors of

[86] M.Cheremnykh, "Krasnaya armia, kransyi flot, truda i mira krepkii oplot," *Krokodil*, no. 7 (1929): 1.

[87] At the time of publication, Serbia was incorporated into the state called KSHS (the Kingdom of Serbs, Croatians and Slovenians).

[88] I. Amsky, "Na Zapade," *Krokodil*, no. 4 (1929): 5.

[89] Ibidem.

Figure 3 K. Rotov, "Eshe o novom byte," *Krokodil,* 1929.

Krokodil showed.[90] Hunting for "pests" that had to be excluded from the party elaborated in 1929 to a bigger extent. In issue 18, the front page depicted the struggle against "pests" with the words: "It is not enough to hang good slogans and charts. One has to check for parasites from time to time to see if they are underneath."[91]

Moreover, *Krokodil* demonstrated that even the purges could not help to cleanse "alien elements" who were "clean" from the formal point, including party membership since 1917, voting for the common line of the party, not distinguishing from the others. The caricature "Obman zrenyia" ("Optical Deception") showed that people could pretend that they were "good" and "proper" Bolsheviks.[92] On the

Figure 4 K. Yeliseev, "Obman zreniya," *Krokodil,* 1929.

third and fourth cartoons on the caricature, it is written: "This is how the cleansed presented himself in front of the committee. And this is who he is." While the third cartoon depicted an average party member in an unremarkable outfit, the fourth cartoon exposed that he was

[90] B. Samsonov, "Sezonnyi tovar," *Krokodil*, no. 3 (1929): 2.

[91] K.Rotov, "Eshe o novom byte," *Krokodil*, no. 18 (1929): 1.

[92] K. Yeliseev, "Obman zreniya," *Krokodil*, no. 25 (1929): 10.

genuinely a tsarist officer, one of the worst enemies of the Bolsheviks. Moreover, K. Eliseev, the author of the caricature, underlined that the cleansing committee was imagined as angry and grumpy men (the first caricature) but in reality, this committee consists of the average people with calm facial expressions. In this way, *Krokodil* hinted to the readers that the cleaning committee was too mild, but also just towards the hidden "enemies of the people." This idea appeared multiple times in both 1928 and 1929 issues, but, for instance, in the poem "Khoroshii paren'" ("Good Boy") in the next issue.[93]

[93] N. Kr-n, "Khoroshii paren,'" *Krokodil*, no. 26 (1929): 2.

1.2. Blaming Local Authorities: "Self-Criticism" Campaign

Foolish deeds of the local authorities were the primary objects of representation in satire, and the fault for Soviet people's hardships shifted on them in *Krokodil*.[94] The obligation of employees, who were party members, to criticize their colleagues and management openly in the party assemblies fit this agenda. French historian François-Xavier Nérard pointed out that the campaign of critique and self-criticism shaped the mechanism of denunciation practices to reinforce it in the everyday life of Soviet citizens.[95] *Krokodil* reflected this tendency perfectly, unfolding the context and justification for the "self-criticism" campaign. The first issue of 1928 illustrated the typical features of Soviet society at the end of the NEP era: struggle against extensive bureaucracy,[96] active implementation of the labor ethics and the duties of the workers,[97] basic clothes shortages, and nepotism.[98] In issue 2, all images reflected predominantly the bourgeoisie and its elements in the Soviet reality, bureaucratic routine,[99] and poor cooperative management.[100] There was also another issue—the impoverishment of the villages due to transferring most products into the cities to accommodate the needs of the growing urban population on behalf of the cities.[101] Industrialization came to the agenda. Other several cartoons were dedicated to scenes from Soviet everyday life.[102] Surprisingly, there was no kind of punishment designed for those

[94] K. Rotov, "Sezonnoe," *Krokodil*, no. 1 (1928): 9.

[95] François-Xavier Nérard, "Pyat procentov pravdy," 124.

[96] L. Peshkin, "Sluchai," *Krokodil*, no. 1 (1928): 4.

[97] S. Oktyabrev, "Prazdnyie myusli Savelia Oktyabreva," *Krokodil*, no. 1 (1928): 6.

[98] K. Khomze, "Primer drugim," *Krokodil*, no. 1 (1928): 7.

[99] K. Yeliseev, "Soobrazil," *Krokodil*, no. 2 (1928): 4.

[100] Yu. Ganf, "Maskarad na l'du," *Krokodil*, no. 2 (1928): 1.

[101] D. Melnikov, "Ponimai, kak khochesh," *Krokodil*, no. 2 (1928): 2.

[102] V. Gin, "Sezonnaya bolezn,'" *Krokodil*, no. 2 (1928): 7.

who were considered as impeding the development of the Soviet state, i.e., those who later on would be referred to as "enemies," but for now were just ridiculed.

All the issues of the journal in 1928 showed images of greedy factory managers, bureaucrats of lower and middle-level positions, members of local governments. According to the journal authors, they were the ones to blame for any failures, 'parasites of the society'. At the same time, the message was to prepare the readers for the idea of a necessary 'cleanse' among such members of the communist party. Still, even in issues 5, 6, and 9, the potential punishment proposed only layoffs and moral judgment. Noteworthy, nobody from the party nomenclature, even ideologically defeated Leon Trotsky, Nikolai Bukharin, and others, were mentioned in all the analyzed issues. Evidentially, it became dangerous to laugh about Stalin and the government in general.

The state was the publisher of *Krokodil* and the employer of its writers and caricaturists, hence the topics covered in the journal were also defined by the state. The readers could see the journal as a means of recovery of social justice in the cases when employees were fighting with a municipal economy—"kommunkhoz." For instance, the overtime work of firefighters in Ukraine was not paid, and they took legal action against kommunkhoz to get compensated. Publishing the story in *Krokodil* was the last resort.[103] Therefore, making a story published in such a widespread mass media called for public condemnation and risk for such organizations like kommunkhoz to be more controlled by the authorities.

In 1929, *Krokodil* did not change the main object of laughter—the local officials and directors of the factories. Again, their corruption, bribery, inaccessibility for the average workers, and incompetence remained the key features of what *Krokodil* exposed to the

[103] "Mozhet byt', pomozhet," *Krokodil*, no. 29 (1928): 10.

readers about them. The typical story was that the head (predsedatel') of the central social security fund in Tatarstan took a leave of absence for medical reasons, went for vacations and business trips multiple times, whilst falsifying the necessity of those expenses and exceeding the allowed average limits for vacations.[104] The author of the story called him "The Almighty" referring to the the real power of the local bureaucrats and factory directors. At the same time, the campaign of self-criticism along with denunciations and punishment of the "enemies of the people" were not mentioned more than before in the first six issues of 1929. Sometimes the blame for belonging to the Right Opposition was a convenient excuse for the punishment even among low-ranking regional party members. This was not uncommon; on the basis of critique during the self-criticism campaign party members could accuse their colleagues of being ideologically wrong without any supporting evidence, if to believe *Krokodil*.[105]

The theme of blaming the Right Opposition and the Left Opposition and suspicion of everyone brought up again the cleansing of the party from the "pests" and dominated thematically in the issues in 1929, for example, in issue 13. Oddly enough, the topic of Trotsky and Trotskyists was almost never brought up on the pages of Krokodil, except for when it was mentioned by P. Belyanin in his caricature. In it, Trotsky was looking at a middle-earner from the peasantry ("serednyak") and was "recommending" to pinch him.[106] Probably editors of the journal aimed to avoid any allusion to Trotsky, who was in exile in Turkey by that time, as if he had never had any political influence. This tendency might signify the highest punishment for higher-ranking Soviet politicians—they were not

[104] "Bolezn' vsemogushego," *Krokodil*, no. 6 (1929): 8.

[105] Nikita Kryshkin, "Za pravui uklon," *Krokodil*, no. 9 (1929): 11.

[106] P. Belyanin, "Glyiadyia na serednyiaka…," *Krokodil*, no. 13 (1929): 10.

ridiculed but forgotten. Although Joseph Stalin also almost did not appear in the journal but for some other reasons. The explanation might be that he was "untouchable," not allowed to be criticized, in contrast with other party leaders.

1.3. Laughing at "Class Allies" of the Bolsheviks: Workers and Peasants

Various groups of professionals or workers complained to *Krokodil* for its untrustworthy and disrespectful representation of them. Journalists responded that *Krokodil* represented people in a satirical, exaggerated manner to emphasize their negative and/or hilarious sides. By this, workers should have understood how they could not behave in order to not be ridiculed.[107] Indeed, this unraveled one of the main aims of the journal—to fix moral and social norms of relationships inside the community on local and national scales, to reshape labor ethics, and to "demolish" with the use of satire all elements inappropriate for the Soviet society. *Krokodil'*s authors did not just reflect on the shortcomings of Soviet reality, they highlighted the tendencies to criticize.

Workers had to be politically savvy and have a firm communist attitude, if someone did not—they could be considered a "pest," as the story of Savelii Oktyabrev showed.[108] Other members of the collective could be interested in the reasons for the lack of any party activities or political consciousness of a specific worker; it could lead to severe consequences. Thus caricatures of *Krokodil* did not express directly what those consequences could be. Even the campaign of self-criticism with the unclear objective of blaming someone in the collective shaped the framework of blindly criticizing any random or disliked employee to implement the directives for criticizing oneself by blaming the collective's members.[109] The fault was not important, it was rather an ability to scold and report anyone, even the administration and/or secretary of the party cell. Damoclean sword could punish everyone in the community, as the journal had demonstrated, similar to the

[107] Savelii Oktyabrev, "V zashity "nashei gazety,"" *Krokodil*, no. 2 (1928): 7.

[108] Savelii Oktyabrev, "O spetze," *Krokodil*, no. 30 (1928): 2.

[109] Nikita Kryshkin, "Po dolgu sluzhby," *Krokodil*, no. 30 (1928): 2.

Kafkian "Process"—nobody could prevent the prosecution, whether the prosecuted acknowledged their fault or not.[110]

[110] British researcher of humorous culture Natalia Skradol wrote about similar phenomenon in her article, so it can be proved with the analysis of *Krokodil*.

1.4. Personal Enemies of Joseph Stalin Depicted in *Krokodil*

As Stalin struggled for power since Lenin's death in 1924, he consolidated with different party leaders against his most prominent enemies, among whom was Leon Trotsky. In 1928, he finally defeated all his competitors for power and started mass industrialization and collectivization. For these necessities to turn the Soviet Union into an industrial great power against the West, Stalin supposed it essential to search for scapegoats inside the community to blame for the mistakes of Stalin and the Central Committee.

In issues 1 to 9, party leaders did not exist on the pages of *Krokodil*. The already alienated elements in society intensely expressed a desire to continue the communist idea of the class struggle, according to Karl Marx's "Capital." One of the prominent philosophers of the 20th century, Valery Podoroga, wrote that Stalin's regime preferred the continuation of the "civil war" (class war) as the only possible consolidation of the masses relied upon the fear of inner enemies.[111] This fear also sublimated to the forms of loyalty and admiration of Joseph Stalin in the role of "father of the nation."

Later, in the following issues of the same year 1928, Stalin's personal political enemies, Leon Trotsky and Nikolai Bukharin were represented on the cover page, or, at least, the image represented figures who resembled them. The visual narrative recounted the background of Trotsky as an energetic speechmaker, though it would not have been *Krokodil* without any comicality and irony.[112] The calendar behind his figure showed the 1st of April, the custom of "Fool's Day" invoking humor and jokes in the Russian and European cultures. The title of the front page is "Neumnaya shutka" ("Not a Smart Joke") illustrated

[111] Valery Podoroga, *Vremya posle. Osventsim i Gulag: myslit' absolutnoe Zlo* (Moscow: Ripol Classic, 2017), 23.

[112] M. Cheremnykh, "Neumnaya shutka," *Krokodil*, no. 13 (1928): 1.

Trotsky (or a bureaucrat resembling him) as a politician whom people should not trust as his speech did not reflect reality. One can observe the similarity of this image with the real photo of Trotsky from 1924. In 1927, Trotsky had been already laid off from all his official jobs and, in 1929, Stalin ordered to send him out of Moscow and RSFSR to Kazakhstan.

Figure 5 M. Cheremnykh, "Neumnaya shutka," *Krokodil,* 1928.

Figure 6 Photo of Leon Trotsky, 1924.
Photo by Underwood Archives/ Getty Images

Not only Bukharin was repressed and shot in the Great Purge that became a character on the front page of *Krokodil*. In the 17th issue of 1928, there was poet Demyan Bedny who was later fired and fell into poverty after critique of Stalin held a huge empty bottle; next to him Nikolai Bukharin, wearing civilian clothes as Bedny, was small and insignificant, placed directly near the horsetail. There was also Nikolai Semashko, the Commissar of Health, in white clothes holding a special device.[113] One might suppose Semen Budyonny and Sergey Kamenev as Red Army commanders depicted not an ironic way, in contrast with Bukharin and Kamenev, who would be repressed in the 1930s and already criticized by Stalin and Politburo as the opposition, though both Bydyonny and Kamenev would be

[113] M. Cheremnykh, "Nas smelee v boi," *Krokodil*, no. 17 (1928): 1.

deprived all posts in the party and prosecuted in the Great Purge. All of them ironically struggled with alcoholism. This fact was captured in the title "Vedi zh, Budyonny, nas smelee v boi" ("Lead Us, Budyonny, Bravely Into Battle"), mocking them on the way they got this habit of overdrink as well—the empty bottle in the hands of one of the most prominent revolutionary poets, Demyan Bedny. In this light, *Krokodil* targeted to illustrate the political figures of the highest ranks when the context facilitated. Simultaneously, the journal represented the new show trials and prosecution of local party leaders to renew the personnel structure and workforce inside the party.

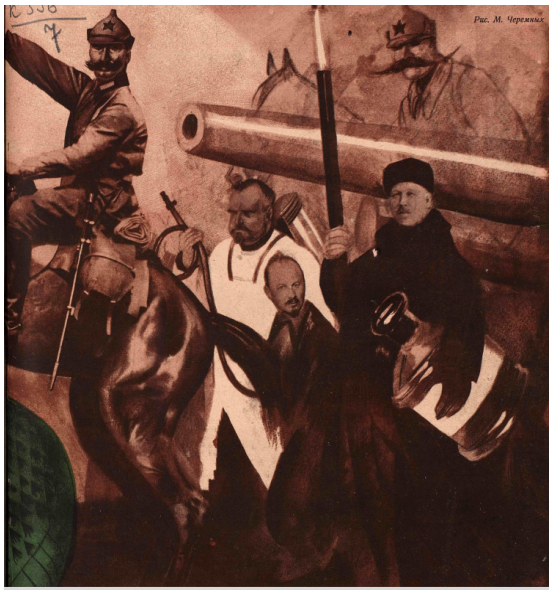

Figure 7 M. Cheremnykh, "Nas smelee v boi," *Krokodil,* 1928.

Authors of the journal mentioned Joseph Stalin only referring to his ideas and statements as the rule or order, not subject to discussion or doubt. Obviously, Stalin and the highest ranks of the Soviet Politburo and Central Committee of the Party were sacred figures not to be criticized. The campaign aimed to promote the younger generation of bureaucrats, much more loyal to Stalin himself as a "vozhd,'" leader of the nation. In 1928, he declared the campaign for mass critique and self-critique; *Krokodil* propagated this image of Stalin in issues 17 and 18, the whole journals dedicated to that agenda. The illustration on the 18th issue, Yuri Ganf's "Being Late" ("Opozdali"), represented this notion in the text beneath: "But comrade Stalin said that leaders should be criticized, or they become arrogant… ."[114]

[114] Yu. Ganf, "Opozdali," *Krokodil*, no. 18 (1928): 11.

Writers of *Krokodil* mentioned remarkable political events such as the defeat of Stalin's opponents in 1928, named "Right Opposition" which included Nikolai Bukharin, Alexei Rykov, and other prominent figures. On the pages of the journal, the party member and middle-level manager of the state departments, comrade Simakov, shouted about the rejection of his plans the phrase recalling the party's struggle of Joseph Stalin with his competitors for being a successor of Vladimir Lenin as the leader of the USSR. This phrase is the following: "Officials! Bureaucrats! We're in the midst of work! And you want to ruin the revolutionary effort! A right-wing opposition!"[115] This phrase was meant as a curse for those to whom they were directed.

The critique of Stalin's competitors and oppositionists in *Krokodil* combined with the further mass cleansing of the party in the late 1930s. The process correlated with the further denunciations of everyone who supported their political ideas or referred somehow to them. No wonder, their incompetence and inability to fulfill the needs of state-building had already been shown in 1928 in the following image: they were not able to solve the "road issue" to build roads, according to the state administrative plans.[116] Both Andrei Lezhava, the Council of the State Planning Committee (Gosplan), and Valerian Osinsky, the Head of the Central Statistical Administration, supported previously Bukharin and other higher-ranked members of the party, who were supposed to disagree with Joseph Stalin. During the Great Purge, both were executed, as the logical continuation of the final step of Stalin to cleanse the party from the old generation of Bolsheviks. One might observe that *Krokodil* facilitated the understanding among mass readers of why they were to be laughed at that later on, accepting their faults in front of the party and state, they ought to be repressed.

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[115] B. Samsonov, "Kollektsia lakirovannykh. Tovarsh Simakov," *Krokodil*, no. 22 (1928): 3.

[116] It was preceded before the elaboration of Five-Year Plans ("pyatiletka"), which started in December 1928.

On the basis of the contemporary political course and higher party leaders' struggle, the most ardent citizens brainwashed by official propaganda were ready to denounce or at least report on everyone who seemed to organize the deliberate counterrevolutionary sabotage. Or at least there were citizens who pretended to be rampant communists and expose enemies, for their benefit. The first category had never been mocked in *Krokodil*, in contrast with the second. They were trying harder to find anyone to blame for even a hint of counterrevolutionary activity, as the comrade Shtoltseva in the story "Kolektsia lakirovannykh. 6. Tov. Shtoltseva" ("The Collection of Lacquered. 6. Comrade Sholtseva") who removed from the wall the portrait of Lunacharsky for being suspected on him as the "right opposition."[117] Needless to say, 1928 was the year of the final defeat of the Right Opposition in VKP (b), and *Krokodil*, as always, repeated the main idea of struggling with it, taking into consideration its danger. However such danger was not explained, leaving the readers to comprehend the background themselves.[118]

Figure 8 L.,M., "Opasnot' pravogo uklona," *Krokodil,* 1928.

[117] B. Samsonov, "Kolektsia lakirovannykh. 6. Tov. Shtoltseva", *Krokodil*, no. 27 (1928): 2.

[118] L.M, "Opasnot' pravogo uklona," *Krokodil*, no. 42 (1928): 2. This was not the only case with the critique of the Right Opposition. See later in Chapter 1.

Returning to Boris Samsonov's story about Sholtseva, her efforts were not in vain because, as publicist B. Samsonov indicated. She achieved the job place somewhere, though she was non-competent and useless. The story represented the key idea—"podhalimstvo," or adulation, and pretense to be a "genuine communist" had to be ashamed and unmasked in the same way as the "enemies of the people," regardless of the fact that punishment should be different. Both categories were "pests" for the Soviet society in the eyes of caricaturists of *Krokodil*.

The point remains that Stalin and the Central Committee of the party never directly specified how to determine properly the "true communist" and distinguish him or her from the "pests," signaled it indirectly. By 1928, Soviet people started to get used to the self-criticism campaign to find out the specific "enemies of the people," though even *Krokodil*, following the agenda of the official party course, did not clarify fully. In other words, it became evident that Stalin had already launched the process of concentrating people's attention on the search for the "pests" at that time, following the pre-NEP time of the October Revolution 1917 and the consequent Civil War idea of cleansing from the "class enemies." Now, Soviet citizens should have been prepared to denounce or report everyone who seemed suspicious. This phenomenon is the direct premise for the evolving mass repressions and its acceptance by the vast majority of the Soviet people.

1.5. Renewing Cultural Elites: Mocking "Incorrect" Intelligentsia

If the vast majority of stories involved the condemnation of the behavior by referring to people without any kind of notorious reputation, some cases could appeal to famous artists or other professionals. Vsevolod Meyerhold, a well-known theater director and producer, working with Konstantin Stanislavski, the founder of Stanislavski's system of acting, was the object of attack from *Krokodil* by the constant author Savelii Oktyabrev. He judged Meyerhold's interpretation of the classic play of the 19th century "Gore ot uma" ("Woe from Wit"), blaming him for being ridiculous, and even rephrasing the official title of the play as "Woe to Wit" ("Gore Umu").[119] Oktyabrev did not mention at all what was his main rebuke and why it was the wrong interpretation.

It is not coincidentally that in the same year, Meyerhold came across the Soviet borders for European tours and health care. The government suspected him literally in the desire not to return back to the USSR. Afterward, the issue of closing the theater he was a head of (GosTIM) officially arose but was realized only a few years later.[120] In 1938, the State Theater of V. Meyerhold (GosTIM) was closed, Meyerhold was imprisoned in 1939 and shot in 1940. His wife, famous Soviet actress Zinaida Reich, was killed by unknown people in 1939. Meanwhile, *Krokodil* did not only post the critique of Meyerhold and his art to prepare people to criticize Meyerhold themselves but also to accept later on the fact that he was "the other."

[119] Savelii Oktyabrev, "Gore umu," *Krokodil*, no. 12 (1928): 2.

[120] O.V. Golovnikova, "Dokumenty RGVA o tragizheskoy sud'be V. Meyerholda" https://www.vestarchive.ru/arhivnye-dokymenty/1222-dokymenty-rgva-o-tragicheskoi-sydbe-ve-meierholda-k-90-letiu-rossiiskogo-gosydarstvennogo-voennog.html

This critique of Meyerhold also continued in the 15th issue, where the word "omeyerholdyvanie" was used with historical plays as a synonym for alteration or wrong interpretation of that old plays in a negative way, though it is not evident for the modern readers of *Krokodil* what was the exact meaning of that world.[121] The image of the theater director had even worse connotation: he was represented as a believer ("Chto za komissiya, sozdatel'"), referring to God (in Russian–"sozdatel,'" literally translated as "creator"), what considered outdated and non-Soviet social standards.[122] Indirectly, the thought might come to the minds of the readers that if the person had a fear of self-criticism, he was conscious of the disadvantages of his work or even dismal. The evolution of his reputation occurred in *Krokodil*: in 1929, representatives of the provincial community told in the poetic form that regardless of the absence of Meyerhold in our town, they still had cultural progress in the theater.[123] By then, the reputation of Meyerhold slightly rehabilitated, though shortly—in 1928-1929, he had tight connections with Nikolai Bukharin and Alexei Rykov, who would be blamed for the Right Opposition and temporarily excluded from Politburo later in 1929.[124] Later on, the journal mocked his constant artistic crisis and also his colleague, Konstantin Stanislavski, the founder of the Moscow Art Theater and the new acting system —the system of Stanislavski, that became widespread all over the world. *Krokodil* criticized it, noting that the theater director "ostanislavil" his actors, which meant in this play of words disgraced his actors with such a system.[125]

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[121] N.K., "Otdel bibliografii," *Krokodil*, no. 15 (1928): 8.

[122] Ar., "Gore Meyerholdu," *Krokodil*, no. 36 (1928): 6.

[123] Vas. Lebedev-Kumach, "Muzikal'nyi narod (iz cicla "Provintsia")," *Krokodil*, no. 1 (1929): 9.

[124] Yuri Yelagin, *Dark Genius (Vsevolod Meyerhold)*, (London: Overseas Publications Interchange Ltd, 1982), 319.

[125] Vas. Lebedev-Kumach, "Stranichka izyashnykh isskusstv," *Krokodil*, no. 7 (1929): 9.

Meyerhold was not the only representative of the Soviet intelligentsia of the 1920s who became victims of harsh critique and mocking. Persecution of Nikolai Golovanov, the Soviet conductor and composer of the Bolshoi Theater in the 1920s and 1930s, also expressed on the pages of *Krokodil.*[126] *Krokodil*'s authors blamed him, referring to unnamed magazines, for "anti-Semit antics" ("antisemitskie vykhodki"), also mentioning that he was oppressed by the prosecutor to stay in the Soviet Union and that other artists of the Bolshoi Theater stood up for him. As in Meyerhold's case, neither the author noted the details or even the plot of the "antics," nor he demonstrated his opinion to the artists who supported Golovanov. However, he was not repressed in the 1930s or 1940s or imprisoned; mostly, he saved his job and stayed an influential composer of that time.

In 1929, the critique of intellectuals continued, especially of those who had a powerful protégé or glory in the eyes of Soviet people, like writer Valentin Kataev, the brother of Yevgeny Petrov. He was blamed for embezzlement by *Krokodil* but the journal's authors did not mention either the details or the claim for punishment, which was typical for *Krokodil* in its attitude towards intelligentsia.[127] The only thing that should be relevant for the readers—to know about this fact and accept it, publically reprimand the accused.

Even the authors of *Krokodil* could become the victims of denunciations: the constant publicist under the pseudonym "Savely Oktyabrev" dedicated the first-page column to the review that somebody blamed him for belonging to the "Right Opposition."[128] Oktyabrev started his explanation with the reason why he needed to explain from the words "Taking

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[126] "Obshimi usiliyami," *Krokodil*, no. 16 (1928): 8.

[127] "Brat'iam-pisatel'iam (novye epigrammy A.Bezymenskogo)," *Krokodil*, no. 7 (1929): 5.

[128] His real name is Boris Samsonov. For details see the website of Fundamental Electronic Library: http://feb-web.ru/feb/masanov/map/03/map04442.htm .

into account the fact that this kind of malicious slander[129] could damage my position."[130] Oktyabev revealed his political position as completely coherent with the official political discourse of the party, regarding the building of socialism, heavy industry, attitude to kulaks, and the campaign of self-criticism, though he identified himself as "nonpartisan." He justified himself not only in the eyes of readers, but also of the party members, and editors, maybe officials as well. It means that nobody could feel safe and secure from such allegations, and that might not have been rumors but evidentially the specific form of espionage to discredit the suspicious element. Perhaps, rumors could not diminish someone's career opportunities at that time without any proof of the "counterrevolutionary" deeds or ideas.

"Red Laughter," as Serguei Oushakine called the satirist culture in the Soviet state, was an important factor in uniting people, while simultaneously being used to exclude the specific categories of people, deemed as "pests" or the "enemies of the people." Visual narratives made it clear—the representatives of the bourgeoisie, priests from various religious denominations, kulaks and NEPmen, leaders of alien countries, and ridiculous and greedy bureaucrats were among the key "enemies." Textual narratives touched predominantly local officials and management of the factories: every issue of the journal in 1928 contained stories mocking them. Sometimes, satirisation of higher political leaders occurred, depending on the flows of political struggle on the way of Stalin's rise of power and authority.

[129] Also "navet" from Russian language can be translated as "denunciation", as we see in this context: somebody, probably, from his colleagues or foes, did not blame him directly, but evidentially denounced him, indirectly ("It has come to my attention…"), and with the intention to lay him off or destroy the reputation, as he explained to the readers.

[130] Savelii Oktyabrev, "Ob'yasnenia Saveliya Oktyabreva (vynuzhdennyie)," *Krokodil*, no. 41 (1928): 2.

Humor could play a key role in the legal out-loud expression of disappointment about the shortages of everyday life possible among Soviet citizens. The materials of *Krokodil* in 1928 and 1929 proved this. Moreover, *Krokodil* created the illusion of a safe space for Soviet people to laugh at their bureaucrats or other "pests" to shift responsibility for the public and political mistakes on them to provide the simple answer of who had to be blamed for it. Meanwhile, *Krokodil* showed that anyone could be in the court of accused, even ardent communists or higher political leaders, especially, with the help of a self-criticism campaign.

Chapter 2. The Visual and Textual Narratives of Denunciations

The prominent Soviet satirical journal *Krokodil* created not only the images and categories of the "enemies of the people" that were the victims of denunciations but also depicted the whole socio-cultural context of Soviet society in the late 1920s–early 1930s. In this chapter, the conditions and circumstances, reasons, and consequences of the Soviet practice of denunciations will be analyzed through the prism of satire.

Mostly, the denunciations were broadly connected to the campaign of self-criticism that elaborated in the same year as the Shakhty Show Trial of 1928. This campaign, according to Stalin's Report at the meeting of the activists of the Moscow organization of the All-Russian Union of WGOs, blamed the new local authorities for their detachment from the masses and the workers for their non-desire or fear of criticizing their authorities.[131] It can be considered as a benchmark of the broad campaign for criticizing "from below," but with the limitations to discuss the shortcomings of the Bolsheviks' party or Soviet state.

As Stalin asserted, "It should, first, raise the vigilance of the working class, sharpen its attention to our shortcomings, facilitate the correction of these shortcomings, and make all kinds of "surprises" in our construction work impossible."[132] Stalin mentioned the "Shakhty Trial Show" as the counterrevolutionary group of specialists working for international bourgeoisie. I can interpret the campaign of self-criticism as the beginning in the light of a direct signal for every party chain and factory to check the suspicious elements in the management, and, in addition, to be more attentive to the workers themselves.

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[131] Joseph Stalin, "Doklad na sobranii active moskovskoy organizatsii VKZHO", 13.04.1928, accessed 5.05.2022, https://stalinism.ru/sobranie-sochineniy/tom-xii/doklad-na-sobranii-aktiva-moskovskoy-organizatsii-vkzho.html .

[132] Ibidem.

Reports and denunciations on representatives of local authorities, especially, in the time of state abrupt revisions became the main topic of *Krokodil* in 1928, supporting the campaign with caricatures and humorous stories aimed to laugh at the corrupted officials and the dismal of the workers to search for the proper "hostile elements." Since both textual and visual narratives of *Krokodil* related mostly to the critique of both low and middle-level officials, inasmuch as workers and average citizens, it might be considered a real embodiment of the campaign of self-criticism in the notion of what Stalin mentioned. The journal did not criticize the higher-ranked authorities or ideological disadvantages, instead focusing primarily on the "pests" of the society I considered in the first chapter. Here I will consider in particular, how this campaign promoted by the authors and editors of the main satirical journal went hand in hand with the propagating denunciations and reports as "the civil duty" of Soviet citizens, and what were the features and motifs of denunciations.

2.1. Denunciation as The "Civil Duty" of The Soviet People

Some people experienced the fear of denunciation and disclosure as the social "pests" ("vrediteli'"), mistrusting their superior colleagues. In issue 2, the main character of a story, a director of Butilkomcombinat[133] literally suspected his colleague that he would denounce him in the connection with extra spending of the director.[134] The plot wrapped up with sarcasm about the guilty director, and his fear illustrated that he was afraid because he was guilty. If to prolong the logical chain, only those people who commit any kind of crime should bear the responsibility and be aware of the possible denunciations on them.[135] The construction of fear as the emotion of the victim of denunciations can be seen. Moreover, according to the text of the noted article, the Criminal Code of 1926 imposed a punishment of up to two years of imprisonment.[136] The director of the noted story had serious reasons to fear. The director mentioned MUUR as the place where considering denunciations. MUUR or MUR is the acronym of the Moscow Criminal Investigations Department which had a long history of functioning since the 19th century.

Denunciation became the central plot for the pages in 1928.[137] Paradoxically, representatives of the socially "hostile classes" could denounce the VKP (b) members on the local level (members of the city board, departments of the state offices, etc.). The original institution that received such documents or the specific class belonging to both the actor and the victim of the denunciation was unclear in the story. The content developed around the

[133] It can be translated from Russian as a factory specialized on the bottle production.

[134] Pavel Cherenkov, "4-7-22," *Krokodil*, no. 2 (1928): 3.

[135] I found out that the author of the story mentioned Article №113 of the Criminal Code of RSFSR.

[136] The Criminal Code of RSFSR1926 with additions. URL: https://docs.cntd.ru/document/901757374 .

[137] S. Kartashov, "Zayavlenie grazhdanina Plyavina (kuda sleduet)," *Krokodil*, no. 2 (1928): 3.

charge for the absence of party leaders' portraits but instead the image of the Mother of God.[138] In the Criminal Code of the USSR of 1926, Article 126 prescribed the punishment of a fine of up to 300 rubles[139] or three months of community service for holding religious images in public buildings.[140] Evidently, not every building in the Soviet state could be considered public, even if all spaces belonged to the state. However, the Criminal Code did not explain whether to regulate the punishment for the objects of religious character inside the private space of the individuals. Therefore, it is hard to say what kind of consequences could evolve through the denunciation.

Even a curse from the victim of denunciations in the words, referred to the Russian prerevolutionary period's phrase "go to the devil!" became the reason to suspect the person in sympathy towards the tsarist regime. From the rhetoric of that time, it might have meant that that person still believed in God and old values, confessed to Christianity, and, consequently, did not support the Marxist evolutionary paradigm. The fall of reputation and social validity for the people who doubted the predominant dogmas, even a single word or phrase, could jeopardize the process of prosecution for those who pronounced.

This case demonstrated that one report could embrace the various groups of defendants who surrounded the actor of denunciation. In the story, the author with pseudonym "Kartashov" published a story with the report containing at least five party members living in one dormitory with the actor. Except for religious belonging, among the accusations were also:

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[138] In Russian original text, it was written with a small letter, according to the government's antireligious campaign in the 1920s.

[139] The amount equaled approximately to the monthly salary of the highly qualified workers at that time.

[140] https://docs.cntd.ru/document/901757374

- The gathering that accompanied by loud songs and talks → the critique of the party nomenclature;
- The inappropriate family name that reflected the belonging to the class enemies → "the otherness" and differentiating interests with the party;
- Not wearing the revolutionary medals and badges of honor → no proof of being proud of the party's belonging and of being a genuine revolutionary;
- Reading of the "wrong" books that conceptually debated, even implicitly, with Marx's works → doubt and disbelief in the correctness of the party's ideological basis, the consequent critique of the communist party;
- Naming children on behalf of the religious saints instead of the approved revolutionary names and laughter at them → resistance to the Soviet culture and the hidden sympathy for religion.[141]

To be noted, it is not evident where was satire on the pages of *Krokodil,* particularly, in this story. It should have been an indirect or direct hint on what to laugh at. Despite the fact of the difference in humor perception between modern abstract Russian people and the Soviet citizens with their cultural background, still the question remains. It is noteworthy that no author signed under the report which was untypical in comparison with textual and visual materials of the previous two issues.

It would be impossible to denounce colleagues, neighbors, or familiars without knowing their shortcomings and dark sides. *Krokodil* recounted to the readers that all new appointments to the job position would definitely lead to curiosity among colleagues about

[141] After this sign "→" I will mention the logic of what the complainant suspected victims of denunciations for or might have suspected, in my opinion.

how to manage or handle a new person in the workspace with benefits.[142] Namely, knowing the weaknesses of a new colleague might have been used in order to push on him or her, or being afraid of the potential threat to their careers from his/her side. In the atmosphere of mistrust toward anyone in Soviet society at the end of the 1920s, such an ambiguity could literally create a situation when the social instincts of employees would be to unite against suspicious and dangerous colleagues on behalf of the protection of their interests and interests of the community. Moreover, they could behave in the most accurate way with colleagues and keep an eye on every word and deed while communicating with them. This phrase demonstrates the tendency to control even the employees higher on the job hierarchy: ""At least we know which button of the right person to press!"—said the citizens, sighing."[143] According to the story, employees of the Highest Repertkom of Ukrainian SSR were trying to find the Achilles' heel in the personality of the newly-appointed Secretary (technically, the head of the department) and successfully found it in his desire to compose scenarios.

Later through the text, one might see that it was incorporated into Soviet corporative culture in the way *Krokodil* reflected upon it. The working process and communication between employees seemed impossible without a better understanding of each person engaged in the work team. Moreover, to be fully engaged in the collective, the person should be "readable" and transparent for the others from the point of "normality": "It is time to get over the abnormality with Comrade Plessky."[144] Abnormality and non-transparency constituted the most stigmatized feature for the Soviet people—the category of the "Other/

[142] Archip Geltzer, "Zakon Prirody," *Krokodil*, no. 8 (1928): 7.

[143] Archip Geltzer, "Zakon Prirody," *Krokodil*, no. 8 (1928): 7.

[144] Ibidem.

Others," which equally signified the marginality and potential threat to the whole society, as it was propagated.

In the Soviet Union, citizens could suspect not only their colleagues or acquaintances but also friends and family members for possible denunciations. Such behavior—to be accurate in words and deeds in order to prevent any kind of denunciations and reports—might have led to ridiculous situations when people deliberately reported themselves to the police. *Krokodil* expressed in the story of B. Levin that the person with the surname Vasilyev stole and spent 276 rubles from the treasure of the local committee of the party on his own necessities, ran to the other city in order to avoid prosecution, met there his friend Boinikov.[145] Vasilyev understood that Boinikov knew about his crime and saw him after their small talk near the policeman, first of all, suspecting him of denouncing. Moreover, Vasilyev decided to report on himself and acknowledged his fault without any kind of denunciation from Boinikov. The explanation of it might not be revealed in the Criminal Code of the USSR, where no additions as mitigation of the penalty for stealing money as a result of professional activity («rastraty») existed. Although self-reporting might have potentially weakened the realization of the penalty.

Some citizens were ready to report to the police people who seemed to them as an "alien element" ("tchuzhdyi element"). This classification applied when the critique of the productivity or operation of the Soviet press or public authorities overwhelmed the allowable level, though such vague criteria depended completely on the people who witnessed the critique. In addition, there had always been an ability to denounce "alien elements," whether the suspicious situation happened in public or private spaces.

[145] B. Levin, "Zasypalis,'" *Krokodil*, no. 13 (1928): 6.

Even in banya, conscious Soviet citizen Klimov suspected the military commissar ("tovarisch voenkom" in the plot), attempting to oblige the others to call the police for his suspicious statements defending the Soviet press from the Klimov's slander.[146] But Klimov soon realized that social status and job had this "alien element," as he called him, and begged his pardon.[147] As the red thread runs through, *Krokodil* got the idea that wrong thoughts and words could lead to the prosecution for sabotage, based on what will be said. For instance, the old Bolshevik Pavlov was threatened by a younger comrade for saying that the factory was named after Karl Liebknecht who was German for so-called "sabotage."[148]

To fulfill the civil duty was a difficult task: it was obligatory to spy on colleagues or management, to collect materials against them for proving their inability to work on the specific, usually, higher rank job position, or to be a "true communist." Especially, if the state revision, as the form of control of how the factory or state institution worked, detected nepotism, bribery, or misappropriation of public funds, vigilant colleagues might have used the materials or surveillance to the court as witnesses of dismal. Potential denouncers or, as in this case, witnesses who were ready to provide evidence and speak out against ex-colleagues or ex-bosses. Though the protagonist of the story "The Duty of a Citizen" wanted to denounce before the revision but decided to keep silent about the malpractice of his boss, being torn apart between two ideas—to denounce and to "fulfill his civil duty" or not to report to save his job.[149] Stepan Matveevich, a potential informant, was afraid of the consequences of both "non-denunciation" that existed in the Criminal Code as well, and, at

[146] Russian traditional public bathhouse, synonym of a sauna.

[147] Vl. Pavlov, "V banje," *Krokodil*, no. 18 (1928): 5.

[148] Yu. Potehin, "Nesoznatel'nii starik," *Krokodil*, no. 19 (1928): 4.

[149] Vl. Pavlov, "The duty of a citizen," *Krokodil*, no. 30 (1928): 3.

the same time, of the revenge from his boss, even though he was already imprisoned for ten years.

What is more significant, the start of the political process of repressions, known as "The Shakhty Trial" signified the shift of responsibility for the failure to fulfill the industrialization needs on engineers and local authorities. Among the failures, were international loans and the ability to export grain and other goods from the USSR. The engineers working on the Shakhty's coal mines were sentenced to death penalty or several years of imprisonment, becoming one of the first victims of the show trials of the 1920s and 1930s. In *Krokodil*, the stupid witness, named just as "golovotyap" ("headbanger")—literally a person who is working incorrectly was mentioned in the context of acknowledging his own failure, same as those prosecuted "vrediteli" ("pests"). He also recognized that they were persecuted for the "real" reasons: breaking vehicles, and poorly building of the workers' houses, in other words, dismal in the industrialization campaign. The only distinguishing feature that divided him from them – they did it for European money, the alienated West in the eyes of Joseph Stalin.[150] *Krokodil* referred to the idea that many "enemies of the people" were to be unmasked as "golovotyapy" (e.g. non-competent specialists) though not mentioning anything about the victims of the show trial or their fate.

The same reference to "The Shakhty trial" appeared in the next issue: "Shakhtinskii vredil'" ("Shakhty's pest") replied to the abroad that he could be kept for one or twenty rubles.[151] An author named Argus mentioned him among not only typical objects of critical attacks like old Russian intelligentsia (Bunin, Kupriyanov) or foreign Soviet foes (such as Mussolini) but also among usual Soviet people (Moscow citizens or cashiers) or even the

[150] "Nepogreshimyi," *Krokodil*, no. 23 (1928): 11.

[151] Argus, "Citati "Na Dne" Gor'kogo v nashi dni," *Krokodil*, no. 24 (1928): 3.

influential persons (Mikhail Koltsov, the chief editor of *Krokodil*). Evidentially, Argus used this cultural reference well-known to the Soviet readers of Maxim Gorki's play "Na Dne" ("The Lower Depths") where the protagonists were marginalized people living in a shantytown without any chance to get above their lives. Regardless of the fact that the author noted different clusters of Soviet society, the reference had to show the same absence of hope for the improvement of the mentioned people and the ridiculous features of the characters (such as Mussolini).

Remarkably, *Krokodil* did not have any explanation of why engineers and workers of Shkahty were considered "pests," or any details of the Shakhty Show Trial. They were constantly mentioned as "pests," but without the description of them in a humorous way. Neither their competence nor their behavior or appearance was discussed, as it would be in the case of bourgeoisie or priests. For instance, the contrast existed between "shvakhtintsy" —people with a ridiculous name rooted in the word "shvakh," which could be translated as "something completely bad, out of business"—and "shakhtinstsy," (originated from the name "Shakhty") who were considered the "enemies of the people."[152] The association with "shakhtinstsy" was built around cheating/betrayal of society. They have been marked as an extremely negative form of workers. Though "shvakhtintsy" became the collective image of non-professionals whose business would certainly fail. The publicist decided to compare them as the benchmark of the worst Soviet employees who were both obstacles in the way of productivity and Soviet industry.

Krokodil urged Soviet citizens to be careful, seemingly repeating Stalin's idea about the enemies that surrounded Soviet people and had to be unmasked. Even in the short phrases

[152] M.Andr., "Shvakhtintsy," *Krokodil*, no. 27 (1928): 2.

like “Ne vsyakoi krasnote mozhno verit’: mukhomor tozhe krasnyi” (“Not all redness is to be believed: the fly agaric is red, too.”) one might see the evidence of such direction of the journal to constantly remind of the danger of the enemies presence inside the society to the readers.[153]

Krokodil mostly supported the decisions of the party, demonstrating the weakness and stupidity of the fearful bureaucrats or directors. The whole eighth issue related to the party purge, though it was 1929. The XVI Conference of VKP (b) in April 1929 resolved that the essential measures to struggle with bureaucracy would be the cleansing of the party. Evidentially, It is explicitly shown in issues 8 and 17. Even the front page of the eighth issue illustrated a crying man. He resembled the employee or director or someone who did not belong to the workers and peasants with his glasses and suit with a tie.[154] According to the plot, the party deprived him of the membership card (“partyinyi bilet”) which technically meant the loss of career opportunities and withdrawal of belonging to civil society in a certain sense. What is more important, this person was cleansed—the big white words “O chistke” (“About the Purge”) highlighted this. After 1929, the campaign of self-criticism became the background for purges and its first step to the real consequences, which were more severe than just a layoff. *Krokodil* prepared the ground for this step, as we can see in the analysis of the sources from 1928.

Figure 9 K. Rotov, “Razgovor s partbiletom,” *Krokodil,* 1929.

153 Ipa., “Razmyshlenia na lone prirody,” *Krokodil*, no. 35 (1928): 6.

154 K.Rotov, “Razgovor s partbiletom,” *Krokodil*, no. 8 (1929): 1.

Later on the second page of the same issue 8, *Krokodil* observed several categories of the people: directors and vice-directors of the factories, a head ("predsedatel'") of the regional party committee, and secretaries of the party cell. They were trying to justify themselves, explaining why the party was wrong to throw them away as a result of the purge.[155] A lot of the issues published in 1929 contained references to certain individuals who were victims of the purges. *Krokodil'*s authors insisted that VKP (b) never made a mistake. On caricatures, clarification of the accused became the object of laughter, automatically considered ridiculous and false. Hence, the wheel of repressions started to spin actively. Previously, in 1928, there was no direct proclamation of the purges as a usual practice of the state imposed on its citizens. However, the presence of the enemies' agency and the hints on developing denunciations were shown in *Krokodil* clearly.

Figure 10 M.Khrapovsky
"Al'bom nechistykh,"
Krokodil, 1929.

Moreover, the journal called readers to send their stories about incompetent party members to the editorial board.[156] It can be interpreted as the appeal to spy on the local heads of the party cells and directors of the factories or governmental organizations, and consequent denunciations of them for public shaming. After that, the deprivation of party

[155] M.Khrapovsky, "Al'bom nechistykh," *Krokodil*, no. 8 (1929): 2.

[156] Ibidem.

membership was the higher punishment, illustrated in *Krokodil*, and, hypothetically, the warning signs from higher-ranked party members, who had the power for not only deprivation but probably other measures.

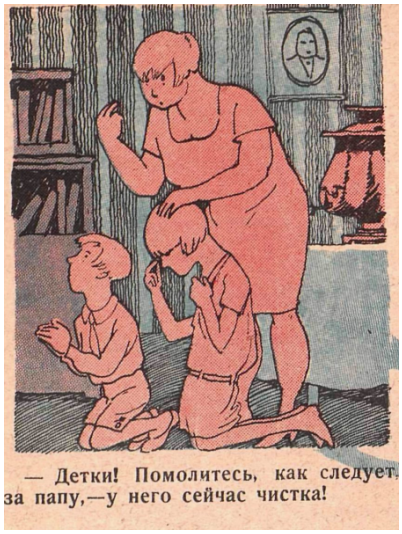

Figure 11 K. Yeliseev, Unnamed, *Krokodil,* 1929.

The purges along with denunciations constituted the pathway towards repressions and its acceptance via *Krokodil* manifested in the dominant mockery of the reactions of those, who could be prosecuted. The mockery of the fear of the victims of the denunciations mirrored the existence of such emotions, as be supposed, in Soviet society because of the real danger to the accused. Authors of *Krokodil* understood these measures as a necessity for society's functioning. But for those who experienced the purge, the time of the revision felt extremely challenging, as shown in this image: "Children! Pray properly for your father, he has a purge now!"[157]

Visual narratives determined the bourgeoisie-looking people who might have obtained the power, and suspected them of inappropriate behavior, unmasking them as potential "enemies", or "pests". This caricature below is noticeable in the way that there is the depiction of drunk and rich people who have fun as if they are American youngsters of the Jazz Age, as Scott Fitzgerald would describe.[158] They have a car, they wear black suits, and a driver. On the car door, there is a sign "GIK" that might mean "Gosudarstvennyi Institut Kinematografii" (State Institute of Cinematography). Perhaps, they belong to the artistic elite. The protagonist holds a bottle of alcohol and sits with a young woman with a

[157] K. Yeliseev, Unnamed. *Krokodil*, no. 8 (1929): 6.

[158] M. Khrapkovsky, "Obyvatel' v okne," *Krokodil*, no. 11 (1929): 12.

fur coat and high heels. In the window of the house, there are witnesses who see these drinking people. The witnesses are "average" Soviet people who watch them and feel anger—that's why the title of the caricature is "Obyvatel' v okne" ("The Average Person in the Window"). This "average" Soviet person, namely, a man is shocked by these people—his forehead becomes wrinkled, and his eyebrows are high. The anti-Soviet behavior of those drinking people in the car should be obvious. He says to his wife that she "should not look in order to avoid the accusation of power discreditation." In this caricature, *Krokodil* represents the immorality and debauchery of the artistic elite who felt unleashed, as if they could do absolutely everything that the average Soviet people could dream about—such as a car with a driver or even a black suit. At the same time, this elite is protected by the authorities—that's why to criticize them means to be accused of power discreditation for the people in the window. In this way, *Krokodil* emphasizes that the artistic elite should be restrained, that they do not behave like Soviet people but instead show the attributes of power and wealth. Such criticism of the elite was connected with the real cleansing started against elite members, like Stanislavskii or Meyerhold.

Figure 12 M. Khrapkovsky, "Obyvatel' v okne," *Krokodil,* 1929.

2.2. Performing Ambitions or Revenge in the Form of Denunciations

Russian words "podsidet'" or "kopat' pod" mirrored the corporative practice among employees of the late 1920s and early 1930s to use the weakness of colleagues against them. Denouncers could even falsify the report about something that would enable dismissal of them and replace them with those who reported. The fear of such reports that could literally turn into denunciations was strong enough among employees of the governmental organizations and institutions, and factory management. *Krokodil* made clear that such emotions as fear and anxiety could literally be a trickster that changes its skin like a chameleon when the fear of reports or denunciations could transform into the desire to report or denounce the others. This fear could be shared only with a family or people whom the potentially accused could trust. The caricature of issue 17 demonstrated this: in the conversation with a woman, her husband expressed the unwillingness to take a vacation while the other colleague will "dig under" him ("podsidet'") to take his job.[159]

Law and order were on the side of the higher-ranked bureaucrats, police officers, and other representatives of the Soviet authorities rather than the usual workers and middle-class employees. Their privileges to obtain the best quantity and quality of goods were well-preserved til the moment when those in power lost their social status after being denounced. As *Krokodil* showed, the privileged people actively denounced the other people, lower in the social hierarchy, to protect their position and the right to be "elites", who doubted it or made notice of their inappropriate behavior. The caricature "Sluchai s seledkoi" ("The Incident with a Salmon") illustrated such occasions: the wife of a prosecutor grabbed more salmon in the cooperative shop and later reported on the salesman who tried to prohibit her from doing

[159] Vl. Pavlov, "Ni otdyha, ni sroka," *Krokodil*, no. 17 (1928): 2.

so. Her husband literally threatened the salesman to be imprisoned for any kind of crime he thought would be enough to punish the salesman for not recognizing the privilege of the prosecutor's family to have access to better goods. The prosecutor had enough power to impose a sentence for the hardest crime—for the anti-Soviet coup.[160] In the Criminal Code, to get such a conviction meant to be claimed as "the enemy of the workers" with deprivation of citizenship and deportation from the USSR, imprisonment on the borderlands, dismissal, public reprimand, and confiscation of the property.[161]

In 1928, the self-criticism campaign promoted by the Central Committee of the Party mostly referred not only to the critique of local bureaucrats but also the reports on them publicly in *Krokodil*. They should have been sentenced to be laid off from their job position; no signs of denunciations on them to VCHK or other inner institutions for the beginning of the prosecution were shown. Typically, such public critique in the humorous form appeared in the journal with the indication of a particular name, surname, job position, brief job description, and location. Across the USSR, one could see the precedence of public judgment and recommendation to dismiss at least. This measure imposed on the victim of the report the sense of shame and was an attempt to prevent the other multiple cases of dismal.

Mostly, authors of *Krokodil* reviewed the corrupted and non-competent officials or directors of the factories in the section "Vily v bok" ("Pitchfork in the ribs"). The head of the Ural Mountains' resort, comrade Shapiro, ordered to limit the electricity usage for the visitors after they fell asleep. The absurdity of the order was in the specific form of

160 I. Amskii, "Sluchai s seledkoi," *Krokodil*, no. 19 (1928): 5.

161 The Criminal Code of RSFSR of 1926 with additions, Section 4, Article 20., accessed 31.07.2022, https://docs.cntd.ru/document/901757374 .

"punishment"—the perpetrator Shapiro would have turned the electricity off for the whole week for the first time, for the consequent times—for the month or forever. The author of this publication offered to replace comrade Shapiro for his incompetence.[162] This evidence as the form of public critique could be not only an evaluation of the managing ability but also the performance of the campaign of self-criticism, as *Krokodil* did "from below" towards Shapiro, as to represent itself as a "horn of truth" and a means of struggle for workers' interests.

Noticeably, the authors and editors of *Krokodil* searched specifically for the plots of self-criticism cases. The vast majority of the issues were full of notes, claiming to address the journal to laugh publically at their colleagues, but mostly, at their heads or local officials. For instance, such an appeal appeared on page 2 in issue 36, and it was not an exception. The readers who were workers and employees, replied massively and sent to the journal the critique of ridiculous behavior and incompetence of their leaders.

Such a strategy facilitated the idea of the "all-seeing eye", akin to George Orwell's later reference "Big Brother is watching you", but in a positive way. To invoke laughter among readers meant the provoke the outburst of emotions, nullifying the fear of the average people to be ridiculed. In addition, this created a common mental space where "the truth" with the critique of the officials and heads protected the workers from being alone in unfair situations. The story "V beregakh" ("In the Shores") demonstrated this vision of *Krokodil* and *Pravda* as the final "court" of judgment with the critique of the factory management.[163] The protagonist, a director of a factory, being criticized harshly at the party workers' meeting, talked with an activist worker about the inefficiency of reporting on him

[162] "Zamena neobkhodima," *Krokodil*, no. 23 (1928): 9.

[163] Vl. Pavlov, "V beregakh," *Krokodil*, no. 35 (1928): 6.

and other management in local journals and later in *Krokodil* and *Pravda.*[164] He also mentioned the occurrence of the "worker bureaucratism."

Figure 13 Eliseeva, "V panike," *Krokodil,* 1928.

Hypothetically, the campaign of self-criticism in public at the local party meeting could lead at least to the layoffs and later to the report on those workers or members of the party who did not criticize enough or did this irregularly. Mostly, people misunderstood the balance between criticizing enough and, in case of their own mistakes, becoming the victims of laughter. That was the reason why bureaucrats or directors, as well as high-ranked employees and workers, had a fear of that and expected severe consequences, as depicted in the caricature made by Eliseeva "V panike" ("In Panic").[165] The person, who was lying under the boat, panicked because of the self-criticism he had to make, like most employees.

Workers, especially, employees in state departments or big factories, were afraid of being reported in the process of colleagues' self-criticism, as the other caricature "V samuyu zharu" ("In the Heat") in issue 26 showed.[166] The fear of being publicly blamed forced a male employee forced him to take a leave from the job, thus not participating in a self-criticism campaign. His colleague asked him why he was on the beach, undressing, if it was too early for the vacation, and the protagonist responded that he wanted to wait til the end of

[164] Vl. Pavlov, "V beregakh," *Krokodil*, no. 35 (1928): 6.

[165] Eliseeva, "V panike," *Krokodil*, no. 24 (1928): 4.

[166] Yu. Ganf, "V samuyu zharu," *Krokodil*, no. 26 (1928): 5.

Figure 14 Yu. Ganf, "V samuyu zharu,"

the campaign. The title of the caricature underlined that the employee took a vacation on the beach, deliberately far from his job place, and also at the time when the self-criticism campaign would peak. The caricature highlighted that employees not only were afraid of hearing critique and criticism about themselves but also of criticizing their colleagues or, what is more important, their bosses.

French historian Francois Xavier Nerard wrote that the aim of the self-criticism campaign was to express publicly the frustration from the processes that took place in the Soviet society in the late 1920s and 1930s but under the control of the party and without any opportunity to judge higher nomenclature.[167] Bolsheviks, even the working class had to criticize themselves in order to avoid mistakes and improve the reality, as proclaimed in the speech of Joseph Stalin at the 27th Party Conference. Moreover, the word expressions that signified the campaign of self-criticism, which included, first of all, critique of the local authorities or colleagues, especially heads or local party cells (gubkom, obkom or gorkom, etc.), mentioned also "ratsionalizirovat'" ("rationalize") that meant to lay off the accused or people who misunderstood of whom and how to criticize. In the caricature "Polozhitel'nyi", the word "ratsionalizirovat" signaled to the collective that he would be "rationalized" next. This ward was used for the protagonist, Fedor Ivanovich Ignatov, who did not criticize anyone in front

[167] François-Xavier Nérard, *"Pyat procentov pravdy": razoblachenie i donositelstvo v stalinskom SSSR* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2011); chapter 4.

of the administration of the enterprise he had been working.[168] Being under the threat of being fired, he criticized the administration and party cell in order to save his job position. This case showed us that the campaign of self-criticism helped people to save jobs or even to be promoted for the fulfillment of Stalin's and Politburo's directives.

Figure 15 D. Melnikova, "Kur'eznyi sluchai," *Krokodil,* 1928.

The tendency for non-criticizing or for mitigating the critique of the administration of the enterprise, factory, or state departments, was exposed in the other phenomenon—"podhalimstvo" ("adulation") in order to preserve the job. Paradoxically, it caused the layoff as well. In the caricature "Kur'eznyi sluchai", three colleagues were talking in the café and discussing the layoff for the adulation of one of their colleagues.[169] Evidently, this was a "lesson" for them as well of how to behave properly with the directors and their bosses in order to avoid the lay-off.

Such rumors in the working collectives, obviously, were not uncommon. Moreover, this facilitated being careful and trying to understand the signals of the higher-ranked party leaders regarding how and whom to criticize, a crucially valuable feature in the times of party dictatorship with limitations of any kind of freedom.

In issues 24, 25, and 26, the non-partisan author, Savelii Oktyabrev, wrote in *Krokodil* instructions for the party meetings and public self-criticism on how to criticize properly. Self-criticism was propagated, though the real risk of being fired existed for the

[168] Nikita Kryshkin, "Polozhitel'nyi," *Krokodil*, no. 25 (1928): 2.

[169] D. Melnikova, "Kur'eznyi sluchai," *Krokodil*, no. 25 (1928): 7.

reason that most employees and bureaucrats reported publicly on their direct administration at the party meetings. The illustration "Geroi, kakikh malo" ("The Unique Hero") demonstrated exactly the same discourse—the employee with his wife being proud of fulfilling his civil duty in Soviet terms, criticizing "properly" five times at the party meetings, and even not being fired.[170]

Figure 16 Yu. Ganf, "Geroi, kakikh malo," *Krokodil,* 1928.

As the campaign of self-criticism embraced the critique of colleagues and administration and was obligatory for everyone, the right understanding and balanced measure could even facilitate the promotion or at least encouragement from the administration, as shown in the image "Staratel'naya samokritika" ("Diligent Self-Criticism").[171] That proved again the idea that *Krokodil* repeated the party's vision that it was essential to be on the same line and attitudes as the program and course of the party established.

Figure 17 Yu. Ganf, "Staratel'naya samokritika," *Krokodil,* 1928.

The ability to report and denounce predetermined the Soviet existence for some people, at least, represented as a norm in *Krokodil*. To spy on colleagues or responsible superior comrades, being suspicious constantly, and notice every detail of routine that distinguishes from the conventional one, was the constructed

[170] Yu.Ganf, "Geroi, kakikh malo," *Krokodil*, no. 26 (1928): 3.

[171] Yu.Ganf, "Staratel'naya samokritika," *Krokodil*, no. 31 (1928): 9.

new reality. Even shopping in the cooperative market, namely, groceries that were delicious at that time, such as biscuits and ham, was enough to suspect the misappropriation of public or corporate funds.[172] The questions for the researchers of the journal popped up of what was the object to laugh at—the whole situation or the blame for being an embezzler under the mask of "true communist." Apart from it, the comrade from whose face the speech was composed, intended to trace the conversations of the suspected person. Nikita Kryshkin did not write about the possible topics of it but one might guess that the topics might have contained the dangers for the Soviet power, according to the Criminal Code, elements, even connected to the counterrevolutionary sabotage. This episode shows the readiness of several citizens to denounce and spy on their colleagues absolutely freely, which could be combined and perfectly fit with the campaign of self-criticism.

Revenge, as well as ambitions to replace someone from the job position, was among the prominent reasons to denounce or report on the party meetings on the person. Employees could be victims of the public report and consequent ostracism for preventing nepotism from the side of colleagues or administrators. Personal revenge could take place as well, with the involvement of romantic drama and local police. In issue 45, the protagonist was a specialist in a specific field: he blamed people on belonging to the Right or Left Opposition for payments from his "clients" who would like to denounce and destroy the career and reputation of the suspected people.[173] His "client" was the old lady who would like to spoil the life of her son-in-law because of his cheating and fleeing with the other woman, she asked the protagonist to "prishit' uklon" which meant to start the criminal case consciously, and the innocent person that would have been connected with the Right or Left

[172] Nikita Kryshkin, "Zapiski samokritika," *Krokodil*, no. 28 (1928): 2.

[173] Gramen, "Specialist (partfantasia)," *Krokodil*, no. 45 (1928): 2.

Opposition. What is more interesting, *Krokodil* used this kind of thieves' slang that would be predominant later on in the Gulag's discourse.[174] The journal demonstrated the absurdist story – non-partisan people could be in a safer position that they could not be blamed for their belonging to the Right or Left Opposition, and that is why they could not be denounced. At that time and later on, not being a member of VKP (b) was possible and not punished that much: even one of the main publicists of *Krokodil*, Boris Samsonov (under the pseudonym Savelii Oktyabrev) pointed out that he is a non-partisan. The answer to the question of what were the reasons for that is still unclear.

In Chapter 2, I analyzed three predominant reasons why Soviet people denounced. First of all, they might have understood it as a "civil duty," from their own persuasion to purify Soviet society, truly believing in communist dogmas, and being under the strong influence of Stalin's evolving Cult of Personality. Such people could be an object to criticize in the humorous form only for their untrustworthiness, for not being "true communists," or for misunderstanding the signals that power moved down to the average citizens. *Krokodil* operated as a means to propagate the patterns of "good" and "bad" employers and employees, administration and workers, far beyond only categories of the "class struggle." In addition, Stalin's indirect signals of the forthcoming political course since 1928 mirrored in the journal, especially in the campaign of self-criticism that adjusted citizens to report publicly in the party meetings or denounce special institutions like NKVD or other party organizations.

Secondly, the analysis of *Krokodil* proved that the corporative culture nurtured espionage on colleagues and administration, as well as on the local authorities, in order to

[174] Another meaning of the phrase "prishit'" means "to kill". See I.B. Ratushinskaya, "Kratkii slovar sovetskogo zhargona", *Sakharov Center website,* https://bit.ly/3RHuZm2.

get improvement of the individual everyday life and existence. Regardless of career ambitions or desire to get better conditions of living in a housing estate, Soviet inhabitants were to laugh at their greedy compatriots. Namely, the campaign of self-criticism became the litmus paper to see how many people found the balance between searching for an option to denounce and not being denounced themselves.

Thirdly, the idea of revenge occurred as one of the central narratives in the context of denunciations. Revenge mostly had tight bounds with ambitions, namely, preventing someone from bribing, using personal social connections in the form of nepotism, misappropriating public or enterprise funds. In *Krokodil*, the absurdity of Soviet rules under which the society functioned, was distorting the boundaries between the victims and actors of denunciations. Both innocent person and offender could denounce each other from the point of revenge: the real offender—in order to prevent his own prosecution, the innocent employee or citizen—for fulfilling the sense of social justice and personal discrimination.

For all three categories, the objects of laughter were both actors and victims of denunciations and reports. The publicists and caricaturists of *Krokodil* sentenced them the punishment like the layoff in the worst-case scenario or the sense of shame from the laughter of the community on them.

There was no mention of the plot of show trials or the direct consequences for the victims and actors of denunciations that appeared in *Krokodil* in 1928 and in 1929. Although after analysis of the humorous discourse, I concluded that repelling from the mockery the particular "pests" or "class enemies" that were not intersected mostly, the journal highlighted the ideal pattern of the Soviet citizen—careful, ardent "true communist," without any suspicious features or behavior of a corrupted person, definitely, participating in

the life of the community even via criticizing the comrades on party meetings. Even they should have been passing the control of the vigilant compatriots and social circles in order to unmask the potential “enemies of the people.”

Conclusion

Based on the materials of *Krokodil*, one might see the five key categories of the "enemies of the people"—often described as "pests" or "parasites" or "alien elements"—emerge. The journal's humorous discourse reflected the socio-political and cultural transformation of the early Stalinist Soviet Union, including broad critiques of local authorities from the political campaign of self-criticism. The textual and visual narratives in *Krokodil* from 1928-1929 demonstrated that the journal highlighted the "pest of the society" or "alien elements" both directly and indirectly.

There is no novelty in the idea that kulaks, former tsarist army officers, priests, aristocrats, and NEPmen were enemies of the Soviet authorities. Indeed, readers could easily find their description in issues of *Krokodil.* In 1928, however, *Krokodil* also included workers, the local authorities, and higher-ranking party officials like Trotsky and Bukharin, later prosecuted under Stalin's regime of terror. The expansion of who was designated as an enemy of the state was connected broadly with the start of the self-criticism campaign and the defeat of the Right Opposition as Stalin and his most loyal supporters in VKP (b) seized power. Moreover, the journal emphasized new "enemies" of the state around the same time as the "Shakhty Trial," the first show trial that foreshadowed the mass prosecutions that followed.

In 1929, the journal noted the addition of new "alien elements" which closely resembled the foreign policy of the USSR. Criticism of the "international bourgeoisie" highlighted by images of the West, encouraged readers to search for "counterrevolutionary elements inside Soviet society, which was especially useful in the party's goal to finally terminate the New Economic Policy.

After the Shakhty Show Trial of 1928, the Soviet people could ideally unmask the potential enemies without necessarily knowing about the dangers of "alien elements." The spectrum of the victims of denunciations involved their colleagues, party members, neighbors, and relatives. It sharpened the vigilance of citizens, who took at that moment the responsibility of interpreting the signals of the party leaders properly and of any consequences associated with misinterpreting them. Therefore, those who misunderstood the general party line, regardless of their status and credibility, were automatically labeled as potential "enemies" and experienced the same consequences as those who bribed or poorly performed their job duties, according to *Krokodil*.

The authors of *Krokodil* did not use the term "enemies of the people" directly, only terms like "pests" or "alien elements" or "parasites", although they had similarities. The rejection of Lenin's interpretation of the inner and outer elements in the power discourse can be explained by the gradual shift away from Lenin's ideological influence before the formation of Stalinism. These two years became the pivotal milestone when the denunciations continued to be an essential part of Soviet everyday life and searching for the "enemies of the people" was not new, though not that radical yet for claiming the specific severe punishment of them, labeling them "enemies." However, this period reflected the demand to denounce shaped by Stalinist discourse. The legal category "enemy of the people" appeared in the Constitution of the USSR of 1936 and prior to this was the "enemy of the proletarians" from the Criminal Code of RSFSR of 1926. *Krokodil* did not show the punishment of those "enemies" directly, but rather intentions to denounce them or fear and anxiety of the accused, and suspicions of the other citizens. At the same time, the journal reflected this re-enforcement of the new early Stalinist practices for imposing citizens of

being vigilant: the "alien elements" could be everywhere, and the boundaries of social class broadened with the blurry features of who might be interpreted in this way.

Krokodil became an extremely powerful channel for the propaganda of the "right" party line because it reflected the reality of everyday life and hardship of millions of ordinary Soviet citizens, and in an easy, simplified way, readable for everyone. The journal pretended to be the "horn of truth," actively engaging its readers for public laughter, resentment, or approval, shaping public sentiments in compliance with the political line of VKP (b). The readers constantly sent their stories to the journal from across the Soviet Union and the journal supported such communication, creating the illusion of a safe space for sharing the views "from below" with the mission to help solve the problems of ordinary people by publishing their stories.

In this light, *Krokodil* could easily proclaim the crusade against the "alien elements" or anyone who could be considered as such by Stalin and Politburo. Between 1928 and 1929, the journal highlighted the signs of appropriate and inappropriate behavior, lifestyle, ways of thinking, and class belonging. "Class enemies" could be seen on the individual level for people to be punished by public mockery, cleansing from the party and thus from any career opportunities and chances for a decent life. Others who did not fit the established standards were mocked by the journal and could experience the fear of exclusion, as most victims of denunciations expressed. Emotions like fear and anxiety, as well as an absolute serenity, according to the journal, expressed an inability to be incorporated into society and were featured as the hallmarks of suspicious activity or behavior.

On the one hand, *Krokodil* established an opportunity to denounce alien elements as a way to perform their civil duty and purify Soviet society. On the other hand, laughter and

public resentment, with the consequence of more severe punishment, led to the idea that constant surveillance over the Soviet population was needed. Nobody could hide from the authorities and the public judgment and evaluation, regardless of class belonging, previous activity in the party cells, or work experience.

The stories and caricatures revealed only the intentions or desire of the Soviet people to denounce and did not serve as a mechanism to officially report suspicious activity to the state. *Krokodil* served two fundamental purposes: to perform the civil duty in an attempt to cleanse the society from its "alien elements," and build socialism faster; second, to help diminish competition in the job market or inside the party. Soviet citizens could send their stories for publishing to criticize their colleagues or bosses and/or use *Krokodil* as a manual to find the features of the "enemies of the people" in order to revenge the competitors or personal enemies by denouncing them.

In this thesis, I have considered not only the act of denunciation itself, but also the circumstances around denunciation. These circumstances include how and when the idea of denunciation appeared and evolved in the plot of the story, mirroring the context of Soviet society; the discourse on how the protagonists intended to denounce: the behavior of the denouncers and the victims; and finally, the result or consequences for both actors and victims. Although the words "denunciation," "denunciators," "to denounce" in all grammar forms were almost never used, it was explicit for the readers who were actors and victims of denunciations. Surprisingly, readers were allowed to laugh at both sides: the authors of *Krokodil* could mock the greedy and ambitious citizens who intended to denounce to profit personally, as well as their victims with their fear and inability to justify their behavior. The

acts of denunciation, the party and Stalin, however, were never been objects of their laughter.

The authors of *Krokodil* encouraged the punishment of denunciators and their victims to a bigger extent by unmasking them and their malperformance as employees and Soviet citizens. The layoff and public resentment, exclusion from the party were the most common consequences for the victims of denunciations and official reports, however, legal prosecution and imprisonment were also a real threat, as the journal demonstrated. *Krokodil*, therefore, provided the broader context of how citizens turned into pariahs of Soviet society, alienating them from their everyday lives and social status, and threatening their career prospects. Laughter in this sense became the decisive instrument of consolidating people with the party's official line and for reprimanding enemies in the form of propaganda.

The argument that humorous discourse functions to unite and, simultaneously, disintegrate people in the USSR by scholars like Natalia Skradol or Christie Davies applies to the early Stalinist period if viewed under the prism of *Krokodil*. In general, laughter provided new insights into the repressive mechanism of early Stalinism.

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