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# Policing post-Stalin society

The militsiia and public order under Khrushchev

Yoram Gorlizki

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YORAM GORLIZKI

## POLICING POST-STALIN SOCIETY

### The *militsiia* and public order under Khrushchev\*

The Soviet leadership after Stalin embraced a “new course” which entitled the population to limited socio-economic guarantees in exchange for public compliance with regime norms. The transition to this new order was not a smooth or easy affair. Building economic and welfare institutions through which incentives could be entrenched and socio-economic rights promoted involved experimentation and failure.<sup>1</sup> Dismantling Stalin’s machinery of coercion was also a far from straightforward matter. Stalin’s successors soon came to realize that even within the framework of a one-party authoritarian system, loosening controls risked triggering high levels of public disorder. The new leadership’s strategy rested, in part, on strengthening the justice agencies and on the adoption of a more covert, prophylactic role for the security police. Its ability to maintain public peace would depend, however, to a great extent on the services of the ordinary police, the Soviet *militsiia*, whose forces outnumbered judges and procurators at least ten times over.<sup>2</sup>

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1. From a large selection of works, see Ed A. Hewett, *Reforming the Soviet economy: Equality versus efficiency* (Washington: Brookings, 1988): chap. 5; Peter Hauslohner, “Managing the Soviet labour market: Politics and policymaking under Brezhnev” (unpublished PhD thesis, Michigan, 1984).

2. According to Soviet usage, the *militsiia*, as a voluntary civil militia attached to local soviets, contrasted starkly with the coercive police forces which serve capitalist states. Soviet authorities thus spurned the term “police” as a translation of the *militsiia*. In practice, however the functions of the *militsiia* became virtually identical to those of police services elsewhere such that for the purposes of this paper the terms *militsiia* and police will be used interchangeably.

Responsible for patrolling the streets, manning public positions and carrying out the vast majority of arrests, the *militsiia* was normally the first line of defense against public anger. This article examines how the *militsiia* coped with this responsibility and how, over the course of Khrushchev's rule, it was remodeled in order to deal with the problems of containing public disorder in a reforming, post-dictatorial society.

The Soviet *militsiia* operated at the interface of state and society. In fulfilling their ordinary duties *militsiia* officials were often physically immersed in everyday life, with stations near markets, construction sites and factories, and ancillary networks embracing a wide range of everyday civilian figures such as caretakers, wardens, housing administrators, social inspectors and street committees. In popular publications the *militsiia* was often pictured as "rubbing shoulder to shoulder with the community."<sup>3</sup> At the same time the *militsiia* was also the personification of Soviet power, the most visible everyday epitome of the state. It was perhaps for this reason that in times of violence and mass disorder the first port of call for the mob was often the police station.<sup>4</sup> The police were also a membrane connecting state to society in another key respect. Central to the stability of the post-Stalin state was the regime's segmentation of society through a network of administrative barriers between social, ethnic and territorial groups. The state-created system of territorial stratification created clusters of privilege around "closed enterprises" and "closed cities."<sup>5</sup> Operating the passport system and the hierarchy of permits and licenses which were key to the functioning of this system was also the domain of the police.

One of the main difficulties for the *militsiia* under Khrushchev was that its organizational home, the Ministry of Internal Affairs (Ministerstvo Vnutrennikh Del — MVD), was a chief target of institutional destalinization. Over the course of the 1950s and early 1960s the MVD was frequently reorganized and purged. At the same time the regime had to confront a growing public order problem, as manifest in an upsurge of hooliganism and mass riots. The regime sought to address this problem by attaching particular significance to the concept of "public order." One expression of this was the renaming, in 1962, of the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs as the Ministry for the Protection of Public Order (Ministerstvo Okhrany Obshchestvennogo Poriadka — MOOP). By this point, the regime had arrived at new institutional solutions for maintaining public peace. In these, the *militsiia* would play a prominent role.

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3. *Vsegda na postu (iz opyta raboty uchastkovykh upolnomochennykh militsii)* (Orenburg, 1962): 4.

4. For more on this, see V. A. Kozlov, *Massovye besporiadki v SSSR pri Khrushcheve i Brezhneve* (Novosibirsk: Sibirskii khronograph, 1999): 15, 18, 262, 264, 267, 277, 291, 337.

5. See Victor Zaslavsky, *The neo-Stalinist state: Class, ethnicity and consensus in Soviet society* (Armonk, NY: ME Sharpe, 1982): 33-35, 58-59, 71, 76, 140-141, 152-153.

### The *militsiia* and the Ministry of Internal Affairs under Khrushchev

Under Stalin the Ministry of Internal Affairs had been an unwieldy conglomerate with a long-running involvement in terror, extra-judicial repression and slave labour.<sup>6</sup> Since the 1930s the MVD and its predecessor, the NKVD, had, apart from its ordinary responsibilities, accumulated a broad portfolio of economic functions which helped push its workforce at the end of the 1940s to over a million.<sup>7</sup> The ministry was also bound up in the system of extra-judicial repression. Although the ministry's predecessor, the Commissariat of Internal Affairs (Narodnyi Komissariat Vnutrennikh Del — NKVD) had split into two bodies, a reduced NKVD and a new Commissariat of State Security (Narodnyi Komissariat Gosudarstvennoi Bezopasnosti — NKGB) in April 1943, the two bodies remained closely linked, a fact that was unaffected by the largely formal conversion of the two commissariats into ministries (the MVD and MGB — Ministerstvo Gosudarstvennoi Bezopasnosti) in March 1946. One measure of this close link was the wholesale transfer of the *militsiia* from the MVD to the MGB in October 1949. Shortly after Stalin's death, on 10 March 1953, the two ministries were again reunited.<sup>8</sup> After Beria's fall in June 1953, Khrushchev and the new leadership sought to reform the ministry in two ways: first by rationalizing its structure and relieving the ministry of alien "economic" functions; and secondly by purging it of its ties to Stalinist terror.

Rationalizing the MVD began with the transfer of the Gulag to the Ministry of Justice in March 1953.<sup>9</sup> On 1 September 1953 the infamous Special Board of the ministry was dissolved.<sup>10</sup> The unification of the MVD with the MGB was then reversed on 13 March 1954 when key subdivisions were transferred to a new Committee for State Security (KGB) at the Council of Ministers. In an effort to rid itself of a host of "atypical" (*nesvoistvennye*) functions, on 7 February 1956 the collegium of the Ministry of Internal Affairs submitted successful proposals to the Central Committee on the transfer of chief construction administrations (of which there had, at one point,

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6. At the time of its inception in 1934 the MVD's predecessor, the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs (NKVD), had been endowed with a very broad range of functions, including protecting state security, guarding the Soviet Union's borders, registering marriages, managing correctional labour camps, supervising motorways, firefighting and ensuring the accuracy of weights and measures; the commissariat's main subdivisions included administrations for the *militsiia*, state security, border and internal troops, firefighting and correctional-labour camps. M. I. Eropkin, *Razvitie organov militsii v sovetskom gosudarstve* (Moscow, 1967): 59-62.

7. A very useful description of the MVD's structure on 1 September 1949 may be found in A. I. Kakurin and N. V. Petrov, *Gulag, 1917-1960* (Moscow: MFD, 2000): 324-333.

8. M. I. Eropkin, *Razvitie, op. cit.*: 74.

9. Following a spate of uprisings in summer 1953 the Gulag was returned to the MVD in January 1954 and from that stage the camp system was gradually wound down, with the rate of dismemberment picking up following XX Party Congress in February 1956. For a description of uprisings in Norilsk and Vorkuta in June and July 1953, see A. I. Kakurin and N. V. Petrov, *Gulag, op. cit.*: 567-587; for more on the return of the Gulag to the MVD in January 1954, see *ibid.*: 372-373.

10. A. Artizov et al., *Reabilitatsiia: Kak eto bylo* (Moscow: MFD, 2000): 69-70.

been 16) to corresponding economic ministries.<sup>11</sup> The following year, in 1957, the main administration for border guards was transferred to the KGB.<sup>12</sup>

By the mid-1950s the MVD had successfully cast off most of the economic and extra-judicial functions which it had acquired under Stalin. By now the largest administrative subdivision within the MVD was the chief administration of the *militsiia*, which had returned to the ministry from the security police in 1953. The *militsiia* carried out three types of duties.<sup>13</sup> The first may be categorized as social control functions.<sup>14</sup> These included the validation of internal passports, the issuance of residence permits (*propiski*)<sup>15</sup> and the treatment of non-criminal public order offenses.<sup>16</sup> Secondly, in order to prevent crimes and apprehend criminals, the *militsiia* carried out operational searches (*operativno-rozysknaia rabota*). Thirdly, the *militsiia* acted as an agency of criminal inquiry (*doznanie*), in the conduct of which *militsiia* officials were invested with criminal procedural powers, such as the right to start criminal cases.<sup>17</sup> The most politically sensitive and strategically important of these functions were the first, social control tasks.

Within a year of the XX Party Congress, the MVD, which under Stalin had been a composite ministry embracing a wide variety of functions, had been stripped of most of its economic, construction and security divisions, so that its work was now

11. V. F. Nekrasov, "Nikolai Dudorov," *Sovetskaia militsiia*, 6 (1990): 18.

12. V. F. Nekrasov, *Na strazhe interesov sovetskogo gosudarstva* (Moscow, 1983): 329-330. In addition, the main administration of internal and convoy guards had seen a fivefold reduction in troop numbers between 1945 and 1955. *Ibid.*: 112-113, 116, 331.

13. This follows M. I. Eropkin, "Organy okhrany obshchestvennogo poriadka v sovremennyi period," in *Organy sovetskogo gosudarstvennogo upravleniia v sovremennyi period* (Moscow: Iuridicheskaiia literatura, 1964): 202-204.

14. In Soviet parlance this was referred to as "administrative work" or "administrative supervision." See M. I. Eropkin, "Organy," *art. cit.*: 202-203; and F. S. Razarenov, *Administrativnyi nadzor* (Moscow, 1964).

15. The internal passport system had been introduced through two SNK regulations of 27 December 1932 and 14 January 1933 which had sought to curb peasant migration to the larger cities. By 1953 there were restrictions on 340 cities, settlements and rail junctions as well as on several border areas. In addition, released inmates from the camps were subject to passport restrictions. A Council of Ministers resolution of 21 May 1953, sponsored by Beria, sought to lift most of these restrictions; it was replaced, however, by resolution no. 2666-1124 of 21 October 1953. See A. Artizov *et al.*, *Reabilitatsiia*, *op. cit.*: 45-48, 385 fn. 35.

16. Non-criminal public order violations and breaches of bye-laws (which could include swearing, fortune telling, littering the parks, trampling lawns, and ruining shrubs or flowers) were either subject to on the spot fines or treated through "administrative procedures" (i.e. outside the ordinary courts). Other tasks of this kind included ensuring compliance with road and motor regulations and enforcing the Soviet licensing system by which access to firearms, explosives, official seals, poisons and the means of printing and communication were regulated.

17. Whereas in the exercise of its duties as an agency of investigation the *militsiia* was bound by criminal procedural laws, as a search agency it was regulated by administrative orders from senior officials. Both functions were exercised by the main administration for criminal search and investigation (and its regional departments) and the OBKhSS (Otdely Bor'by s Khishcheniiami Sotsialisticheskoi Sobstvennosti i Spekuliatsiei: Departments for combating theft of socialist property and speculation). By contrast with the social control functions, searches and criminal inquiries were together known as the "operational services" of the *militsiia* and usually required more specialized and better educated staff.

dominated by the activities of the *militsiia*.<sup>18</sup> The ministry was also purged of officials who had been implicated in the illegalities of the Stalin years. In the two years following the June 1953 Central Committee plenum 4,000 “compromised” members of the MVD’s managerial stratum (*rukovodiashchii sostav*) were dismissed and many of their positions filled by functionaries from the party apparatus. The purge encompassed a list of MVD generals who, on the recommendation of the minister, Sergei Kruglov, were stripped of their rank and title for violations of socialist legality, abuse of office, and other misdeeds committed under Stalin.<sup>19</sup> Kruglov himself did not escape the wrath of destalinization. “Khrushchev,” writes Nekrasov, “associated Kruglov with many of the excesses of the Stalinist system. Hence he began to look for mistakes (both real and imaginary) in Sergei Nikiforovich’s work.” Khrushchev levered out Kruglov in January 1956 and had him replaced by Nikolai Dudorov who, as a Central Committee apparatchik with no previous ties to the security services, was meant to break the “NKVD chain” of officials who had led the ministry since the 1930s.<sup>20</sup>

Khrushchev went further than merely rationalizing the ministry or liberating it of tainted personnel. In keeping with the broad thrust of administrative reforms after Stalin, the ministry was decentralized. On 22 February 1955 a Russian republican Ministry of Internal Affairs was established, attracting key leadership functions from the all-union ministry. As part of a sweeping anti-bureaucracy drive, the new republican minister, Nikolai Stakhanov, informed the Central Committee eighteen months later that almost 7,000 administrative positions had been axed.<sup>21</sup> Under Khrushchev the *militsiia* also reverted to a pre-Stalinist administrative structure. Prior to the sharp centralization of the early 1930s, the *militsiia* had been institutionally built into the fabric of local power and administered through local soviets.<sup>22</sup> In a

18. Although not completely dissolved, the internal troops of the MVD, which continued to be administered in a separate division by the ministry, were also severely reduced. The number of MVD internal troops fell by 40,000 from 1953 to 1956, so that by November 1956 troop numbers stood at approximately 18,000. See V. A. Kozlov, *Massovye besporiadki*, *op. cit.*: 33.

19. This was part of a joint list of generals submitted to the Central Committee by Kruglov and the head of the KGB, Ivan Serov, in December 1954. V. F. Nekrasov, “Sergei Kruglov,” *Sovetskaia militsiia*, 5 (1990): 22.

20. For a detailed description of how Khrushchev arranged Kruglov’s dismissal, see V. F. Nekrasov, “Sergei Kruglov,” *art. cit.*: 23-24. Kruglov was eventually expelled from the party for “violations of socialist legality” on 6 January 1960. On Dudorov’s background and his support of Khrushchev, especially in the leadership struggle with Malenkov, see V. F. Nekrasov, “Nikolai Dudorov,” *art. cit.*: 18-22.

21. Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Social’no-Politicheskoi Istorii — RGASPI, f. 556, op. 23, d. 8, l. 73-74.

22. For more on the system of “dual subordination” of the 1920s, in which the *militsiia* had been answerable to local soviets as well as to the central internal affairs apparatus in Moscow, see M. I. Eropkin, *Razvitie*, *op. cit.*: 12-14, 18, 39; and R. S. Mulukaev, “Stanovlenie organizatsionno-pravovykh osnov militsii,” *Trudy vysshei shkoly MVD*, 27 (1971): 7. On the centralization of the 1930s, including the creation of the main all-union administration of the *militsiia* on 25 May 1931 and the effective disappearance of dual subordination in 1934, see M. I. Eropkin, *Razvitie*, *op. cit.*: 57-59; and *Vysshie organy gosudarstvennoi vlasti i organy tsentral’nogo upravleniia RSFSR (1917-1967)* (Moscow, 1971): 481-482.

return to this tradition in October 1956 regional administrations of the MVD were redesignated as arms of the corresponding soviets, thus restoring the historical pattern of “dual subordination.”<sup>23</sup>

It is likely that Khrushchev himself harboured a personal animus against the MVD.<sup>24</sup> This found expression in the general underfunding of the institution under his leadership, the reduction in wages and pensions for ministry officials, the drastic cuts in staffing levels and the denial of much-needed materials and technical facilities. Even after the first round of post-Stalin cuts, which affected a wide range of institutions, reductions of MVD staffing levels continued into the late 1950s. On 30 August 1958 a government commission ordered the all-union MVD to act on proposals from the Ministry of Finance to relieve the MVD of 40,000 posts.<sup>25</sup> Although not implemented in full, over 1958 and 1959 the Russian *militsiia* was forced to cut 15,682 posts (over 12% of its staff), yielding savings in salaries of 163 million roubles a year.<sup>26</sup> The biggest blow, however, was the abolition of the all-union MVD itself on 13 January 1960. While some of its functions were transferred to other bodies, most were passed on to the RSFSR ministry.<sup>27</sup>

Khrushchev may have been swayed by the parallel campaign, also launched at this time, to entrust the protection of social order to people’s guards (*druzhiny*). Rather than relying solely on formal state agencies, such as the *militsiia*, to defend public order, greater weight was placed on the voluntary efforts of lay organizations, winning financial savings in the bargain. Even after the failure of this public law campaign had become apparent, Khrushchev’s hostility to the *militsiia* remained. When, for example, he was presented with a draft statute on the *militsiia* in 1962 which proposed raising its budget and increasing the powers of its officials, Khrushchev reportedly went into a frenzy, arguing that the authors had “gone out of their mind” in wanting to throw such resources at the *militsiia*, and he crossed out many of the proposals in the draft, scrawling the word “rubbish” (*drianaia zapiska*) in the margins.<sup>28</sup>

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23. The *militsiia* was now held accountable to regional and local soviets as well as to the next hierarchical instance of the MVD. It was thus hoped that regional and local soviets and executive committees would play a more active role in organizing the *militsiia*, discussing its affairs at their meetings, and mobilizing public support for its actions. M. I. Eropkin, *Razvitie*, *op. cit.*: 78-79; *id.*, “Organy,” *art. cit.*: 195-196.

24. See Vadim Tikunov, “Na strazhe obshchestvennogo poriadka,” *Partiinaia zhizn’*, 20 (1965): 15-21; “Khrushchev protiv militsii?,” *Sovetskaia militsiia*, 7 (1989): 37-38.

25. V. F. Nekrasov, “Nikolai Dudorov,” *art. cit.*: 24.

26. V. F. Nekrasov, “Nikolai Stakhanov,” *Sovetskaia militsiia*, 7 (1990): 26.

27. The RSFSR MVD gained three administrations (special *militsiia*, internal and convoy troops, and educational establishments) to add to the six that it had at its inception in 1955 (for the *militsiia*, correctional labour camps, fire-fighting, cadres, archive and administration). V. F. Nekrasov, “Nikolai Dudorov,” *art. cit.*: 24.

28. As reported at the time by the Presidium member, Frol Kozlov, to the then head of the administrative agencies department, Nikolai Mironov. Interview with S. I. Grachev, 18 April 1991.



Even after the many secondary or extraneous activities of the MVD had been jettisoned, the core purpose of its main arm, the *militsiia*, remained in doubt. At the same time the regime would slowly have to come to terms with new realities. The relaxation of Stalinist constraints had opened the way for an upsurge of public order violations. Learning to deal with these would prove to be one of the main challenges facing the post-Stalin state.

### Public order violations under Khrushchev

Stalin's death prompted a lifting of restrictions on many fronts. The first and most notable of these was the sudden release of 1,195,000 prisoners following the "Decree on Amnesty" of 27 March 1953. Progress in registering recently amnestied convicts at new places of residence proved to be very slow. Even this, however, lagged well behind the capacity of the regime to organize work for ex-convicts.<sup>29</sup> By July 1953 the state had been able to organize work for only 625,700 of the one million prisoners who had been released.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, large numbers of former prisoners, many of whom were ordinary criminals, were allowed to roam the country with few restrictions, while many of those who were traced by the police found themselves without gainful employment and were compelled to find alternative, often semi-legal, means of eking out an existence.<sup>31</sup> Many former convicts, especially among the ordinary criminals, found themselves on the margins of society, leading dissolute, drunken and often violent lifestyles. Regional authorities often found that they did not have the resources to accommodate or contain these new arrivals. As D. Iakovenko, who served in an internal troop division of the Ministry of Internal Affairs at the time, observed:

The release of prisoners in such large numbers swamped our railways and water transport, train stations and piers, as well as large and small towns, and considerably complicated our work, leading to a sharp rise in serious crimes. In Stalingrad, for example, it was dangerous even to walk out on the streets in the daytime... The *militsiia* were unable to cope with this huge wave (*moshchnyi val*) of prisoners who had been released from so many camps.<sup>32</sup>

29. 781,968 former prisoners had been released by 10 June 1953. Of these 602,130 had been registered, of whom only 64.6% were placed in officially recognized jobs. V. A. Kozlov, *Massovye besporiadki*, *op. cit.*: 189.

30. Iu. V. Aksiutin and A. V. Pyzhikov, *Poststalinskoe obshchestvo: Problema liderstva i transformatsiia vlasti* (Moscow: Nauchnaia kniga, 1999): 143.

31. A letter to the Central Committee from the Stavropol *kraikom* of 1 March 1957 attributed the recent settlement of 6,500 aliens in the resorts of the region to the amnesty and the removal of passport restrictions. A letter of 17 May 1957 attributed similar problems in Kaliningrad to the removal of passport restrictions in 1955. RGASPI, f. 556, op. 23, d. 32 (see fn. 21). The regime's reluctance to prosecute "violations of the passport regime" is evidenced by decline in criminal convictions for this offense from 19,704 in 1952 to 14,409 in 1953, 9,025 in 1954 and 7,485 in 1955. Gosudartsvennyi Arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii — GARF, f. 9492, op. 6, d. 14, l. 15.

32. Iu. V. Aksiutin and A. V. Pyzhikov, *Poststalinskoe obshchestvo*, *op. cit.*: 144.

Other longer-term factors also contributed to the rise in social disorder under Khrushchev. Prime among these were the migrations of hordes of young, male workers to new construction sites and farms in the Virgin Lands in Kazakhstan and the return of deported peoples, most notably Chechens, to their homelands. The sudden resettlement of uprooted people, many of whom were stripped of traditional social and family supports, stirred up tensions both among the migrants themselves and with local communities. Tempers were often particularly tested by rules which allowed returnees to reclaim their former apartments, forcing their current residents out on to the streets.<sup>33</sup>

One measure of the rise in public disorder in the early post-Stalin period was the growth in criminal convictions for hooliganism. From 1950 to 1956 the number of successful prosecutions across the USSR mushroomed from 71,907 to 196,558. Convictions for other crimes of violence, such as blows and assaults also rose, from 74,696 in 1950 to 120,024 in 1956, while successful prosecutions for resistance to authority grew from 3,123 in 1950 to 11,061 in 1956. Collectively, the share of these crimes as a proportion of all convictions in the USSR shot up from 8.6% in 1950 to 32.0% in 1956.<sup>34</sup> All pointed to the growing inability of the state to contain acts of aggression, especially those committed in public spaces under the influence of alcohol.

For its part, the new scaled-down *militsiia* was not up to the task of dealing with these problems. The regime encountered numerous difficulties in recruiting, training and controlling *militsiia* officials. The authorities certainly did not have a large pool of eager or reliable recruits to choose from. Given the acute manpower shortages after the war, the *militsiia* had been forced to enlist the services of many “untrained” or “politically unreliable” cadres, as well as, in some areas, pensioners and invalids.<sup>35</sup> In some regions, such as Kemerovo, the *militsiia* appointed inexperienced personnel to responsible operational positions and, presumably for lack of choice, gave jobs to candidates with highly dubious records.<sup>36</sup> The average educational level of *militsiia* staff was risible. Soon after assuming office, in March 1956, the USSR Minister of Internal Affairs, Dudorov, revealed to a gathering of republican ministers that 46% of *militsiia* staff could boast no more than primary education and a further 42% had not completed secondary school. “That means,” he concluded, “that about half the force is virtually illiterate while most of the other half doesn’t have a secondary education... Comrade Bulganin is right, we need to lift the *militsiia* from the dirt and put it on its feet.”<sup>37</sup>

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33. V. A. Kozlov, *Massovye besporiadki*, *op. cit.*: chaps. 1, 3 and 4.

34. GARF, f. 9492, op. 6, d. 14, l. 14-16.

35. M. I. Eropkin, *Razvitie*, *op. cit.*: 72.

36. Kemerovo city party committee resolution on the *militsiia* of November 1956 in RGASPI, f. 556, op. 23, d. 8, l. 44-45.

37. V. F. Nekrasov, “Nikolai Dudorov,” *art. cit.*: 18. In some areas low educational levels were also evident in the managerial stratum. A memo from Kemerovo in mid-1956 reported that approximately half of the officer corps had attended less than seven years of school while only a third of operational workers had undergone specialist *militsiia* training. In the Mari ASSR only 30 of 58 line functionaries, 50 of 121 operational staff and three out of 71 ward plenipotentiaries had completed secondary school. RGASPI, f. 556, op. 23, d. 8, l. 44-45, 58-59.

Towards the end of 1956 the regime adopted measures on the *militsiia* aimed at addressing the growing public order problem. On 25 October the Central Committee and the Council of Ministers issued a joint resolution “On measures to improve the work of the USSR Ministry of Internal Affairs.” The resolution prompted a host of local rulings on improving working conditions for the *militsiia*, on moving reliable party cadres to local branches of the MVD, and on stepping up the work of voluntary auxiliary brigades which could assist the *militsiia* in its work.<sup>38</sup> On the strength of the resolution, the number of *militsiia* officials manning public positions and patrolling the streets increased. The regime also reformed its legislation on hooliganism, so as to make the apprehension of hooligans more practicable than it had been previously. On 20 December 1956, a decree on “petty hooliganism” gave the authorities a means of skirting the harsh provisions of existing legislation (art. 74 of the RSFSR criminal code), which provided for a minimum custodial sentence of one year for any act of hooliganism, by allowing judges to impose mild punishments of three to five days detention for relatively minor offenses.<sup>39</sup> The new legislation only served to further underline the seriousness of this problem however. In its first year on the books, almost 1.5 million people were convicted on charges relating to the decree.<sup>40</sup>

Despite the attention bestowed on the *militsiia* and on social order problems at the end of 1956, the difficulties facing the state remained formidable. Particularly disturbing were the spontaneous eruptions of violence which were liable to overwhelm the *militsiia* and engulf whole towns or settlements. In 1958 there were cases, especially in the new towns (*novostrochnye gorodki*) of Central Asia, where whole districts were in effect seized by hooligans. On certain occasions, for example the riot in Grozny in August 1958, senior public officials, such as a regional party secretary and the deputy republican Minister of Internal Affairs, were dragged out on to the street and beaten up, while rank and file *militsiia* operatives simply took off their uniforms for fear of being assaulted. Lacking an appropriate means for placating riots and resolving heated disputes, the *militsiia* were sometimes driven to their last resort, the use of firearms.<sup>41</sup>

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38. Thus, for example, a resolution of the Novosibirsk *obkom* of 29 November 1956 ordered that 350 communists and komsomol members should be directed to the city *militsiia* within two months and a further hundred should be sent to district *militsii*. Similarly a resolution of the Penza *obkom* of 13 November 1956 directed 24 party and komsomol cadres to the local MVD, while a letter from the Briansk *obkom* to the Central Committee of 5 November announced that 80 “politically prepared and morally sound communists” were to be appointed to the local branch of the MVD. There were also similar rulings in Vladimir, Ivanovo, Ulianovsk, Arkhangelsk, Primorskii, and Kemerovo provinces. Auxiliary *militsiia* “brigades” were forerunners of the people’s guards (*druzhiny*) which were formally introduced in 1958. RGASPI, f. 556, op. 23, d. 8, 26.

39. Such cases were heard under “administrative procedures” which were considered by a single judge in a summary hearing without right of appeal. Administrative hearings were normally grouped together by judges and processed quickly in sessions, which could typically take up one morning a week, and be heard either at court offices or at a local police station.

40. V. A. Kozlov, *Massovye besporiadki*, op. cit.: 185.

41. *Ibid.*: 38, 146, 151, 193, 201-205. For a case in July 1957 when two *militsiia* officials in Leningrad used guns in order to deal with a fight with 150 students, see RGASPI, f. 556, op. 23, d. 32.

Tensions between the *militsiia* and local communities were often inflamed by the dubious practices and reputations of the *militsiia* themselves. In a report on its activities in 1959 to the Central Committee, the RSFSR Ministry of Internal Affairs conceded that no less than one in ten *militsiia* workers that year had been subjected to penalties for abuse, negligence, drunkenness and amoral misdeeds.<sup>42</sup> Where particularly serious offenses were perpetrated *militsiia* officials were themselves prosecuted. In his speech to republican ministers in March 1956 Dudorov identified this as one of the two gravest shortcomings in the work of the *militsiia*: “In the organs of the *militsiia* many crimes are committed by the officials themselves. This is a most serious misfortune.”<sup>43</sup> Perhaps most serious for community relations and for the reputation of the *militsiia* were the instances of unfounded arrests and beatings by *militsiia* officials. “Arbitrary rule and lawlessness,” observed a report on the state of discipline and criminality within the *militsiia* submitted to the collegium of the MVD on 25 June 1956, “find expression in the use of force against Soviet citizens, in injuries and killings. There are still many cases of *militsiia* officials taunting and mocking our citizens.”<sup>44</sup> This was of sufficient concern that on 29 January 1958 the Central Committee issued a resolution “On violations of legality by the *militsiia*” which highlighted cases of rudeness, beatings and unfounded detentions by *militsiia* officials.<sup>45</sup> The Central Committee resolution appears to have had only a marginal effect. A survey conducted by the RSFSR procuracy in 1959 discovered numerous cases of violations of socialist legality by *militsiia* officials, including beatings of suspects, forced confessions, falsification of evidence and crimes provoked by *militsiia* personnel.<sup>46</sup> In June 1960 the Procurator General Rudenko wrote that “in conducting inquiries and in their operational-search work certain *militsiia* functionaries resort to illegal methods right up to the application of physical force against witnesses and suspects, the provocational use of agents and the outright falsification of charges against certain innocent citizens.”<sup>47</sup> The following March the RSFSR procurator, A. A. Kruglov, wrote to the Central Committee in a similar vein:

The RSFSR procuracy has reports of trouble in the *militsiia* relating to the lack of education of its cadres and their failure to contain violations of socialist legality, as a result of which such violations have become common place. Recently the RSFSR courts have seen a significant volume of criminal cases brought against workers of the *militsiia* for gross violations of legality. These include the

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42. RGASPI, f. 556, op. 23, d. 101, l. 79-80. For an example of drunkenness among *militsiia* officials in the Mari region, see *ibid.*, d. 8. There is a good discussion of the high rates of general disciplinary punishments and party reprimands against *militsiia* officials in Altai *Krai* in 1957 in *ibid.*, d. 56, l. 46.

43. V. F. Nekrasov, “Nikolai Dudorov,” *art. cit.*: 18.

44. Cited in V. A. Kozlov, *Massovye besporiadki*, *op. cit.*: 202.

45. *Ibid.*: 206.

46. RGASPI, f. 556, op. 23, d. 101, l. 23.

47. V. A. Kozlov, *Massovye besporiadki*, *op. cit.*: 206.

falsification of investigations, the application of physical force to suspects and witnesses, the illegal detention of citizens, and so forth.<sup>48</sup>

The *militsiia*'s reputation for illegally arresting and beating suspects meant that group hooliganistic actions, sometimes involving perpetrators who had themselves been detained or beaten by the police, often converged on *militsiia* outposts. When, for example, the *militsiia* apprehended one of 15 youngsters who caused an affray in Novorossiisk on 9 January 1956, the remainder, together with a segment of a crowd leaving a nearby cinema, stormed the local police station throwing sticks and stones at the windows and attacking the policemen there. The crowd, at one point a thousand strong, was only eventually tamed when border troops and a squad from a local military garrison were sent in. Similarly on 21 January 1956, when the husband of an illegal trader in the town of Klaipėd (Lithuania), who had been apprehended by the *militsiia*, had an epileptic fit, a 500-strong crowd rounded on the *militsiia* post in the market, and then on the main police station hurling bricks and stones and shouting "Beat the police." On 28 October a drunken man who had abused passengers on a bus was taken to the police station in the town of Slaviansk in Ukraine. Their passions inflamed by cries that the drunken man was being beaten by the police, a crowd of 500-600 people hurled stones at the police station and tried to break into the police cells.<sup>49</sup>

The often dismal reputation of the police exacerbated tensions with local communities and provided a focal point around which angry crowds could vent their spleen. Large outbreaks of violence — "mass disorders" — were nonetheless confined in the 1950s to quite specific circumstances, such as migrant communities in the Virgin Lands, garrison towns and interethnic conflicts — often involving the returned Chechens — in the Caucasus. Even the rise in cases of ordinary hooliganism, while causing some concern, was not perceived as a burning political issue. In the early 1960s this would change. A crime wave in 1961 and the Novocherkassk massacre in 1962 would force the question of public order onto the political agenda.

### Finding new solutions

Two concurrent public order issues in 1960-1961 forced the regime to pay more attention to the *militsiia*. The complete breakdown of order in Novocherkassk in summer 1962 then turned the regime in favour of a more robust and long-term strategy for promoting public order. The endorsement of the *militsiia* and of the new Ministry for Protection of Public Order in late summer and autumn 1962 would mark the onset of a new and distinctive approach to public control which would become a key component of Brezhnev's social contract.

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48. RGASPI, f. 556, op. 23, d. 119, l. 34-35.

49. V. A. Kozlov, *Massovye besporiadki, op. cit.*: 202-204.

The first public order issue to force its way onto the political agenda in 1960-1961 was the dramatic rise in cases of hooliganism. The adoption of special administrative procedures for processing cases of “petty” hooliganism at the end of 1956 had diverted the bulk of hooliganism cases from the ordinary courts and reversed the sharp escalation in criminal convictions for hooliganism which had been apparent since 1950. The entrusting of basic law enforcement functions to voluntary people’s guards in 1958 and 1959 however proved to be a policy failure.<sup>50</sup> Apart from acting as less of a deterrent, inexperienced lay guards often aggravated rather than resolved tense conflict situations on the ground. With an upsurge of serious cases of hooliganism on their hands, the law enforcement agencies were instructed to direct cases which, in the previous two years would have been handled in administrative procedure or in the comrades’ courts, back to the ordinary people’s courts. Against the background of a general rise in criminal convictions of over 50% between 1960 and 1961, the volume of convictions for hooliganism more than doubled in 1961.<sup>51</sup>

The second area of concern was a spate of mass disorders in the first half of 1961. Riots involving thousands of disaffected citizens broke out in Krasnodar in January, in Murom and Biisk (Altai *Krai*) in June, and in the town of Aleksandrov in July. The disturbances certainly had wider social causes. Low prices and steady wage increments had generated widespread shortages. Further, two of the towns, Murov and Aleksandrov, were located just beyond the 100 km ring around Moscow and thus had very high concentrations of groups, such as vagrants, prostitutes, shirkers and camp returnees, who had been denied registration rights in the capital and its immediate environs.<sup>52</sup> The high incidence of social drop-outs appears to have increased tensions. Ringleaders of the riots tended to be those most marginalized by society, such as orphans, disabled soldiers, and those who were either wrongly convicted or who had served long terms for trivial misdeeds, and who naturally harboured deep grudges against the state.<sup>53</sup>

In virtually all cases the focus of the crowd’s animosity was the *militsiia*. In Murom, crowds screaming “Beat the fascists,” “Beat the vermin” or simply “Beat the *militsiia*” rained stones on the police station and attacked police officials; in

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50. A party resolution “On raising the role of the public in the struggle with criminality and with violations of public order” had been adopted on 5 November 1958. That month, people’s guards were set up on an experimental basis in Leningrad. Use of the people’s guards was generalized following the joint resolution of the Council of Ministers and the Central Committee of 2 March 1959 “On participation by workers in the protection of public order.” In addition to the ordinary *druzhiny* (people’s guards), of whom there were 2 million (24,000 units) in 1959, the latter resolution gave a strong impetus to lay assistants across the range of functions carried out by the *militsiia*, including non-staff ward plenipotentiaries, vehicle inspectors, passport inspectors, social investigators and assistants within specialized branches of the *militsiia* such as the OBKhSS.

51. GARF, f. 8131, op. 32, d. 6748, l. 85-96.

52. Being outside the ring also meant that food was harder to come by than in the showpiece capital. V. A. Kozlov, *Massovye besporiadki, op. cit.:* 258.

53. *Ibid.:* 243-244, 250, 260.

Aleksandrov, also to the sounds of “Beat and smash the *militsiia*” rioters set fire to the police station and brutally assaulted an innocent bystander who they mistook for a policeman; and in Biisk, where tensions between drinkers and the *militsiia* in the town market tended to run high, the wife of a man who had been detained for beating up a policeman, shouted out to a gathering mob that the “vermin policemen have taken our savings” and then implored the crowd to “kill the two (policemen)” as a result of which the two policemen were dragged out of a car, only to be saved at the last moment by incoming soldiers.<sup>54</sup>

The regime responded to these trends with two actions. First, on 16 August 1961 the Central Committee issued a resolution “On measures to strengthen the struggle with manifestations of criminality in certain towns and districts.” In the following months *obkom* buros across the country followed up the resolution’s recommendations by tabling motions on the crime wave at buro meetings, and by channeling reliable cadres to the regional justice agencies.<sup>55</sup> This was followed, secondly, by the decrees of 15 and 20 February 1962 which protected the *militsiia* by extending the death penalty for violent attacks which threatened the life, health or dignity of members of the *militsiia* or of the people’s guard. The power of the *militsiia* was further shored up by another decree, shortly afterwards, which provided for sanctions against members of the public who refused to submit to the *militsiia*’s authority.<sup>56</sup>

Towards the end of 1961 and at the beginning of 1962 advocates of the *militsiia* also lobbied the party leadership for more resources. One of the *militsiia*’s most ardent supporters was the head of the administrative agencies department at the Central Committee, Nikolai Mironov. Believing that the *militsiia* had been disadvantaged by the dissolution of the USSR MVD in January 1960 and thereby the lack of an institutional representative at an all-union level, Mironov took up the *militsiia*’s cause by sending a policy document “On the *militsiia*” to a member of the party Presidium, Frol Kozlov, urging the leadership to increase the *militsiia*’s wages, to invest in new equipment and to take steps to raise the *militsiia*’s status.<sup>57</sup> For his part, the new RSFSR Minister of Internal Affairs, Vadim Tikunov, who had assumed office in August 1961, sent Khrushchev a new draft all-union statute on the *militsiia* with a recommendation that *militsiia* personnel be issued with rubber truncheons, handcuffs and tear gas.<sup>58</sup> On account of what appears to have been a long-held scepticism towards the *militsiia*, the First Secretary, Nikita Khrushchev, blocked all these moves.<sup>59</sup>

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54. *Ibid.*: 261-263, 277, 289-291, 297. Kozlov [267] notes that a feature of the Murom riot was the fact that it was “almost exclusively directed at workers of the *militsiia*.”

55. RGASPI, f. 556, op. 23, d. 141.

56. *Vedomosti verkhovnogo soveta SSSR*, 8 (1962): 83; 14 (1962): 148.

57. Interview with S. I. Grachev, 18 April 1991.

58. V. F. Nekrasov, “Vadim Tikunov,” *Sovetskaia militsiia*, 8 (1990): 21.

59. S. I. Grachev, the deputy head of the administrative agencies department, was told this at the time by his immediate boss, Mironov. Interview with S. I. Grachev, 18 April 1991.

What finally broke Khrushchev's resistance was the political fallout from the events at Novochoerkassk on 1 and 2 June 1962. The disturbances there were sparked off by the unhappy coincidence of national price rises for meat and milk, announced on 31 May 1962, with a 30% slashing of piece-rates at the Budennyi electric locomotive plant in Novochoerkassk. A group of 25 workers at the steel shop, unsatisfied by the explanations of the head of the industrial department at the Rostov party committee, Buzaev, streamed out on to the factory square and called on workers from other factory sections to join them. By 11 o'clock a large demonstration carrying home-made banners with the slogan "Meat, milk and higher wages" had gathered in front of the main building of the factory administration and at midday protesters stopped a passenger train heading from Saratov to Rostov. By 4.30, following the failure of top regional party and soviet dignitaries to placate them with speeches from the main balcony, a crowd of over 4,000 protestors seized the factory grounds, easily overwhelmed the 200 or so *militsiia* who had been sent in to bring order, and thereafter surrounded the main *militsiia* building in the city. The following day, on 2 June, a giant crowd, carrying red banners and portraits of Lenin, now swelled with workers from other factories, as well as women and children, marched on the headquarters of the city party committee. Following a meeting of a protestors' delegation with two national party leaders, Anastas Mikoian and Frol Kozlov, who had flown in from Moscow to calm the situation, a section of the crowd began to make a move on the *gorkom* building. It was at this point that internal troops of the MVD, under the head of the Novochoerkassk garrison, General Oleshko, opened fire on the crowd, killing twenty people.<sup>60</sup>

Two factors distinguished the events at Novochoerkassk from other mass disorders of the post-Stalin period. First, whereas other disturbances had tended to attract marginal social groups, drunkards and former criminals, many of those involved in the Novochoerkassk protests were men and women (as well as children) of good social standing with no criminal associations.<sup>61</sup> Secondly, whereas other disorders had been rooted in local conflicts, the Novochoerkassk uprising took place against a background of widespread disaffection with the economic policies of the regime.<sup>62</sup> The events in Novochoerkassk were on a major scale and the demands of protestors tapped the sympathies of many workers in nearby areas.<sup>63</sup> The incident was indeed viewed with sufficient seriousness by the leadership that Presidium (*Politbiuro*) members were immediately flown in to the affected area to quell the disturbances. In the following weeks the party Presidium was kept regularly informed of developments in the Rostov region.<sup>64</sup>

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60. For a description of these events, see Samuel Baron, *Bloody Saturday* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).

61. V. A. Kozlov, *Massovye besporiadki, op. cit.*: 303, 307, 310, 316, 348.

62. *Ibid.*: 230-234, 305-307.

63. This is described in *ibid.*: 302, 366-374.

64. *Ibid.*: 305, 323, 350, 357, 374. Other mass disorders to have elicited some reaction — albeit more limited — from the Moscow leadership were the riots in Georgia in 1956 and in Grozny in 1958. See *ibid.*: 153-154, 182.



Although we still do not have reliable information on dynamics within the Presidium at this time, it would appear that any resistance Khrushchev may have had to elevating the status of the *militsiia* was broken in the wake of Novocherkassk. Certainly, in the weeks following the massacre, the regime was quick to pour resources into public order institutions. Less than a month after the protest, on 7 July 1962, the collegium of the RSFSR MVD formally approved Tikunov's original proposals to equip the *militsiia* with rubber truncheons, tear gas and handcuffs.<sup>65</sup> On 17 August a resolution "On measures to improve the activity of the Soviet *militsiia*" addressed the organization's continuing personnel problem by promising more qualified and politically reliable staff for the *militsiia*. Within eighteen months the RSFSR *militsiia* would acquire 12,000 communists and komsomol members.<sup>66</sup> In a symbolic move the RSFSR Ministry of Internal Affairs was renamed the Ministry for Protection of Public Order (MOOP) on 30 August. It was at this time too that the concept of "public order," as a mark of the new importance invested in it, began to be seriously studied and used by policy analysts and legal scholars.<sup>67</sup>

On the symbolic plane the *militsiia*, the main protector of public order, also prospered. Red banners were introduced for republican, regional and urban garrisons of the *militsiia*, oaths of allegiance were instituted and a new annual "day of the *militsiia*" was inaugurated on 10 November 1962.<sup>68</sup> Khrushchev and other members of the Presidium praised the *militsiia* at a celebratory ceremony that day in Moscow. Furthermore, over the summer and autumn a rash of acclamatory books and pamphlets on *militsiia* workers were published and the Minister of Culture, Ekaterina Furtseva, was instructed to commission films depicting *militsiia* workers in heroic roles.<sup>69</sup>

## Conclusion

The Novocherkassk drama and the backdrop of widespread dissatisfaction with the economic policies of the regime against which it was played out compelled the Soviet leadership to adopt a new formula for maintaining public order. The most immediate remedies included the formation of a new Ministry for the Protection of Public Order and steps to improve the cadre base and to raise the profile and reputation of the *militsiia*. A raft of other reforms in this period would indeed anticipate the approach to public order which would predominate under

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65. V. F. Nekrasov, "Vadim Tikunov," *art. cit.*: 21.

66. *Ibid.*: 22.

67. M. I. Eropkin, "Organy," *art. cit.*: 183 fn. 2, 184.

68. *Pravda* (27 September 1962).

69. V. Shiriaev, *Moia militsiia* (Iaroslavl', 1962); V. N. Liakin, *Vrag ne dostignet tseli* (Moscow, 1962); *Vsegda na postu* (Orenburg, 1962); Klimenko, *Protiv khuliganov i tuneiadtsev — gnev i silu obshchestvennosti* (Petrovsk, 1962). On the *militsiia* films, see V. F. Nekrasov, "Vadim Tikunov," *art. cit.*: 22.

Brezhnev.<sup>70</sup> Thus, for example, legislation in July 1962 extending the brief of the security services by revising article 70 of the RSFSR Criminal Code on “anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda,” presaged the deterrent approach to dissident and anti-Soviet activity, as well as the vast extension of the regime’s informer network, which would characterize the early Brezhnev period.<sup>71</sup> Similarly legislation in summer 1966 granting police officials greater discretion in the arrest and detention of hooligans<sup>72</sup> and establishing a new Union Ministry for the Preservation of Public Order, was entirely in keeping with the reforms of summer 1962.<sup>73</sup>

Strengthening the *militiia* was not the only lesson of Novocherkassk. With an eye to improving incentives, work norms were reduced and the sharp price rise withdrawn. New passport regulations adopted shortly after the demonstrations, on 19 July 1962, introduced a new band of towns and cities in the south, including the flashpoint centres of Groznyi, Krasnodar and Novocherkassk itself, which were ruled out of bounds for high-risk social groups. In line with this policy some central towns and districts, such as Moscow, Leningrad and Moscow *oblast’*, had further passport restrictions imposed on them in August 1966.<sup>74</sup> It was as a continuation of policies introduced in the last two years of Khrushchev’s tenure that under Brezhnev a new formula for managing public order was settled on which granted a major role to the *militiia* in applying summary justice and in operating an elaborate system of territorial and social stratification. In exercising these functions the *militiia* was helped by the fact that its operatives had by now largely outgrown the methods and approaches of the Stalin years, and by the fact that the glaring discrepancy between utopian aspirations for self-administration and the realities of state-managed public order which had characterized the Khrushchev era had all but withered away.

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70. See V. A. Kozlov, *Massovye besporiadki*, *op. cit.*: 384; R. G. Pikhov, *Sovetskii soiuz: istoriia vlasti, 1945-1991* (Moscow, 1998): 245.

71. V. A. Kozlov, *Massovye besporiadki*, *op. cit.*: 405.

72. The decree of the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet of 26 July 1966 allowed the head of the *militiia* to decide within 24 hours of arrest of a petty hooligan whether to hand him over to a people’s court, a comrades’ court or a social organization. He could also now fine a petty hooligan on the spot without referring him to a court. Procedures for court hearings were simplified and detention for petty hooliganism was raised from a range of three to five, to ten to fifteen days, with a supplementary fine to cover food and lodging. See *Vedomosti verkhovnogo soveta SSSR*, 30 (1966): 595; for corresponding changes to the RSFSR codes see *Vedomosti verkhovnogo soveta RSFSR*, 32 (1962): 769.

73. The new ministry had four main administrations (*militiia*, places of confinement, internal troops and fire-fighting) and a number of ordinary administrations (e.g. an investigation administration). *Vedomosti verkhovnogo soveta SSSR*, 30 (1966): 594.

74. V. A. Kozlov, *Massovye besporiadki*, *op. cit.*: 229, 402, 406.