

Lessons about the Soviet Polity Learned from Stalin's Youngest Victims: Children of Enemies of the People

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Abstract

Interviews in 2005-2007 with thirty-five children of parents designated as "enemies of the people" because of their national or class background during the 1930s and 1940s offer insight into how the Soviet regime retained the loyalty and quiescence of its citizens. I conducted these interviews in eight cities of the Russian Federation, extending geographically from the White Sea in the far northwest to Akademgorodok in western Siberia. The subjects were born between the mid-1920s and the mid-1930s. Their categories of enemy status included wealthy peasants ("kulaks"), pre-revolutionary gentry, members of non-Bolshevik socialist parties before the Bolshevik Revolution, citizens of the borderlands between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany or nations occupied by the Soviet Red Army after the signing of the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact of 1939, Communist Party members who evoked disquiet among the Stalinist leadership, socialist immigrants to the Soviet Union from capitalist countries, and ordinary workers caught up in the random sweeps of the Stalinist repressions. As children, these Soviet citizens lost one or both parents, their homes, often their relatives and friends, sometimes their birth identity, usually health because of physical deprivations, and unfettered opportunities for higher education and full membership in the polity otherwise open to non-stigmatized persons.