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1

The Changing Nature of Centre–Local Relations in the USSR, 1928–36

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The relations between the central and regional authorities in the Russian Empire and the USSR were always problematical. This in part reflected the difficulties of governing a vast territory of great geographical and ethnic diversity. It also stemmed from the kinds of objectives that the rulers of this country set themselves. The question of ordering centre–local relations posed acute difficulties, especially against the background of the partial disintegration of the state itself in 1917–20. In the wake of revolution and civil war the Soviet authorities attempted to reorder centre–local relations. This was done within the strong political framework provided by the Communist one-party state, supported by the Cheka and the Red Army. The reconquest of territories held by the Whites and other nationalist forces provided the background to a bold experiment in state-building. The Bolsheviks encountered problems in establishing control over territories where their rule viewed as alien and illegitimate. The Soviet regime itself, based on its experience during the civil war, distinguished between regions that were considered loyal, disloyal or neutral. The New Economic Policy (NEP), introduced in 1921, was a strategy both for reviving the economy, and for reordering the central authorities relations with their local territorial units. With the abandonment of NEP in 1929 centre–local relations were again to be fundamentally transformed.

Centre–local relations in the USSR in the 1920s

At the outset the Soviet authorities introduced a new principle in state-building, the recognition of the national and ethnic principle, which the tsarist regime had for the most part ignored. The old tsarist system of administration, based on the appointment by the centre of provincial governors, who were unaccountable to the local population, was to be dispensed with. The constitution of the USSR of 1922 enshrined this principle

into the organisation of the state, by the creation of union republics and autonomous regions based on nationality.

The transformation of Russia from the highly unitary system of the tsarist state to the Soviet state with its commitment to some form of devolved power in the 1920s involved a dramatic change. The Soviet constitution of 1922 embraced the principles of federalism, but this was always a qualified federalism, in which the power of the respective national federal units was extremely uneven. The Communist one-party state was essentially unitary in structure, especially so after 1929. After the crisis of peasant uprisings and famine in 1921-2 the balance between the centre and the localities was shaped by the limited capabilities of the central party-state apparatus, by the revival of the market economy and by the need to integrate this multi-national state, at least in part on the basis of compliance if not of active consent.

The principle of Soviet state organisation was based on a critique of the tsarist state. The tsarist state was viewed as an imperialistic state, constructed partly through military conquest, with the Russian core exploiting its colonial, non-Russian periphery. A policy of Russification and the suppression of local languages and cultures complemented military and economic domination of the periphery. The tsarist state was characterised by great discrepancies between regions in terms of their economic, social and cultural development. Frontier regions provided military bases for the projection of Russian military and imperial ambitions. These regions also provided raw materials and markets for Russian and foreign industry.

The professed objective of Soviet policy was to raise the economic and cultural level of the more backward regions and to bring them up to the same level as the most advanced regions of the USSR. Only Soviet power, it was argued, was able to develop these regions. On this basis the backward republics and regions would be more firmly integrated into the state on the basis of their perceived self-interest. Central to this was the policy not only of toleration, but also of active encouragement for local languages and cultures. Alongside this went the policy of *korenizatsiya*, the promotion of cadres from the titular national groups, and their recruitment into the Communist Party. The resolution of the XII party congress which enshrined the main features of Soviet nationalities policy was based on a report presented by Stalin.¹

Underlying this policy lay a number of basic principles. First, that the Russian people, the Russian language and culture did not enjoy a position of privilege *vis-à-vis* the other peoples within the USSR. Secondly, it was assumed that concessions on language and cultural questions to the non-Russian peoples would serve to strengthen support for the regime amongst them, and that it was possible to distinguish between cultural nationalism and political nationalism or what was construed as 'bourgeois nationalism', that is the desire for independence and secession from the Soviet state. These

concessions, as well as the economic benefits bestowed by official policy, were to provide the cement that would bind the state together.

Lenin famously in 1921, writing on official policy in Turkestan, stressed the need to win over the native populations in the non-Russian regions, and to combat 'Great Russian chauvinism' within the party's own ranks. This, he argued, was vital as part of the Communist party's strategy for revolution in India and the Far East.² At the same time Soviet control over large parts of Russia and the non-Russian regions of the former empire, including Ukraine, the Caucasus and Central Asia, was established only by military conquest. In the case of Turkestan the Bolsheviks' struggle with the armed forces of the so-called 'Basmachi' continued until at least 1925.

The development of Soviet nationalities policy in the 1920s paralleled the concessions to the peasantry and NEPmen, and the relaxation on religious policy after 1924. These measures were intended to serve the same end of constructing a more solid base of popular support for the Soviet regime in the country. These concessions were shaped by the political crisis of 1921, and were given further impetus by the rebellion of the Georgian peasants in 1924.

An illustration of this new line was the development of the policy of 'Ukrainisation', which was carried through by Stalin's appointee as General Secretary of Ukraine, Lazar Kaganovich, from 1925. Ukraine, because of its importance economically, strategically and because of its distinct cultural identity represented a major test of the regime's ability to administer this vast multi-national state. 'Ukrainisation' set as its avowed aim the use of the Ukrainian language in the republic's party, soviet, trade union and military organisations, and the promotion of Ukrainian language in education and in the mass media. From 1928 the protocols of the Ukrainian Politburo were recorded not in Russian but in Ukrainian. Efforts were also directed at recruiting Ukrainians into the party.³

It was assumed that with the economic development of Ukraine there would be an influx of peasants into industry, and that in time the republic's towns and working class would become overwhelmingly Ukrainian-speaking. Official policy aimed to anticipate and guide this process. This conciliatory policy pursued towards the non-Russian nationalities in no way was intended to diminish the party's control, and the instruments of repression always remained in reserve.⁴

This policy was dictated from the centre, and the local political leadership in the republic was required to carry it out. Within the Ukrainian political leadership those of a more nationalist stamp embraced it enthusiastically, but others were more critical, and in some cases were very hostile to the policy. What is remarkable is that Ukrainisation was implemented in a situation where the overwhelming majority of the working class and of the urban population was Russian-speaking. In 1927-8 the policy came under a hail of criticism both from the Russian-dominated party and trade union bodies in Ukraine and from those on the left of the party at all-union level.

It was condemned by G. E. Zinoviev,⁵ by Yu. Larin⁶ as well as by V. Vaganyan in his book *O natsional'noi kulture*.⁷ On the left of the party there remained a strong current, which has been termed 'national nihilist', which saw the withering away of national differences and national identity as the party's objective.

Ukraine in the 1920s enjoyed a limited but significant degree of autonomy. The republican authorities were bound by the general economic policy of the centre, but were also capable of pushing their own demands within those confines. Ukraine in particular vigorously promoted schemes for the development of the industries of the republic, notably the Dneprostroi hydro-electric project, the reconstruction of the southern metallurgical works and the reconstruction of the Donbass coalfield. It was in part as a result of this pressure that Ukraine was accorded the central place in the First Five-Year Plan's industrialisation project.

The policy of Ukrainisation, Kaganovich argued in 1927, would provide the model for the revolutionary movements in Hungary, Poland, Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia. Similarly, nationalities policy towards the Finns and the Karelians in Karelia would provide a model for the Scandinavian countries, just as Soviet policy in Central Asia was a model for the Far East. Successful revolution in these countries would, it was anticipated, seek to unite their new socialist republics with the USSR. It was therefore imperative that the relations between the constituent republics of the USSR and the centre were organised on the basis of equity and justice.⁸

At the XVI party congress in June 1930 Stalin again stressed that the party was committed to promoting the full flowering of the cultures and languages of the people's of the USSR. He rejected the argument that it was time to abolish the national republics and regions. Instead, he argued, it was necessary to continue the policy of creating a system that was 'national in form but socialist in content'. In this speech he criticised local nationalism, but stressed that Great-Russian chauvinism constituted 'the chief danger in the Party in the sphere of the national question'.⁹

In 1930 the trial of the Association for the Liberation of Ukraine (Spilka Vyzvolenia Ukrainy or SVU) was held. A number of prominent Ukrainian intellectuals were accused of plotting, with Polish and German intelligence agencies, to separate the Ukraine from the USSR. The trial heralded the tightening of control over intellectual life in Ukraine. It also marked in part a retreat on Ukrainisation, particularly the abandonment of moves towards the use of Ukrainian within the main economic organisations. In other areas, Ukrainisation continued.

Stalin and the republican and regional party secretaries

Central to any understanding of the way in which the Soviet political system developed from the 1920s into the 1930s is the question of Stalin's own

personal power and his relationship with the powerful republican and regional leaders. Earlier historians, notably I. Deutscher, R. V. Daniels and T. H. Rigby, emphasised Stalin's control over the central party Secretariat as the determining factor in creating a disciplined body of supporters in the power struggle following Lenin's death.¹⁰ This view argues that through control over appointments and promotions at local level Stalin created a regional base of support. He was able also to control the delegations which attended the party congresses and thereby to control the debate and more particularly the process of election of the Central Committee. The position of the republican and regional party leaders was constrained by the discipline imposed by the doctrine of democratic centralism and the increasingly rigid definition of party ideology. Loyalty to the party transcended allegiance to republic or region. The terms 'oblastnik' was a term of contempt for those who adhered too narrowly to a provincial view of political interests.

The Central Committee was expanded from 40 members and 17 candidates at the time of Lenin's death to 71 members and 50 candidates by 1927. The membership of the Central Committee represented a certain diversity of institutional and regional interests, with between 35 and 45 per cent made up of leaders of regional and republican party organisations.¹¹

Stalin did not act at the behest of the regional party leaders but he had to construct an alliance with these leaders from 1927, to set the policy agenda and to win them around to his point of view. He did this through a series of campaigns – the anti-kulak campaign of the winter of 1927–8; the Shakhty affair and the campaign against the bourgeois specialists from 1928 onwards; the war scare of 1927; the Smolensk scandal and the attack on corruption in the regional party organisations, the self-criticism campaign and the drive to promote a new generation of specialists. All these separate campaigns were coordinated into one unified campaign against the so-called 'Right' Opposition in 1928–9.

In this abrupt change of course away from NEP and towards forced development of heavy industry Stalin could appeal primarily to those heavy industrial regions that sought new investment (the Urals, Ukraine and Leningrad). Other regions based on light industry (notably Moscow oblast) and the agricultural regions, which had benefited under NEP, might be expected to be more circumspect in their support of the 'left turn'. But Stalin's appeal was not simply based on the material self-interests of particular regions, but on the basis of a broader vision of socialist transformation of the USSR and the building up of its defence base.

In the summer of 1928, after the crisis of grain procurement in the preceding winter, it appeared as though the 'Right' could control the party. In the second half of 1928 their grip was weakened. The defeat of N. A. Uglanov, first secretary of the Moscow party organisation, engineered by Stalin and his supporters, marked a watershed. The return to the rhetoric of class warfare, to the administrative measures of war communism and to the

heavy idea of a renewed socialist offensive against capitalist remnants provided the unifying ideological and policy basis of the group in the party leadership around Stalin.

The strengthening of the central leadership's position brooked no opposition. Internal party democracy was already severely eroded by 1923. In the attacks on the Joint Opposition in 1927 Stalin had recourse to the party's Central Control Commission and to the GPU; control of the party press and manipulation of party meetings was a central part of the campaign. The enthusiasm with which regional party secretaries embraced the policy of 'revolution from above' needs to take these factors into account. The scope for regional and republican leaders to come together to formulate alternative policies, or to question the official line, was already very limited. Once Stalin's position became unassailable after 1928, almost no republican or regional secretaries were to challenge the 'general' line. The direction and tone of policy was set by the centre.

Notwithstanding its vast size, the USSR was made up of a relatively small number of key economic regions, with a very clear hierarchy reflecting their relative importance. Within the Politburo only the most important regions were represented: the two capitals Moscow (L. B. Kamenev, then N. A. Uglanov) and Leningrad (G. E. Zinoviev, then S. M. Kirov), and Ukraine (L. M. Kaganovich, then S. V. Kosior). The number of key regions (if we look at the proceedings of the XVII party congress, Chapter 3 in this volume) was no more than about a dozen. These regional authorities had far greater resources, carried much greater political weight and were in a much stronger bargaining position than the others. This made the centre's task of controlling the republics and regions more straightforward than might otherwise be thought. What, however, made the task of control difficult was the sheer scale of work undertaken in those years. The problem was to ensure that the party chiefs in these regions were efficient and loyal and that they were able to ensure the same of their subordinates.

The Secretariat and Orgburo and the Department for Assignment (Orgraspred) exercised close control over party appointments. The Central Committees of republican party bodies, obkoms, kraikoms and gorkoms were required periodically to report on their activities to the Orgburo. The Orgburo also carried out periodic inspections of the work of lower party bodies, and dispatched instructors to ensure that policy was properly implemented. The regional party secretaries were increasingly appointed from the centre, although central nominees had to be formally elected by the local party organisations. Those assigned to these posts were usually old revolutionaries with some standing in the party. Many built up their expertise as regional bosses, who were often transferred from post to post around the Union.

Stalin was also able to place his supporters in key positions of power within the regional and republican apparatus. James Hughes, in analysing

the 'patrimonial' basis of Stalin's power, identifies a number of key appointments from the summer of 1924 whereby officials close to Stalin, many of them having worked with him in the Secretariat and Orgburo, were placed in key positions. In 1924 Orgburo member N. A. Uglanov replaced I. A. Zelenskii, a Kamenev supporter, as Moscow regional party secretary. In 1925 L. M. Kaganovich was transferred from Orgraspred to become General Secretary of the Ukrainian Communist Party. S. I. Syrtsov in January 1926 was made first secretary of the Siberian kraikom, filling a vacancy left by the promotion of the existing secretary S. V. Kosior to the party Secretariat. At the same time S. M. Kirov, who had played a role in suppressing the Astrakhan workers in 1920 and led the Baku party organisation, was made Leningrad regional party secretary in place of Zinoviev.

Hughes adds:

the network-building process is evident in the latter 1920s from the movements between Secretariat and Orgburo posts and regional leadership positions of A. A. Andreev (Orgburo to North Caucasus), D. E. Sulimov (Orgburo to Urals), S. V. Kosior exchanging posts with Kaganovich (Secretariat and Orgburo to Ukraine), N. M. Shevernik (secretariat and Orgburo to Urals), K. Ya. Bauman (Orgburo to Moscow), I. M. Vareikis (Secretariat to Central Black Earth region). By 1927–28 such an exchange between centre and region was an established method of continual supervision of the system.¹²

This pattern continued into the 1930s: P. P. Postyshev was transferred from the Secretariat to the post of second secretary of the Ukrainian Communist party in 1933, and A. A. Zhdanov was brought in from Gorky into the party Secretariat, and then appointed first secretary of Leningrad gorkom, following Kirov's assassination in 1934.

The centre's control over appointments greatly increased its power over the republics and regions. This power was by no means absolute. Stalin in 1928 tactfully withdrew Kaganovich from Ukraine because of opposition from other senior party figures in the republic to his authoritarian methods of rule. Uglanov, head of the Moscow party organisation, in 1928 threw his lot in with the 'Rightists'. S. I. Syrtsov, promoted by Stalin as chairman of Sovnarkom RSFSR, became one of his bitterest critics. Bauman, first secretary of the Moscow party organisation and a candidate member of the Politburo, was removed in 1930 because of excesses in carrying out collectivisation. Even the dependable A. A. Andreev, first secretary of the North Caucasus kraikom, in 1929 expressed reservations with regard to aspects of collectivisation policy and the issue of whether the kulaks could or could not be admitted into the kolkhozy.

The interaction between the central and regional authorities was often complex, and the flow of influences was often two-way. This is reflected in

the development of the Urals-Siberian method of grain procurement at the end of 1928. The strategy emerged out of a complex interaction between the Moscow authorities and the regional authorities of the Urals and West Siberia.¹³

The outlook of republican and regional leadership had been shaped in the struggle with the Right, for the First Five-Year Plan and in the struggle for collectivisation and 'dekulakisation'. Leading party secretaries from the main grain-growing regions participated in formulating the policy. Competition between these leaders helped to force the pace of collectivisation in 1929-30. They had been distinguished by their commitment to carrying through the 'revolution from above' and by their apparent loyalty to Stalin. Particular leaders, notably B. P. Sheboldaev of North Caucasus, M. M. Khataevich of Central Volga, R. I. Eikhe of West Siberia, K. Ya. Bauman in Moscow oblast and then in Central Asia distinguished themselves by their resolute commitment to fighting the 'war' against the 'kulaks'.¹⁴

Stalin's article 'Dizzy with Success' in March 1930, which called a halt to forced collectivisation and placed the blame for excesses on local party workers, created a crisis in centre-local relations. Local party workers were reluctant to accept responsibility for the crisis. This did not mean that they rejected the policy of collectivisation and dekulakisation. On the contrary they considered the policy had failed because of the lack of resolve of the central leadership to carry it through.¹⁵

The First Five-Year Plan

The XV party congress in December 1927, in its resolution on the drafting of the Five-Year Plan, noted the need for special attention to be devoted to 'the raising of the economic and cultural positions of the borderland and backward regions' whilst 'not losing sight, however, of the connection between the needs and wants of the regions and those of the Soviet Union as a whole'.¹⁶

G. F. Grin'ko, who in 1930 took over as commissar of finance, in his book on the First Five-Year Plan, argued that the country was divided for economic administrative purposes on the basis of three principles, first, economic rationale; secondly, nationalities policy; and thirdly, defence considerations. From the time of the Goelro electrification project of 1920 the USSR was organised into distinct economic regions, the so-called 'Gosplan regions': the Urals, Siberia, North Caucasus, the Central Industrial region, Lower and Central Volga, etc., based on scientific and economic considerations.¹⁷ This principle had, however, to be reconciled with the rights of different nationalities in the USSR, in accordance with the party's nationalities policy. According to Grin'ko, himself an ardent Ukrainian patriot, Ukraine, on the basis of purely economic considerations, should have been split into three regions: the southern coal and iron ore extracting

regions of the Donetsk Basin and Krivoi Rog; the Black Sea steppe agricultural region; and the north-western region of intensive agriculture based on Kiev. However, because of the overriding importance of the principle of nationality in this case, the Ukraine had to be organised as a single entity.¹⁸

From the standpoint of the USSR as a whole, however, this concession to Ukrainian national sensibilities created a potential problem, of lopsided development with an overly powerful Ukrainian lobby being able to influence overall economic policy.

The importance of political considerations was reflected in the treatment accorded to the key Donetsk coal basin in Ukraine. The eastern section of the basin, including Shakhty, was attached to the North Caucasus region, with its capital at Rostov. This was based on the perceived need to attach a strong proletarian centre to the North Caucasus, considered as a Russian Vendeé, the base for the White Armies during the civil war, and a Cossack region with strong kulak farmers.¹⁹

Central Asia and the Transcaucasus, Grin'ko argued, had been 'typical semi-colonial dependencies of Russian tsarism'. In the Transcaucasus, with its heterogeneity and intermixture of nationalities and its history of racial conflict, a federation of national republics and regions had been created, with authority to carry out all plans of economic development in the region.²⁰ In direct contrast in 1924 Central Asia was organised into three autonomous national republics of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tadzhikistan. But major economic projects, such as irrigation schemes, which affected the interests of the entire region, were to be entrusted to the Central Asian Economic Council, which embraced all the national republics. This was based partly on considerations of administrative convenience. But it may have also been intended as a means of impeding the growth of pan-Islamic ideas and movements amongst the Moslem population.

Grin'ko claimed that the very structure of the First Five-Year Plan was in part 'a result of the rivalry and conflicting claims among the individual economic regions with the central authorities of the Soviet Union'. However, he stressed the positive aspect of this process, arguing that it did not constitute a 'centrifugal' tendency. Separatist tendencies, reflecting the bourgeois and petty bourgeois aspirations of part of society, were kept in check by the Soviet regime's socialist character (i.e. the one-party state).²¹ The system of economic planning, Grin'ko argued, involved a combination of the branch principle of administration, of vertical administration, based on different sectors of industry, agriculture and transportation, with the territorial or horizontal principle of planning based on the economic regions and national republics.

The development of regional specialisation, Grin'ko argued, was an integral part of the general plan of socialist development of the USSR. The well-established Moscow and Leningrad industrial districts would decline in relative terms,²² but the privileged position of Ukraine would be enhanced.

The share of these regions in the total capital of the country during the plan was to be reduced from 65 per cent to about 55 per cent, but distributed as follows: the share of Leningrad reduced from 10 to 7.3 per cent; that of the Central Industrial Region from 31 to 21 per cent and that of Ukraine increased from 24.5 to 26.2 per cent, making it the major industrial region in the USSR.²³ Grin'ko's projection regarding the future relative importance of Ukraine and Moscow was to be confounded by developments in the 1930s.

The shifting balance of centre-local relations, 1929-33

After 1929 centre-local relations were fundamentally reordered. Industrialisation and collectivisation were carried out as part of the centrally initiated and directed 'revolution from above'. Associated with this was the unleashing of the 'cultural revolution', which was directed not only at entrenched bureaucratic power but was increasingly focused on what were considered cultural survivals, particularly in the non-Russian republics, that were deemed incompatible with the emergent socialist system.

An initial hypothesis associated with the planning experiments connected with Goelro was that it was possible to achieve a harmonious combination of central and regional planning.²⁴ In practice the First Five-Year Plan saw the relentless imposition of central directives and, because of the exaggerated nature of the targets set, the recourse by the centre to the commandeering of resources and their allocation to priority projects. The location policy for industry assumed growing importance with various considerations being balanced: the need to raise the economic level of the more backward regions and attain a greater dispersion of industrial activities; the need to locate industry closer to the main reserves of raw materials; the need to avoid overburdening the transport system with expensive hauls; and finally and of critical importance the question of defence and the location of industry away from vulnerable frontier zones and the creation of a new industrial base in the East.²⁵

The industrialisation and collectivisation drives greatly increased the economic functions of the regional and republican party secretaries. Their role was to ensure administrative flexibility, to identify problems and to advance their own schemes for the development of their regions. The centre delegated to them responsibility and expected them to exercise initiative and independent judgement within the parameters set by central policy. They were subject to close scrutiny by the centre, but they developed also their own vested interests, cultivating their own networks and their own cliques of officials. Republican and regional party secretaries were not just the passive creatures of the centre. They were caught also between the pressures from the centre and those from lower down the hierarchy, the secretaries of the raikoms. A complex series of strategies were developed to evade or subvert central control.

While the Soviet authorities remained committed to the development of all the major republics and regions of the USSR, they also recognised a distinct division of labour, on the basis of which these areas would be integrated into the economic system as a whole. In the course of the First Five-Year Plan the balance shifted towards regional specialisation: Moscow and Leningrad were recognised as specialist industrial regions, based on advanced technology; the Ukraine specialised on ferrous metallurgy, coal, engineering and grain production; Central Asia was given over to cotton; Karelia was given over to timber and energy production. This process of specialisation made regions even more dependent on the centre for essential investment and supplies (grain to the timber regions of the north and to the cotton-growing regions of Central Asia). At the same time stress was placed on the self-reliance of regions in ensuring their own supply of food.

Changing priorities

Stalin in his speech to the XVI party congress on 27 June 1930 highlighted the problem of 'the proper distribution of industry throughout the USSR'. He noted that the country's reliance on 'the coal and metallurgical base in the Ukraine' was an obstacle to the development of the major industrial centres of the Urals and West Siberia. It was essential, he declared, to immediately begin building a second industrial base, namely the Urals-Kuznetsk Combine (UKK), utilising Kuznetsk coking coal and Urals iron ore.²⁶

D. E. Sulimov and I. D. Kabakov, as first secretaries of the Urals obkom, vigorously promoted the scheme for a major investment drive to revitalise the Urals metallurgical industry. The first secretary of Urals kraikom, N. M. Shvernik, was ousted in 1929 by the obkom for failing to defend the interests of the Urals metallurgical industry with sufficient determination. The Urals Planning Commission and the representatives of the enterprises of the region promoted the scheme. It was strongly backed by Russian interests and particularly by Sovnarkom RSFSR. Through the 1920s the Urals metallurgical industry was in bitter competition with the Ukrainian metallurgical industry, which sought to establish for itself the dominant position as the country's principal metallurgical base.²⁷

The Central Committee on 15 May 1930 approved the scheme for the Urals-Kuznetsk Combine, but the investment for the development of the Greater Urals was significantly less than what the Urals kraikom had sought. Debate on the project had begun in earnest at the end of 1929. It was vigorously supported in the centre by G. M. Krzhizhanovskii, head of Gosplan, and by V. V. Kuibyshev, head of Vesenkha. It was promoted for both economic and defence reasons. The Ukraine, Krzhizhanovskii argued, had to be considered a frontier zone, and thus vulnerable in the event of war. The project was opposed by Ukrainian interests. With the approval of the project, investment in the metallurgical industry of Ukraine was sharply

curtailed.²⁸ Support for the project was no doubt shaped also in part by the idea that it corrected or balanced the Ukrainian bias in the industrialisation plans of 1928 by building up the RSFSR.

The dramatic shift in centre-local relations at the end of the 1920s is illustrated by the change in relations between Moscow and Ukraine. In July 1928 Kaganovich was withdrawn from Ukraine and replaced as General Secretary there by Stanislaw Kosior. Kosior had earlier worked in the central party Secretariat; he remained as head of the Ukrainian party until 1938. Vlas Chubar' remained as head of Sovnarkom Ukraine until 1934. Within the Ukrainian Politburo other figures remained of note, such as G. I. Petrovskii, a long-standing member of the Ukrainian Politburo, and from 1926 a member of the all-union Politburo.

In 1929 the approval of the First Five-Year Plan and the launch of agricultural collectivisation and dekulakisation delivered a major blow to the limited autonomy enjoyed by Ukraine and other republics. In December 1929 the People's Commissariat of Agriculture (NKZem) of the USSR was created, headed by Ya. A. Yakovlev, and was entrusted with responsibility for implementing collectivisation and creating the new collective farm system. This involved a major step towards strengthening central control. The creation of NKZem USSR was criticised by M. Skrypnik, one of the leading politicians in Ukraine and a strong advocate of Soviet federalism, as a step towards weakening the authority of the republican organisation, and as a precedent which would be followed in other fields.²⁹

Skrypnik's forebodings were amply borne out. With the initiation of the First Five-Year Plan Vesenkha USSR extended its authority over the republican Vesenkhas. In 1929 virtually all of the large industrial enterprises of Ukraine were transferred to the union commissariat. Vesenkha Ukraine, having the ground cut from under its feet was transformed virtually into the People's Commissariat of Light Industry Ukraine.³⁰ The authority of the republican tier of government was severely weakened. Vesenkha USSR dealt directly with the enterprises under its control in the regions, and where it needed consultation with the territorial authorities was inclined to deal with the oblast as much as the republican tier.

The powers of republican and regional authorities were significantly curbed by the budgetary reform of 1930, whereby the Commissariat of Finance of the USSR collected turnover tax centrally. Thereafter the republics were granted allocations from the centre as a form of subsidy. The budgets of most of the republican and regional authorities were very small, and went mainly on financing local social and cultural services. The economic development of the republics and regions was largely financed from the centre. The central authorities maintained control over the republican authorities through regulating their revenues and by establishing norms of expenditure.³¹

By the early 1930s certain policy areas were already outside the purview of the Ukrainian Politburo: economic planning, heavy industry; rail transport;

internal security; defence–foreign policy. This left other areas where it continued to exercise some influence: light industry and trade; the urban economy, housing and public services; water transport; agriculture; cultural, educational, social and health questions. The Ukrainian Politburo, unlike the all-union Politburo in Moscow, continued to meet on a regular weekly basis throughout the 1930s. Much of its work was given over to supervising the operation of the economy, carrying out investigations at Moscow's behest into those sectors of the economy which were deemed to be failing, and monitoring the state of the tractor and combine harvester parks. A constant stream of telegrams flowed between the all-union Politburo and the Ukrainian Politburo, with the Ukrainian Politburo seeking clearance for even relatively minor matters from Moscow.

It is notable that the all-union organs of administration, already at the beginning of the 1930s regarded as their structural sub-departments not only the republican commissariats but also even the Ukrainian government. For example the head of NKZem USSR, Ya. A. Yakovlev, and the chairman of Tsentrosoyuz, Ivanov, on 1 March 1931 sent a telegram to the head of the Ukrainian government Chubar', chairman of Sovnarkom Ukraine, in which they demanded by 2 o'clock that day an answer concerning the release of land from around the city suburbs under market gardening to the consumer cooperatives. If this demand was not fulfilled they threatened Chubar' with taking the matter to the Procuracy.

Chubar' telegraphed a reply that he would not sign the order requested and protested that the threat to take the matter to the Procuracy was unwarranted and politically mischievous. Moreover, he raised the matter at a session of the Ukrainian Politburo. There it was noted that cases of threats from the side of the all-union organs in relation to Sovnarkom Ukraine had become more frequent and it was decided to bring it to the attention of all-union Central Committee.³²

The famine, 1932–3

The relations between the republics and the centre were illustrated by the response to the famine crisis in 1932–3. Centrally appointed plenipotentiaries were sent to Ukraine to impose grain procurement targets on an unwilling Ukrainian party leadership. By 1931 there was already concern about the situation in many of the grain-producing regions. Moscow kept a close eye on developments. Secretariat plenipotentiaries and Central Committee members were sent to the regions which were experiencing difficulties. Kaganovich, former General Secretary of the Ukrainian Communist Party, was dispatched on numerous occasions to the republic to sort out problems.

In the spring of 1932, faced by serious food supply problems, market controls were relaxed in order to provide incentives to the collective farms and individual peasants to release more food. In the summer of 1932 concern

over the harvest and procurement targets created a new strain in centre-local relations. In 1932-3 party leaders from Central Black Earth, Central Volga, West Siberia and Kazakhstan informed Moscow of the dire situation in their areas with regard to food supply and the associated cuts in rations.³³ In the course of 1932 a limited market reform was introduced. While some regional leaders, such as B. P. Sheboldaev of North Caucasus, voiced opposition to free market prices, others, such as R. I. Eikhe, of West Siberia, and M. M. Khataevich, of Central Volga, argued for still more flexibility.³⁴

In June 1932 Kaganovich wrote to Stalin: 'The regions are pushing hard on the problem of grain, and we are refusing the overwhelming majority'.³⁵ Stalin summoned a conference of party secretaries and chairmen of soviet executive committees from the main grain-producing regions and republics for the end of June. Stalin insisted that the first secretaries should be held 'personally responsible' for fulfilling the grain procurement campaign. The conference adopted a draft resolution based on Stalin's instructions that was strongly critical of the work of local organisations in Ukraine and the Urals. It demanded action to curb kulak influence and to 'smash opposition' to official policy.³⁶

On 2 July 1932 Stalin wrote to Kaganovich concerning the situation in Ukraine. He railed at Kosior and Chubar' for their opportunism, their irresponsibility, and proposed that they should be dismissed.³⁷ At a meeting with Kosior on 23 June, Kaganovich warned him that they would have to make an example of him of how not to lead party organisations.

V. M. Molotov and Kaganovich attended the III All-Ukrainian Party Conference on 6-9 July 1932 as representatives of the centre. At the conference Kosior, Chubar' and Skrypnik, reflecting a mood strongly voiced in the Ukrainian Central Committee and by the raikom secretaries, called for greater realism in procurement policy.³⁸ Molotov and Kaganovich insisted that there could be no let-up in collectivisation and in pressure on the kolkhozy to supply more grain. Stalin had ordered a delivery of 7.7 million tons of grain from the Ukraine; after considerable argument the Ukrainians finally managed to get the figure reduced to 6.6 million tons, but this was still far beyond a realistic target. In his address Kaganovich severely criticised the party's work in the countryside. A central difficulty, he noted, was the mechanical way in which grain delivery quotas were allocated to the 400 raions, regardless of local circumstances. The Central Committee had sent its plenipotentiaries to the republic to overcome this problem. He dismissed the claim by many raion workers that the plenipotentiaries had only made matters worse.

On 11 August 1932 Stalin, in a letter to Kaganovich, expressed alarm at the situation in Ukraine. He openly voiced his contempt for the republican leadership: Kosior vacillated between the demands of the Central Committee and those of the raikoms; Chubar' was no leader, and S. F. Redens, as head of OGPU, was failing to fight counter-revolution. The Ukrainian party with 500,000 members was infested with conscious and unconscious Ukrainian

nationalists or Petluraists (followers of the Ukrainian partisan Simon Petlura). He proposed that Kaganovich take over as General Secretary of the Ukrainian party in place of Kosior, whilst retaining his post as party Secretary. V. A. Balitskii should take over as head of the Ukrainian OGPU, and Redens demoted to deputy. Chubar' should be sacked as head of Sovnarkom Ukraine, possibly replaced by Grin'ko. The republic had to be strengthened: 'We must not spare any money on this.' If this was not done, Stalin warned 'we may lose Ukraine'.³⁹

In a few days Stalin changed his mind. In a note to Kaganovich and Molotov, he confided that besides Kaganovich there was no other obvious candidate to replace Kosior in the Ukraine, but it was impossible to transfer him there as this would weaken the Secretariat of the Central Committee at a critical time.⁴⁰

In August Stalin, on vacation, drafted the law on the theft of cooperative and collective farm property, and the theft of goods from transport.⁴¹ Kaganovich, writing to Stalin, welcomed the proposal on the grounds that regional leaders were seeking greater powers, as they feared the kulaks would walk all over them.⁴²

In the autumn of 1932 a high-powered commission, headed by Kaganovich, was sent to the Northern Caucasus to investigate the difficulties in grain procurement.⁴³ It met with the North Caucasus kraikom in Rostov on Don on 2 November and appointed plenipotentiaries for each district. Other special commissions were sent to Kharkov and Saratov, areas where disorder and resistance was intense. On 4 November the Central Committee–Central Control Commission plenum appointed a special commission, headed by M. F. Shkiryatov, to purge the North Caucasus, some Ukrainian and Lower Volga raions of 'people hostile to Communism conducting a kulak policy' and who were reluctant to implement the grain collections and sowing campaigns.⁴⁴

In November the North Caucasus kraikom buro, with Kaganovich in attendance, resolved to smash all the saboteurs and counter-revolutionaries responsible for the failure of grain collection and the autumn sowing. As a result the inhabitants of sixteen villages of the North Caucasus were deported to the far north. Mass repression was applied under the directives of Molotov and Kaganovich, in North Caucasus, the Ukraine and Belorussia.⁴⁵ As the first secretary of North Caucasus krai, Sheboldaev, was to put it 'the kulaks again in 1932, this time from the base of the collective farm, tried to fight us about grain... But we did not understand it', so that the Central Committee had to send in 'a group of Central Committee members under Comrade Kaganovich to us, to help us correct the situation'.⁴⁶

At the joint plenum of the Politburo and the presidium TsKK on 27 November Stalin accused local communist officials of idealising the kolkhozy, which had been infiltrated by kulaks and other anti-Soviet elements.⁴⁷ At the joint Central Committee–Central Control Commission

plenum in January 1933 Stalin said that the 'causes of the difficulties connected with the grain collections' must be sought in the Party itself. The Kharkov first secretary R. Ya. Terekhov told him flatly that famine raged in the Ukraine. Stalin sneered at him as a romancer and all attempts to discuss the matter were simply dismissed out of hand.⁴⁸ Kaganovich stressed Stalin's role in directing policy, citing his speech to the Politburo-Presidium TsKK on 27 November 1932.⁴⁹ Kaganovich condemned the failure of leadership of the obkoms and raikoms, accusing them of turning a blind eye to the activities of 'kulaks' and adopting a 'tender-hearted' approach to the work of counter-revolutionaries.

On January 11 the Central Committee plenum decided to establish an agricultural department (*Sel'khozotdel*), headed by Kaganovich. On his recommendation new political departments (*politotdely*) were set up in the sovkhozy and the MTS.⁵⁰ The plenum approved a new purge of the party ranks and passed a resolution condemning the Eismont-Tolmachev-Smirnov group.⁵¹ A special resolution of the Central Committee sought to define the responsibilities of the MTS, the *politotdely* and the raikom so as to avoid conflicts between them.⁵² The purge, conducted under the direction of Kaganovich, fell disproportionately on the rural party organisations.

The famine of 1932-3 wrought devastation across great parts of the Soviet Union. Its worst impact was felt in Ukraine, North Caucasus, the Lower Volga and Kazakhstan. The crisis exacerbated relations between the republican and regional (obkoms and raikoms) authorities, and between these bodies and the central authorities in Moscow.

The tightening of central controls, 1932-34

With the defeat of the internal party opposition, the developing famine crisis and the mounting concern about internal security political control within the Soviet leadership was dramatically centralised. This was encouraged by a growing preoccupation with external security, prompted by the Japanese seizure of Manchuria in 1931 and Hitler's advent to power in Germany in 1933.

The demise of the formal meetings of the Politburo, Orgburo and Secretariat, especially evident from the start of 1933, following the earlier demise of the Central Committee plenum, drastically reduced the opportunities which local leaders had to speak before party fora.⁵³ Some opportunities for lobbying and advancing local interests remained, through the party and government bodies and through the commissariats, and even through direct contact with Stalin and other leaders. In 1934, in what appears to be a determined effort to improve centre-local relations and to mollify local party bosses, certain days were set aside in Stalin's appointment diary for meetings with republican and regional leaders, coinciding with Central Committee plena. This practice, however, was soon abandoned.⁵⁴

These changes point to a drastic tightening of central controls over the whole political system in 1932–3. At the same time sharp contradictions and acute tensions marked the political situation. Stalin and his colleagues, as in 1930, attempted to unload the blame for the crisis in agriculture onto the shoulders of republican, provincial and district party officials. At the same time as Stalin's powers were strengthened his authority was being called into question as never before. Even within the tightly regulated Stalinist state catastrophic policy failure could produce political rumblings that had unknowable consequences. This is reflected most clearly in the emergence of the various underground groups with their own manifestos: the Syrtsov–Lominadze group; the Ryutin Platform; and the Eismont–Smirnov–Tolmachev group.⁵⁵

The Ryutin Platform of 1932 depicted Stalin as someone who had been intent on personal dictatorship since 1924–5, 'selecting people personally loyal to him for posts on the Central Committee and on the secretariats of the gubkom and obkom committees'. Ryutin offered the following judgement: 'The entire top leadership of the Party, beginning with Stalin and ending with the secretaries of the oblast committees are, on the whole, fully aware that they are breaking with Leninism, that they are perpetrating violence against both the Party and non-party masses, they are killing the cause of socialism.'⁵⁶

The acute tensions in centre–local relations in 1932–3 resulted in the removal of a number of prominent republican and regional party secretaries (see Chapters 2 and 3). In the case of Ukraine Stalin, having failed to find suitable replacements for Kosior and Chubar', instead decided to put in a counterweight in the person of P. P. Postyshev. Postyshev was a Kaganovich protégé, and from 1930 onwards worked in the Secretariat and Orgburo in Moscow. In 1933 he was sent to Ukraine to take over the leadership of the Kharkov party organisation and as second secretary of the Ukrainian party. In 1934 he was elected a candidate member of the Politburo CPSU.⁵⁷

The shake-up in the leadership of the republican party organisation in 1932–3 was associated with moves to further limit its autonomy, regarding both economic and nationalities policy. The centre launched a major campaign against 'bourgeois nationalism' in Ukraine, Belorussia, Transcaucasus and Central Asia. The policy of concessions with regard to the non-Russian language and culture was increasingly curtailed. The influence of organisations representing the interests of the republics within the central governmental apparatus was diminished.

During collectivisation, 'dekulakisation' and the famine the Soviet state demonstrated its enormous power over the countryside. The regime's strong points were the main urban–industrial centres. The disturbances in Ivanovo in 1932 thus acquired great significance, demonstrating the potential vulnerability of the regime in its own heartland.⁵⁸ This provided the background to the new purge of the party ranks begun in 1933. It was also the

background to the reintroduction of the internal passport system from 1933 onwards, which was aimed at 'cleansing' the main urban centres of unreliable elements. A crucial new dimension in centre-local relations was introduced, the distinction between 'regime' and 'non-regime' areas of the country.⁵⁹

The Second Five-Year Plan

At the end of 1930 determined efforts were made to strengthen Sovnarkom and Gosplan, and to tie them more closely to the Politburo, with the aim of imposing greater authority and discipline in the field of economic planning. This was intended to check the power of the all-union commissariats and the strong regional lobbies who were seen as having contributed to the relentless raising of targets in 1929-30, which destroyed the coherence of the First Five-Year Plan. Kuibyshev was appointed head of Gosplan in November 1930, occupying simultaneously the post of vice chairman of Sovnarkom and STO. Molotov took over as chairman of Sovnarkom and STO in December 1930. Gosplan was further strengthened by the creation of the Central Administration of National Economic Records (TsUNKhU) in December 1931, as a commission of Gosplan in place of the Central Statistical Administration (TsSU). The task of TsUNKhU was to compile data on the state of the economy, and to compile assessments of the state of the harvest on the basis of which procurement targets could be set.

Sovnarkom USSR on 25 March 1932 set a timetable for the compilation of the Second Five-Year Plan. Gosplan USSR was to give its schema to Union commissariats and republican and local planning organisations by 1 April. Union commissariats were to present their preliminary control figures to Gosplan by 10 July, republican commissariats theirs by 20 July. By 20 August, Gosplan USSR should present a draft plan to the Sovnarkom USSR. Then, on the basis of control figures ratified by the government, Gosplan would issue directives and limits to the commissariats, republics and oblasts, who should each return their plans – broken down both by branch and territory – by the end of November. Finally the Second Five-Year Plan was to be presented to the Sovnarkom USSR by January 1933.⁶⁰ The basic instruction concerning the drawing up of the plan by Gosplan in 1932 assigned a key place to the regional location of the country's productive forces, and to defining the role of the regions within a Union-wide division of labour.⁶¹

The draft of the Second Five-Year Plan, compiled by Gosplan USSR at the beginning of 1934, comprised two volumes, the second of which dealt with the Plan of Development of the Regions. In his foreword to the volume Kuibyshev, chairman of Gosplan, claimed that extensive consultation with the republics and regions, their planning departments and research institutes had been undertaken in drafting the plan. Gosplan USSR organised seven conferences for examining the perspective development of various groups

of regions, culminating in the All-Union Conference on the Location of the Productive Forces, convened with the participation of the Academy of Sciences USSR, the main people's commissariats and representatives of the republics, krais and oblasts.⁶²

The reality was rather different. There was in fact little consultation between Gosplan USSR and the republican, krai and oblast authorities. Many of these regional authorities were so disrupted by the famine in 1932–3 and their authority so shaken, that their input was very small. The declining influence of Ukraine over economic policy was reflected in the fact that no draft Second Five-Year Plan for the republic was drawn up. A similar situation existed in other key regions, such as the Urals.⁶³

Molotov and Kuibyshev submitted the plan to the XVII party congress in January–February 1934. The congress discussed and approved the plan's basic outlines. Consultation continued after the congress and the Second Five-Year Plan was finally approved in November 1934.

Molotov and Kuibyshev in their reports to the XVII party congress emphasised the new shift of investment eastwards, closer to raw materials' supplies. The reality was more complex. The pattern of investment during the Second Five-Year Plan reflected clearly a new set of priorities. The total planned investment in the USSR during the Second Five-Year Plan was 133.4 milliard rubles, of which 98.8 milliard rubles were assigned according to territory. The remaining partly 34.5 milliard rubles were accounted for by military–defence and internal security expenditure.

Of the figure assigned to territories 70.5 per cent went to the RSFSR and just 16.8 per cent to Ukraine, 1.8 per cent to Belorussia, 5.25 per cent to the Transcaucasus and 5.62 per cent to Central Asia.⁶⁴ Ukraine was accorded a much less privileged position than in the First Five-Year Plan. Capital investment in Ukraine was very close to the relative proportion of the Ukrainian population in the USSR—17.8 per cent (30 million out of 168 million). By contrast Moscow oblast with a population of 10 million (5.9 per cent of the total) received 10.7 milliard rubles (10.8 per cent of the total).

Heavy industry remained the main beneficiary of the plan, with 46.7 milliard rubles assigned to NKTyazhProm. Of this sum the RSFSR was assigned 27 milliard rubles (70 per cent) and Ukraine 8.2 milliard rubles (20.9 per cent). Three regions received particularly favourable treatment: the Urals region, Moscow oblast and Ukraine. Together the Urals oblast and West Siberia krai took 24.16 per cent of the total, significantly outmatching Ukraine. For agriculture (NKZem and NKSovkhos) a total capital investment of 14.7 milliard rubles was proposed; the RSFSR was granted 9.8 milliard rubles (69 per cent) and Ukraine was to receive 2.1 milliard rubles (14.7 per cent) (Table 1.1).

There was a significant shift in industrial and agricultural investment away from the Ukraine. But this was something more complex than a shift to the East. The two major winners were the Moscow oblast and the Urals oblast. Other regions who did well were Leningrad oblast, the West Siberia

Table 1.1 Second Five-Year Plan: planned capital investment in the republics and regions

	<i>Investment in NKTyazhProm (milliard rubles)</i>	<i>(%)</i>	<i>Investment in NKZem/ NKSOvkhoz (milliard rubles)</i>	<i>(%)</i>	<i>All capital investment (milliard rubles)</i>	<i>(%)</i>
USSR	46.76		14.75		133.4	
Assigned by territory	39.05		14.25		98.8	
RSFSR	27.21	69.7	9.8	68.9	69.69	70.5
Ukraine SSR	8.2	20.9	2.1	14.7	16.6	16.8
ZSFSR	2.29	5.8	0.6	4.5	5.1	5.2
Bel. SSR	0.1	0.2	0.4	3.0	1.7	1.7
C. Asia	1.2	3.2	1.2	8.7	5.5	5.6
Moscow oblast	3.5	9.0	0.56	3.9	10.76	10.9
Urals oblast	7.1	18.3	0.75	5.3	10.49	10.6
Leningrad oblast	1.9	4.9	0.30	2.1	5.62	5.7
West Siberia krai	2.3	5.9	0.96	6.7	5.33	5.4
North Caucasus	1.8	4.7	1.11	7.8	4.67	4.7
Far Eastern krai	0.35	2.5	1.0	2.6	4.07	4.1
Kazakhstan ASSR	1.5	4.0	0.89	6.2	4.0	4.1
Gorky krai	1.7	4.4	0.44	3.1	3.9	4.0
Ivanovo	1.2	3.2	0.2	1.9	3.1	3.1
Lower Volga	0.7	1.9	0.9	6.5	3.0	3.0
Central Volga	1.1	2.8	0.9	6.5	2.9	2.9
CBE	0.6	1.7	0.7	5.4	2.5	2.5
E. Siberia	0.5	1.3	0.3	2.1	2.2	2.2

Source: Proekt vtorogo pyatiletnego plana razitiviya narodnogo khozyaisva SSSR (1933-1937). Tom 2 Plan razvitiya raionov (Moscow, 1934), pp. 240-1.

krai, the North Caucasus krai, the Far Eastern krai, Kazakhstan ASSR and Gorky krai. The high investment in the North Caucasus, Kazakhstan ASSR and the Central and Lower Volga, was partly intended to undo the damage caused by the famine. In the case of the Lower Volga krai it was linked to the ambitious project for irrigating the Trans-Volga region. The high investment in the Far Eastern krai reflected defence considerations.

In the RSFSR in addition to the 13 regions noted above there were another seven regions whose total capital investment varied from a high of 1.7 milliard rubles to a low of 0.2 milliard rubles (in descending order of importance they were Bashkir ASSR, Western oblast, Northern krai, Tartar ASSR, the Crimean ASSR, the Karelian ASSR and Yakutia ASSR.) The total capital investment in these seven regions amounted to 6.4 milliard rubles.

The Ukraine was to remain the country's premier coal and metal base, although with the development of the UKK and other regions its contribution

to the country's production as a proportion would decline. Out of 16.6 milliard rubles assigned to Ukraine, some 8.2 milliard rubles (49 per cent) was assigned to heavy industry (NKTyazhProm), representing 17.5 per cent of the investment for the whole of the USSR. The coal industry was to receive 1.3 milliard rubles (38.8 per cent), non-ferrous metallurgical industry 3.8 milliard rubles (42.9 per cent); machine-building 810 million rubles (11.1 per cent); chemical and coke chemicals 1.1 milliard rubles (26.7 per cent). Light industry received a mere 954 million rubles (11.4 per cent). Investment in NKZem and NKSovkhoz was 2.12 milliard rubles (14.2 per cent).

The figures of the plan indicate that, whereas Ukraine was to remain a major heavy industrial region, the dominant position which it had occupied during the First Five-Year Plan was past. Within Ukraine itself the dominance of the Donbass coalfield and the southern metallurgical works was underlined. At the same time investment in heavy industry in Ukraine was assigned to NKTyazhProm, largely by-passing the republican authorities.

Centre–local relations, 1934–6

The Soviet economy in the 1920s like the tsarist economy, was characterised by a diversity of economic forms (*mnogoukladnost*). Much of that diversity disappeared with the introduction of the First Five-Year Plan and the collectivisation of agriculture. This was reflected also in a fundamental change in the balance of institutional power. In 1921–8 economic policy was largely shaped by those agencies concerned with the operation of the market economy – fundamentally the integration of the economy through the mechanism of the market, price regulation and taxation – NKFin, NKTorg. After 1928 economic power moved to those commissariats concerned with planning and state ownership and regulation of the economy – principally Gosplan, Vesenkha – supported by the key agency of party–state control TsKK–NKRKI. In agriculture the creation of NKZem USSR, Kolkhozsentr and Traktorsentr involved a move from the administration of the rural economy to its administrative reorganisation, subordination and regulation. The Committee for Agricultural Procurements (KomZag), headed by Kuibyshev, was established in February 1932, attached to Sovnarkom-STO. Its regional plenipotentiaries became an indispensable part of the mechanism of central control over agriculture.

Local party authorities were themselves accountable for how policy was implemented in their region. A system of control by party plenipotentiaries and investigating commissions was evolved. To deal with particular problems in agriculture and on rail transport the system of (*politotdely*) was instituted in 1933. At the Central Committee plenum of 22–28 November 1934, largely as a result of pressure from regional party secretaries, the *politotdely* in the MTS were abolished.⁶⁵ The *politotdely* in the sovkhozy remained in existence through the 1930s.

The establishment of the Commission of Party Control and the Commission of Soviet Control, replacing TsKK-NKRKI, in 1934 was intended to create a stronger system of control from the centre, which was not beholden to local party authorities, and whose prime responsibility was to ensure that policy was implemented. The creation of the Central Committee's Department for Leading Party Organs (ORPO) by the XVII party congress further strengthened the oversight of republican and provincial party committees.

The purge of the party ranks, authorised in January 1933, was carried out by a special Central Purge Commission, operating with own purge commissions in the localities, not under control of the local leadership. About 18 per cent of party members were expelled. The creation of the all-union Procuracy in July 1933, the NKVD USSR in February 1934, and the People's Commissariat of Justice USSR in July 1936 were important steps in strengthening central control over judicial policy. These moves, J. Arch Getty argues, were partly motivated by the desire to control the arbitrary and excessive resort to repressive means by provincial and republican organs of justice.⁶⁶

The role of the republican and regional party authorities was increasingly defined by the needs of the planned economy as coordinators, problem-solvers and trouble-shooters. They were required to carry out investigations and to enforce policy at the behest of the centre. In 1933 the Ukrainian party leaders were required by the centre to investigate defects in the coal and metallurgical industries, on the railways and in agriculture. In agriculture, where the control by the branch commissariats NKZem and NKSovkhoz were necessarily weaker, the republican and regional authorities retained some vestige of authority, with much of their work being organised around the autumn and spring sowing campaign, the harvest campaign and the grain procurement campaign.

Agricultural policy, 1933-6

Stalin, as is clear from his correspondence with Kaganovich in the years 1931-6, showed great personal interest in the figures for grain procurement from the republics and regions. Pleas for adjustments in procurement targets almost invariably went to him for arbitration. Stalin clearly considered himself an authority in this field. It may also be the case that it was easier for him to exercise authority over these targets, which involved the degree of pressure to be applied to the peasants and collective farms, than over targets for industrial production, which involved much more complex problems in reconciling the figures for different enterprises and institutions. For industrial targets it was safer to leave the technical details to Gosplan and Sovnarkom.

In September 1933, with the poor harvests in the Central Volga, Lower Volga, southern part of Urals and Western Kazakhstan, M. A. Chernov, the head of the Committee for Agricultural Procurements, proposed reductions in

procurement targets. To oversee the procurement campaign M. A. Chernov was sent to the Lower Volga, A. I. Mikoyan was sent to the North Caucasus. Close scrutiny was also kept on the progress of the autumn sowing campaign.⁶⁷ In response to high procurement targets local authorities attempted to evade controls by organising their own grain, seed and fodder funds; in response to attempts to impose tight financial and credit controls local authorities resorted to creating money substitutes.

In 1934, despite indications of a good harvest, Stalin feared that complacency in the republics and regions would undermine the procurement campaign. In August Khataevich, of Dnepropetrovsk obkom, requested that the procurement target for his oblast be reduced by 6 million puds. The Ukrainian leadership scaled this down to 4 million puds, a target which the Politburo in Moscow then approved. From August to October the central authorities maintained relentless pressure on the republics and provinces to realise the plan targets. Stalin was kept informed at every stage and played a major role in guiding policy, displaying a clear understanding of the provinces, which were failing, and those who were doing well.⁶⁸

In August 1934 leading party officials were dispatched to oversee the procurement campaign in the various regions. Stalin in his communications with Kaganovich stressed the need to maintain pressure on the regions to meet their targets. K. V. Ryndin, 'a petty demagogue', first secretary of Chelyabinsk obkom, he instructed, should be told that if he failed to meet his target he would be ousted.⁶⁹ In October Kaganovich wrote to Stalin about the difficulties of getting the procurement target fulfilled: 'On the scene in Siberia and the Chelyabinsk oblast I had to lash out, of course, as harshly as I could against the opportunists and blind leaders. The results don't seem to be too bad, Siberia will finish by the 1st [November] and Chelyabinsk by the latest by 25th'.⁷⁰

In 1935, with a record harvest, Stalin insisted on pushing up the grain procurement targets as a reserve against future uncertainties. He demanded that pressure be maintained on the republics, especially Ukraine, and the regions, to meet these targets.⁷¹

In 1936 there was a very poor harvest caused by drought, but the centre's response was more temperate than in 1933 or 1934. In September and October Kaganovich dispatched a number of telegrams to Stalin, at his holiday retreat in Sochi, relaying the demands from the Azov-Black Sea krai, Stalingrad, Voronezh, Kursk, Sverdlovsk, Saratov, Gorky obkoms and Bashkir ASSR for their procurement targets to be reduced—with recommendations for somewhat lower cuts than those proposed. By 1936 the Soviet government had built up a substantial grain reserve to cope with such emergencies. In all cases Stalin agreed to a reduction in the procurement targets, although in some instances he proposed smaller reductions than those suggested by Kaganovich.⁷²

In the field of industrial policy the regional administration was concerned with ensuring plan fulfilment. The Stakhanov movement, which developed from August 1935, reflects the roles that the regional administration performed within the economy. The Stakhanov movement in the coal industry, and the analogous movement on the railways, was pioneered in the Donbass, with the Donetsk obkom, headed by S. A. Sarkis, playing a leading role in developing this initiative. There may also have been some input in developing this movement from NKTyazhProm and NKPS. Only subsequently did the central party and state authorities take up and promote this idea on a national scale, extending it to all sectors of the economy and all regions of the country.⁷³

The regional authorities were required to develop the Stakhanov movement in all branches of the economy. Not all regional leaders were enthusiastic about this campaign. Early in 1936 the Politburo instituted a major investigation, carried out by KPK, headed by N. I. Ezhov, into industry in the Sverdlovsk region. Ezhov in his report to the Politburo severely censured party secretary I. D. Kabakov for systematically neglecting the Stakhanovite movement.⁷⁴

Conclusions

The main shift in centre-local relations occurred in the period 1929-34, and it occurred in two phases. The first phase, in 1929-30, was associated with the collectivisation of agriculture and the development of the First Five-Year Plan. In this period the autonomy of the republican', and to a lesser extent the regional, tier of administration was weakened by their loss of economic powers: through the transfer of powers over agriculture to NKZem USSR and NK Sovkhoz USSR and the Committee for Agricultural Procurements (KomZag); through the takeover of republican and regional industries by Vesenkha USSR; through the weakening of the budgetary powers of the republics and regions. In the second phase, 1932-4, the weakening of the localities was directly related to the famine and its repercussions. This led to a fundamental change in the way in which the political system was structured with the development of a plethora of administrative agencies of central control (politotdely, purge commission, KPK-KSK, ORPO). After 1933 the attack on bourgeois nationalism also circumscribed the autonomy of the republican organisations.

These developments fundamentally changed relations between the centre, the republics and the province level of administration. They reflected a change from a system of horizontal integration based largely on the market to one based mainly on vertical integration, and branch administration of the planned economy. These changes taken together were associated with a dramatic strengthening of Stalin's personal power and the decline of the instruments of collective decision-making. In the process the role of the

republican and provincial tiers of administration was considerably weakened. The political-administrative system, however, still required considerable delegation of power to lower-level officials in policy implementation. The elaborate system of central controls developed in this period imposed severe limits on local initiative but such controls could not, and did not, seek to extinguish that initiative

From 1934–36 a certain stability re-entered the system in terms of central and local relations. But it was a period marked by attempts by the centre to achieve more discipline amongst lower administrative tiers (through the checking and exchange of party cards) and the development of strategies to promote greater economic efficiency (Stakhanovism). It was a period characterised by growing alarm at the international situation, and by a growing trend towards economic autarchy and isolationism. This obsessive pre-occupation with control was bound to create confusion in responsibility and to undermine initiative. The terror in 1936–8 again fundamentally restructured centre–local relations.

Notes

1. *Kommunisticheskaya partiya Sovetskogo Soyuza v rezolyutsiyakh i resheniyakh s"ezdov, konferentsii i plenumov TsK* (Moscow, 1976), Vol. X, p. 234.
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51. *KPSS v rezolutsiyakh*, Vol. 6, 1985, pp. 21–31.
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53. See E. A. Rees and D. H. Watson, 'Politburo and Sovnarkom', in E. A. Rees (ed.), *Decision-making in the Stalinist Command Economy, 1932–37* (London, 1997), pp. 12–4; E. A. Rees, 'Stalin, the Politburo and Rail Transport Policy', in Julian Cooper, Maureen Perrie and E. A. Rees (eds), *Soviet History 1917–53* (London, 1995), pp. 104–11.
54. *Istoricheskii Arkhiv*, 1994, No. 6, pp. 119–51. On 1 January 1934 Stalin met Sheboldaev, Ptukha and Evdokimov; on 4 July he met Khataevich, Evdokimov, Gryadinskii, Sheboldaev, Ivanov and Pramnek; on 4 July he met Kabakov, Ptukha, Lavrent'ev, Mirzoyan; on 6 July he met Goloded, Ryndin, Razumov, Veger; on 16 July he met the Ukrainians: Kosior, Postyshev, Lyubchenko, Khataevich, Veger and Demchenko, evidently about the grain procurement targets; on 25 July he met Goloded and Gikalo of Belorussia. On 28 November he again met the Ukrainian leaders: Kosior, Postyshev, Petrovskii, Khataevich, Veger, Demchenko, Lyubchenko, Sarkisov and Chernyavskii; on 29 November he met Eikhe, Gryadinskii, Ptukha, Razumov, Evdokimov, Isaev and Mirzoyan; on 4 December he met Razumov, Eikhe, Gryadinskii, Mirzoyan and Shubrikov.
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