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“Without Preachers, in a Corner of the Barracks”: Protestant “Barracks Congregations” in the Perm-Kama Region in the Second Half of the 1940s through the Early 1960s

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This article examines the genesis and evolution of Protestant groups in the cities and workers' settlements of the Perm-Kama Region from the 1940s to the early 1960s. The circumstances of life in the conglomerations of settlements in cities in the Urals led to the formation of “barracks congregations” of believers. Glushaev argues that in these years the barracks communities of Evangelical Christians-Baptists and Mennonites played a unique social role, through which horizontal ties were restored and religious practices, adapted to new conditions, took shape.

Keywords: urban conglomerations, workers' settlements, barracks congregations, special settlers, Evangelical Christians-Baptists, Mennonites, anti-religious propaganda.

1.

ANTI-RELIGIOUS propaganda called them “sectarians” (*sektanty*). The authorities gave out limited information on the presence of Baptists, Pentecostals, and Mennonites in Soviet society, always relegating them to the side of the “road to building Communism.” But the time had passed when Evangelical believers had been called “sectarians—the kulak’s [rich peasant’s] Petrushka,”¹ portrayed in anti-religious posters as a rosy-cheeked puppet with the “hostile face of a village kulak” leering out from be-

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hind its back. The creation in 1944 of the joint Union of Evangelical Christians and Baptists (which some Pentecostals later joined) was to demonstrate, in the political calculus of the Stalinist leadership, that “the Soviet state takes into consideration the existence of religious ideas and (...) does not limit the free performance of religious rituals” (“Religiia i tserkov’”: column 1782).

But in practice the tolerated activity of Protestant groups was significantly circumscribed by control from state structures and dependent on a fleeting political conjuncture. In particular, in contrast to the capital cities (Moscow, Leningrad) and some regional centers, in which Evangelical Christian-Baptist houses of worship (*molitvennyye doma*) were active, there were no officially registered congregations of Evangelical believers in the towns and settlements of Molotov Oblast² before the mid-1950s. (In Izhevsk and Kirov, administrative centers of regions bordering on Molotov Oblast, communities of Evangelical Christians-Baptists³ were registered by organs of the local executive committees in 1945–46 [Iarygin 2004: 110].) The lack of officially registered Evangelical congregations in Molotov Oblast, however, does not mean that none existed there. In the first year after the war, 1946, a group of Evangelical Christians in Molotov (the name of Perm from 1940–57) presented an official⁴ of the Council on Affairs of Religious Organizations (SD RK) with a petition to open a house of worship (Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Permskogo kraia [GAPK], f. r-1205, op.1, d. 60, l. 1). The registration process dragged on and in the end became mired in bureaucratic red tape.

Other population centers in the oblast also witnessed the formation of Protestant communities. But at that time city and district au-

1. Petrushka is a comic character in traditional Russian folk puppet theater. — Translator.
2. In the Russian version of this article, the author uses the designations “Molotov (Perm) Oblast,” “Prikam’è,” and “Permskoe Prikam’è” as synonyms. “Prikam’è” and “Permskoe Prikam’è” are translated here as Perm-Kama Region. (The Kama River runs through the region.) — Translator.
3. The Russian term “Evangelical Christians-Baptists” signifies believers affiliated with the Union of Evangelical Christians and Baptists (formed in 1944). The cumbersome name reflects the union of two prominent, related strands within Russian Evangelicalism. This translation interprets “Evangelical Christians” as believers affiliated with that strand of Russian Evangelicalism, whereas the phrase “Evangelical believers” includes those of other branches as well, such as Mennonites and Pentecostals. — Translator.
4. The Russian term *upolnomochennyi* (“plenipotentiary”) is translated in this article as “official” or “representative.” These “officials” most likely worked for either the Council on Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church or the Council on Affairs of Religious Organizations (two state bodies that dealt with religious matters), although the connection is often not stated explicitly in the text. — Translator.

thorities preferred not to notice the small religious groups, whose members, moreover, included a particular category of Soviet citizen, “deportees, listed in the special registry,” according to a 1953 report (Permskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv noveishei istorii [PermGANI], f. 105, op. 20, d. 129, l. 163). With respect to local information on the religious situation in the oblast’s districts at the beginning of the 1950s, an oblast official, N.G. Muzlov, repeatedly complained that reports from district and city authorities lacked information on active non-registered believers’ groups, and the reports arrived late (PermGANI, f. 105, op. 20, d. 131, l. 168). It was not rare for officials to learn of prayer meetings by chance, as when residents, neighbors of a Baptist believer in the barracks, came to the Municipal Executive Committee in Gubakha (Molotov Oblast) in 1955 “with the complaint that the frequent singing and gatherings Marchenko holds violate the rules of the dormitory and interfere with normal life” (PermGANI, f. 105, op. 22, d. 106, l. 6).

The incomplete nature of information on small religious groups active in the region during the late 1940s and early 1950s created the impression of an insignificant number of Protestant communities. For example, V. P. Buldakov, a lecturer for the Oblast Committee of the Communist Party in the 1950s and 1960s, wrote during his tenure that before 1954 in the oblast’s cities and settlements, “isolated groups [of Evangelical Christians-Baptists], few in number, existed,” and “groups of Mennonite believers, mainly Germans by nationality, were not particularly active” (Buldakov 1972: 119, 121).

There are several reasons for this initial fragmentation of Evangelical believers’ religious life. First, there were the consequences of the political regime’s repressions directed against religious leaders and rank-and-file believers in the 1930s and 1940s. Thus, in 1935 the most active members of the Perm community of Evangelical Christians were arrested, and the leaders were sentenced to varying prison camp terms and exile. The other believers ceased meeting together in public places (Derbenev 2001: 5; *Gody terro-ra* 2003: 112).

Second, the scattered nature of the Evangelical movement stemmed from a whole series of social, political, and cultural processes at work in the second half of the 1940s. The actual conditions of life of the majority of the Perm-Kama Region’s population influenced the emergence of Protestant groups. It is worthwhile here to reconstruct the everyday environment of the population centers in which groups of Evangelical Christians-Baptists, Pentecostals and

Mennonites took shape, and to examine through a social lens believers' involvement in various social networks, their interpersonal relations and their interaction with official institutions. In the final analysis, the history of everyday life in the cities and settlements of Molotov Oblast in the 1940s and 1950s can illuminate to no small degree the specifics of religious minorities' development in the region.

The urban world of the Perm-Kama Region at the turn of the decade was a complex mixture of different ways of life, preserved and accumulated during the preceding years of Stalinist industrialization and calamitous wartime. The policy of extensive exploitation of the region's natural resources and the bureaucratic interests of industrial enterprises produced a distinctive kind of population center, known in official propaganda as a "Soviet city." These centers of administrative authority, founded upon the economics of large-scale enterprises and the power of the penal organs, characteristically exhibited a "patchwork" building-up of the territory with the attachment of separate workers' settlements to plants, factories, and mines. As candidly described in a 1949 report: "[Our] cities—for example, Gubakha, Polovinka, Solikamsk, Krasnokamsk, Chusovoi and others—up to now amount to a conglomeration of many poorly built settlements strewn with rubbish" (PermGANI, f. 105, op. 15, d. 510, l. 69).



**A view of the workers' settlement at the J. Stalin Factory, Perm,
at the beginning of the 1930s.**

The population of the workers' settlements presented a motley picture of various categories of Soviet citizen, brought by fate to the industrial plants of Molotov Oblast. The majority were immigrants from rural districts, gathered by recruiters for work in the factories and mines, or peasants who had fled the collective farms for the city. During the Great Patriotic War, the urban population of certain industrial centers (Gubakha, Kizel, Krasnokamsk) increased by one-and-a-half to two times (PermGANI, f. 105, op. 13, d. 175, l. 55). In heavy industry, timber processing, and coal mines, evacuees and mobilized civilians replaced workers conscripted into the military. A sizeable number of former prison camp inmates and special settlers, restricted in their right of movement within the oblast's territory, were among the workers and staff. And as a result of the social upheavals in which migrants found themselves, the violation of traditional cultural norms, significant demoralization, and a coarsening of morals took place. According to the testimony of one police official in a 1952 report on the security ministry's police work: "The continuous flow of workers recruited for industry and timber processing and the presence of corrective labor camps, Ministry of Internal Affairs [MVD] colonies, and special exiles are producing a strained operational environment in the oblast's center and on the periphery" (PermGANI, f. 105, op. 18, d. 195, l. 123).

Incidentally, the level of "hooliganization" of daily life in the early 1950s in the cities and workers' settlements of Molotov Oblast was so high that at one point it became a subject of discussion at the highest government level. By the fall of 1953, the crime situation in the oblast had effectively escaped the authorities' control. On February 27, 1954, the minister of internal affairs and the general prosecutor of the USSR had to give a special report to the highest Soviet leaders on the crime situation in Molotov Oblast (Kozlov 2010: 84–85).

On the whole, according to composite data on the socio-economic development of Molotov Oblast in the first half of the 1950s, the extensive growth of the cities through the incorporation of villages and the construction of barracks housing districts meant that "workers' settlements" concentrated around industrial enterprises became the main structural units of urban space (Chashchukin 2009: 64). The settlements, consisting of barracks and dormitories, privately built dwellings, and mud huts, could scarcely be considered the cities of an industrial society. Instead, they were reminiscent of the industrial camps that arose in the British Isles at the dawn of capitalism (Leibovich

1993: 65). These conglomerations of settlements “did not enjoy a unified cultural and territorial space. They would only become cities, as characterized by autonomy of individual life and the division of social relations into private and public spheres, in the post-Stalin era, during the housing construction initiatives of the Khrushchev and Brezhnev years” (Kabatskov 2012: 26–27).

From a different perspective, the expanse of barracks housing taking shape on the city outskirts brought together people of extraordinarily different social positions and conflicting cultural mentalities. The files of official P. S. Gorbunov preserve his observations of the barracks residents in the workers’ settlement of Chernushka: “Zorin was a powerful old man, 62 years old, with a long white beard and the hair on his head also completely white. He wore no clothes—no trousers or shirt, no hat—except for a long white linen shroud, and on his feet he wore only white linen slippers fastened with a row of buttons (...). Thus attired he walks seven kilometers to church, winter and summer.” The chairman of the district committee of the Voluntary Society for Support of the Army, Air Force and Navy (DOSAAF, a Soviet social organization that still exists in Russia today), M. D. Poponin, who lived with Zorin in the same barracks, complained, according to a 1955 report, that “people are continuously coming to Zorin, and when will they stop all this and give us some peace and quiet” (PermGANI, f. 105, op. 22, d. 107, l. 81).

In other words, the everyday provincial life of the Soviet people consisted of conflicting and marginal elements. A Baptist’s account (recorded by a journalist) provides a vivid picture: “We were living then in the barracks, in one of the settlements in Perm. We could often hear fights among the neighbors on Saturdays and Sundays and, of course, on paydays. We wanted somehow to resist such people, to counter them with a different atmosphere” (Tiuliandin 1964: 6). In this respect, a chaos of cultural practices filled the communal life of the barracks, and the boundary between the public and private spheres of life was almost non-existent. Neighbors routinely witnessed arguments between spouses or conflicts between barracks residents; and no matter who prevailed in this environment, instead of the collectivization of life, its atomization, the obliteration and collapse of “normal” forms of human cohabitation, resulted (Orlov 2010: 128). Given these circumstances, I suggest that the formation of Protestant communities was believers’ unique response to the anomie of everyday life and their attempt to restore ruptured social, and more simply human, ties.

2.

In the early postwar years, low-level administrative staffers regarded the religious activity of settlement residents with complete neutrality. The social closeness of the “little bosses” to the culture of the ordinary people and the officials’ immersion in the settlements’ practical life affected their attitudes toward residents’ piety. Moreover, in the realm of official state policy and political rhetoric, “the precise Stalinist formulation” of Article 124 of the Constitution—On the Free Exercise of Religion and the Freedom of Anti-Religious Propaganda—prevailed (“Religiia i tserkov” 1947: column 1781). The emotional stresses of postwar life’s difficulties and its disorder permeated the general mood, but there was hope of a softening of the political regime that proved “nothing more than an illusion. But even these illusions were a reality of postwar life, a strategy for survival” (Zubkova 1998: 26).

For instance, it was not at all strange that in 1947–48 groups of Orthodox believers in the large workers’ settlement of Borovsk (near the city of Solikamsk) on more than one occasion petitioned different government authorities about opening a church. In its petition, one such group “indicated that the settlement had 3,242 believers” (GAPK, f. r-1351, op. 2, d. 14, l. 20). The chairman and secretary of the Borovsk settlement council endorsed and certified these petitions (GAPK, f. r-1351, op. 2, d. 14, l. 21).

In turn, the activity of the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptists (VSEKhB) lent legitimacy to Evangelical believers’ requests to regional officials for permission to conduct prayer meetings and to open houses of worship. In October 1946 a group of Evangelical Christians in Molotov applied to an oblast official to open a meeting-house (GAPK, f. r-1205, op. 1, d. 60, l. 1). Attached to the application was a list of a group of 20 (*dvadtsatka*) plus supplemental pages with 20 different surnames of believers (GAPK, f. r-1205, op. 1, d. 60, ll. 1 ob. –3).⁵ According to this surviving evidence, the Russian-speaking congregation had no fewer than 40 members. As surmised from documents from the 1920s containing some of the same surnames, some members of the group had formerly belonged to the Perm Congregation of Evangelical Christians, which was closed in the mid-1930s (“Protokol Obshchego sobraniia”).

5. The Soviet state required a core of 20 believers to petition for registration of a church community. — Translator.

If one considers only those included in the aforementioned lists, the group consisted of 11 men and 29 women. The majority were over fifty years of age (GAPK, f. r-1205, op. 1, d. 60, l. 1. ob. 2, 3), and pensioners and housewives constituted the main social group in this community. The document noted that among “the group of 20 who signed the petition there were no minors or persons deprived of their voting rights by a court” (GAPK, f. r-1205, op. 1, d. 60, l. 1).

But, in reports marked “secret,” officials from the Council on Affairs of Religious Organizations (SD RK) for Molotov Oblast pointed out another peculiarity of Evangelical groups’ composition. They often remarked, as in a 1949 report on a believers’ petition to open a house of worship, that the believers in such religious associations were not “continuous” residents of the oblast (GAPK, f. r-1205, op. 1, d. 268, l. 1). This euphemism hinted that the religious groups brought together special settlers (i. e., deportees).

This suggests that the “silence” of the district and municipal executive committees’ secretaries concerning unregistered groups of Baptists, Evangelical Christians, and Mennonites in the cities and settlements of Molotov Oblast, of which the official N. G. Muzlov complained, is explained by the following: The special-settler component of Protestant groups was subject to the jurisdiction of special commandants’ offices of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Ministry of State Security (MVD, MGB). In 1948 the chairman of the Gubakha Municipal Executive Committee hazarded a request to the head of the city’s MGB office seeking information on clergy “who independently and illegally go about the city and the district settlements to perform rites in believers’ homes: they baptize, perform funeral services and readings, and conduct organized worship services and missionary work” (GAPK, f. r-1351, op. 2, d. 14, l. 24). Staffers of the municipal MGB did not judge it necessary to share the information and recommended that he “turn to the Oblast Administration of the MGB regarding this question” (GAPK, f. r-1351, op. 2, d. 14, l. 25).

Parenthetically, this incident raises the question of the interrelations of the oblast officials from the Council on Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church (SD RPTs) and the Council on Affairs of Religious Organizations (SD RK), on the one hand, and the MVD–MGB organs in Siberia, on the other, from the second half of the 1940s to the early 1960s, a question A. V. Gorbatov has researched. In Gorbatov’s view, “The State Security organs in particular possessed the most complete and objective information on religious congregations’ daily activity, as

well as confidential information on religious leaders and activists. For the most part, it was the Religious Affairs representative who subsequently made use of this information *to a limited extent* [italics mine—A. G.], but party workers, propagandists, and journalists did so as well” (Gorbatov 2008: 76).

One distinctive aspect of urban development in the Urals (incidentally, something also characteristic of cities in Siberia and the Far East) was the establishment of settlements of special settlers and their subsequent incorporation within the city boundaries (Mazur 2002: 178). Until the mid-1950s, in the mining industry centers and cities in the Perm-Kama region and in the mining settlements of the Kizelov Coal Basin there were “special regime” zones, built up primarily with barracks, whose inhabitants labored at the local enterprises. Special Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) commandants’ offices were in place for the surveillance and administration of the settlers. On paper, special settlers enjoyed the full rights of Soviet citizens in the 1940s and 1950s, except for freedom of movement. But, as is well known, the actual discrimination against deported groups was not limited to their right to relocate.

By the early 1950s, a special administrative-legal structure had been finalized for different categories of special contingents. In these years Molotov Oblast ranked in the top five regions in the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic (RSFSR) for the number of special settlers living there (Zemskov 1990: 10). In July 1950 the Oblast Department for Special Settlers had 90,860 people in its registry (Suslov 2010: 158). Some fluctuation in the contingent’s numbers was observed from time to time, but the oblast’s ranking remained unchanged. In 1952 a police official reported: “During the Patriotic War and the following years, 89,153 people arrived—members of General Andrei Vlasov’s anti-Soviet fighting force [*‘vlasovtsy’*], Germans, Crimean deportees, members of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists [*‘ounovtsy’*], Kalmyks, Lithuanians, and those exiled for infractions of various decrees [*‘ukazniki’*]” (PermGANI, f. 105, op. 18, d. 195, l. 122).⁶ In other words, part of the urban and rural population of Molotov Oblast consisted of forced migrants who found themselves on the territory of Perm-Kama Region.

The representative of the Council on Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church (SD RPTs) in the oblast, P.S. Gorbunov, saw a direct cor-

6. These decrees included the June 2, 1948, decree against “spongers” on the collective farms. — Translator.

relation between the special contingent relocated to the oblast and the rise in sacramental observance among Orthodox parishes. For example, a 1949 memorandum noted: “The city of Kizel occupies the first place among the oblast’s parishes in the number of rites performed (baptism, marriage, burial, and others). To be sure, one cannot fully attribute this piety to the native population of Kizel, insofar as a significantly numerous contingent was brought to Kizel from the western oblasts, Crimea, and elsewhere. Among them there are many believers” (PermGANI, f. 105, op. 15, d. 153, l. 12).

The formation of Protestant groups in the industrial centers’ sprawling settlements also had ties with the special settlers. A petition from the village Mitrakovo (Krasnovishersk District) to the representative of the Council on Affairs of Religious Organizations (SD RK) in 1948 requested registration of a congregation aligned with the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptists; the group numbered 20 to 30 adherents (GAPK, f. r-1204, op. 2, d. 2, l. 14). In their incorporation of special settlements, Mitrakovo and its neighbors Morchany and Bakhari were typical of the oblast’s northern settlements at the time. According to first-hand accounts, already in the 1930s near the villages “a settlement of special settlers was organized. There were several barracks, a canteen, a bakery, and an office. (...) Most of the arrivals came from Ukraine” (Bondarenko 2008: 146). Local residents and special settlers worked at the Krasnovishersk pulp and paper mill, an early product of Stalin’s Five-Year Plan, built by prisoners.

An official reported in 1949 that in the group of Evangelical Christians in Mitrakovo “the majority of the believers are not continuous residents, but immigrants from other oblasts of the Soviet Union” (GAPK, f. r-1205, op. 1, d. 268, l. 1)—in other words, special settlers, a majority of whom were Ukrainian, according to existing records. Thus, forced migration to the oblast changed the region’s map of piety substantially and gave rise to new sites of Evangelical activity (See Glushaev 2012).

One category of deportees, the Soviet Germans, faced particular discrimination. More than 10 directives issued by the Council of People’s Commissars of the USSR (SNK SSSR) and by the State Defense Committee during the war years authorized deportation, resettlement and forced settlement of the entire ethnic group. (Categories of exiles and special settlers were defined in accordance with such directives [See Pobol’ and Polian 2005; Leibovich 2009: 28–30; Belkovets 2008]). By the time the special-settlement system was dismantled

in the mid-1950s, more than 52,000 ethnic Germans, including children and elderly retirees, were living in Molotov Oblast. (For a 1952 tally, see Suslov 2010: 389; my calculations of a 1954 figure of 52,507 individuals are based on a report found at PermGANI, f. 105, op. 21, d. 142, ll. 8–14).

German believers—including those exiled from their places of residence in the 1930s (“former kulaks” from the German villages of Ukraine and the Volga region), some of those mobilized during the war into the “workers’ army” (transferred to the special settler category in 1945–48), and Soviet Germans repatriated from Germany after the war—practiced Catholicism or were adherents of Protestant denominations (Lutherans, Mennonites and Baptists). The deportations and mobilizations of the German population, for all practical purposes, destroyed the church institutions that had existed earlier. “Without priests or preachers, in the corners of barracks and in mud huts, they recited to each other in a whisper what they were able to remember. They held church services within a very narrow circle, often just within a single family,” wrote V. Veber of the Soviet Germans, deported beyond the Urals during the war (Veber 1989: 373). Later, the special-settlement regime and the degraded atmosphere of the settlements resulted in the definitive weakening of church life, in its becoming more primitive, and in the spread of extra-institutional religious practices. Thus, in the absence of male clergy, women conducted religious rites. For instance, in the northern settlements of Cherdynsky District (Molotov Oblast) in 1955, women presided over German Catholics’ religious gatherings; they baptized children, married the young, and performed “other religious offices” (PermGANI, f. 105, op. 22, d. 106, l. 13).

In time, Protestant congregations took shape in the cities of Molotov Oblast—Molotov, Berezniki, Gubakha, Kizel, Solikamsk, Krasnokamsk, Nytva, Krasnovishersk and others—where “specially registered” populations lived in close proximity to each other. Religious brotherhoods served as their foundation, formed amid the conditions of the special administrative-legal regime and reflecting the specific daily circumstances of the sprawl of settlements surrounding cities in the Urals. “Barracks congregations”—Walter Sawatsky’s image to describe the Mennonite and Baptist groups that arose in the post-war years (Zavatski [Sawatsky] 1995: 72)—effectively conveys the distinctiveness of such religious brotherhoods that existed irrespective of the confessional or national makeup of particular groups. Analogous

associations existed in regions of the country whose development resembled that of the Perm-Kama Region. For instance, a Pentecostal preacher in Perm, formerly a prisoner in the Vorkuta camps, recalled religious gatherings in the settlements on the outskirts of Vorkuta: “The meeting took place in something (...) like a barracks, the rooms were already prepared” (Babushkin 2004).

One can most likely trace the formation of German-speaking religious congregations in the Perm-Kama Region’s industrial districts to the arrival of labor battalions of Soviet Germans in Molotov Oblast. In January and February 1942, the mobilization of Germans into worker colonies sent to industrial works, coal mines, logging operations, and fisheries took place following decrees of the Council of People’s Commissars and the State Defense Committee (GKO) and instructions from the People’s Commissariat of Internal Affairs (NKVD) (See Belkovets 2008: 153–76). Those mobilized into the labor army were not considered a repressed category.

In the autumn of 1942, almost one thousand mobilized girls and women arrived in Krasnokamsk (Molotov Oblast) for work at the oil refinery, the Molotov Oil Works, the Kamsk Pulp and Paper Mill, and other plants in the city. As the German women in the worker battalions were housed in barracks and cellars, small communities began to cohere. In these circumstances, confessional differences played a secondary role. Former labor army worker P.P. Peters wrote: “The older people went over hymns [*molitvennye pesnopeniia*] they remembered so as not to forget them, wrote them down in notebooks—yes, in the regular notebooks from the paper factory, which in a town of paper-mill workers it was still possible to lay hands on. Some of the female labor army workers remembered the old numerical-notation transcriptions and filled a mass of notebooks, arranging the melodies for four parts and secretly trying to rehearse these songs that brought help to tired, oppressed people” (*Nemtsy v Prikam’è*, t. 2, 2006: 111). The public space of the barracks, in which any gesture or spoken word could be interpreted as political sedition, reduced the display of piety to basic, inconspicuous acts: short daily prayers, quiet singing of certain Evangelical hymns, and the observance of holidays on the Christian calendar.

Later, during the postwar years when repatriations from Germany swelled the number of German special settlers, religious gatherings of Mennonites, Baptists, and Lutherans became regular events in the workers’ settlements of cities in the Urals. A memorandum from the Solikamsk Municipal Committee of the Communist Party

(GK VKP [b]) reported: “[In] the new settlement at the Magnesium Works in Barracks No. 54 (...) repatriated Germans gather, mainly on Sundays from nine in the morning till noon, and read ‘the Good Book’ (...) Citizen Klein [a woman] reads, and one old man (...) explains [what was read] to those present. (He is the leader.)” (*Nemtsy v Prikam’è*, t. 1, 2006: 226). The enduring tradition of the Protestant confession, with its “emphasis on the idea of eternal predestination and on the inevitability and even the blessedness of suffering” (Mitrokhin 1997: 397), facilitated the restoration of religious life in these barracks congregations. Fate was accepted as the manifestation of God’s will; and only personal, unconditional faith was required for “the salvation of one’s immortal soul.” Moreover, Protestant preachers not only spread the Gospel, but also established congregations, close-knit collectives of coreligionists, in which each individual received constant consideration. For the Germans of the barracks enclaves, amid the disintegration of familial and personal bonds, the rootlessness of everyday life, and social discrimination, the communal life of religious brotherhoods supplied lost human connections and gave the Germans the opportunity to speak in their native tongue.

But the special regulations to which deportees were subject made the barracks congregations’ preachers very vulnerable: more often than others, they became the objects of the state security organs’ attention. When the regime was hardened, as happened in 1946–49 (Belkovets 2008: 190), the penal organs used repressive measures against them. A Mennonite group in Solikamsk that was uncovered in 1947 was subsequently scattered and demoralized by the arrest of its preachers. Officials charged believers with making use of their religious beliefs in the struggle against Soviet authority. Under pressure from interrogators, an aged Mennonite preacher, Ivan Korneevich Penner, repatriated from Germany, “confessed” that while living in occupied territory during the war, “using religious convictions, in his sermons (...) he condoned the existence of the fascist authorities.” In the opinion of the interrogating officers, as a consequence of these sentiments, Penner “*waged war against the Soviet state* [emphasis in the source document]” (*Nemtsy v Prikam’è*, t. 1, 2006: 327). Having found himself in Molotov Oblast, said the preacher, “I was dissatisfied with my position in the special settlement and thought my life was difficult, while they wrote to me from America that there they live well, and I believed this” (*Nemtsy v Prikam’è*, t. 1, 2006: 328).

Through the layers and obfuscation of the state security interrogator's bureaucratise emerges a picture of a frightened old man whose fate was replete with the twists and turns brought on by the social upheavals of the twentieth century. It is difficult to interpret the preacher's "anti-Soviet" opinions as calls to struggle and resistance, especially given the Mennonites' opposition to violence. But to his religious frame of reference, the circumstances of life in the workers' ghetto and the blatant discrimination for national and religious reasons appeared as a trial of his Christian soul, and he desired to leave this sinful world and "take refuge" in the community of fellow believers.

The humble people's critical view of the authorities, the natural dissatisfaction with the daily struggles of life, and the tense criminal environment in the workers' settlements became eschatological signs in Protestant circles, and gave rise to a sense of "the last days." Special settler Evald Karlovich Gubert, a worker in the Solikamsk cooperative "Red Dawn," appeared with Penner in the interrogation file. A Lutheran by confession, Gubert had joined a Mennonite congregation through force of circumstance (*Nemtsy v Prikam'e*, t. 1, 2006: 329–33). An interrogator transcribed his statement under questioning: "In my sermon, I first read several chapters from the Bible and then began to speak of how we must not forget that we live on earth for a short time, and therefore should pray to God for our future life. I also *called upon believers to pray for those in prison, that God would give them health and that they could return safely to our family* [emphasis in the source document]" (*Nemtsy v Prikam'e*, t. 1, 2006: 333). These were utterly typical religious statements that one might hear in any Protestant community. It was only the authorities' particular view of this religious dissidence that transformed it into political subversion and a cultural-political phenomenon (Kozlov and Mironenko 2005: 7).

In 1950–51, the oblast's high court sentenced the Mennonite preachers to 25 years in a corrective labor camp. In his appeal to the Supreme Court of the RSFSR, Penner, a former stablehand at the Solikamsk Children's Sanitarium, wrote with a touch of amazement:

I ask the Supreme Court to take into consideration my advanced age (63 years), my peasant origins, my lack of education, and my work until my arrest as a blacksmith on a collective farm since 1929. (...)

And also, since I have had little education, how could I carry on any actions against Soviet authority, when I do not understand political matters and do not try to figure them out? (*Nemtsy v Prikam'e*, t. 1, 2006: 329).

Interestingly, in his private dispute with official ideology, the preacher employed the same conceptual system as the authorities. His emphasis on social proximity to the foundational classes of the socialist state and his use of illiteracy as justification for “political mistakes” reproduced key elements of the Soviet person’s discourse in the Stalinist era. This verbal manifestation of everyday Soviet life, which Stephen Kotkin has called “speaking Bolshevik,” was “the obligatory language for self-identification and as such, the barometer of one’s political allegiance to the cause” (Kotkin 1995: 220).

In other words, daily life in the Perm-Kama Region’s industrial centers did not do away with believers’ religious system of beliefs and values, but in a bizarre way it merged this system with the norms, rituals and stereotypes of Soviet ideology. Believers used the language that surrounded them and thought in the categories of Soviet “newspeak.” Phrases from formative Soviet propaganda texts appear especially frequently in Baptist congregations’ petitions for registration in the 1950s. For example: “The Russian October Revolution proclaimed the equality not only of all citizens of the country but also of all churches and confessions. We believers are deeply grateful to the party and the government of our great Motherland for a happy and joyful life and for the gift of religious freedom to all churches and religious associations, including also the Baptists” (GAPK, f. r-1204, op. 1, d. 7, l. 1). The faithful hoped that the authorities would actually allow them to worship freely. Usually these expectations remained unfulfilled, but the congregations continued to exist.

Around 1950, Protestant barracks congregations, along with traditional religious communities of believers worshipping in Orthodox churches and Old Believer chapels already active in Molotov Oblast, became an almost universal phenomenon in workers’ settlements, in which special settlers and migrants from different regions of the Soviet Union lived close together. In particular, communal, neighborly relations revived and gave rise to the formation of religious groups. For example, according to field reports from 1951, in the settlement of Yaiva (Aleksandrovsky District), “in the barracks where deported Germans live, believers gather weekly and read the Bible and the Gospel and sing psalms. (...) The group numbers up to 20 believers of both sexes” (GAPK, f. r-1204, op. 2, d. 2, l. 110).



Roman Karlovich Shlender (center), presbyter of the congregation of Evangelical Christians-Baptists in Berezniki (Molotov Oblast), and members of the congregation in front of the barracks of the workers' settlement, 1957.

In Berezniki, a major industrial center in Molotov Oblast, groups of Evangelical Christians-Baptists met together. An official report in 1952 noted: “According to the information we have (...) [the congregation] numbers up to 130 people, divided into two subgroups”: a Russian group, under the leadership of I. G. Pikulev (born 1895) and A. D. Voronova (born 1900), and a German group, whose preacher was Roman K. Shlender (born 1900). In today’s terms, the congregation served as a social network. Believers gathered in groups of 10 to 15 and held prayer meetings in their apartments. The Russians “favored” the barracks on Rabbit Hill (*Zaiach’ei Gorke*), while the German believers “favored” the barracks “in Block 19 and in the first sector” (GAPK, f. r-1204, op. 2, d. 2, l. 223). Thus, the composition of the Baptist community was not ethnically homogenous, and the sub-communities maintained a constant connection with each other.

According to the recollections of an elderly believer in a present-day Pentecostal community in Perm, German special settlers lived in the workers’ settlement of Eranichi in the city of Molotov in the early 1950s. On Sundays, joint religious services of German Baptists and Evangelical Christians from the city’s Russian Evangelical Christian-Baptist congregation took place. In the “German barracks,” two of the rooms where settlers lived were partitioned off, and on certain days they used them for prayer meetings (Tsiurpita 2010).

The evidence of archival documents from the 1940s and 1950s and the memories of Evangelical believers, as we have seen, often link Protestant congregations to the distinctive environment of the barracks enclaves in which believers (particularly German Baptists and Mennonites) found themselves. Religious brotherhoods existed in the constricted space of believers' daily activities and were almost invisible to the outside observer. For instance, as the official N. G. Muzlov wrote in 1950 of Russian-speaking groups of Evangelical Christians in Molotov and Berezniki: "They stubbornly deny the evidence that they hold prayer meetings—they say they 'go visiting'" (GAPK, f. r-1204, op. 2, d. 2, l. 94). In this way, the gradual establishment of horizontal social and religious ties facilitated the genesis of Protestant congregations in the Perm-Kama region in the postwar period.

3.

Against the background of political events and social reforms that followed Stalin's death in 1953, the energetic activity of Protestant preachers came as a surprise to the regional authorities. In May 1955, a large religious gathering took place in the settlement of Yaiva, on the outskirts of Aleksandrovsk, attended by representatives of the oblast's Evangelical congregations. The gathering turned into a special official meeting of the religious groups' leaders, at which they elected a senior presbyter for the oblast (GAPK, f. r-1204, op. 2, d. 7, l. 5). And although this central Baptist assembly was short-lived, it demonstrated the Evangelical movement's ability to consolidate believers outside of the official system—believers who had often disregarded decisions of the leaders of the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptists and circumvented control by state structures.

The cancellation of the special settlement regime in the second half of the 1950s and Protestant preachers' return from the labor camps made the presence of religious minorities obvious to the civil authorities. Thus, in a barracks enclave on the southern side of Solikamsk with the characteristic name "Worker Town," archival documents from 1960 show that two unregistered groups of German believers existed: a Baptist group with 40 adherents and a Mennonite community of 25. These groups were branches of larger communities on the northern outskirts, in what had been Borovsk (GAPK, f. r-1205, op. 1, d. 23, l. 185–185 ob.), which was administratively incorporated into Solikamsk in 1959.

Regular gatherings of the Baptist and Mennonite barracks congregations proved an effective mechanism for the adaptation and con-

solidation of the German-speaking population, especially its young people, amid the specific conditions of longstanding discrimination on the basis of their nationality. A list of Baptist believers who had met together on August 6, 1960 “in the workers’ town, in Barracks 6, apartment 14, in Mrs. Anna Petrovna Martens’s place,” provides a vivid example (GAPK, f. r-1205, op. 1, d. 23, l. 180). G. I. Martens (born in 1924), a machinist in the mining section of the Solikamsk Potash Works, served as the preacher for the group. Of the list’s 20 individuals, 17 were women and three men. A fourth man, not on the list, was the preacher himself. Many of the surnames indicate familial and relational connections. All the believers, mainly young or middle-aged, lived in the “German” barracks located close together (See Appendix 1).

One official, V. V. Beliaev, describing the believers’ life in a given settlement, noted:

Upon visiting the Germans’ apartments in the settlement of Worker Town in Solikamsk, the following scene was revealed: of all the people, Germans, we talked to in the quarters (about ten apartments), who lived in the barracks, all turned out to be connected to one degree or another with religious sects. There were no radios, no lectures take place there, and no agitators visit these barracks. In the apartments there were ‘slogans’ from the Gospel, embroidered onto rugs and towels and in frames, and so forth, such as ‘God is love,’ ‘I and my house will serve the Lord,’ ‘The best minutes are those I spend with the Lord,’ and so on. Some of the believers we met and with whom we spoke extensively were extremely fanatical (*Nemtsy v Prikam’e*, t. 1, 2006: 253).

In fact, embroidered, framed Biblical quotations were a constant feature in Mennonites’ living quarters (Bulatova 2000: 143).

The religious population’s spontaneous activity evoked a completely predictable reaction from the local authorities, although without the use of mass violence; times had changed. Seen in this light, the anti-religious campaign deployed at the end of 1958 seems more like a quest for a means of control over unauthorized religious institutions. The unfolding campaign placed explicit emphasis on the unmasking of and control over “sectarians,” including the Protestant communities in places in which believers lived in close proximity to each other. Indeed, Tatiana Kirillovna Nikolskaia sees this as a particular mark of the Khrushchev anti-religious campaign; she comments that “the ideology of the time was strikingly anti-sectar-

ian” (Nikol’skaia 2008: 176). The local party executive committees summoned preachers and, after a short interview, “collected signed statements” on the cessation of “sectarian meetings.” This was reminiscent of the well-known procedure applied in the special commandants’ offices in the settlements when in 1948 the state criminalized “flight from the places of obligatory, continuous residence by people deported to remote districts of the Soviet Union during the Patriotic War.” The relevant decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, dated November 26, 1948, authorized “permanent resettlement” for all categories of special settlers (See, for example, Belkovets 2008: 218–23).

In addition to this method of policing, the administration of workers’ settlements applied “joint responsibility” as a mechanism of control. (Khosking [Hosking] 2012 discusses the use of this archaic practice in Soviet society.) Commandants from among barracks residents were placed in charge of the barracks, known in official speak as “communal houses.” Elected “house committees” regulated everyday practical questions within the barracks-like dormitories. The functions and degree of responsibility of these collective institutions replicated, in part, the main elements of community life in the village commune. The commandants and house committee members were to maintain discipline among the residents, which required them to monitor the loyalty of the barracks residents. Thus, as a report on the town of Nytvva (Molotov Oblast) pointed out in 1957: “Bauman, commandant of the barracks, Vais, a member of the house committee, and others were summoned from the communal houses, where cases of the Germans meeting in apartments for prayer were also observed. (...) They were ordered not to permit prayer meetings in the apartments” (GAPK, f. r-1205, op.1, d. 23, l. 81).

Nonetheless, the influence of barracks religious associations among the German-speaking population was quite consequential in settlement life in the second half of the 1950s. Oblast official V. V. Beliaev reported: “When Anna Emmanuilovna Berg, a deputy of the Nytvvsky District Soviet, began to conduct active social work among the citizens living in the Kamsk dockyards settlement (an outlying district of Nytvva), many of her friends immediately turned their backs on her and stopped speaking to her. They conveyed their aversion and warnings orally through her husband, also a believer, and forced Berg to sign a statement of her resignation from her position as deputy, which she did” (*Nemtsy v Prikam’e*, t. 1, 2006: 237). In the settlement of Worker Town in Solikamsk, with close-knit, active barracks congregations of German Mennonites and Baptists,

the “red corner”⁷ in the local club was temporarily closed under pressure from the believers; and unknown individuals broke a radio that played Soviet music (*Nemtsy v Prikam'è*, t. 1, 2006: 254).

In time, a cultural conflict emerged among the ethnic Germans as a result of a quite unmistakable process of acculturation effected by Soviet propaganda and the influence of mass-distribution productions of Soviet culture. Oleg Leonidovich Leibovich, in his analysis of the local German milieu of the late 1940s–50s, rightly comments that in these “years German culture was a preserve of traditionalism, a return to the practices and beliefs of early Protestantism. Naturally, this aspect of German culture alienated many young people who had received a Soviet and indeed simply a secular education, thereby strengthening the assimilation process” (Foreword to *Nemtsy v Prikam'è*, t. 1, 2006: 20).

The drama of the cultural fissure among Soviet Germans at the end of the 1950s intensified in the wake of anti-religious propaganda that charged barracks congregations’ preachers with creating a religiously based closed national community. The propaganda targeted the Mennonites in particular. As the regional propagandist of atheism Edmund Mikhailovich Kremzer wrote: “The teaching of the Mennonites in our country is not only religious but also nationalistic” (Kremzer 1960: 4–5). Kremzer acknowledged that as a result of his propagandistic work, “many Germans who had in the past been my good friends turned from me, and now do not give me the time of day” (*Nemtsy v Prikam'è*, t. 1, 2006: 254).

The subsequent fate of the barracks congregations was determined, in part, by general processes of socio-economic development in the Perm-Kama Region’s cities. Mass housing construction begun at the end of the 1950s gradually changed the look of the cities, as prefabricated housing districts replaced the barracks zones. The relative normalization of life in the 1960s permitted many believers to acquire their own places to live—private houses. The socio-cultural environment of the barracks deteriorated, ultimately becoming a zone of social alienation.

Additionally, the anti-religious campaign of 1958–59 and local authorities’ administrative control that was directed toward constraining Protestant groups’ religious life spurred many believers to leave for other parts of the country. Former special settlers, deportees from Ukraine, returned to their homeland. The German population of the workers’ settlements, including Baptists, Pentecostals, and Mennon-

7. The red corner was an area in the barracks used for Soviet propaganda events. — Translator.

ites, in most cases left for Kazakhstan, Orenburg Oblast, and other regions of the Soviet Union. Some managed to emigrate abroad.

The reduction in German Baptist, Mennonite, and Lutheran congregations was most pronounced amid the migrations of the early 1960s. According to data from 1958–59, active Protestant congregations in the oblast numbered 59 and represented between 2,220 and 2,320 believers, whereas figures from an irregular census conducted in the autumn of 1961 indicated the presence of 37 Protestant groups representing a total of 1,161 Evangelical believers. Of eight Mennonite fellowships in which approximately 400 German believers participated, two remained (with 117 adherents); four Lutheran communities (200 people) shrank to two groups (30 people); and the number of Evangelical Christians-Baptists, about 1,200 believers in mid-1958, had dwindled to 720 by 1962 (GAPK, f. r-1204, op. 2 d. 7, l. 172; PermGANI, f. 105, op. 27, d. 133, ll. 59–60; GAPK, f. r-1204, op. 3, d. 47, ll. 11–73).

In conclusion, it is worth noting that the barracks religious brotherhoods of Evangelical Christians-Baptists and Mennonites arose in the specific conditions of the industrial settlements of the Perm-Kama Region in the postwar period. The special restricted zones, the limited mobility of the settlement population (resulting from undeveloped urban infrastructure and the attachment of the workforce to the industrial plants and coal mines), and also the repressive practices of the state for a long time obstructed the formation of Evangelical Protestant associations in the cities. The barracks congregations in the workers' settlements became the first link in the emergence of Protestant groups in Molotov Oblast.

The German-speaking congregations of Evangelical Christians-Baptists occupied a special place in this confluence of circumstances. By 1958, on the territory of Perm Oblast, 28 or 29 Baptist groups consisting of about 1,200 faithful were active, including 15 groups that consisted entirely of Germans (about 900 people). In population centers in which "citizens of German nationality" were comparatively few, German believers joined "religious communities of Evangelical Christians-Baptists together with citizens of other nationalities" (GAPK, f. r-1204, op. 2, d. 7, l. 173). Eventually, some of these groups either disbanded or merged with larger religious congregations in the oblast. But subsequently the number of Protestant believers stabilized and, gradually, representatives of Evangelical Protestantism became a noticeable presence in the religious life of the region. Thus, Protestant barracks congregations, including German-language religious brotherhoods, served as a catalyst in the formation of Evangelical associations on the territory of the Perm-Kama Region in the postwar years.

Appendix 1

Compiled from "List of Participants at a Gathering of Sectarians-Baptists on August 6, 1960, in the Workers' Town in Solikamsk, Barracks No. 6, Apartment 14" (GAPK, f. r-1205, op. 1, d. 23, ll. 183-84).

No.	Surname, First Name, Patronymic	Year of Birth	Occupation	Address
1.	Penner, Anna Yakovlevna	1909	housewife	barracks 6, apartment 15
2.	Broun, Renata Andreevna	1905	—"—	barracks 6, apartment 18
3.	Fal'kinshtern*, Lilia Andreevna	1939	—"—	barracks 5, apartment 6
4.	Shnarvasser, Renata Rengol'dovna	1938	Combine No. 8, Sector-2, plasterer	barracks 6, apartment 4
5.	Zimens, Lilia Germanovna	1936	Solikamsk Magnesium Works, KhPR, plasterer	barracks 6, apartment 14
6.	Shiller, Marta Eduardovna	1924	Housing and Utilities Department, Solikamsk Magnesium Works, housing complex	barracks 5, apartment 9
7.	Freilikh, Erna Eduardovna	1923	shoe repair shop	barracks 5, apartment 13
8.	Martens, Lilia Eduard.	1931	Solikamsk Magnesium Works, Repair and Construction Administration, housing complex	barracks 5, apartment 4
9.	Shiling, Gerta Avgustovna	1909	housewife	barracks 2, apartment 26

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No.	Surname, First Name, Patronymic	Year of Birth	Occupation	Address
10.	Leven, Susana Davydovna	1942	Combine No. 8, Construction Administration No. 1, painter	barracks 2, apartment 19
11.	Leven, Elizaveta Petrovna	1906	housewife	—"
12.	Fal'kanshtern*, Gerbert Robertovich	1930	potash works, mining section, locomotive operator	barracks 5, apartment 6
13.	Gibler, Rudol'f Arturovich	1930	potash works	barracks 6, apartment 16
14.	Gants, Roman Avgustovich	1924	potash works	barracks 5, apartment 14
15.	Fal'kanshtein*, Elena Petr.	1899	pensioner	barracks 5, apartment 6
16.	Shparvat, Iza Ivanovna	1897	housewife	barracks 6, apartment 4
17.	Zimler, Elena Davydovna	1927	unemployed	barracks 2, apartment 19
18.	Gants, Lina Robertovna	1924	housewife	barracks 5, apartment 14
19.	Leven, Elizaveta Davydovna	1945	not in school	barracks 2, apartment 19
20.	Martens, Mar. Ivanovna	1897	unemployed	barracks 5, apartment 15

* This should read "Fal'kenshtern" (*Nemtsy v Prikam'e*, t. 1, 2006: 205).

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