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## **DENUNCIATIONS IN THE ERA OF STALIN'S REPRESSIONS**

### **ДОНОСИ В ЕПОХУ СТАЛІНСЬКИХ РЕПРЕСІЙ**

The era of Stalin's repressions, especially its culmination in the 1930s, is known as one of the darkest periods in the history of the Soviet Union. After Joseph Stalin came to power in the late 1920s, the country experienced sweeping political, economic, and social changes. Stalin's policies of collectivisation and industrialisation led to profound upheavals in agriculture and industry, causing widespread discontent and social instability.

To consolidate his power and control society, Stalin and his inner circle began to carry out mass repression against real and perceived political enemies. These repressions included arrests, deportations, exiles, and executions of millions of people that continued until 1953. An important role in this process was played by denunciations, which became a widespread and even encouraged phenomenon in society.

The attitude towards denunciation, both at the state level and among ordinary people, is ambiguous. In some historical periods, the state stimulates (morally and materially) voluntary informants, while in other periods it censures their actions.

The denunciations of the Stalinist period became one of the tools with which the state controlled the population and fought the so-called «enemies of the people». The state machinery of repression actively used information obtained through denunciations for arrests and trials. Many citizens, fearing for their lives and seeking to avoid reprisals, became informers. Some used denunciations to settle personal scores or achieve career goals. Thus, denunciations fitted into the general context of Stalinist repression as an important element of the state system of terror, which played a significant role in creating an atmosphere of fear and distrust in Soviet society.

The definition of the concept of denunciation can vary depending on the context and source. From a scientific point of view, denunciation is a multidimensional phenomenon. It combines different facets of individual and social relations. There are several formulations that characterise this phenomenon.

The *official definition* is that «denunciation» is the reporting to government agencies or other law enforcement agencies of the alleged illegal or subversive activities of another person, often anonymously, for the purpose of prosecuting or punishing him.

We can also talk about the *historical-political definition* of the concept. A denunciation in the context of Stalinist repressions is a written or oral report sent to the authorities, most often to the NKVD, with information about alleged anti-state activities, disloyalty or other hostile activity of citizens. The denunciation often became the basis for arrest, interrogation and subsequent reprisals. In addition, there are also psychological, social and legal definitions of denunciation.

On the materials of modern literature we can give examples of formulations that are most often used by authors in the definition of the concept of «denunciation». Oleg Bazhan's work defines denunciation as «a written or oral report to the authorities of suspicion of counter-revolutionary activity, espionage or other anti-state activity, often anonymous, aimed at persecuting and punishing specific individuals». Oleg Khlevniuk's book «The Everyday Life of a Soviet Man in the Age of Stalinism» describes denunciation as «a way of interaction between citizens and state authorities, when a report of alleged violations or anti-state activities is used to eliminate personal enemies or competitors». Alexander Solzhenitsyn's «The Gulag Archipelago» sees denunciations as «an instrument of mass terror used to instil fear and maintain repressive control in society». These definitions provide insight into the different aspects and functions of denunciations in the Stalinist period and help to understand their role in the system of political repression.

Denunciations became one of the key tools of the Stalinist regime to maintain political control and implement mass repression. They were used to identify real and imaginary «enemies of the people», which allowed the authorities to justify arrests, interrogations, torture and executions. Through denunciations, the state exercised not only political but also social control. Citizens had to constantly watch their words and actions, fearing that any manifestation of discontent or disagreement could become a pretext for denunciation.

This created an atmosphere of fear and suspicion that permeated all layers of society. The authorities actively used denunciations to manipulate society and put pressure on individuals. Denunciations could become a tool for settling personal scores, eliminating competitors or ill-wishers. Often denunciations were written for career advancement or material benefits, making them an effective way of manipulation and pressure.

For many Soviet citizens, denunciation became a way of demonstrating loyalty to the regime. Filing a denunciation was seen as a patriotic act, an expression of loyalty to the party and the state. It helped to strengthen ideological discipline and unity among the population.

Denunciations created the illusion of total surveillance, which increased the feeling of helplessness and fear among citizens. People knew that they could be watched by their neighbours, colleagues and even relatives, which made it impossible to express any open dissent or dissatisfaction with the regime. Mass denunciations destroyed traditional social ties and undermined trust between people. They fostered an atmosphere of mutual distrust and suspicion, which had a negative impact on the

social fabric of society. This made the population more divided and vulnerable to the repressive apparatus.

Denunciations served as a means of legitimising repression in the eyes of society and the international community. The authorities could present repression as a legitimate and necessary measure to combat internal enemies, relying on «evidence» obtained through denunciations.

Soviet propaganda contributed to the legalisation of denunciations. From radio receivers and newspaper pages Soviet citizens were constantly urged to be vigilant. Most of the propaganda posters of those years are devoted to the need to resist pests in their ranks. Films and plays were made about exposing spies, traitors and enemy saboteurs. Children were involved in the process of denunciation. Pavlik Morozov is considered the symbol of denunciation of that time. The story of the pioneer, who at the age of 13 allegedly exposed the crimes of his kulak father and was killed for it by his relatives, became a cult in the USSR. Unfortunately, Morozov was only one of many child denunciations.

Overall, denunciations played a multifaceted role in Stalinist society, being an important element of state policy and social control. They helped to maintain the repressive regime, break down social ties and create an atmosphere of fear and suspicion that allowed the authorities to effectively manage and suppress any form of resistance.

### **Sources and literature**

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