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## **Making Peace with War: Adaptation and the Soviet Political Economy in the Blockade of Leningrad**

### **Adaptation and the Soviet Political Economy**

While one of the main criticisms of the Soviet economy was that it was inherently inefficient, another was that rigid adherence to the Plan structure and lack of accountability constrained innovation and the capacity to adapt to shifting economic circumstances within and outside the country. Policy shifts were the result of Kremlin politics to address those inefficiencies for political ends: e. g. Stalin's changes in economic goals between the first and second Five-Year Plans, Aleksei Kosygin's attempt to introduce some decision-making flexibility (Liberman reforms), and Mikhail Gorbachev's *perestroika*. The story after NEP was that innovations were grounded in political struggles, or were marginal changes that did not address contradictions within the Soviet political economy<sup>1</sup>. Maintaining the visible relevance of Bolshevism — correctness of the Communist Party and its leadership, centrality of "Soviet" identity, absence of private ownership of the means of production, planned exchange — was core to Soviet political DNA.

What of survival in war? What were roots, enablers, and constraints on adaptation in practices and logics of Soviet economic institutions? If there was a moment when regime elites and average cadres should have been open to some degree of "opening" Soviet institutions and turning to pragmatic policies and practices, the Blockade of Leningrad was just

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such the event. If the regime's ultimate goal was holding on to power, the extreme nature of the Blockade — from the imminent threat of German storming the city, to the destruction from shells and bombs, to the starvation that gripped the city (and opportunism in illegal food theft and resale that emerged) — should have moved elites and officials to focus on defending that core logic (maintaining power) and being prepared to alter other institutions and practices to support that goal. While Stalin grew impatient with Andrei Zhdanov's incapacity to act forcefully and proactively<sup>2</sup>, civilians began to take matters into their own hands: for example, letters to Zhdanov and others at the top to beg for food and sometimes to warn the elite of corruption or speculation; or active searches for extra food, which could include bartering with soldiers (e. g. tobacco for food), collecting vegetables left in fields near Leningrad, or participating in a black market of stolen food or stealing food themselves in the most desperate circumstances<sup>3</sup>.

In this article we look at adaptation in 1942, when it was clear that the Blockade was not going to end any time soon and the consequences of pre-war institutions, policies, and practices were not quite up to the task of mass survival and mobilization, or had contributed (via sins of omission or commission) to mass death. We focus on policy adaptations related to *supply and distribution of food*. We also focus on the formal policies themselves, leaving the shadow economy and policy deliberations as separate (if intimately related) subjects for another time. Adaptation has many facets, such as causation (what compels, facilitates, and hinders), trajectory, and degree of adaptation. We also focus on *trajectory and degree*: how far did adaptations move from initial policies, and in what manner? For the moment, we infer and imply relations and mechanisms of *causation* nudging policies and practices of authority. This means several issues arise: 1) In what manner and to what degree did preexisting knowledge, habits, and practices of command facilitate and constrain the perceptions and appreciation of risks, and the capacity to imagine and implement responses and adaptations? 2) How did contingencies — from military events, to decisions from Moscow, to city-level relations and decisions and negotiations — affect the form, trajectory, and degree of adaptation?

The elite in Smolny were unprepared for anything like the Blockade. Some of this could be forgiven, as foreseeing the Blockade itself would require the foresight of a deity. Yet in other ways, Zhdanov *et al.* were guilty of sins of omission and commission. We should not be hostage to the belief that Zhdanov was all-powerful. While he might not have learned important lessons from the Winter War<sup>4</sup>, in other ways his hands were tied by institutional characteristics of the command economy. Domestic trade played an enormous role in the movement of capital in the Soviet command economy, generating the lion's share of income to budgets and providing cash for local banks for paying salaries to workers and engineers. Any serious limitations on trade used to defend Leningrad's stocks of resources (including food) would diminish cash flows into the budget and force the state to print more money. One lesson learned from the Winter War was a decree on June 22, 1941, by the Narkomat of Finance, limiting cash withdrawals from savings accounts to 200 rubles per month; further, interest payments on state bonds were stopped<sup>5</sup>. Further reconstruction of the political economy of production and provision, however, required much fore-

sight and confronting practices and interests ingrained by a decade of the Stalinist command economy. Persistence of pre-war practices continued in other institutional spheres. For example, the NKVD continued to seek “traitors” and fifth columns where there might have been few threats — yet food security became equally or more important, given the degree of opportunistic theft and speculative resale of food from the state’s storage depots<sup>6</sup>.

We can add to this that suboptimal policies and policy failures left Leningrad with the worst possible situation on September 8, 1941: too many people and too few resources inside the blockade ring. Calling initial civilian evacuations “bungled” would understate how badly organized the entire endeavor was. The first attempt to evacuate children was ineptly run, leading some civilians to distrust further state attempts. As well, so long as civilians were unaware of the true nature of the German advance and believed in pre-war propaganda — the Red Army would quickly take any fight to enemy soil — they had incentives to remain, in particular not losing jobs and living accommodations in the Soviet Union’s second city. Zhdanov did not request permission from Stalin to make Leningrad a “besieged city” (*gorod na osadnom polozenii*), which would have given the authorities the rights to compel mass civilian evacuation. This left over 2,5 million civilians in the city and its surroundings, to which we can add refugees streaming from western territories. In contrast to too many people, there was too little food in reserve. Zhdanov waited as long as he could legally to implement rations (July 18, 1941), and even then permitted ration levels often little different from Leningraders’ usual pre-war diets. Fuel was also not sufficiently in reserve: energy resources, especially coal, were practically depleted by mid-August, since railroads exclusively transported troops and munitions<sup>7</sup>. Finally, city finances were further strained by the creation of the *narodnoe opolchenie* in July 1941 — Moscow would not make decisions on financing these units until August 14, leaving regional authorities to foot the bill and distract resources and attention from other wartime preparation<sup>8</sup>.

In these circumstances, policies had to be innovative, while not risking Stalin’s suspicion or raising civilian expectations for future reforms, especially devolution of autonomy. Smolny’s challenge was navigating between the Scylla of toeing a Stalinist line, and the Charybdis of meeting real challenges of Blockade and war. We argue that the experience of the first deadly winter forced the elite to take adaptation seriously, in a way that maintained state and Party power and hegemony of Bolshevism, while also taking practical, realistic steps to improve effectiveness of civilian provision. Given enough pressure, elites revealed that they could learn, just as civilians were forced to learn to cope with starvation — and they learned how to maintain *practical control* while ceding some *symbolic control*. A NEP. 2, in which the state controlled the commanding heights but allowed some degree of autonomy, was in the making.

### **Organizational Innovations: Streamlined Economic Control**

Policies for feeding civilians in the first six months of the Blockade had a one-size-fits-all logic. The only real policy of import early on was rationing — even if

introduced a month into the war and enforced in a slipshod fashion. The only real variation in the ration system was four formal, public categories (with workers and engineers important to military production in the highest category), and all Leningraders were placed in one of the four<sup>9</sup>. In the course of the first months of the Blockade, the authorities persisted with the strategy of increasing centralized control over the distribution of food: eventually, food was available only through stores or a decreasing number of canteens and cafeterias, and then only in strict accordance with exchanging the proper value of ration coupons. This strict control, the authorities seemed to think, would allow them to optimize the distribution of food not only to civilians generally but also in varying proportions depending on the military utility of different groups of civilians. Centralized control of food also kept this key resource of social control in the hands of the authorities — in theory.

Organizational change was possible that could maintain the Bolshevik monopoly on power. Smolny had the example in Moscow and some regions of restructuring lines of authority. Not long after the *Wehrmacht* invaded, lines of authority were streamlined. The GKO (*Gosudarstvennyi komitet oborony*, State Defense Committee) in Moscow was the pinnacle of power, and authority was centralized in GorKO (*Gorodskoi komitet oborony*, city committee for defense) in some localities<sup>10</sup>. Leningrad's own Military Council was an initial example of adaptation that maintained (and even improved) centralization of power. On July 24, 1941, the authorities created the Commission on Defensive Work around Leningrad (*Komissiiia po stroitel'stvu ukreplennoi polosy vokrug Leningrada*), which on August 20 became the Defense Council (*Soviet oborony*). Stalin demanded changes in its membership, and on August 30 the Military Council of the Leningrad Front (*Voennyi soviet leningradskogo fronta*) was finalized<sup>11</sup>. Yet centralizing authority over civilian and military affairs did not mean further innovations were inevitable or would be effective. More thorough changes in institutional structures of food provision, for example, was a potentially more radical undertaking that could affect the relative balance of power between various state organizations, and between the state and civilians. Further innovations would require a powerful incentive — such as the wave of mass death that overtook Leningrad. Yet it seemed that was enough; come 1942, Smolny began to rethink organizational structures and practices, perhaps before civilians themselves took desperate innovative action to save their lives.

**Distributing Food.** The Military Council was not entirely docile in the second year of the Blockade. Even if new policies and innovations continued to follow a basic Bolshevik script of centralized, hierarchical control, new feeding policies augmented the ration system or aimed to improve its effectiveness, and there was some degree of delegating responsibility for obtaining and distributing food. One of the most important institutional adaptations came once starvation was well under way: the creation of the Food Commission of the Military Council of the Leningrad Front<sup>12</sup>. On January 11, 1942, Sovnarkom sent a shipment of food to Leningrad for distribution to soldiers at the Leningrad Front and to besieged civilians. Aware of the desperate food situation in the city, Leningrad's Military Council stipulated the creation of the Food Commission as a subgroup responsible for strict oversight of food distribution, from adjusting ration levels to allotting food to specific organizations to

approving one-time packages of additional food to individuals. Formal members of the Food Commission were Aleksei Kuznetsov (Zhdanov's right-hand man and the most active leader), Petr Popkov (chair of the Leningrad Ispolkom, city council), Petr Lazutin (Party secretary for food), and sometimes Iakov Kapustin (Party secretary for industry). Nikolai Solov'ev, chair of the Leningrad oblast' ispolkom, was initially on the Food Commission, but we found little evidence of his active participation in decision-making. Zhdanov was not formally on the Food Commission, but as the most important member *de facto* of the Military Council, important questions were referred to him. Judging from hand-written comments on these requests, Kuznetsov's suggestions also carried weight. (In contrast, Kapustin's and Popkov's recommendations usually did not go far if their judgment differed from Kuznetsov's or Zhdanov's.) Ivan Andreenko implemented Food Commission directives but did not participate in decision-making. The first meeting was on January 15, 1942, and most members met thereafter on an as-needs basis: more often in winter and spring 1942 when lobbying was at its most intense, less often later.

Centralizing decision-making over food in the Food Commission promised to solve two vexing and related organizational issues. The first was that different actors within the state and Party — e. g. Glavrestoran (city organization for restaurants and canteens), Raipishchetorg (district organizations for food distribution), and the like — might work at cross-purposes, and various organizations and enterprises were lobbying Smolny for extra food. With decision-making centralized in the Food Commission, Leningrad's leaders could streamline important decisions on who received what food, such that Andreenko, Lazutin, and others with authority over the distribution of food were all on the same page, while also addressing desperate lobbying from various directions<sup>13</sup>. Further, this also streamlined lobbying: directors of research institutes, enterprises, and libraries, and even deputy heads of regional NKVD or military units, who thought they needed more food, could initiate an appeal to the Food Commission rather than going through more convoluted channels. (Approximately one fourth of appeals were from individuals, and the rest were from organizations, from our rough estimate based on appeals available in archives.) This said, whether the Food Commission significantly improved the effectiveness of food distribution and civilian survival is difficult to ascertain. At the very least, *decisions* about targeted distribution of food were more orderly, even if *implementing* those decisions still faced such institutional challenges as insider opportunism (e. g. theft and speculative resale of food).

While the Food Commission was an important innovation that seemed to improve decision-making efficiency vis-à-vis food, other organizational changes were more problematic, in part because they involved more working parts. Some changes entailed organizational mergers, such that changes were more a matter of lines of command than real procedures for providing civilians with food. An early and important innovation, suggested by ordinary people, was to “attach” civilians to their nearest bread stores. This gave civilians some certainty that there was a place where they had rights to obtain food, and by making the civilian search for food less chaotic and rationalizing it, this also made it possible to get rations without standing in long queues as long as before this reform. Additionally, in May 1942, the city Ispolkom

proposed closing consolidating food stores to streamline provision. Lenkhlebtorg (the state organization for selling bread) was liquidated, and its resources were transferred to Raipishchetorg (the broader food trade organization)<sup>14</sup>. Another, and potentially more significant, organizational adaptation was the creation of “Departments for worker provision” (ORS, *Otdel rabochego snabzheniia*). This was not a new policy, as ORS existed in the 1930s; but in the Blockade, Smolny considered expanding the ORS network, and this involved further decentralization. The first wave of introducing ORS came in late 1941, and the change was introduced to more large enterprises by June 1942. One potential effect of using the ORS system was that workers would not have to search for food throughout the city or spend time preparing it; ORS made it possible for workers to spend more time on the job. This also potentially increased worker dependency on the state for supplying food. This said, the real contribution of ORS to improving food provision was difficult to measure, and supplying workers with food remained incredibly difficult<sup>15</sup>. However, the ORS innovation did point to another direction of organizational adaptation: new structures or policies introduced from above, but allowing some degree of decentralization in actual functioning. Unable to count on a significant increase in the amount of food brought into the city, the authorities turned to rationalizing the use of what they had and what little could come in across frozen Ladoga. One combination of hierarchy with some decentralization was the *statsionar*, a special site where civilians at the highest risk of death were provided with extra food and warmer surroundings, as well as a modicum of medical attention. Often the stay was for ten days, although this could vary with staff decisions at specific sites and was not always consistent<sup>16</sup>. While this innovation helped some survive, it was a relatively conservative innovation. Access was not universal, and food provision was only a slight improvement over usual rations.

As a matter of course, opening a *statsionar* required permission or orders from Party and state officials. Once that permission was given, enterprise managers and workers had some responsibility preparing space for a *statsionar* — and sometimes they had to fulfill other responsibilities as well. A. S. Belov and E. P. Petrov, workers at the Proletarskii factory, wrote about organizing a *statsionar* at their enterprise at the behest of Party and state decrees “to preserve cadres”. Belov and Petrov, self-proclaimed “Old Bolsheviks”, were given the job of organizing and then running the *statsionar* in late January 1942. They received part of a hospital barracks that was in horrible shape — broken glass was everywhere and doors would not shut, for example — but after a week of working only with axes and shovels and sometimes even sleeping there to maximize effort, they had enough rooms in good enough order that a *statsionar* could function, in theory. To function, however, the *statsionar* needed food, and Belov and Petrov quickly learned they were responsible for this task as well. Not only did they have to go through the factory store to obtain the bread; they then had to use sleds to transport it from the relevant food depot to the *statsionar*. On February 1, they proudly published the first *statsionar* menu: an omelet and tea for breakfast; wine, beef broth, and kasha for lunch; and goulash and cocoa for dinner. The portions were meager — the omelet used only seven grams of powdered egg — but a *statsionar* patient received 400 grams of bread daily. Opening

a *statsionar* was not without challenges. The assistant store manager did not know about the *statsionar* project, and so he did not recognize a memorandum from the trade department requesting food for the *statsionar* as valid. Belov and Petrov had to call the factory director, who eventually called the assistant managers and put things right. It then turned out that Belov and Petrov would need hard cash to obtain the wine. Belov and Petrov mentioned that there had been other bureaucratic obstacles, but that the factory director and Party cell chair usually managed to cut through the red tape. From February to May 1942, they claimed, the *statsionar* helped 274 men and 131 women survive<sup>17</sup>.

Not all openings of *statsionary* awaited word from above. Sofiia Glazomitskaia, Party secretary for the Rabochii textile factory, related a narrative in which her Party cell and her workers were both obedience to the authorities' demands but also took initiative, sometimes ahead of the authorities. One such case was a factory *statsionar*. In January 1942, the city Gorkom instructed Rabochii to set up a *statsionar*, but Glazomitskaia claimed that they already had an unofficial *statsionar* up and running: Rabochii workers had organized beds and linens in one unused room, and they contributed ration coupons to obtain food through normal stores to feed those comrades most in danger of dying from starvation. Glazomitskaia pre-empted the obvious question: how did one obtain food that was so scarce and when everyone was starving? She noted that until the *statsionar* was officially approved, Rabochii workers did in fact sacrifice some of their scarce food for the greater good. They also used some of materials normally used for production but at this moment unused — leather destined for belts and other such things — that could be turned into something edible<sup>18</sup>.

The *statsionar* was a temporary measure to address the most drastic cases of starvation as the wave of mass death was crashing over the city. Most sites were operational only between January 1 and May 1, 1942. They were replaced by *stolovye usilennogo pitaniia*, “high-calorie diet canteens” that provided marginally higher rations and were organized in factories and enterprises and several orphanages. Yet this direction of organizational adaptation did not end with this change. Along with centralization and streamlining existing structures, the authorities experimented with greater precision in control and targeting food provision, in a way that would maintain control while optimizing civilian well-being. One innovation that promised to maintain centralized control and to improve effectiveness of feeding civilians was *ratsionnoe pitanie*, which changed procedures for feeding and using ration coupons. *Ratsionnoe pitanie* had the potential for two improvements in feeding civilians. First, before summer 1942, enterprise workers had various ration coupons corresponding to different types of food (bread, meat, sugar, etc.), and workers usually could eat only one time per day at the enterprise cafeteria, at lunch. Ration coupons not used in the cafeteria could be used in stores for the same kind of food. In the new system, ration coupons were specific for type and source of food: cafeteria coupons were good only for a specific cafeteria, and enterprise cafeterias offered three meals per day. This policy was tried experimentally in several enterprises in May 1942; by late June Smolny decreed it be employed across most Leningrad enterprises. Second, *ratsionnoe pitanie*, like ORS, potentially expanded control over workers by tying the

labor force to enterprises for nourishment: now they had to use rations at specified cafeterias, and did not have to search the city for food (and thus had one less excuse for not showing up to work). Given that many workers' families had been or likely would be evacuated by late summer 1942, this freed workers to focus on labor. Further, in principle this policy meant Leningrad workers were eating similar meals at similar times, a standardization of movement and nourishment of bodies. Before, Leningraders might move between stores and cafeterias at various times — unless long lines dictated arriving early in the morning — and this could break any rhythms of labor and everyday life in the besieged city. Now there was a potentially more structured rhythm not only to eating but also to work and to survival — with the usual caveat that *ratsionnoe pitanie* was employed as intended.

Measured and targeted extra food might seem a marginal improvement, but in Blockade conditions this was a welcome improvement. One report to Zhdanov and Kuznetsov from April 1942 reported that, were this new policy to be operation by June 15 as planned, *ratsionnoe pitanie* would add around 17 % more calories for the various ration categories. Workers on category I rations would receive 2127 calories per meal instead of the 1781 calories of normal rations. Service personnel (*sluzhashchie*) would receive 1589 calories instead of 1295<sup>19</sup>. Unsurprisingly, this innovation in feed required organizational changes — in particular, the expansion of Lenglavrestoran. More cafeterias and canteens had to be opened for *rationnoe pitanie* to work, because this new policy would apply to 951 300 people — practically the entire city population! At that moment, Lenglavrestoran had 1438 enterprise canteens and cafeterias with 140 000 seats and the capacity to prepare at best 1 856 000 meals per day — far too few meals, as the plan called for three meals if possible (even if dinner was relatively light). Not all of these were operational, apparently, and to meet the required plan Lenglavrestoran would have to get some of these working again — if possible, 260 more cafeterias would become operational, adding 780 000 meals per day<sup>20</sup>. However, Lenglavrestoran did not have the capacity to expand their network to this extent. There were not enough trained personnel, and so employees would have to be recruited and given crash-courses in preparing the special meals for this policy. One possibility was to recruit housewives who were at the moment unemployed or underemployed<sup>21</sup>.

Youth were also targeted for *ratsionnoe pitanie* in late 1942, given that they had received low rations thus far. In November 1942, the Party Gorkom directed Party leaders at lower-level bodies and enterprise directors to integrate youth up to 16 years old into the *ratsionnoe pitanie* system. Many youth were working in various enterprise in the capacity of apprentices, and their salaries were miserly — around 125 rubles per month. However, local *rationnoe pitaniue* could cost almost twice that. Parents could help sometimes, but orphans and youth with less well-off parents were at a serious disadvantage. Some less well-off youth would use ration coupons to obtain bread but only eat half of it; the other half they would sell at the *rynok* for extra money, perhaps to buy or repair clothes or shoes. Thus, local enterprise directors were requesting permission to give these youths extra wages. Other youths were using “advances” of their rations, i.e. trading in ration coupons for future days to obtain food today, which they might eat hurriedly and without setting aside reserves.



One suggestion to address this issue was to give youth special coupons that would not allow such advances<sup>22</sup>.

**Sources of Food.** These policy shifts sometimes could seem like a game of shifting responsibility for feeding civilians from one part of the bureaucracy (Raipishchetorg and Lenglavrestoran) to another (enterprises). Yet there was an innovative facet to this policy: enterprises gained not only obligations, but also rights and benefits from distributing and even producing their own food<sup>23</sup>. In his April 1943 report about enterprise structure and the provision of food, I. G. Stozhilov noted that one problem in 1942 was that various food trusts (*tresty*) “took such a great burden on themselves and could not concretely get to every factory or even every shopfloor, as was demanded.” When the authorities told enterprise directors to do something, directors generally responded, “give us the chance.” The authorities responded by ordering enterprise directors to organize *podsobnoe khoziaistvo* — literally, “victory gardens” — at their factories<sup>24</sup>.

The authorities streamlined *distribution* of food, whether to improve general efficiency or to better target civilians: *stantionary*, ORS and *stolovye usilennogo pitaniia*, and so on. However, such policies had two shortcomings: they did not always address the *quantity* of food, and they did not address *alternative channels* for distributing food, especially shadow exchange. This does not mean the authorities were ignorant of the need to address food security. In fact, on the eve of war, the Eighteenth Party Congress adopted decisions for rapid development of local provision: popular consumption should increase by 150 percent, commensurate with a rise in wages and in volume of state and cooperative trade (from 126 billion rubles in 1937, to 206 billion rubles in 1942); and state and cooperative retail trade networks should expand by 38 percent to improve trade. Additionally, in March 1939 the Eighteenth Party Congress adopted a special plan to build around Moscow and Leningrad a set of agricultural bases to provide vegetables, meat, and dairy products for those cities. The goal was “to use in full existing potentials to create a suburban zone of flourishing agriculture”<sup>25</sup>. Alas, these directives were nowhere near complete when war began. State consumer trade in Leningrad grew by only 0,4 percent, and old flaws of the trading system persisted: consumer demand and conditions for selling various goods were badly studied (if at all), and local resources were poorly used. In 1943, Leningrad authorities assessed the needs in vegetables and potatoes as 350 kilos per person<sup>26</sup>. In fact, consumption of those products for 1938–1940 was substantially lower, and the city still had to buy food from other regions<sup>27</sup>. This did not auger well for war, even more for a blockade of the city.

Without having these formal, developed food bases, the authorities did the next best thing: create smaller food bases using whatever land was available. This ended up as an expansion of another pre-war policy, *podsobnoe khoziaistvo* (“ancillary farms”, i. e. extended victory gardens). While *podsobnoe khoziaistvo* had been in use by some major enterprises before the war, to provide extra food for those organizations, two civilian academics proposed expanding this practice early into the Blockade. In November 1941, as mass hunger set in, V. A. Bryzgalov, a young professor of vegetable production at the Leningrad Institute of Agriculture, and I. S. Mekhanik, a senior agronomist for Lengorplan, sent Popkov a memorandum

proposing to use available free space in the city and existing *sovkhozy* (39 inside the Blockade ring) to grow vegetables<sup>28</sup>. Bryzgalov and Mekhanik argued that situation on the “food front” was looking bad for summer and autumn 1942, but the authorities could alleviate this by cultivating vegetables anywhere possible, and investing in pig and cattle farming inside the Blockade ring. They suggested the authorities, in that first winter, quickly take account of available land for growing, create a seed fund, prepare greenhouses, print appropriate brochures with necessary instructions for sowing and cultivation, organize labor for transportation and sowing, and then sow in the spring and summer<sup>29</sup>. To realize this project, Bryzgalov and Mekhanik suggested creating an agriculture department (*sel'khozbiuro*)<sup>30</sup>. They called for beginning vegetable production in late autumn 1941, but due to the lack of energy for greenhouses, the project was postponed. (As an aside, in the 1970s and 1980s the Leningrad-based agricultural enterprise Leto was able to provide Leningraders with radish, potatoes, cucumbers, and tomatoes for the entire year — so this was not unfeasible, regardless of Leningrad’s naturally short growing season.)

In 1942, Smolny ordered enterprise directors to organize such gardens on industrial territories<sup>31</sup>, and then gave civilians seeds to plant crops any place they could till, such as the grounds in front of St. Isaac’s cathedral. Ultimately, *podsobnoe khoziaistvo* was not limited to enterprise property: civilians were given seeds and ordered to plant gardens in apartment courtyards or any other place that could be tilled. Civilians took up the task, although some had to cope with theft of carrots and cabbage<sup>32</sup>. The many parks and green space in Leningrad were originally designed for aesthetic reasons, but in 1942 they served a new purpose: that earth could be used to grow various vegetables that would feed the civilians and soldiers in the winter of 1942–1943. Open land not only in parks or courtyards, but also on factory grounds and in suburban space within the Blockade ring were fair game for planting as well. In 1942–1943, one can see the scale of private initiative supported by the authorities. Planting vegetables in many local parks was viewed by Smolny as a temporary and acceptable compromise.

Victory gardens made a contribution to Leningrad’s food security for the second winter of the Blockade. According to an Ispolkom report, 2927 tons of potatoes were harvested inside the Blockade ring for 1942, of which 1712 tons came from Victory gardens and only 1215 from *sovkhozy* inside the siege area. In fact, *podsobnoe khoziaistvo* had overfulfilled the planned target, while local state farms had not fulfilled even 50 percent of what was planned for them. A report from October 27, 1943 revealed further results of *podsobnoe khoziaistvo*. In 1942, 1784 hectares were set aside for planting, and in 1943 this was increased to 3009 hectares<sup>33</sup>, which were administered by 25 *sovkhozy* and 633 smaller *podsobnyie khoziaistva*<sup>34</sup>. In 1942, 2927 tons of potatoes were harvested — 1712 from *podsobnoe khoziaistvo*, versus 1215 from local *sovkhozy*. For 1943, this increased to 13 207 tons (*podsobnoe khoziaistvo*) and 4429 tons (*sovkhozy*)<sup>35</sup>. (If there was a lesson about the relative efficiency — or lack thereof — of the collective farm system, the authorities did not note it.) Between 1942 and 1943, the amount of land set aside for vegetables was reduced, with additional land given over to growing potatoes, because the latter provided more food per unit of land. In the “right” conditions, it seems, Soviet political

economy could recognize dictates of efficiency and respond appropriately<sup>36</sup>. Importantly, while some *podsobnoe khoziaistvo* operated on factory grounds, with workers formally assigned to cultivate a set amount of land and eventually harvest a planned amount of food, other plots were tended by civilians, many of whom accepted Party requests or assignments but put in significant free time with this labor. Considering that amount of time and energy civilians expended at jobs and daily survival (e. g. invested in seeking scarce food and other goods), this was no small effort<sup>37</sup>.

Note these adaptations were grounded in state control and a hierarchy of consumption dictated by the state; by 1942 not only of food but also of bodies in *statsionary* or as dictated by *ratsionnoe pitanie*. Even if *podsobnoe khoziaistvo* involved some decentralization, enterprises were still required to fulfill output plans for the vegetables they sowed. Alas, none of these innovations came in time to reduce the massive death count in the first winter, and *podsobnoe khoziaistvo* was oriented to the next winter. Just as for evacuations and rationing, *ratsionnoe pitanie* and *statsionary* were introduced far too late to have had the possible impact they could have had. Were these more central to food provision earlier in the Blockade — if not at the start, when the gravity of the situation was clear to Smolny — then food would have been distributed relatively more effectively, in a less haphazard fashion. Further, state officials would have had more time to work out initial kinks that inevitably come with rapid implementation of new policies. As Stozhilov noted in a retrospective report in 1943, food provision was centralized but not well organized<sup>38</sup>. Partly this was because shifts in 1942 gave Lenglavrestoran more duties, canteens, and the like to cover, and more personnel meant more room for mistakes or confusion. This also meant greater possibilities for theft — more food, coupled with the centralized system of the command economy, meant more temptations for insider opportunists to steal food for their own consumption or for speculative resale in the *rynok* system.

Yet cabbage would not magically move from ground to storage to civilians. In July 1942, the head of the Leningrad branch of the People's Commissariat for Justice (*Narodnyi Komissariat Iustitsii*, NKlu), I. A. Rykhlov, suggested to Kuznetsov, Kapustin, and Popkov that the city "expropriate" civilians' vegetables. Leningrad NKlu investigators discovered that potatoes, beets, and other produce were turning up at the *rynok* and turning into private profit! Market actors, on interrogation, claimed these vegetables would be thrown out or left to rot were they not sold. Rykhlov suggested prosecuting civilians who harvested vegetables prematurely for their own use, and that Leningraders evacuating the city be forced to turn over their produce. Kapustin made a pragmatic objection that took into account civilians' likely responses. A handwritten note on Rykhlov's text reads: "This proposal is unrealistic, as we cannot force an individual to turn over their garden freely at a fixed price. The gardener will not agree to surrender at an arbitrary price. Comrade Kapustin agrees with the arguments and proposes to leave the question open"<sup>39</sup>. Leaders of the totalitarian state were unable or unwilling to combat civilian proprietors: transaction costs to expropriate civilian produce were high, and evacuees could spread stories of expropriation where they went, evoking memories of the Civil War and collectivization. Some elites were learning lessons, not only about adaptation, but about foreseeing consequences of policies.

### Failed Adaptations — the Case of Fish

In the spring, any scholar of the Blockade who happens to be in St. Petersburg might observe something that should make him or her take notice. For a few weeks, restaurants and pubs offer *koriushka*, a smelt-like fish that inhabits the Neva and, in the spring, makes a run up the river — providing a bounty for pub-crawlers in need of good, cheap food. This also happened to be something Smolny and Leningraders needed in the Blockade — and this is what makes our hungry scholar of the Blockade take notice. Where was that fish, or any Neva fish for that matter, in that first hungry winter and thereafter? That same scholar would notice water all around — the Neva, the Gulf of Finland, and Lake Ladoga, for starters. Did the war drive away the fish, or did Leningraders and their political bosses somehow forget about all that aquatic life around them?

The answer is that there were fish in the Neva and surrounding waters, and the regime and civilians had not forgotten about them. Individual fishing between 8 p. m. and 5 a. m. was classified as “theft”. Given that fish from Leningrad’s rivers and canals might feed soldiers and civilians, this restriction followed a particular logic, even if it seems a bit draconian at first glance<sup>40</sup>. Yet keeping poachers for taking fish did not mean the regime had a surefire way to get it, and getting that fish was no easy task. Amateur civilian fishermen just would not be able to provide skilled manpower to complete the job. Harvesting a sufficient quantity of fish required mobilizing people and equipment that happened to be in the Baltic Fleet and Red Army. Early in the war, the military had commandeered most of the needed equipment for fishing and water transportation, and most of the civilians with sufficient skills to catch a non-trivial amount of fish were serving in the army and navy. So, in October 1941, the Military Council prepared an edict to facilitate fishing. They gave Lenryba and several other organizations the right to fish in the Neva, Lakhta-Lisy Nos, the coast near Oranienbaum, around Kronshtadt and Seiskar island, and the southeastern part of Ladoga. Lenispolkom was required to provide fuel and other necessities for the tasks at hand. The naval port commander and the quartermaster of the Leningrad Front were required to provide assistance for catching that amount of fish that would go to feeding military units. The navy was supposed to give Lenryba permission to sail through these waters for fishing purposes. The Leningrad *oblast’ ispolkom* was instructed to release all fishermen in the Pargolovo, Oranienbaum, and Vsevolozhsk districts from any work duties not related to fishing and to bring back any fishermen who had been evacuated out of the area. The Red Army (specifically, the Eighth army) was to return fishing boats to Lenryba and to help transport them to those areas for fishing listed above. Lenryba would receive necessary aid from various other state organizations and trusts, including Lenglavrestoran, Voentorg, and the October and Leningrad railways. Leningrad’s Trade Department would control production of food from fish, mostly through the Pishchevik factory. The Military Council set a target of 25–30 tons of fish for October and November of 1941 alone, and a goal of 2261 tons for the second quarter of 1942 was more ambitious still<sup>41</sup>.

Just as for pre-war plans to supply Leningrad with food, these decrees ran into a different reality. Party instructors from the shipbuilding department of the Gorkom,

Sobolev and Grasman, discussed shortcomings of fish policies in a letter to Lazutin at the end of November 1941:

**Some thoughts on food supplies for the population of Leningrad**

Despite the fact that Leningrad lies near a vast water basin, absolutely nothing has been done organizing large-scale fishing in the current severe situation of food provision for the population. At the same time, central newspapers (*Izvestia*, Nov. 23., 1941) report about widespread ice fishing on the Amur river.

We propose arranging large-scale fishing on the Neva, Lake Ladoga, the Gulf of Finland, and some other lakes in the Karelian Isthmus by providing special nets, diving equipment, explosives, winches, lifting devices, and if needed even a steam fleet. Those workers who are unemployed at factories should be involved in this massive undertaking for catching fish. Naval vessels returning from military assignments can also be used as a last resort for catching fish. They should be equipped with special devices. At a minimum, the aforementioned measures can provide us with 100-150 tons of fish per day.

For a population of 2 million, this would mean an additional ration of 50-60 grams of fish per capita that, in turn, would greatly improve the current difficult situation with feeding people caused by the untimely blockade of Leningrad...<sup>42</sup>

There is no any evidence that Lazutin, or the Gorkom, seriously considered these options. The only way to implement the aforementioned suggestions was after detailed discussions with high-ranking naval officers or at the level of the Military Council. However, top brass of the Baltic Fleet were preoccupied with their main task of fighting and surviving in extremely unfavorable conditions of besieged Leningrad. Given the constant threat of German air raids, ships deployed in the Neva had to be covered or disguised and otherwise not attract German attention; all naval maneuvers took place only at night. Further, marines were well fed thanks to substantial supplies at Kronshtadt, and they had to share some food with the city and the Red Army in December 1941 — hence, they had less of an incentive or sense of urgency to comply with such time-demanding additional tasks. Alas, what worked well in the rear, did not work at all in Leningrad.

Despite this early planning, by June 1942 only 566 tons of fish had been caught for that second quarter of 1942 — less than 25 percent of the amount originally hoped for<sup>43</sup>. One report to Lazutin from late June 1942, “On poaching in the Gulf of Finland”, noted difficulties between civilian and military authorities, especially regarding fishing in the Primorskii district<sup>44</sup>. District military commanders were not granting civilian authorities permission to let their fisherman go out into the waters. Naval authorities guarding the coastline were also doing little about poaching, which was also interfering with civilian fishing. Some of these poachers might even have been military personnel or civilians working with the military<sup>45</sup>. Reports on the military’s less than helpful attitude to fishing also noted that military commanders were less than helpful with collecting firewood for the coming winter. The commander and commissar of the vessel *Stoikii* commandeered firewood from a local factory<sup>46</sup>, and Glavlesosbyt complained to the Military Council that army units were taking wood without official permission. Lengransitsplav similarly complained that soldiers were

taking wood allotted for constructing defensive fortifications without formal permission, which constituted theft<sup>47</sup>. Military policies and politics, it turned out, erected an unfortunate barrier to harvesting this particular bounty. Even though the military was under civilian control, military authorities in this case felt confident enough to call their own shots, in the end depriving Leningraders (and many fellow soldiers) of fish.

Catching fish was not too much a new policy, given that the state collected fish earlier, and using fish to feed the population should not have been a radically new idea. However, here we see a counter-case to our earlier discussions: the attempt to use a readily available source of food was stymied by organizational interests, not just institutional contradictions. This was a potentially problematic civilian-military divide, the likes of which has not received sufficient attention for the Blockade or the entire Soviet war effort. And the civilian-military divide was not simply at the level of elites; it could have been at work at lower levels, such as military units taking what they could (even if marginal) and daring civilian authorities to do anything about it. One wonders what more wrinkles and contradictions in the political economy of wartime survival were embedded in problematic civilian-military relations and military capacities to enforce their will.

### Conclusion

This has been a small part of one half of the political economy of wartime survival in the Blockade Leningrad. Much remains to tell: state-civilian interactions (through letters, resistance of bodies, and the like); politics of production under duress and starvation; the real degree of state capacity, given corruption, incompetence, and uncertainty in a rapidly changing military situation; and other aspects of the institutional order. The other half is civilian responses to duress and effects of their innovations on institutional capacity and possible policies. We have hinted at some of these, although a more developed study of shadow exchange inside the state and via the *rynok* system is underway. In sum, the story of persistence versus adaptation, and contingency versus capacity, remains to be told. This has been only an initial step in that broader project.

Our goal here has been to examine some policy innovations — their roots, scale, and trajectories — by the time it was clear that the Blockade was not a quick aberration and that civilian death and suffering had to be addressed before either civilians died off in even greater numbers, or took matters into their own hands. Yet innovations had limits, especially Stalin's personal dictatorship, but also a political culture of Bolshevism in which power and control were perhaps the most important facets. Innovation might entail either devolution of some authority and action, or lead to outcomes that could create yet more cracks in Soviet power. The trick was walking the fine line between devolution of decision-making that would allow lower-level cadres with local knowledge to take action, while not losing too much of a grip on power. Many innovations addressed this by building on previous templates. Wartime *podsobnoe khoziaistvo* was an expansion on the same pre-war policies, albeit on a greater scale and with greater civilian participation — which, as we saw, mean acknowledging *de facto* civilian “ownership” (of some kind) in the fruits of that

labor. ORS built upon existing institutions, as did *ratsionnoe pitanie*. These basic innovations did not challenge the Bolshevik hierarchy of authority. The case of fish, however, reveals a problematic new hindrance to innovation: not from Bolshevik mentalities or convoluted economic institutions, but from possible competition with military interests and capacity.

The second half of 1941 was a story of shock, panic, and desperation. By 1942, the war and Blockade were a new normal, and the regime responded accordingly: devising responses that were more in line with that new normality, that did not overtly challenging existing institutional arrangements and power logics, and that could defend state power to control its citizens. However, other challenges persisted (which we address in forthcoming work): a growing economy of shadow exchange (some of which involved theft and speculation), tensions in control and autonomy of Blockade bodies, and a tension between formal discourse (especially propaganda) and civilian discourse (from letters to the authorities, to shadow talk) revealing potential contradictions and correlations between the political economy of control and a nascent moral economy of dignity and provision. *Ratsionnoe pitanie*, *podsobnoe kkhoziaistvo*, *statsionry*, and the like were the easy parts of innovation, and they revealed that the regime could adapt — when power was not so much at stake. What happened beyond that is another story to be told.

<sup>1</sup> An example of the first would be Nikita Khrushchev's *sovmarkhoz* reforms, intended to undercut the central economic bureaucracy. An example of the second would be the constant attempts under Leonid Brezhnev to harness the "scientific-technological revolution" or Iurii Andropov's use of cost-account (*khozraschet*) and disciplinary actions to reduce labor absenteeism (which Mikhail Gorbachev copied in his first years in power). In neither case do we see real adaptation to new circumstances in the domestic economic and global context.

<sup>2</sup> *Izvestia TsK KPSS*, no. 9, 1990, pp. 204, 213.

<sup>3</sup> Lomagin N. *V tiskakh goloda. Blokada Leningrada v dokumentakh germanskikh spetssluzhb, NKVD i pis'makh leningradtsev* (St. Petersburg, 2014).

<sup>4</sup> Some such lessons include: the immediate introduction of ration systems in all frontline cities; a hard monetary policy, including strict limits on cash withdrawals from saving accounts; and tight control over energy consumption, transportation of fuel and other vital resources by water, and extensive use of local resources, etc. In one form or another, these recommendations were made by the State Planning Committee (Gosplan) or other relevant branches of the government. This topic, lessons of the Winter War learned and not learned, demands its own separate study.

<sup>5</sup> See instruction by Narkomat of Finance, "On cash withdrawals from savings accounts", in *Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv ekonomiki* (RGAE, Russian State Economics Archives), f. 7733, op. 26, d. 24, l. 92.

<sup>6</sup> E. g.: *Tsentral'nyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Sankt-Peterburga* (TsGA SPb, Central State Archive of St. Petersburg), f. 7384, op. 36, d. 128, 129, 148, and 149.

<sup>7</sup> *Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii* (GARF, State Archive of the Russian Federation), f. P-6822, op. 1, d. 21, l. 16.

<sup>8</sup> RGAE, f. 7733, op. 26, d. 26, l. 32–34, d. 78, l. 86–91.

<sup>9</sup> There were additional secondary categories, or revisions of categories, that were not announced publicly: for example, extra food for Party members, *nomenklatura*, blood donors, and others.

<sup>10</sup> Leningrad's Military Council emerged as part of this process, albeit with its own unique politics. See: Danilov V. N. *Sovietskoe gosudarstvo v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine: fenomen chresvychainykh organov vlasti 1941–1945 gg.* (Saratov, 2002).

<sup>11</sup> Boldovskii K. et al. *Blokada Leningrada v resheniiakh rukovodiashchikh partiinykh organov Leningrada 1941–1944 gg. Postanovleniia biuro leningradskikh gorkoma i obkoma VKP(b), stenogrammy zasedanii. Chast' 1: Iun' 1941 g. — mart 1942 g.* (St. Petersburg, 2019), p. 39; Danilov V. N. *Sovietskoe gosudarstvo*, p. 47.

<sup>12</sup> Sobolev G. L., Khodiakov M. V. 'Prodovolstvennaia komissia Voennoego Sovieta Leningradskogo fronta v 1942 g.', *Modern History of Russia*, no. 1 (15), 2016, pp. 8–21. Archival materials about Food Commission decisions were declassified only recently. In his *Leningrad v blockade* (Pavlov D. V. *Leningrad v blockade* (Leningrad, 1985)) Dmitrii Pavlov made little mention of the Food Commission and its work — perhaps because he returned to Moscow on January 18 and did not observe its working, and because Food Commission members were repressed in the Leningrad Affair.

<sup>13</sup> Andrenko was not a member of Food Commission. His job was to supply the Food Commission with all needed information and then immediately implement their decisions as decrees of Lengorispolkom.

<sup>14</sup> TsGA SPb f. 2076, op. 4s, d. 67, l. 12–13.

<sup>15</sup> *Tsentral'nyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv istoriko-politicheskikh dokumentov Sankt-Peterburga* (TsGAIPD SPb, Central State Archive of Historical-Political Documents of St. Petersburg) f. 25, op. 15, d. 150, l. 2.

<sup>16</sup> Cf.: TsGAIPD SPb f. 4000, op. 20, d. 18, l. 20–22.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, op. 10, d. 1131, l. 1–5.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, d. 327, l. 8–9.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* f. 24, op. 2v, d. 5787, l. 27.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, l. 28.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, l. 29.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, d. 5835, l. 38.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 25, op. 15, d. 150, l. 3.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, l. 2.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 4000, op. 20, d. 74, l. 1.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, l. 4.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, l. 1, 3.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 24, op. 2v, d. 5082, l. 6–7.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, l. 5.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 25, op. 15, d. 150, l. 2.

<sup>32</sup> *Gosudarstvennyi memorial'nyi muzei oborony i blokady Leningrada* (GMMOBL, State Memorial Museum of the Defense and Blockade of Leningrad) op. 1r, d. 30.

<sup>33</sup> TsGAIPD SPb f. 4000, op. 20, d. 75, l. 1.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, l. 4.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, l. 2.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, l. 4.

<sup>37</sup> For one account, see the diary of Aleksei Evdokimov: GMMOBL op. 1r, d. 30.

<sup>38</sup> TsGAIPD SPb f. 25, op. 15, d. 150, l. 2. We should note demographic changes eased the food situation somewhat: the massive death toll and then civilian evacuation meant fewer mouths to feed.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 24, op. 2v, d. 5888a, l. 12.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 4000, op. 20, d. 57, l. 66.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, d. 40, l. 4–5.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 25, op. 13, d. 27, l. 87.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 4000, op. 20, d. 40, l. 26–27.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 24, op. 2v, d. 5835, l. 6.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, l. 8.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, l. 12–13.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 7384, op. 17, d. 651, l. 1–6.



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**Abstract:** War demands the capacity of state elites and officials, and institutions, to adapt to challenges. One constant refrain in Western accounts was the inability of the Soviet command economy to adapt—yet that command economy contributed to survival and eventual victory. To what extent could and did economic actors and institutions adapt to new circumstances, versus following tried-and-true policies of the 1930s? In this article, we use the case of Leningrad in late 1941 and 1942, when the Blockade provided severe challenges and became more than a fleeting military event. One of the most important challenge (if not the most important) was the supply and distribution of food to maintain the operation of the city and military production. The massive death toll revealed the degree of the challenge, the force of the German siege, and the lack of sufficient preparation beforehand. Yet the regime did implement innovations and adaptations in obtaining and provisioning. We focus on one set of formal policies: the streamlining of food distribution and the expansion of *podsobnoe khoziaistvo* (successes), and the possibility of using fish (a failure). These policies were grounded in existing institutional templates and knowledge; however, fishing policies revealed contradictions between civilian and military actors. More radical innovations would require informality; but the Soviet regime could adapt.

**Keywords:** blockade, Leningrad, World War II, political economy, command economy, rationing.

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