

## PEASANT WOMEN IN POLITICAL POSTERS OF THE 1930

IN 1929, A NOVEL IMAGE APPEARED in Soviet Russia: the *kolkhoznitsa* (collective farm woman). She was featured in Sergei Eisenstein's film *Staroe i novoe* (*Old and New*, or *The General Line*, as it was originally titled in English), released in October 1929.<sup>1</sup> The centerpiece of the film is a determined young peasant woman who helps to establish a collective farm, or *kolkhoz*; the villagers resisting collectivization ridicule her efforts and label her a *baba*. After much difficulty, she obtains a tractor for the farm. In the final scene of the film as originally edited by Eisenstein, she is pictured triumphantly at the wheel of the tractor.

A similar recasting of the female peasant image was taking place in political posters. In 1929, a poster by I. Meshcheriakov, "Na kollektivnuiu rabotu" (To Collective Work), anticipated visual conventions that became standard in the 1930s (fig. 3.1).<sup>2</sup> It depicts a group of peasants (men and women) cheerfully going to work in the fields. Women are prominently placed in the center of the poster. A woman is shown driving a tractor (a male tractor driver precedes her). Eighty thousand copies of the poster were printed—a substantial edition for the time, and evidence that this particular image of the new collectivized countryside was intended for widespread distribution.

These developments in 1929 anticipated major changes in iconography the following year. Beginning in 1930, the peasant woman, now transformed into a *kolkhoznitsa*, began to appear with unprecedented frequency in political posters devoted to rural themes. Out of a sample of 175 political posters dealing with agriculture issued between 1930 and 1934, I have found that 106 posters (61 percent) included images of women. Women occupied a central or prominent place in 68 posters, or 39 percent of the total.<sup>3</sup>

The volume of poster production does not tell the whole story; the size of the printing also gives an indication of the importance of certain posters. A typical press run in the early 1930s ranged from 10,000 to 30,000. But some posters, especially on agricultural themes, had much larger print runs. As we have seen, Meshcheriakov's 1929 poster was issued in an edition of 80,000. Another collectivization poster, Zakhar Pichugin's "Kolkhoz v rabote" (Collective Farm at Work), appeared in 1930 in a printing of 100,000 (fig. 3.2).<sup>4</sup> This poster, created in the same style as the Meshcheriakov poster, places two sturdy young peasant women in the center of the composition. They are gathering hay. To their left, the young male driver of a horse-drawn harvester smiles at them as he passes by.

Details of this idyllic harvest scene illustrate the new visual language that was becoming established. Young, trim women are shown in the act of working; the old class marker, the sickle, has disappeared (the tractor will take its place). Each woman wears a red kerchief tied behind her head, in the style of women workers, rather than under the chin, as was formerly conventional in the representation of peasant women. Details of appearance, such as the style of the kerchief, conveyed the message to viewers that the *kolkhoznitsa* was different from the *baba* of the past; she belonged to a new breed of *Homo sovieticus* in the countryside.

The novel imagery was epitomized by Vera Korableva's widely disseminated and memorable poster, "Idi, tovarishch, k nam v kolkhoz!" (Come, Comrade, Join Us in the Collective Farm!) (fig. 3.3).<sup>5</sup> The poster was first issued in 1930, then reissued in 1931, and reproduced in many different national languages. The 1931 Russian-language version

alone consisted of 40,000 copies, but the total output far exceeded that number. It shows a young woman standing in front of the young male peasant tractor driver; she is calling to others to join the *kolkhoz*. Her companion is smiling, and she, too, has a cheerful look. She is placed in the dominant position in the poster—that is, in front of the man and engaged in action. Her appearance has the same essential features as the peasant woman in Pichugin's poster ([fig. 3.2](#)).

Korableva was only one of a number of talented political artists who created memorable posters on the theme of collectivization. "Idi v kolkhoz" (Go and join the Collective Farm), by Nikolai Terpsikhov, appeared in a printing of 100,000 and in many different languages, including Ukrainian ([fig. 3.4](#)).<sup>6</sup> The most important poster in the regime's campaign to halt the massive slaughter of livestock by forcibly collectivized peasants, it features a young peasant woman leading a horse and cow to the collective farm. She looks out at the viewer with a penetrating, direct gaze.<sup>7</sup> Below her on the left is a barn with collectivized cows, and on the right a male peasant is reeling backward and dropping his knife after slaughtering livestock. Here again, the artist has incorporated the attributes of the new *kolkhoznitsa*.

Terpsikhov's poster illustrates another major development in the visual language used to depict rural life in the early 1930s. Whereas formerly, peasant women were defined by their place in a hierarchy dominated by the image of the urban worker, now they began to appear alone in posters. In other cases, they were placed in front of and in a prominent position vis-a-vis male peasants (as in the Korableva poster, [fig. 3.3](#)). Some posters showed peasant women in pairs or in groups, without any men in the picture. For example, a 1930s poster, "Delegatka, na udarnuiu uborku pold" (Woman Delegate, to the Shock Work Harvest in the Fields!), presents an all-female harvesting scene, with a woman tractor driver in the lead.<sup>8</sup>

These kinds of compositions were virtually unprecedented, in Soviet political art before 1930. To be sure, three out of five posters dealing with collectivization continued to represent peasant women in a secondary or recessed position in relation to men. But some posters contained a new visual syntax for placing the *kolkhoznitsa* in the hierarchy of heroic groups.

Rural women not only appeared in novel combinations in political posters, they were also represented in the larger-than-life format previously reserved only for workers and Red Army heroes. The magnification device had been used during the Civil War but had receded from visual propaganda in the 1920s. Its reintroduction in the early 1930s accentuated the importance, once again, of superhuman Bolshevik heroes whose deeds made them giants among the "masses." In the system of signification of political posters, perspectival distortions served to identify heroic figures. Thus, the *kolkhoznitsa* was now sometimes represented as a giant figure, towering over enemies and the landscape around her.

The 1930 poster "Krest'ianka, idi v kolkhoz!" (Peasant Woman, Join the Collective Farm!) (printing of 20,000) depicts a larger-than-life young peasant woman resisting the tugs of a priest, drunkard, and kulak who seek to arrest her progress along the path leading to the *kolkhoz* ([fig. 3.5](#)).<sup>9</sup> Her severe and determined expression and her forceful gesture toward the collective farm make it clear that she is a person to be reckoned with. The formidable peasant woman heroically resisting "class enemies" in the countryside became a stock figure in visual propaganda of the early 1930s. Never before

had the peasant woman been represented with this kind of perspectival distortion, which previously had been applied exclusively to the two unambiguous heroes of the revolution.

Nikolai Mikhailov's 1930 poster, "V nashem kolkhoze net mesta popam i kulakam" (There Is No Room in Our Collective Farm for Priests and Kulaks), encapsulates the new trends in political art ([plate 3](#)).<sup>10</sup> Printed in an edition of 42,000, it portrays a powerful-looking, larger-than-life young woman. She holds a rake to fend off priests and kulaks, represented as tiny figures clustered at her feet. A row of tractors passes behind her. She is entirely red and has the attributes reserved for heroic figures: she appears alone in the poster and fends off her enemies like a haughty giant. The diagonal lines, the woman's gesture, size, and appearance, and the color symbolism combine in this poster to illustrate the innovations in representation of the female peasant.

During the first half of the 1930s, the collective farm woman acquired a central place in Stalinist iconography. Her image was circulated throughout the country, with modifications to suit non-Russian areas of the country. Izogiz selected certain key slogans and then commissioned posters designed for non-Russian segments of the population. One slogan utilized in this way was "Idi k nam v kolkhoz" (join us in the collective farm). A poster created to illustrate this slogan presents three Central Asian women—the new *kolkhoznitsy*. They have serious expressions and one of them sits at the wheel of a tractor. The poster was translated into many different Central Asian languages.<sup>11</sup>

## THE NEW STALINIST ICONOGRAPHY

In analytic discussions of political art in the early 1930s, tremendous attention was devoted to the issue of *tipazh*. As we saw in chapter 1, *tipazh* acquired central importance in discussions of posters because established images of class categories had disappeared. In the Soviet lexicon, the term *tipazh* implied a correct rendering of a particular social category. The essence of *tipazh* was not typicality, but typecasting or typicalization.

The problem for artists in the 1930s was that typicalization entailed a rendering of images not as they currently existed but as they would exist at some unspecified time in the future. This is what Anatolii Lunacharskii meant when he explained in 1931 that the artist's task was not to describe what existed in the present but to disclose "the inner essence of life, which comes out of proletarian goals and principles."<sup>12</sup> Like the concept of socialist realism then taking form, this prescription for artists involved a fundamental shift to a new mode of visual representation which presented only the future—the future in the guise of the present.

During the early 1930s, Soviet artists created a new image of the peasant woman—now no longer a female *muzhik* of the past but a *kolkhoznitsa* of the future. The contrast between the two visual images—the robust peasant woman *baba* and the trim *kolkhoznitsa*—must have struck many viewers. As we have seen, the collective farm woman had quite a different physiognomy and demeanor from her predecessor. She wore her kerchief in the style of women workers, and sometimes her hair was even cut short. Shoes often replaced the traditional bast sandals.<sup>13</sup> Above all, she was young and trim, especially during the First Five Year Plan.

Whereas earlier images of peasant women had often emphasized maturity and fecundity—broad hips and large bosoms—the new image stressed a far slimmer and more youthful body, with understated breasts. Collectivization posters seldom portrayed female peasants with their children.<sup>14</sup> The emphasis, instead, was on women's participation in agricultural labor. The attributes of youth, agility, and fitness were directly linked to the labor function. The new image of the peasant woman focused attention on production, not reproduction.

A 1930 poster by the distinguished Soviet artist Aleksandr Deineka, “Kolkhoznik bud' fizkul'turnikom” (Collective Farmer-Be an Athlete) (printing of 20,000), exemplified the new image of the female body ([fig. 3.6](#)).<sup>15</sup> It features two young women and a man doing calisthenics. All are barefoot, wearing exercise clothes (short skirts or shorts); the women have short hair (in the style of women workers) and trim bodies. Two figures are in the background: a man driving a tractor and a man drying himself with a towel. The tractor driver serves as a reminder that exercise is connected to work, that it enhances labor power.<sup>16</sup>

The traditional class marker for peasant women, the sickle, disappears in the early 1930s (the scythe disappears in images of male peasants as well). The tractor takes its place. In fact, the tractor becomes a key signifier for collective farms in visual propaganda and a symbol of progress more generally. Many political posters included tractors, and men often sit in the driver's seat. But in collectivization posters, women also make an appearance as tractor drivers. Out of 106 political posters relating to agriculture between 1930 and 1934 that include images of women 37 (35 percent) depict women behind the wheel of a tractor. An occasional poster in 1929 had incorporated images of female tractor drivers ([fig. 3.1](#)), but the connection between women and tractors was heavily emphasized only from 1930 onward.

There are many examples of such posters. Some featured a column of women tractor drivers. These posters appealed to *kolkhoznitsy* to become shock workers and to join the ranks of the “*krasnye traktisty*” (Red tractorists).<sup>17</sup> In others, women and men appeared together in a tractor column or female tractor drivers provided the background frames (a common stylistic device) for the main image. In the poster, “Krest'ianki! Povysim urozhai! Ob'edininim krest'ianskie dvory v kollektivny” (Peasant Women Let Us Increase the Harvest! Let Us Unite Peasant Households into Collectives), a young *kolkhoznitsa* smiles as she drives a tractor ([fig. 3.7](#)).<sup>18</sup> The tractor is marked with the words: “All forces to the sowing campaign! Do not allow one kulak to interfere with the spring harvest.” The woman tractor driver, who is brimming with confidence and authority, is depicted entirely in red. A red person on a red tractor was scarcely a realistic rendering of the rural scene. But viewers knew how to interpret the color red and to appreciate its positive connotation, since red was a privileged color in both religious and Bolshevik art. It conferred sacred status on a person or object.

Behind the smiling tractor driver in the poster are seven scenes contrasting the condition of women before collectivization and their position as beneficiaries of the collective farm system. The before/after format was characteristic of the folk art style of the *lubok*, which had been popular among lower-class groups (both urban and rural) before the revolution. But the *lubok* style was under attack in the 1930s by artists, and officials denigrated it as a relic from an antiquated culture that did not correspond to proletarian art. Writing in 1931, Moor observed that a “peasant poster” was developing

and “sometimes this poster is absolutely the same as the Sytin *lubok*. They have one and the same form.” He urged artists to study form seriously and to stop using the *lubok*.<sup>19</sup>

### THE BABA AND THE *KOLKHOZNITSA*

The emergence of a new iconography can only be explained by a combination of circumstances; no single factor will suffice to account for such a shift in the basic pattern of visual representation. At the outset, it is worth noting that female poster artists achieved prominence for the first time in the early 1930s, many of them concentrating particularly on the theme of collectivization. As we have seen, some of the most memorable posters on this theme with large printings came from female artists such as Korableva.<sup>20</sup> The presence of female artists certainly deserves attention, but it cannot account for the prevalence and consistency of the new imagery. Many collectivization posters were created by male artists, who far outnumbered the women in the profession.

The shift in iconography coincided with momentous developments in the lives of rural women. When the collectivization campaign gathered momentum in late 1929 and early 1930, women became centrally involved in the growing resistance movement in the countryside. Opposition to forced collectivization was widespread in these months and, indeed, throughout the rest of 1930 and into 1931; sometimes, large groups of peasants mobilized in violent encounters with local authorities.<sup>21</sup> Rural women displayed particularly vigorous resistance to the collective farms, and they often stood in the forefront of these rebellions.<sup>22</sup> As one contemporary observed, “A significant proportion of the mass of peasant women turned against collectivization.”<sup>23</sup>

Official commentators ascribed the hostile attitudes of rural women to their susceptibility to rumors and agitation by kulaks.<sup>24</sup> In fact, women had many grievances against the new collective farm system. One major issue centered on the socialization (communal ownership) of livestock, an aspect of the peasant household economy and culture traditionally under female supervision. During the early months of forced collectivization in igzq and early 1930, local authorities confiscated peasants’ farm animals, particularly the precious cow—the *burenushka* of Russian folklore—which provided milk for the children and often functioned as a ritual totem of the peasant household.<sup>25</sup>

Collectivization coincided with a vigorous campaign against institutionalized religion, and the establishment of the new farms often coincided with the closing of churches and suppression of religious activity in the countryside. The attack on churches and the clergy infuriated many peasants and galvanized women into mass resistance.<sup>26</sup> Women also feared rumored changes. Word had it that “collectivization would bring with it the socialization of children, the export of women’s hair, communal wife-sharing, and the notorious common blanket under which all collective farmers, both male and female, would sleep.”<sup>27</sup> Not all these rumors seemed far-fetched to rural women, many of whom had observed a libertarian attitude toward sex on the part of some Communist Youth League activists and incidents of sexual impropriety by local party bosses.

Faced with the destruction of their way of life, peasant women (and men) sought to explain their sudden and devastating misfortune with reference to two great calamities of the Russian popular consciousness, one historical and the other symbolic. According to the first, collectivization was a “second serfdom”; according to the other, it was the

arrival of the Antichrist and the beginning of the Apocalypse. Of course, the two were historically related. Peter the Great, who extended the system of serfdom, appeared to the popular imagination—particularly among Old Believers—precisely as the Antichrist. The collective farm, together with its tractors, became a symbol of the Antichrist on earth. In late 1929, rumors began to circulate in many rural areas that the “antichrist had arrived and that the world would soon come to an end.”<sup>28</sup>

Female resistance to collectivization took active as well as passive forms. Not only did many women refuse to join the farms (even when, in some cases, their husbands did so), they also participated in riots that led to violent incidents. In some cases, they burned down the *kolkhoz* stables, barns, haystacks, and houses; in other cases, they confiscated seeds, blocked and destroyed tractors, and attacked local officials. Women showed up at meetings on collectivization instead of the men, interrupted the proceedings, and mounted a vociferous protest.<sup>29</sup>

The authorities adopted a cautious and moderate response to peasant women who resisted collectivization, a circumstance that helps explain the predominantly female composition of the rebellions. In contrast to their male counterparts, the women who participated in violent collective actions were seldom accused of being kulak henchmen (*podkulachnitsy*), and relatively few were charged with counterrevolutionary crimes. Local authorities generally did not use force to contain women’s protests and sometimes did not even report incidents to higher authorities. Even though women were arrested for their activities from time to time, they enjoyed an immunity from summary prosecution not extended to men.<sup>30</sup> Yet official indulgence was limited to acts of collective female resistance. Women enjoyed no special status when it came to the campaign to “liquidate the kulaks as a class.” Entire families were expropriated and sent into exile, with no special dispensations for either women or children.<sup>31</sup>

The official terminology for the peasant women’s rebellions was *bab’i bunty*. The words themselves conveyed official assumptions about the actors and their actions and shed some light on government leniency toward the protesters. The term *baba* had, as noted in chapter 2, strong pejorative connotations, especially for politically conscious women and men. *Bunt* referred to a particular type of mass action and carried the connotations of uncontrolled elemental rebellion or riot. The underlying implication was that ignorant, naive, oppressed women were engaged in spontaneous and irrational protests.<sup>32</sup> The term implied an attitude that was both dismissive (the protests could not be taken seriously) and demeaning (the actors belonged to a category of the population so lowly that they were unworthy even of retribution).

Verbal and visual discourse in 1930 thus offers a study in contrasts. The pejorative characterization of women implicit in the term *bab’i bunty* differed sharply from the image of peasant women conveyed by political art. In fact, the new image of the female peasant represented the antithesis (and very deliberately so) of the previous imagery, which had carried associations with the much maligned *baba*. This circumstance accentuates the complexity of the new imagery and invites a consideration of the conditions that account for the ubiquitous presence of the *kolkhoznitsa* in visual propaganda just when peasant women were presenting the authorities with formidable and unrelenting opposition to collectivization in the countryside.

The new image of the female peasant conveyed several meanings simultaneously and must be comprehended as a complex symbol. Viewed against the background of

women's resistance to the *kolkhoz*, the new iconography of peasant women functioned in much the same way as Stalin's pronouncements did. Moshe Lewin has given this characterization of the role of Stalin's verbal discourse: "Stalin's method consisted of presenting his plans and wishes as accomplished fact, so as to encourage the Party organizations and the other sectors of the administration to come into line with the 'actual situation' as it allegedly existed 'everywhere else.'"<sup>33</sup> In a similar fashion, the smiling woman tractor driver appeared in posters not as an accomplished fact but as an indication of what should be, as an incentive to make it happen. The poster constituted a kind of incantation designed to conjure up the new woman, who would perform certain roles in a specific spirit and manner.

Representing the countryside as though it were populated exclusively by vigorous young, *kolkhoznitsy* and *kolkhozniki* may also have facilitated the imposition of agrarian policies in the early 1930s. Political art projected a rural world in which the *krest'ianka-baba*, together with traditional peasant customs and attitudes, no longer had any place. An old Russian proverb, originating in the countryside, was known to all: "A chicken is not a bird; a *baba* is not a human being."<sup>34</sup> Visual propaganda reinforced the old proverb by creating an image of the present-future in which the *krest'ianka-baba* had been replaced by the youthful and enthusiastic *kolkhoznitsa* building socialism. The new world of the village depicted by Stalinist posters effaced virtually all aspects of the traditional peasant woman, her culture, her way of life. Within the context of a society undergoing forced collectivization, visual propaganda helped justify and make more palatable policies designed to reconstitute the countryside by brutal means.

## THE ART OF SCIENTIFIC PROPAGANDA

How did contemporaries "read" political posters associated with the collectivization campaign? Officials concerned with visual propaganda, as well as poster artists themselves, placed great importance on this question. In the 1930s, those engaged in poster production focused their attention on the effectiveness of propaganda and its capacity to convey the desired message. Although there had been some research conducted in the 1920s on viewer responses to art of various kinds, the 1930s marked the beginning of what might be called "scientific propaganda," an attempt to gauge viewer responses to posters and systematically evaluate audience reception.

A Central Committee resolution of March 11, 1931, addressed the issue of reception directly and called for specific measures to improve information concerning viewer responses. These measures included broader, more systematic poster reviews in the press, the creation of poster review committees among workers and peasants, and the founding of a new organization of poster artists.<sup>35</sup> All these proposals were rapidly implemented in the spring of 1931.<sup>36</sup>

Contemporaries concerned with the production of posters proceeded from the assumption that worker and peasant audiences required different styles of political art to accommodate the different ways of viewing visual propaganda in the cities and countryside. One artist argued in March 1931, "The city poster must cry out, be eye-catching, because here people only catch a glimpse of it, see it in passing. The peasant, on the contrary, loves to stop in front of a poster and examine it in all its particulars." A leading official in poster production observed that "the eye of the peasant

finds it easiest to comprehend the *lubok* and gets lost in the details of the usual 'city' poster."<sup>37</sup> The application of traditional folk styles to Soviet posters was a controversial issue in the 1930s, when artists and officials were eager to create an entirely new "proletarian" style of political art. Despite the controversy, however, the *lubok* format, with such characteristic conventions as contrasting panels showing "then and now" and "we and they," was commonly utilized in the 1930s.

It might at first be assumed that posters on agricultural themes and especially those promoting collectivization were aimed at a rural audience. Certainly, some of these posters made their way to the countryside, where they hung in collective farm meeting rooms, reading rooms, and the headquarters for local party and government organizations. But in the early 1930s, when chaos and disruption prevailed in most rural areas, it is far from clear how extensively visual propaganda penetrated the countryside or was even intended to penetrate the countryside.<sup>38</sup>

Judging by the content of these posters, a rural audience hardly seems appropriate. What did peasants in 1930 or 1931 see in a poster featuring tractors driven by *kolkhoznitsy* when the number of tractors in these years was still small? As of December 1930, 88.5 percent of the collective farms still had no tractors of their own; Machine Tractor Stations served only 13.6 percent of all collective farms.<sup>39</sup> Women drivers were an even greater oddity. They made up only 6 percent of the tractor drivers in the country as a whole in 1932.<sup>40</sup> What kind of an impression did the image of a trim young peasant woman make on peasants, especially in the years 1932-1933, when millions were emaciated and dying in the famine? These and many other incongruities between the pictures and experience indicate that perhaps a different audience was intended.

Although further evidence is needed, I would argue that many of the posters relating to collectivization in the early 1930s were aimed at an urban and working-class audience to a far greater extent than at the rural population. The point of this visual propaganda was to generate support outside rural areas for state policies that were being imposed violently on the countryside. Images of the smiling, slender *kolkhoznitsa*, which must have appeared grotesque in a rural context, especially in the midst of devastating famine, were perhaps more plausible in an urban setting, where the image of the peasant woman now shared common features with the image of the woman worker.

In fact, visual representations generated by Soviet artists during the collectivization campaign were primarily projected through an urban lens. The specific images discussed above, accentuating as they did certain body characteristics and expressions, conveyed urban values and assumptions (slimness versus robustness, for instance) far more than rural ones. Even the emphasis on tractors played more effectively to an urban than a rural audience. Whereas workers easily comprehended the value of mechanization, "the reaction of peasants to the tractor was extremely varied."<sup>41</sup> Many peasants were deeply hostile to tractors and mistrustful about their function. The contemporary press reported incidents in which peasants destroyed tractors; others denounced them as "the work of the Antichrist" and a return to serfdom.<sup>42</sup>

The inappropriateness of some posters for a rural audience was underscored in reviews of posters by students, officials, artists, and even workers and peasants. These reviewers often drew attention to the lack of authenticity in the representation of rural scenes. They complained that some Soviet artists had little knowledge of the countryside and created images that contained gross inaccuracies relating to machinery, terrain,



people, clothing, labor activities, and animals. One poster showed tractors sowing in green fields; another had peasants working in winter without suitable clothes.<sup>43</sup> Reviewers concluded that peasants laughed at such posters and did not take them seriously. But these inaccuracies presented fewer problems if the audience was urban and not rural.

We have very little information about the reception of posters by contemporary viewers, either urban or rural. A rare glimpse of viewer reactions is provided by a report of a meeting of fifty collective and state farm workers that took place on February 28, 1932, in accordance with the March 1931 decree requiring poster review committees composed of workers and peasants.<sup>44</sup> For two hours, they examined and discussed five posters on various themes. The first poster subjected to scrutiny was by Valentina Kulagina, an artist trained in Soviet art schools and a practitioner of photomontage.<sup>45</sup> Her poster, “Udarnitsy zavodov i sovkhozov, vstupaite v riady VKP(b)” (Shock Worker Women of Factories and State Farms, Enter the Ranks of the Communist Party [Bolshevik]), features a photograph of a woman with her right arm raised high (palm forward), a copy of *Pravda* in her left hand. The woman's expression conveys pleasure, almost ecstasy. Compared to the crowd of people clustered below her, she is represented as a giant figure.

The collective and state farm workers viewing the poster had a number of serious criticisms of this poster. Most devastating of all was their observation that the woman presented by the artist did not resemble a shock worker woman but rather a female “kulak or a sales clerk.” They further objected to the lack of communication between the giant woman and the demonstrators below, the inclusion of male rather than female tractor drivers, and the poster's failure to invite collective farm shock worker women into the party. Other posters were criticized because of the artist's ignorance of the countryside or the improper *tipazh* of the woman shock worker.

Some posters featuring young women were deemed positively dangerous, even counterrevolutionary. One reviewer of Korableva's “Idi, tovarishch, k nam. v kolkhoz” (fig. 3.3), possibly the most emblematic of the collectivization posters, harshly criticized what he saw as an implicit sexual invitation in the poster. In a vituperative review, he argued that the poster was having a “counterrevolutionary and harmful effect in the contemporary countryside because the second half of the text is written on the woman and, undoubtedly, will be used by kulakagitators in the broadest possible way.”<sup>46</sup> His point was that the phrase “Join us in the collective farm” happened to be printed across her midsection-by implication, a sexual invitation. The suggestion that collective farm women proffered sexual invitations had grave significance in the contemporary context, amplifying fears of a linkage between communalization of peasant property and the peasant woman's body.

## THE GREAT RETREAT

The First Five Year Plan lasted four years and three months. When the plan ended on December 31, 1932, the country was in the midst of a massive famine that claimed millions of lives in agricultural regions of the country. Against this background, the regime celebrated the success of collectivization.<sup>47</sup> By 1933, nearly four-fifths of all the cultivated land in the Soviet Union had been collectivized and over three-fifths of the

peasant households.<sup>48</sup> The Seventeenth Party Congress, held in February 1934 and proclaimed the “Congress of Victors,” celebrated the victory of socialism.

The year 1934 has been described as the beginning of the “great retreat” from social, economic, and cultural policies introduced during the “socialist offensive” of the period 1929-1933. Nicholas Timasheff coined the phrase “great retreat” to describe the restoration of ideas and practices predating the First Five Year Plan or even the 1917 revolution.<sup>49</sup> The result was an amalgam of the old and the new, within the overall framework of the Stalinist party-state. In agriculture, the “great retreat” led to promulgation of the Model Charter for Collective Farms in 1935, supplanting the far more draconian version of 1930.<sup>50</sup> The 1935 charter eased various regulations and restored small personal farming on plots allotted to collective farm workers, while retaining the basic organization of collectivized agriculture imposed in the early 1930s.

Political art witnessed its own version of a “great retreat” beginning in 1934. Toward the end of 1933, artists and critics expressed dissatisfaction with the prevailing canons for visual representation of the countryside. A review of Natal’ia Pinus’s 1933 poster, “Kolkhoznitsa, bud’udarnitsel uborki” (Collective Farm Woman, Be a Shock Worker of the Harvest) (printing of 30,000) focused attention on the inadequacies of the *tipazh* (fig. 3.8).<sup>51</sup> The reviewer disapproved of the artist’s picture of two young, trim, and energetic *kolkhoznitsy* (one smiling, one serious) on their way to the field with takes on their shoulders: “In the choice of *tipazh*, the artist Pinus wanted to present healthy, jolly, pretty, and intellectual faces, to show the new person who combines in herself physical strength and energy with a high level of culture. But it must be recognized that the artist did not succeed. The *kolkhoznitsy* are not typical. In the poster, we have instead some kind of ‘Mashen’ka and Dasha,’ pretty and rosy but completely uncharacteristic of the *kolkhoz* masses.”<sup>52</sup>

The atypicality of the collective farm women in the poster acquired importance because of a transformation that was taking place in the objective of visual propaganda. Posters on rural themes were increasingly measured by their effectiveness in reaching and persuading a rural audience, now that the great majority of peasants had been collectivized.<sup>53</sup> A growing preoccupation with peasant reception of posters, in combination with other factors, led to important modifications in the representation of the peasant woman. By 1934, the *kolkhoznitsa* had begun to fill out and acquire a fuller, more rounded look. The large bosoms and corpulence of the 1920s did not return, but the trim and athletic look of the early 1930s also faded from the scene.<sup>54</sup> Collective farm women were still generally depicted as youthful, but now older, more mature women occasionally made an appearance.<sup>55</sup> Smiles and quiet satisfaction became far more prevalent than before, and few posters conveyed the intensity and determination characteristic of *kolkhoznitsy* in the early 1930s.

The new demeanor of collective farm women disconcerted some reviewers, who criticized posters for failing to show the *kolkhoznitsa*’s “intensive struggle for socialist reconstruction of the countryside, resistance to the class enemy, resolute surmounting of obstacles, enthusiasm for collective labor and its pathos.”<sup>56</sup> But in 1934, especially after the Congress of Victors, rural propaganda shifted its emphasis from struggle and confrontation to serenity and joyfulness amid abundance. Earlier posters characteristically showed peasant women engaged actively in work. Now they were often depicted in a contemplative or celebratory mood as they surveyed the results of collective

farm labor. Symbols of prosperity abound: sheaves of wheat, plump and wellgroomed farm animals—especially the venerable cow—and fields redolent with crops.<sup>57</sup>

The 1934 poster by Aleksei Sitaro, “K zazhitochnoi kul’turnoi zhizni” (Toward a Prosperous Cultured Life), presents five collective farm women (three agricultural workers, a mechanic, and a teacher) cheerfully striding forward carrying farm animals, wheat, books, and a wrench ([fig. 3.9](#)).<sup>58</sup> They are robust—obviously well fed—and joyous. The artist has included three women (the mechanic, the teacher, and the milkmaid) with kerchiefs tied at the back of their neck, in the new style of the *kolkhoznitsa*; the other two collective farm women wear their kerchiefs in the traditional way, a significant departure from the standard semiotic code. The clustering of farm women in this and other posters may have suggested to viewers that *kolkhoznitsy* of all types had earned, perhaps for the first time, full confidence from the authorities, not just as individuals but as a social collectivity.<sup>59</sup>

Color symbolism changed as well. In the course of the 1930s, pastel colors, especially blues and greens, as well as pink and yellow, were often substituted for the harsher tones of red and black that dominated earlier collectivization posters. A fascinating report of collective farmers' reactions to posters in late 1934 noted that the viewers displayed a strong preference for soft muted colors and were especially partial to one poster with a “delicate blue background.” They reacted negatively to bright garish colors. According to this report, the collective farmers paid attention to color and imagery and generally ignored the text.<sup>60</sup>

Although most *kolkhoznitsy* in posters from 1934 still wore a kerchief tied at the back of the neck in the fashion of urban women, their clothing was sometimes more decorative than previously and included traditional touches, like an apron, which had been part of the standard image in the 1920s but disappeared in the early 1930s. Mariia Voron's striking poster, “Udarnuiu uborku—bol'shevistskomu urozhaiu” (Shock Work at Reaping Befits a Bolshevik Harvest) (printing of 60,000), shows the complex combination of details that characterized rural imagery during the Second Five Year Plan ([fig. 3.10](#)).<sup>61</sup> The *kolkhoznitsa*'s appearance (especially her stoutness, the blue color of the dress, and her apron) as well as her almost classically serene and motionless pose signify departures from visual conventions of the early 1930s. Except for the text, the only red in the picture is her kerchief, tied behind her head. A contemporary reviewer of the poster gave the artist high marks for *tipazh* and praised the “romantic solemnity” of the image of the *kolkhoznitsa*.<sup>62</sup>

An official campaign mounted in 1934 promoted personal cleanliness and attractive clothing.<sup>63</sup> When a new glossy magazine, *Na stroike MTS i sovkhov* (Building Machine Tractor Stations and State Farms), appeared in June 1934, it heralded with pictures and accompanying text the “new life” in the countryside.<sup>64</sup> This slick propaganda organ, which attracted the services of Maksim Gorky and El Lissitzky, asserted in a later issue that “our rural youth are not dressed any worse than city youth. Many of our girls have begun to wear silk dresses, velveteen, and fine wool coats with fur collars, berets. The men wear good suits, shoes, and always a necktie.”<sup>65</sup> Political artists became more attentive to clothing and depicted peasant women wearing pretty blouses or dresses, sometimes accentuated by decorative articles such as embroidered scarves, even while at work.<sup>66</sup> The inclusion of traditional Russian folk-style embroidery—

inconceivable during the early 1930s—reflected the nationalist and folk revival then under way.

A poster by Konstantin Zotov in 1934, “Liuboi krest’ianin-kolkhoznik ill edinollchnik imeet teper’ vozmozhnost’ zhit’ po-chelovecheski” (Every Collective Farm Peasant or Individual Farmer Now Has the Opportunity to Live Like a Human Being), exemplifies some of the changes taking place in the semantic system of visual propaganda (plate 4).<sup>67</sup> Zotov’s poster (printing of 60,000) depicted a peasant family—a mother, father, and toddler—joyfully gathered around a gramophone. The text is a quotation from Stalin: “Any peasant-collective farmer or individual farmer now has the possibility to live in a humane manner, if he only wants to work honestly and doesn’t loaf, is not a vagrant, and doesn’t plunder *kolkhoz* property.”<sup>68</sup> What is unusual about the poster is that it emphasizes, at least implicitly, the woman’s achievements in both production (she is a collective farm worker) and reproduction (she is a mother). Moreover, the poster shows collective farmers at leisure rather than at work. The labor process has been replaced by the fruits of labor, in the form of a gramophone, other household belongings, and personal attire.<sup>69</sup>

Both husband and wife in the poster are well dressed: she in a pink blouse and he in a black jacket with a peasant-style shirt, embroidered at the collar. He is strikingly handsome; she is lovely to look at and, with her gay smile, might well have appeared in a commercial advertisement for gramophones! A contemporary critic, reviewing the poster, considered the *tipazh* of the *kolkhoznitsa* the most successful of the three figures.<sup>70</sup> The child is plump, cute, and claps his hands in delight at the music; his hands also suggest a prayerful position, echoing Madonna and Child images in religious icons. Mothers and children can seldom be found in collectivization posters of the early 1930s and then only in those explicitly devoted to the theme of social services. Even during the Second Five Year Plan, few posters on general themes show the peasant woman with her child, although such images did occasionally appear in contemporary magazines.<sup>71</sup>

The family is shown listening to the gramophone. Behind them are two items that signified a cultured and comfortable life in the countryside: an electric light and a shelf of books. The titles of the books include works by Maksim Gorky, *Maintenance for the Tractor*, works by V.I. Lenin, *Agrotechnolog*, works by I. Stalin, a partially obscured title ending with the words “in the collective farm,” *Improving Milk Yields*, and *Village Reading Room*.<sup>72</sup> The reading material for exemplary collective farmers was thus of three types: works of literature, especially by Gorky; political writings of Lenin and Stalin; and technical books relating to agriculture. The Gorky book is strategically placed first on the left, an indication of its importance. Highly visible in 1934 because of his role as an architect of socialist realism at the First Congress of Soviet Writers, Gorky advocated the use of literature as a force for remolding backward and predominantly rural Russians into a new generation of Soviet citizens. Gorky’s own humble origins and his subsequent rise to fame helped to validate the Stalinist ideal of a society where industrious workers and loyal Communists could rise from rags to riches.

The books, together with the certificate on the wall, provide considerable information concerning the people in the poster. The man is a tractor driver by the name of Nikolai Vasil’evich Lebedev. He received recognition as an exemplary shock worker, and his accomplishments, by implication, can be attributed to mental as well as physical labor (thus the books on tractor maintenance and agrotechnology). His wife, judging by

the books on the shelf, most likely works as a milkmaid on the collective farm, a common female occupation. The poster implies that both Lebedev and his wife are literate.

The implicit message of the poster is that exemplary collective farmers can expect to enjoy the accouterments of a good life, including a gramophone, books, and electric light. Visual propagandists devoted a good deal of attention to the issue of rural prosperity in the mid-1930s. As presented in posters and magazine articles, the good life had come to embrace a host of material possessions: samovar, sewing machine, camera, bicycle, watch, musical instruments, and such home furnishings as “rugs, soft furniture, a dresser with a mirror, a radio, flowers, and lace curtains.”<sup>73</sup>

The contemporary reviewer of the poster expressed particular dissatisfaction with the artist's rendering of the dwelling of the “new people of the countryside.” Zotov's representation, he asserted, failed to contrast adequately the “bright, clean, cozy, and spacious home” of the present with the inhumane conditions of the precollectivization hut.<sup>74</sup> The figures, he thought, were too close together and gave the impression of lack of interior living space. The electric light, he noted, was not illuminated.

Beginning in 1933, political posters more and more often emphasized the linkage between the *kolkhoznitsa* and Stalin.<sup>75</sup> Occasionally, his presence was signified by a quotation or a book, as in the Zotov poster.<sup>76</sup> Other times, he appeared in the background, for example, as a silhouette on a red flag.<sup>77</sup> In some posters, he was placed alongside the peasant woman. Natal'ia Pinus's 1933 poster, “Zhenshchiny v kolkhozakh-bol'shaia sila” (Women in the Collective Farms Are a Great Force), takes the form of a triptych (fig. 3.11).<sup>78</sup> On either side are *kolkhoznitsy*: a tractor driver and a woman with a rake. Both are focused on their work and surrounded by scenes of abundance. Between them is Stalin—the ultimate talisman—appearing here in a photograph taken as he addressed a conference of collective farmers (the source of the famous quotation that provides the caption for the poster). The visual association of Stalin and the *kolkhoznitsy* suggests a close relationship between the leader and the new heroes of the countryside.

As if by contagious magic, Stalin enabled ordinary people to perform heroic feats. This point was clearly brought out by a poster published two years later: Iurii Tsishevskii's “Shire riady stakhanovtsev sotsialisticheskikh polei!” (Expand the Ranks of the Stakhanovites of the Socialist Fields!) (fig. 3.12).<sup>79</sup> Published in 1935, the poster had a press run of 200,000, an extraordinary number for that year and an indication that the authorities considered it important. The centerpiece of the poster is Mariia Demchenko, a Stakhanovite *kolkhoznitsa* who wrote to Stalin promising to achieve a record in the harvesting of beetroot.<sup>80</sup> She stands in a field, holds a red banner, and smiles modestly while gesturing toward her accomplishments and toward Stalin. In the upper left-hand corner appears a sketch of Stalin reading Demchenko's letter to him that was published in *Pravda* (and is reprinted below Stalin's image).

Prior to 1930, when political artists represented the peasantry as a whole, they did so by depicting a *muzhik* (male peasant), usually bearded, wearing a Russian shirt and bast shoes, and sometimes holding a scythe. The image of the *muzhik* was often combined with a beardless male worker—a blacksmith with an apron and a hammer—who symbolized the working class.<sup>81</sup> With the coming of collectivization, the *muzhik* virtually disappears from political posters (replaced by a new image of the young beardless *kolkhoznik*), and the male peasant is no longer paired with the male worker to symbolize the union of the working class and the peasantry.

In 1937, a new image of the worker-peasant combination appeared in political art. This time, instead of two men, the artist presented a male worker and a female peasant. Vera Mukhina's sculpture *Rabochii i kolkhoznitsa* (Worker and Collective Farm Woman) brought together elements of old and new iconography (fig. 1.16). Her image of the peasant woman combined elements of the athletic and forceful *kolkhoznitsa* of the early 1930s with the ample figure of the peasant woman featured in visual propaganda from 1934 on. She does not wear a kerchief, and her hair is cut short in the style of urban women. Like the *krest'ianka* of the 1920s, she carries a sickle, a symbol that had disappeared from posters after 1929. In Mukhina's statue, the sickle and hammer function not only as class markers but also as the coat of arms of the Soviet nation-state. The eclecticism of the imagery contributed to its appeal, and the statue was widely reproduced during the Stalin era.<sup>82</sup>

How can we explain the substitution of a woman for a man in this important symbolic union between workers and peasants? The association of a female figure and agriculture seems natural given the many connections between fertility and the feminine, both in the classical and Russian folk art traditions. But it must not be forgotten that Bolshevik artists deliberately and consistently used a male figure—the *muzhik*—to symbolize the peasantry before 1930.

Mukhina's statue owes its inspiration to visual propaganda of the early 1930s, when the female figure acquired unprecedented significance. To a considerable extent, the *kolkhoznitsa* displaced the *muzhik* as the central image and symbol of the peasantry as a whole. The prominent position of the *kolkhoznitsa* in collectivization posters is indicative of a new gendered discourse about the countryside. Political artists promoted collectivization in the female idiom and, in the process, feminized the image of the peasantry as a social category.<sup>83</sup> Mukhina created the definitive statement of that feminization, using gender differences to convey the hierarchical relationship between the worker (male) and peasant (female) and, by implication, between urban and rural spheres of Soviet society.

In terms of both syntax and lexicon, Stalinist iconography expressed the domination of the cities over the countryside. Collectivization posters of the early 1930s were most likely directed at an urban audience and expressed quintessentially urban values concerning the body, the nature of labor, and the role of mechanization. Images of tractors, women, and hard work helped affirm the logic behind collectivization and provide a justification for the terror and famine inflicted on the rural population in the name of progress.

The focus of visual propaganda with agrarian themes shifted to the countryside after the First Five Year Plan. The *kolkhoznitsa* was not emphasized to the same extent as earlier, although she still appeared in memorable posters produced in large numbers. The "great retreat" in political art meant a recasting of the image of the collective farm woman to incorporate elements of the semantic traditions of both the *krest'ianka* (peasant woman) and the *kolkhoznitsa*. Nevertheless, an urban vision of rural life persisted. As the decade progressed, rural propaganda came to express more and more vividly the dreamlike quality of the Stalinist utopia, with well-fed joyous peasants in fields of plenty.

During the Civil War and the 1920s, images of social groups functioned as abstractions. Everyone knew that not all workers were blacksmiths with a hammer and not all peasant women carried a sickle. These images were symbolic, intended to capture

an element of what it meant to be a worker or female peasant. In the early 1930s, a new type of image appeared in visual propaganda, an image that served as a model, as an ideal type. This was the meaning of *tipazh*, the problem of typicalization that so concerned contemporary reviewers of political art.

The image of the *kolkhoznitsa* was not supposed to be realistic. Its purpose was to provide a visual script and an incantation, engendering a powerful illusion. To depict the rural woman was to invoke her. The image became a vehicle for anticipating and achieving the future. Stalinist propaganda created, in sum, a new political mythology. The picture, especially with the use of photomontage, acquired an unprecedented verisimilitude, not with the existing society but with the rural social world of the imagined future.

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<sup>1</sup> The original version of the film can be viewed at the Pacific Film Archive, Berkeley, California. For a discussion of the history of the film, see Jay Leyda, *Kino: A History of the Russian and Soviet Film* (London, 1960), 262-269.

<sup>2</sup> RU/SU 1658.

<sup>3</sup> Posters for this sample were examined at the Hoover Archives and the Poster Collection in the Graphics Department of the Russian State Library (formerly the Lenin Library). To my knowledge, no published or unpublished catalogue of posters is available for this period. My sample includes all the posters on the theme of agriculture that were available to me for the period 1930 to 1934. I have excluded multiple editions of posters in various national languages. In defining posters in which women occupied a central or prominent place, I used the following guidelines: (a) posters exclusively featuring women (one or more); (b) posters with women and men in which women were not depicted as subordinate to men by virtue of their activity or relative placement; (c) any poster in which a woman is shown driving a tractor. I examined all posters relating to collectivization at the Hoover Archives. At the Russian State Library, where I did not have access to the catalogue, I requested all posters pertaining to the collectivization campaign.

<sup>4</sup> RU/SU 1655.

<sup>5</sup> KP p<sub>4</sub>.IX.3a/idi and RU/SU 641.

<sup>6</sup> RU/SU 1856. The Ukrainian version was issued in a printing of 10,000. The text of the poster reads: "We shall jointly repulse the kulak; we shall organize the collective animal farm"; "Bring all your equipment; don't slaughter cattle; don't sell it." For this and other versions in various languages, see KP p<sub>4</sub>.IX.31/ide.

<sup>7</sup> RU/SU 1856.

<sup>8</sup> RU/SU 1724.

<sup>9</sup> RU/SU 1431. The artist's signature is difficult to read but it appears to be Mikhail Cheremnykh. The term "kulak"—literally "fist"—was traditionally applied to relatively prosperous peasants, especially those who hired labor and lent money to fellow peasants. The term generally had pejorative connotations, even before the Bolsheviks came to power. On the nineteenth-century usage of "kulak," see Cathy A. Frierson, *Peasant Icons: Representations of Rural People in Late Nineteenth Century Russia* (New York and Oxford, 1993), chapter 7. In the 1930s, the label was applied to any peasant resisting collectivization.

<sup>10</sup> RU/SU 1756.

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<sup>11</sup> KP p4.IX.3.g/idi. The precise date of this publication is unknown. It was situated in the poster archive among posters dating from the years 1930-1934. The imagery, text, and theme strongly suggest it was produced sometime in the very early 1930s.

<sup>12</sup> *Brigada Khudozhnikov* 5-6 (1931), 13.

<sup>13</sup> According to Maurice Hindus, who returned to his native village for a visit in the summer of 1929, colored factory-made kerchiefs had come to replace the traditional caps which girls and women wore in an earlier time. He also saw girls in shoes instead of the traditional *lapti*, or bast sandals. See Maurice Hindus, *Red Bread: Collectivization in a Russian Village* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1988), 52. His account originally appeared in 1931.

<sup>14</sup> There were a few notable exceptions, such as the Pichugin poster discussed above ([fig. 3.2](#)) and “Krest’ianki! Povysim urozhai! Ob’ edinim krest’ianskie dvory v kollektivny” ([fig. 3.7](#)). In the early 1930s, images of children generally appeared only in posters devoted to social themes, such as communal dining and nurseries.

<sup>15</sup> KP p4.XXV.2/kolkhoznik.

<sup>16</sup> Deineka produced other posters and paintings in the early 1930s featuring slim women. See, for example, his 1932 painting, *Igraiushchie v miach*, with naked women playing ball (*Agitatsiia za schast’e*, 41) and his 1933 poster, “Rabotat’, stroit’ i ne nyt’!” featuring a trim young woman athlete (KP p4.XXV.2/1p).

<sup>17</sup> Another illustration of this type of poster is “Krest’ianka! Kollektivizirui derevniu,” 1930, artist unknown. It shows a column of tractors with female tractor drivers, all in the color red. At the bottom is a quote from Lenin stating that women will not achieve full liberation until they participate in production. The poster was printed in an edition of 40,000. KP p4.XXVI.7/1k.

<sup>18</sup> RU/SU 1684. The poster appeared in an edition of 40,000.

<sup>19</sup> *Brigada khudozhnikov* 4 (1931), 12.

<sup>20</sup> Other important female poster artists who created key posters on the theme of collectivization were Natal’ia Pinus and Mariia Voron (see [figs. 3.8](#) and [3.10](#)).

<sup>21</sup> On this subject, see Robert Conquest, *The Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivization and the Terror Famine* (New York, 1986), chap. 7.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 152, 154-155, 157, 166; Merle Fainsod, *Smolensk under Soviet Rule*, (New York, 1953), 253; Moshe Lewin, *The Making of the Soviet System: Essays in the Social History of Interwar Russia* (New York, 1985), 179; Lynne Viola, *The Best Sons of the Fatherland: Workers in the Vanguard of Soviet Collectivization* (New York, 1987), 105; Lynne Viola, “*Bab’i Bunty* and the Peasant Women’s Protest during Collectivization,” *Russian Review* 45, no. 1 (January 1986), 23-42; Robert William Davies, *The Socialist Offensive: The Collectivization of Agriculture 1929-1930* (London, 1980), 136-137; A.A. Novosel’skii, ed., *Materialy po istorii SSSR: Dokumenty po istorii sovetskogo obshchestva* (Moscow, 1955), 327-367; Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Stalin’s Peasants: Resistance and Survival in the Russian Village after Collectivization* (New York and Oxford, 1994), 65.

<sup>23</sup> Viktoria Ulasevich, ed., *Zhenshchina v kolkhoze* (Moscow, 1930), 6.

<sup>24</sup> According to a contemporary author writing in 1930: “It must be said that the kulaks, by means of their agents—well-to-do and middle peasants—knew how to win over a significant proportion of the masses of women, pull them into the anti-*kolkhoz* movement, direct their dissatisfaction with the hard conditions of life against the new form of economic organization.” *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>25</sup> Conquest, *Harvest of Sorrow*, 157; Lewin, *Making of the Soviet System*, 179. For a discussion of the significance of the cow in peasant religion, see Boris A. Uspenskii [Uspensky], *Filologicheskie razyskaniia v oblasti slavianskikh drevnostei (relikty iazychestva v vostochnoslavianskom kul’te Nikolaiia Mirlikiiskogo)* (Moscow, 1982), 118, 128.

<sup>26</sup> See Fainsod, *Smolensk*, 253-254, for an example of the involvement of local clergy in women’s rebellions; Conquest, *Harvest of Sorrow*, 207; Viola, “*Bab’i Bunty*,” 29-30.

<sup>27</sup> Viola, “*Bab’i Bunty*,” 31. Rural women were deeply hostile to the libertarian sexual attitudes and practices of the Bolsheviks. On peasant women’s attitudes toward sex, see Richard Stites, *The Women’s Liberation Movement in Russia: Feminism, Nihilism, and Bolshevism, 1860-1930* (Princeton, 1978), 382.

<sup>28</sup> Conquest, *Harvest of Sorrow*, 152. Peasants referred to the VKP (All-Union Communist Party) as the “second serfdom” (*vtoroe krepostnoe pravo*); Viola, *Best Sons of the Fatherland*, 105; Viola, “*Bab’i Bunty*,” 29-30; Fitzpatrick, *Stalin’s Peasants*, 45.

<sup>29</sup> An example of this can be found in Hindus, *Red Bread*, 45-47.



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<sup>30</sup> As Conquest describes it: "For the 'women's rebellions,' according to one activist observer, came to follow definite tactics. First the women would lead the attack on the kolkhoz; 'if the Communists, Komsomols and members of the village Soviets and Committees of Unwealthy Peasants attacked them, the men rallied to the women's defence. This tactic aimed at avoiding intervention by armed forces, and it was successful.' In the Southern Ukraine, the Don and the Kuban, the collective farm structure had virtually collapsed by March 1930." Conquest, *Harvest of Sorrow*, 158. The quotation is from Petro Grigorenko, *Memoirs*, (London, 1983), 35. See also Fitzpatrick, *Stalin's Peasants*, 66.

<sup>31</sup> Conquest, *Harvest of Sorrow*, chap. 6.

<sup>32</sup> Viola, "Bab'i Bunty," 23.

<sup>33</sup> Moshe Lewin, *Russian Peasants and Soviet Power: A Study of Collectivization* (Evanston, 1968), 457.

<sup>34</sup> Another version goes like this: "A crab is not a fish—a woman is not a person." Susan Bridger, *Women in the Soviet Countryside: Women's Roles in Rural Development in the Soviet Union* (Cambridge, England, 1987), 6.

<sup>35</sup> *Brigada khudozhnikov 2-3* (1931), 2-3 articles 6,7,8 of the resolution.

<sup>36</sup> The first meeting of the review board under Izogiz took place on April 5, 1931, with representatives from five major Moscow factories. The meeting was devoted mainly to a discussion of twenty-two posters Izogiz intended to publish. Most were subjected to severe criticism and half were rejected outright. *Brigada khudozhnikov 2-3* (1931), 3. The Union of Russian Revolutionary Poster Artists (ORRP) was established soon after the Central Committee resolution, under the leadership of Dmitrii Moor. See TsGALO, f. 1988, op. 1, ed. Khr. 33, for a draft of the union's charter. Posters were subsequently reviewed in *Produktsiia izobrazitel'nykh iskusstv* (1932), *Produktsiia izo-iskusstv* (1933), and *Plakat i khudozhestvennaia reproduksiia* (1934-1935), published by the Krtiko-bibliograficheskii Institut.

<sup>37</sup> *Brigada khudozhnikov 2-3* (1931), 3, 4. The *lubok* was a folk art print, often satirical, popular among the common people, both rural and urban, before the revolution.

<sup>38</sup> According to Lewin, "The extreme efficacy of this [anti-collectivization] propaganda was due, not to the strength of the kulaks, but to the weakness of official propaganda, and above all to the distrust which the peasants felt, were so frequently justified in the feeling, for the government during the collectivization campaign and more especially during the autumn and winter of 1929-30." *Russian Peasants and Soviet Power*, 487.

<sup>39</sup> Conquest, *Harvest of Sorrow*, 180.

<sup>40</sup> E.K. Kravchenko, *Krest'ianka pri sovetskoi vlasti* (Moscow, 1932), 46.

<sup>41</sup> Davies, *Socialist Offensive*, 384.

<sup>42</sup> For a discussion of peasant reactions to tractors, as reported in the contemporary press, see Edward G. Carr and R.W. Davies, *Foundations of a Planned Economy, 1926-1929* (Harmondsworth, 1974), 225-227; Davies, *Socialist Offensive*, 384-385. According to Fitzpatrick (*Stalin's Peasants*, 46), some peasants believed that the initials MTS, designating MACHine Tractor Station, stood instead for Mir Topit Satana. (Satan is ruining the world).

<sup>43</sup> *Za proletarskoe iskusstvo* 3-4 (March - April 1931), 8; *Produktsiia izo-iskusstv* 2 (1932), 2. A meeting of collective and state farm workers to review posters under the auspices of the Krtiko-bibliograficheskii Institut criticized the depiction of the tractor because it consisted of parts of different tractor systems.

*Produktsiia izo-iskusstv* 3-4 (1932), 20.

<sup>44</sup> For a report on this meeting by L. Krylova and E. Serova, see *Produktsiia izobrazitel'nykh iskusstv* 3-4 (1932), 20.

<sup>45</sup> Kulagina was born in 1902. She produced numerous posters in the 1930s and belonged to the group of poster artists who used photomontage in the style popularized by Klutis, her husband, whose work she publicly supported. See G.L. Demosfenova, A. Nurok, and N.I. Shantyko, *Sovetskii politicheskii plakat* (Moscow, 1962), 77, note 3.

<sup>46</sup> *Brigada khudozhnikov 2-3* (1931), 4.

<sup>47</sup> In January 1933, Stalin announced that the "economic foundation of a socialist society' had now been built and asserted that 'we have established the principle of socialism in all spheres of the economy by expelling the capitalist elements from it.'" Robert C. Tucker, *Stalin in Power: The Revolution from Above, 1928-1941* (New York, 1990), 213.

<sup>48</sup> Alec Nove, *An Economic History of the U.S.S.R* (Middlesex, 1982 [1969]), 174.

<sup>49</sup> Nicholas S. Timasheff, *The Great Retreat: The Growth and Decline of Communism in Russia* (New York, 1946).

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<sup>50</sup> For details on these changes, see Lazar Volin, *A Century of Russian Agriculture: From Alexander II to Krushchev* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1970), 244.

<sup>51</sup> KP P4.XXVI.7/1k.

<sup>52</sup> G. Martynov, "Plakaty k uborochnoi kampanii," *Produksiia izo-iskusstv* 9 (September 1933), 7.

Mashen'ka and Dasha are diminutive forms of common female Russian names.

<sup>53</sup> At the end of 1934, collective farmers at the Kalinin Collective Farmers' Club were gathered together to view and criticize posters on the theme of livestock management. The participants included young and old, activists and leaders, rank-and-file farmers, men and women. This meeting and others like it are evidence of a growing concern with the reception of political posters by collective farmers. See A. Unkovskii, "Kolkhoznyl smotr sel'skokhoziaistvennykh plakatov," *Plakat i khudozhestvennaia reproduksiia* 12 (December 1934), 16-17.

<sup>54</sup> See below for a discussion of Vera Mukhina's famous statue of 1937, *Rabochii i kolkhoznitsa*, which partially restored the image of an athletic peasant woman.

<sup>55</sup> See, for example, the poster by Iurii Alferov and M. Sokolov, "Uspekhi kollektivizatsii—torzhestvo ucheniia Lenina i Stalina" (1934). KP P4.IX.3.9 uspekhi. This poster, which features two *kolkhoznitsy* (the younger one reading a book by Stalin), was widely reproduced and appeared in ten different national languages.

<sup>56</sup> Review of Alferov and Sokolov's "Uspekhi kollektivizatsii" in *Plakat i khudozhestvennaia reproduksiia* 7 (July 1934), 4.

<sup>57</sup> Many posters of this type appeared. For examples, see note 66 below; "Po-byi'shevits'komu borotis'za visokii urozhai!" (1937), KP P5.IX.7/IP; and Mariia Voron's poster (fig. 3.10).

<sup>58</sup> The poster was produced in Leningrad in an edition of 30,000. The text at the bottom reads: "Collective farm woman, care for the collective farm system like the apple of your eye." KP P4.XXVI-7/I.k.

<sup>59</sup> Other examples of posters with women only: Pinus, "Kolkhoznitsa, bud' udarnitsei uborki urozhaiia" (printing Of 30,000) (1933), KP P4.XXVI.7/1k; Alferov and Sokolov, "Uspekhi kollektivizatsii" (1934), KP P4.IX.3.g uspekhi; "Ide vesna, parue den', v kolgospa nasha sila, tsvite kraina moloda, mogut nala i shchasliiva" (printing of 20,000) (n.d. but probably mid-1930s), KPP4.IX.g.ide.

<sup>60</sup> *Plakat i khudozhestvennaia reproduksiia* 12 (December 1934), 16.

<sup>61</sup> RU/SU 1843.

<sup>62</sup> *Plakat i khudozhestvennaia reprodukaia* 9 (September 1934), 16.

<sup>63</sup> As *Pravda* and *Komsomo Akaia pravda* stated: "We endorse beauty, smart clothes, chic coiffures, manicures....Girls should be attractive. Perfume and make-up belong to the 'must' for a good Comsomol girl.... Clean shaving is mandatory for a Comsomol boy." Cited in Timasheff, *Great Retreat*, 317. Various posters were devoted to the theme of cleanliness, such as the one by Lodygin, "Otkrytoe pis'mo ko vsei kolkhoznnoi obshchesuvennosti," 1934, which appeared in a printing of 100,000. The large size of the press run indicates the importance attributed to this issue.

<sup>64</sup> "Muzhik i kolkhoz," *No stroike MTS i sovkhov* 1 (1934).

<sup>65</sup> *Na stroike MTS i sovkhov* 1 (1935), 7.

<sup>66</sup> Two posters of a *kolkhoznitsa* and a cow, issued in 1935 and 1936, respectively, exemplify this development. Each poster shows a peasant woman wearing a colorful outfit complemented by a white embroidered scarf stylishly draped over her shoulder. See Viktor Ivanov, "Kolkhozniki, organizuite molochno tovarnye fermy!" which appeared in the fall Of 1935 (printing Of 75,000). KP pk5.IX.9/1.k. A similar poster by Petr Karachentsov appeared in 1936, "Vpered, k dal'neishemu razvitiuu zhitovnovodstva!" (printing Of 50,000). KP P5.IX.12/1.v. A quote from Stalin appears at the top of the latter poster: "The combination of the personal interests of the collective farmers and the general interests of the collective farm—that is the key to the strengthening of the collective farms."

<sup>67</sup> KP p.4.IX.1.b/libuoi.

<sup>68</sup> The poster and a review of it appear in *Plakat i khudozhestvennaia reproduksiia* 7 (July 1934), 10-11. Contemporary newspaper and journal articles devoted to the lives of outstanding individual farmers and workers (*udarniki* and later Stakhanovites) presented similar scenes of private life. See, for example, *Na stroike MTS i sovkhov* 3 (1934), 3, for accounts of women production heroes. One is shown reading a newspaper. For a detailed discussion of the presentation of Stakhanovite workers, see Lewis H. Siegelbaum, *Stakhanovism and the Politics of Productivity, 1935-1941* (Cambridge, England, 1988), chap. 6.

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<sup>69</sup> This was not the only poster produced in 1934 focusing on the relationship between labor and material acquisitions. See also the poster by Viktor Govorkov, “Skol’ko vesiat trudodni” (printing Of 30,000). It showed what collective farmers could acquire with their labor, including livestock, clothing, and household furnishings. *Plakat i khudozhestvennaia reproduksiia* 12 (December 1934), 14-15.

<sup>70</sup> *Plakat i khudozhestvennaia reproduksiia* 7 (July 1934), 11

<sup>71</sup> See, for example, *Na stroike MTS i sovkhovov* 1 (1935).

<sup>72</sup> The village reading room (*izba chital’nia*) performed a variety of functions for the party-state in the countryside, including agitation, propaganda, organization of special campaigns, and even tax collection and sanitation. Kenez, *Birth of the Propaganda State*, 138.

<sup>73</sup> In this connection, see Govorkov, “Skol’ko vesiat trudodni,” and the review of it in *Plakat i khudozhestvennaia reproduksiia* 12, (December 1934), 15. The quotation is from *Na stroike MTS i sovkhovov* 1 (1935), 10.

<sup>74</sup> *Plakat i khudozhestvennaia reproduksiia* 7 (July 1934), 11.

<sup>75</sup> On the development of the cult of Stalin in the 1930s, see the illuminating discussion in Tucker, *Stalin in Power*, esp. chaps. 7 and 20. For other examples of the visual connection between Stalin and exemplary collective farm workers, see *Na stroike MTS i sovkhovov* 1 (1934), 2 (1934), 5 (1935), 1 (1936), 3 (1936).

<sup>76</sup> In Alferov and Sokolov, “Uspekhi kollektivizatsii—torchestvo ucheniia Lenina i Stalina,” the younger woman carries a red book prominently inscribed with author and title: I. Stalin, *The Speech at the Congress of Collective Farm Shock Workers*.

<sup>77</sup> See the frontispiece of *Na stroike MTS i sovkhovov* 2 (1934), which shows a smiling woman tractor driver. A banner on the tractor reads, “For a rich harvest,” and there are silhouettes of Lenin and Stalin.

<sup>78</sup> KP p<sub>4</sub>.XXIV. 1.b/1.zh. The poster, issued in September 1933, was printed in an edition of 40,000.

<sup>79</sup> KP p<sub>5</sub>.IX. 5.b/1shire.

<sup>80</sup> Demchenko was widely celebrated. She provided the centerpiece for the first 1936 issue of *Na stroike MTS i sovkhovov*. For a discussion of Stalin and peasant women celebrated for production achievements, see Fitzpatrick, *Stalin’s Peasants*, 273-277.

<sup>81</sup> One of the earliest and most influential examples was Aleksandr Apsit’s poster, “God proletarskoi diktaturny oktiabr’ 1917-oktiabr’ 1918” ([plate 1](#)).

<sup>82</sup> A poster appeared in 1937 featuring an image of the male worker and female peasant almost exactly like the one in the Mukhina state: Aram Vanetsian’s “Da zdravstvuet soiz rabochikh i krest’ian!” Demosfenova, Nurok, and Shantyko, *Sovietskii politicheskii plakat*, 325. In August 1939, a major agricultural exhibition opened in Moscow, providing an occasion for a series of posters on rural themes. P. Iastrzhemskii created a poster (50,000 were printed) with neoclassical overtones commemorating the exhibition. Stalin’s image appears on a red flag above Mukhina’s statue of two collective farm workers; the pedestal is covered with a stylized drawing of fruit, and in the background is a photomontage of tractors against a light blue sky. RU/SU 1832.

<sup>83</sup> Joan Scott argues that “gender codes” help establish and “naturalize relations of domination. According to Scott, “middle-class reformers in [nineteenth-century] France . . . depicted workers in terms coded as feminine (subordinated, weak, sexually exploited like prostitutes) . . . [whereas] labor and socialist leaders replied by insisting on the masculine position of the working class (producers, strong, protectors of their women and children).” Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York, 1988), 48. Eric Naiman argues that, during the 1920s, the New Economic Policy was sometimes discredited by critics applying a gender code that associated the NEP with feminine attributes. Eric Naiman, *Sex in Public: The Incarnation of early Soviet Ideology* (Princeton, 1997), ch.5, especially 186.