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# Food and Cooking in Revolutionary and Soviet Russia

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# Food and Cooking in Revolutionary and Soviet Russia

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*In tsarist Russia, with both indigenous and foreign cuisine being very popular, since the middle of the 19th century the figure of the revolutionary took ascetic features. The 1917 revolution saw a prevalence of the scientific aspects of nutrition and its collective organization over any 'culinary' consideration. Nevertheless, during the 1920s, some cookbooks adapted pre-revolutionary culinary traditions to post-revolutionary conditions. But again and again the country would meet dramatic situations as far as food production and distribution were concerned. At the end of the Twenties, the system of communal dining faced a serious crisis, when local governement was forced to help starving people rather than organize collective canteens. Alongside with industrialization of food production (in which A. Mikojan had a crucial role), nutrition was again considered as a pleasure in the 1930s, when Stalinism started to present the Soviet society as accomplished. Often disregarded in Russian revolutionary movements, food became an important element in the propaganda of the Soviet way of life.*

1 Sound culinary traditions existed in tsarist Russia. They were not only indigenous, since during the 19th century French cuisine became very popular, especially among the aristocrats. Russians, in general, appreciated abundance of food much more than refinement. Ivan Turgenev, for instance,

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describes how a country gentleman receives his visitors: he "entertains them sumptuously; in other words, thanks to the stupefying powers of our national cookery, he deprives them of all capacity for doing anything but playing preference".[1] Russian aristocrat and bourgeois cuisine seems to target more at quantity than at quality. In the novel *The Three Fat Men* by Yuri Olesha (1928), the revolutionary threat takes the funny form of rhymes directed against the greedy rich:

These Three Fat Men –
so fat are they,
They drink and gobble
night and day.
The only pastime that they know
Is to watch their bellies grow.
Beware, fat pigs, the time will come
When you will pay for what you've done.[2]

In contrast to the unrestrained avidity of the dominant classes, since the middle of the 19th century, the figure of the revolutionary took ascetic features. In Nikolaj Chernyshevsky's novel *What's to Be Done?*, a character's food habits are described as follows:

He gave up white bread, and ate only black bread at his table. For whole weeks he did not taste sugar, for months together he did not touch fruit or veal or poultry, nor did he buy anything of the kind: "I have no right to spend money on a whim which I need not gratify." Yet he had been brought up on a luxurious diet and had a keen taste, as could be seen from his remarks about food when dining out: he ate with relish many dishes which he denied himself at his own table, while there were others which he ate nowhere, and this for a well-founded reason: "Whatever the people eat, though only at intervals, I may eat also, when occasion offers. I must not eat that which is entirely out of the reach of the common people. This is necessary in order that I may feel, though but in a very slight degree, how much harder is the life of the common people than my own." So, when fruits were served, he always ate apples, but never apricots: at St. Petersburg he

[1] Ivan Turgenev, *A Hunter's Sketches* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1922), 165.
[2] Yuri Olesha, "Chapter Three. Star Square," *The Three Fat Men*, `http://lib.misto.kiev.ua/PROZA/OLESHA/olesha_3tolstiaka_engl.txt`. Last access December, 30, 2015.

ate oranges, but refused them in the provinces. Because at St. Petersburg the common people eat them, which is not the case in the provinces. He ate sweets because a good cake [*pirog*] is no worse than pie [*pashtet*], and pie made of puff-paste is known to the common people; but he did not eat sardines.[1]

The only luxury Rakhmetov allowed himself to enjoy was meat, "the best of meat", and "in large quantities", in order to retain his extraordinary physical strength. " 'I must do it', he had said; 'it will make me loved and esteemed by the common people. And it is useful; some day it may prove good for something' "[2]. Food helps to keep health and strength, to be spent for the good of people. In the positivist atmosphere that prevailed in Russia during the second half of the 19th century , especially within the progressive milieu, food was considered under a medical point of view, as helpful or harmful to the health of the body or of certain organs, and not because of its taste qualities. It was the task of science and medicine to examine food, in order to establish the quantity and the nutritional qualities of the feed rations that were necessary to keep oneself healthy.

From such a standpoint, revolution appears as the hungry people's revolt against full, fat squanderers. Georgij Plekhanov, the so-called "father of Russian Marxism", used an "alimentary" example to show the meaning of historical materialism:

Once the stomach has been supplied with a certain quantity of food, it sets about its work in accordance with the general laws of stomachic digestion. But can one, with the help of these laws, reply to the question of why savoury and nourishing food descends every day into your stomach, while in mine it is a rare visitor? Do these laws explain why some eat too much, while others starve?[3].

Food injustice represented social injustice *tout court*. It is a powerful image, the force of which burst into Majakovsky's poems during the First World War. There he opposed the violent mutilation of a soldier on the battlefield to

[1] Nikolai G. Tchernychewsky, *What's to Be Done?* (Boston: Benj. R. Tucker Publisher, 1886), 213.
[2] Ibid., 211.
[3] Georgij V. Plekhanov, *Izbrannye filosofskie proizvedenija*, vol. 1 (Moskva: Gospolitizdat, 1956), 664.

the "many incompetents" who only thought about "how to better gorge themselves", and concluded with the refusal to sacrify one's own life for the pleasure of those "lovers of women and food"[1].

2 War aggravated the conditions of Russian economy, and pushed workers who were used to be considered as privileged—railroads workers, for instance—into alimentary scarcity. The conflict removed millions of peasants-soldiers from the countryside and drew substantial alimentary resources to the fronts. Though the 1917 revolutions cannot be considered simply as the hungry people's riots against the sated, it is interesting that exactly such an idea was put forward soon after the events. For instance, in Eisenstein's film *The Battleship Potemkin* the occasion for the revolution (in this case, the 1905 one) to burst out is a sort of "culinary" conflict, provoked by the claim to have the sailors eat a *borshch* prepared with spoiled meat. On the dead sailor's chest his companions put a board reading: "for a spoon of *borshch*"[2]. As a matter of fact, however, during the difficult times of the revolution and the civil war, the quality of food became less and less important in a country where many people just starved. In extreme conditions extremely simple food played the greatest role, as its only purpose was survival, and no attention was paid to "gastronomic" aspects. As the main historian of Russian cuisine, Vil'jam Pokhlebkin, observed, elementary foodstuffs, such as "honey, tea, healthy wild herbs, onion, garlic" became essential (for survival).

But it was not only the shortage and the famine that again shifted the accent from taste to quantity. The theorists of the Russian revolution, divided on many other subjects, generally shared a great faith in natural science and its precepts, and held that they should be applied to every aspect of reality. Problems of nutrition should be approached with the instruments of physiology, chemistry, hygiene. Consequently food was only considered as the fuel for the machine of the human body. During a conference in the Autumn of 1921, Aleksandr Bog-

[1] Vladimir Majakovskij, "Vam!", *Polnoe sobranie sochinenij v semi tomakh.* Vol. 1. *Stikhotvorenija, poemy, stat'i 1912-1917* (Moskva: Goslitizdat, 1955). See also "Gimn obedu".

[2] Aleksandr Kuljapin, Ol'ga Skubach. "Pishcha bogov i krolikov. Menju revoljucionnoj epokhi." *Novyj Mir*, 2010, 7. `http://magazines.russ.ru/novyi_mi/2010/7/ku12.html`. Last access December 30, 2015.

danov, a physician, philosopher and revolutionary, and at that time a leading figure within the organization for Proletarian Culture (*Proletkul't*), stated:

> Muscular labour is the result of the energy of Oxidation, the 'combustion' of foods containing carbonic materials, in the organism. So the role of food here is similar to the role of fuel for a steam-engine and, in the same way as is the case with fuel, the value of food as the origin of labour energy is measured in calories i.e. units of thermal energy[1].

While the economic situation of the country completely changed the traditional composition of meals and it became impossible to guarantee even the daily bread ration for the producers of essential goods (who were called "superior categories of consumers"), efforts should be concentrated on the "scientific" prescription of the "physiological level" of nutrition, halfway between the "traditional level" of workers' nutrition and the "famine level" imposed by scarcity. Abram Z. Gol'cman wrote in his work on communist salary, published in December 1918: "We should not give what he wants to the consumer, nor only what we can afford to give him. To the consumer we should give what he needs"[2]. The answer to the question: "in the new socialist society, shall we give to everyone according to one's needs or to one's capabilities?" had to be found within the scientific definition of the individual physiological needs, in relation with the type of work one did. The foundation of the Russian Technical-Scientific Institute for Nutrition (*Rossijskij pishchevoj nauchno-tekhnicheskij institut*) in Moscow in 1918 met the necessity to handle nutrition as a scientific and sanitary issue, thus completely eliminating any traditional "culinary" consideration. The beginning of researches on edible chemical food surrogates was a clear expression of the prevailing attitude.

In order for food to have a role in the construction of the new revolutionary society new ways of preparation, distribution and consumption, that would be fit for the collectivist character of the new social order, had to be found. In the above quoted conference, Bogdanov despised the traditional banquets of

[1] Aleksandr A. Bogdanov, "Labour and the Needs of the Worker", in*Bogdanov's Tektology. Book 1* (Hull: Centre for Systems Studies, 1996), 283.

[2] Avram Z. Gol'cman, *Regulirovanie i naturalizacija zarabotnoj platy,* (Moskva: CK Vseros. Sojuza rabochikh-metallistov, 1918), 83, quoted in Antonella Salomoni, *Il pane quotidiano. Ideologia e congiuntura nella Russia sovietica (1917-1921)* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2001), 135-137.

the higher classes as "unbearably dull or even disgusting, as a survival of barbarism in the eye of the contemporary working man who knows little about gastronomic delights"; for the future generations "it will be not easy to understand how people could come together to perform such graceless or even untidy actions as chewing, swallowing, etc., that are performed by everybody only individually"[1]. However, soon after the revolution immediate measures were taken to replace family kitchens and private restaurants with communal dining structures in the cities. The decree, which attributed to local governments the right to organize collective food services under the control of local Soviets, bears the date of October 27 (November 9) 1917, two days after the revolution. At the beginning of 1919 in the two Russian capitals there were more than 3,000 communal dining structures where millions of people usually fed themselves[2]. Setting up such a system was not easy at all: competent management was lacking in Russia, and organizational practice was largely inspired to the experience of the *American Relief Administration*, an American charity institution that operated in Soviet Russia against the famine in the beginning of the Twenties.

From an ideological standpoint, collective dining systems met two main different requirements of the socialist state: the emancipation of women, and the rational, "scientific" distribution of food supplies. The first aspect was particularly emphasized by Inessa Armand and Aleksandra Kollontaj, the first two directors of the Women's Section (*Zhenotdel'*) of the Russian Communist Party[3]. At the First All-Russian Congress of Women (Moscow, November 1918) Kollontaj stated that "housework is dying out. It is giving way to social management". So, "instead of bothering with cooking, of wasting one's last free hours in the kitchen preparing suppers and dinners, in the Communist society, public cafeterias and central kitchens will be widely established". She concluded: "Communism will liberate woman from domestic slavery, so that her life can be

[1] Aleksandr A. Bogdanov, "Labour and the Needs of the Worker", 293.
[2] Vil'jam V. Pokhlebkin, *Kukhnja veka* (Minsk-Moskva: Polifakt. 2000), 187; Tamara Kondrat'eva, *Kormit' i pravit'. O vlasti v Rossii XVI-XX vv.* (Moskva: ROSSPEN, 2006), 127.
[3] Mauricio Borrero, "Communal Dining and State Cafeterias in Moscow and Petrograd. 1917-1921", in *Food in Russian History and Culture*, ed. Musya Giants and Joyce Toomre (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997), 164.

richer, fuller, happier and freer"[1]. The idea that the way of women's emancipation went through the refusal of cooking had quite a considerable fortune. It is still evident in a booklet published in 1927 with the title *How the Housewife Can Feed Her Family More Healthily*, in which author V. V. Babichev declared: "The oven, tongs, irons, and pots are enemies of female liberation, enlightenment, and culture both in rural and urban life. (…) It is necessary to launch a stubborn battle against the frying pan, the cooking pot, and the mixing bowl. It is essential to create an anti-kitchen front"[2]. The denial of any cooking expertise was quick and widespread. For instance, in his memories Kornej I. Chukovskij, on April 11, 1922, tells that, "because he was hungry," he went to one of Petrograd dormitories to visit some students who had received "8 pounds of peas (each)", but ate them "uncooked (soaked in water). And nothing else!"[3]. Pokhlebkin observes that in a few years the simple ability to cook a hot soup, a *kasha*, or any other more elaborated dish, had already disappeared.

Communal dining structures also allowed a more rational use of food supplies, in comparison with the squandering of traditional private restaurants[4]. Moreover, the new system gave the means for both the "scientific" control of products and a higher uniformity of their quality and quantity, in order to guarantee an equal food distribution. Such an approach, which has been defined "futurist", in contrast with the "traditionalist" one, wholly neglected the aesthetic pleasures of cuisine:

> Despite the repeated assertion made by futurists that food should be "tasty," they distrusted Russia's bourgeois culinary heritage and believed that gastronomy should focus on the goals of improved health and social reform, rather than gustatory pleasure. Some futurists, notably N. K. Miuller, advocated a bland, largely vegetarian diet as the socialist

[1] Aleksandra Kollontaj, "The Family and the Communist State", in *Bolshevik Visions. First Phase of the Cultural Revolution in Soviet Russia*, Part 1: *The Culture of a New Society; Ethics, Gender, the Family, Law, and Problems of Tradition*,ed. William G. Rosenberg (second ed., Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1990), 72.

[2] Vladimir V. Babichev, *Kak domashnaja khozajka mozhet ozdorovit' pitanie svoei sem'i* (Moscow, 1927), 7-8, quoted in Edward Geist, "Cooking Bolshevik: Anastas Mikoian and the Making of the Book about Delicious and Healthy Food", *The Russian Review*, 71, 2012: 300.

[3] Kornej I. Chukovskij, *Sobranie sochinenij v pjatnadcati tomakh*, t. 12. *Dnevnik (1922-1935)* (2-oe izd., Moskva: Agentstvo FTM, 2013), 38.

[4] Mauricio Borrero, "Communal Dining and State Cafeterias", 163.

gastronomic ideal. The futurists rejected piquant sauces, spices, and other concessions to flavor in favor of a preoccupations with calories, vitamins, and similarly "rational" considerations.[1]

Menus in cafeterias and canteens were essential. The regular meal was composed of one or two courses. Usually the first course was a soup, "sometimes *borsch* made from canned preserves of dried roots, sometimes peas, fish, or rice soup. For the second course customers could choose from among such items as ham with beans, shepherd's pie, kasha, and cutlets. In addition to the main courses, the majority of cafeterias served tea, coffee, sour milk (*prostokvasha*) and cookies (*lepeshki*)"[2].

# 3

However, traditional approach to cuisine could not completely disappear. During the Twenties some cookbooks which adapted pre-revolutionary culinary traditions to post-revolutionary conditions, were published—often self-published. The classical book by Pelageja P. Ignat'eva-Aleksandrova, *The Practical Basis of Culinary Art*, probably the best-known Russian cookbook ever, had its twelfth edition in Leningrad in 1927. The only concession to the new spirit of the times was the addition of a foreword by prof. M.D. Il'in on

[1] Edward Geist, "Cooking Bolshevik", 300.

[2] Mauricio Borrero, "Communal Dining and State Cafeterias", 169. More abundant food was sometimes served in the occasion of a particular celebration. For instance, on the first anniversary of the revolution, in November 1918, the citizens of Moscow received "two pounds of bread, a half-pound of candy or fruit preserves, two pounds of fresh fish, and a half-pound of creamery butter per person. Cafés and restaurants were kept open, and food was served without charge; a free dinner was given to the children of Moscow. Similar privileges were extended to the citizens of Petrograd and Saratov, and perhaps other cities". James von Geldern, *Bolshevik Festivals, 1917-1920* (Berkeley - Los Angeles - London: University of California Press, 1993), 95.

*The Scientific Grounds of Nutrition*[1]. But in general the crusade for total renewal concerned the old, traditional recipes, even when they were resumed as such. Two pages of a handbook of food standards for canteens show a list of new names, that had to be used instead of the traditional ones: "sturgeon à la brochette" became "fried sturgeon in pieces", "consommè Pritanièr" was called "stock with roots and greens", "Boyar's *pokhlebka*" turned into "potato soup with fresh mushrooms", and even the most famous "rissoles à la Kiev" were converted into "chicken rissoles stuffed with butter"[2].

It was not easy, anyway, to prepare traditional food in post-revolutionary Russia, since most of the old recipes required ingredients that were not available any more. A delegate to the Eighth Congress of Soviets, held in Moscow in December 1920, wrote of meals consisting of "soup with herring head or rotten sour cabbage and for the main course mouldy millet gruel or a piece of old herring", and the bread was "sodden and heavy, like clay"[3]. Soon after the revolution, in the Kremlin itself, food was not very abundant and quite bad. Lev Trotsky wrote in his memoirs: "Instead of fresh meat, they served corned beef. The flour and the barley had sand in them. Only the red Ket caviare was plentiful, because its export had ceased. This inevitable caviare colored the first years of the revolution, and not for me alone"[4]. Many different reasons contributed to this situation: most of the qualified cooks and chefs, who used to work in pre-revolutionary restaurants, abandoned Bolshevik Russia and continued to work abroad or in the territories occupied by the White Army. The new inhabitants of the Kremlin, on their part, did not want to hire politically suspect workers. Raw materials were not very good either. Pokhlebkin lists "two or three sorts of grains, flour, tea, dry milk, rarely sugar; butter and fat were not always there. There were no fresh vegetables at all: no cabbages, carrots, onions, garlic, not even potatoes, and hardly ever parsley, celery, dill"[5]. Moreover, the Kremlin

[1] Pelageja P. Ignat'eva-Aleksandrova, *Prakticheskie osnovy kulinarnogo isskustva* (izd. 12-e, Leningrad: avtor, tip. Finotd. Leningr. Gubispolkoma, 1927).

[2] Pictures of the pages 96-97 in the book *Produktovye normy obedov, otdel'nyx bljud i prochikh izdelij obshchestvennykh stolovykh (rasladki)* (Moskva, 1928) are published in Tamara Kondrat'eva, *Kormit' i pravit'*, among the illustrations.

[3] Mauricio Borrero, "Communal Dining and State Cafeterias", 169.

[4] Leon Trotsky, *My Life* (New York: Charles Schribner's Sons, 1930), 277.

[5] Vil'jam V. Pokhlebkin, *Kukhnja veka*, 142.

had no cellars or glaciers, so fresh meat and fish, when there were any, spoiled very quickly. All the dining structures, the "highest" as well, were controlled as far as the quantity of used products and the hygiene of preparations were concerned, but no attention was purposefully paid to the specific culinary aspects, such as the taste quality of food. Many legends arose around the possible austerity of the leading Bolsheviks' dining in a country that was devastated by the food shortages. According to some sources, however, in the Twenties the canteens in the Kremlin already offered an incredibly reacher menu than the rest of the city, not to mention the countryside, with a big choice of "meat, poultry, fish, vegetables, butter, eggs, grains, delicacy products such as caviar, sausages and rare fishes", and in the different Houses of Soviet people stood in very long queues to get the simplest food: "bread, sugar, flour, herring, dry fruits and fruit drops", while in the city no edible food was distributed[1]. As Borrero recounts, "unsanitary conditions and the large numbers of daily costumers made state cafeterias a breeding ground for various diseases, such as typhus, which reached epidemic proportions during 1919 and 1920"[2]. But the Kremlin was not immune to this kind of problems: "in the summer of 1920 several people dining at the Kremlin cafeteria for employees of the Council of People's Commissars (*Sovnarkom*) and the cafeteria of the Second Moscow House of Soviets fell victim to scurvy"[3].


At the end of the Twenties, the system of communal dining faced a serious crisis, when local governement was forced to help starving people rather than organize collective canteens. A leaflet of the Moscow Commitee of the Russian Communist (Bolshevik) Party, inviting the workers to support the starving Over-Volga people, published in March 1922, reads: "They started eating clay, soil, sawdust, nibbling old leather and sheepskin. They ate not only all

[1] Tamara Kondrat'eva, *Kormit' i pravit'*, 79.
[2] Mauricio Borrero, "Communal Dining and State Cafeterias", 168-169.
[3] Ibid., 169.

the cattle, but also the manure that remained in the cowsheds after them. They ate the straw mices"[1]. One of the main characters in Andrej Platonov's novel *Chevengur* gives up any idea of tasty food, and starts eating clay:

> he quit plowing and fed himself directly with soil. He always said that since grain comes from the soil, then soil must have its own independent repletion, and all it takes is getting your belly used to it. People thought he would die, but he lived on, picking the clay from between his teeth before everybody's eyes[2].

The following period of the New Economic Politics had a major impact on food distribution within the country. At the beginning people started to directly buy and sell products from the countryside: greens, vegetables and berries, mushrooms, fruits, eggs, milk and dairy products. Then a more lively trade was organized in the big towns, especially in the vicinity of railway stations. Semi-finished or cooked dishes were sold, so that the private cook could gain more, while former civil war soldiers, who worked in factories and had no family, were ready to pay a little more and avoid the loss of the time and energy needed for cooking for themselves. So in the market one could find "pies and pastries with fish, mushrooms, meat, cabbage, potatoes, jam (...), boiled entrails, home-made sausages with offal or blood, baked, smoked, salted and dried fish", and also simple baked items: "curd tarts, buns, gingerbread, shortbread, flat bread with rye and sour cream, cottage loafs, bread rings, cakes, bagels, all different sorts of bread, sweet pastries and biscuits"[3]. The most resourceful and able traders finally opened small shops in which they kept selling take-away food, but where customers could also sit and dine in. Small canteens and private restaurants became common, often offering national cuisine: Ucrainian, Georgian, Armenian and Jewish food became available in all the biggest towns. In their novel *The Little Golden Calf*, Il'f and Petrov ironically describe the old rebus-maker Sinitsky's enterprise: he served homemade lunches to local citizens, "which represented the bulk of the family's income". But the whole setting was very hazardous: "a faience soup bowl with broken handles emerged [from the buffet], along with plates (some with flowers and some without), yellowed

1 Quoted in Aleksandr Kuljapin and Ol'ga Skubach. "Pishcha bogov i krolikov. Menju revoljucionnoj epokhi."

2 Andrej Platonov, *Chevengur* (Ann Arbor: Ardis Publishers, 1978), 66.

3 Vil'jam V. Pokhlebkin, *Kukhnja veka*, 168.

forks, and even a compote dish (although there wasn't the slightest chance of compote being served with this lunch)"[1].

Collectivization and forced industrialization put the country in a dramatic situation again as far as food production and distribution were concerned. It is interesting that an increasing popularity of the vegetarian diet came to hide the impossibility of any other choice. Nicky Kalachov, in the novel *The Twelve Chairs*, faces his financial breakdown, when he

> realized for the first time in three months of married life that his beloved liked sausages of carrots, potatoes, and peas less than he did. (...) Dinner for the two of them (one first course of monastery beet soup and a second course of phoney rabbit or genuine noodles) consumed in two honestly halved portions in the Thou-Shalt-Not-Steal vegetarian canteen took thirteen roubles each month from the married couple's budget. (...) A change to meat-eating under these circumstances would mean ruin"[2].

'Ethical' arguments ("Just think of eating the bodies of dead animals. Cannibalism in the guise of culture") and health evaluations ("The organism is weakened by the continual consumption of meat and is unable to resist infection") are used to convince his wife Liza that the cheaper diet is better.


## 4

Starting from the Thirties Stalinism had a great impact on the whole Soviet way of life, including food and nutrition. In Edward Geist's words, "from 1931 onward 'futurist' and 'traditionalist' ideals merged into Socialist Realist foodways that combined bourgeois luxury with the futurist enthusiasm for a qualitatively new 'scientific' way of eating"[3]. Anastas Mikojan was the person

[1] Ilya Il'f and Evgeny Petrov, *The Little Golden Calf* (Montpelier: Russian Life Books, 2009), 134.
[2] Ilya Il'f and Evgeny Petrov, *The Twelve Chairs*, Part Two, Chapter Seventeen. `http://lib.ru/ILFPETROV/ilf_petrov_12_chairs_engl.txt`. Last access December 30, 2015.
[3] Edward Geist, "Cooking Bolshevik", 301.

who embodied Stalin's politics within the culinary field. In July 1934 Mikojan became the head of the newly created People's Commissariat of the Food Industry. Before that, he had been among the inspirers of the agricultural politics during the First Five-Year-Plan, insisting on the collectivization of cattle, and the building of gigantic factories to manufacture meat. The enthusiasm of the Soviet regime for this kind of projects is evident if one considers the publication of essays and novels on the subject. In 1936, for instance, the literature review "Novyj Mir" published *Meat*, a novel by S. Beljaev and B. Pil'njak.

Mikojan's personal tastes had often important consequences. For instance, in January 1936 he declared himself to be "a great supporter of the production of ice cream. Certain comrades believe to this day that ice cream is merely a children's treat and is of no use to grown-ups. (...) The production of ice cream needs to be expanded as much as possible. I am lobbying for ice cream, because it is a delicious and very nourishing food"[1]. Mikojan decided to build huge mechanized factories, and organized mass distribution of ice-cream. "Soviet factory production of ice cream expanded from mere 20 tons in 1932 to over 46,000 tons in 1938"[2]. During August and September 1936 Mikojan visited the United States and came back in the Soviet Union convinced that canned and frozen food was to be of the greatest importance and that commercials were very effective in changing popular food habits. The following year he supported the so-called cutlets "with a bun", "the Big Mac *ante litteram*", as Gian Piero Piretto has called them[3]. Advertisements promoted the use of ketchup as "the best, sharp, aromatic relish for meat, fish, vegetables and other dishes." The commercial concluded: "Ask for KETCHUP from the factories of Chief Canned Goods Trust in the stores of Union Canned Goods Distribution syndicate and other food sores"[4]. Mikojan's role in Soviet culinary ideology was enormous. As Piretto summarizes:

[1] Anastas I. Mikoian, *Pishchevaja industrija Sovetskogo Soiuza* (Moskva: Pishcheproimizdat, 1941), 147, quoted in Edward Geist, "Cooking Bolshevik", 299.

[2] Ibid., 299.

[3] Gian Piero Piretto, "Tasty and Healthy: Soviet Happiness in One Book", in *Petrified Utopia: Happiness in Soviet Style*, ed. Marina Balina and Evgenij Dobrenko (New York: Anthem Press, 2009), 81.

[4] Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism. Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 91.

thanks to Mikojan's innovations (canned goods, frozen products and semi-prepared foods), it was supposed that records would be constantly broken, perfection would be achieved, and the cook would have a clear advantage according to such parameters as the time spent cooking and the ultimate quality of the results, in conformity with the norms that arose from the political and ideological discourse of the current period.[1]

In the mid-Thirties another important figure was Manuil I. Pevzner, a physician and chief of the Institute for Nutrition, who outlined the "socialist cuisine". He considered harmful all the spices and seasonings that bourgeois master chefs used only "to meet the bourgeois consumer's capricious taste", while he recommended "a simple, healthy cooking, at the basis of which there must be dishes with a neutral taste: boiled meat, pasta, rice, pancakes, *kashi* made with milk, chicken stock. He extremely disliked fried dishes"[2]. "Healthy" was absolutely prevailing over "tasty", along the tendency we have already sketched out in revolutionary Russia since the beginning. The Institute of Nutrition took a series of decisions that worsened the quality of many Russian traditional dishes. For instance:

it was forbidden to take the roots off the soups, supposedly to keep the "proteins", actually to keep the mud; it was forbidden to pour out the water where foodstuffs (vegetables, roots, greens, pasta, *pel'meni*, vermicelli etc.) have been boiled, supposedly because the broths contain proteins, mineral salts, starch and other nutritious substances that can be used, but as a result soups and other preparations were cooked in dirty water; it was forbidden to expose foodstuffs to the prolonged action of high temperature on the false pretext of the alteration of salts and "the reduction of the potency of vitamins" (...). As a matter of fact this meant that the meat was boiled for 40 minutes or 1 hour, instead of 2-2,5 hours, as it used to be (in home cooking). As a result, in the public catering the meat was always tough.[3]

Moreover, it was recommended to use in the kitchen all the remainders of meat and fish, as well as the peelings of vegetables and fruits, not to waste any possible source of nutrition.

[1] Gian Piero Piretto, "Tasty and Healthy", 81.
[2] Irina V. Glushchenko. *Obshchepit. Mikojan i sovetskaja kukhnja* (Moskva: Vysshaja shkola ekonomiki, 2010), 42.
[3] Vil'jam V. Pokhlebkin, *Kukhnja veka*, 238.

As a consequence of such an approach, Soviet cuisine became a subject of medical and technological discussions and a matter for physicians, epidemiologists, toxicologists, chemists and biochemists, as well as mechanics and engeneers who took care of the construction of huge manufacturing plants. Industrial production of foodstuffs, such as bread, or semi-prepared products, was to standardize food habits within the country. In such a context the privileges of particular categories of citizens concerned a different access level to reserved food sources. The popular wit ironized on the situation, paraphrasing an official slogan: "People and party are the same, but the stores are different"[1].

During the Thirties Stalinism started to present the Soviet society as accomplished and wonderful. In this perspective nutrition was again considered as a pleasure, an important element of the new way of life. In 1939 Nikolaj P. Cyplenkov wrote in his foreword to a book of recipes for domestic cooking: "Food should serve as a source of pleasure and the circumstances of its preparation should provide an excellent respite from work"[2]. The main expression of the new ideology of food in Stalin's time was the *Book about Delicious and Healthy Food*, the most famous cookbook in the Soviet Union, which came out in 1939 and had a great number of editions until 1990. It was not just a collection of recipes, but a general encyclopaedia for the Soviet housewives, to whom it was primarily directed. In spite of all the words about women's emancipation, kitchen matters continued to be "exclusive jurisdiction of women"[3]. The title of the book is important, because for the first time food is expected to be "delicious" as well as "healthy". During the Sixties Mikojan said that the Institute of Nutrition originally proposed to call it *Book about Healthy and Nutritious Food*, objecting that "delicious" was an unscientific and bourgeois term. It was Mikojan himself who insisted on the word "delicious" and finally won[4].

In Edward Geist's words, "the goal of the cookbook was not to portray Soviet reality but rather to assert that Soviet power would resolve all present-day problems so quickly and completely that one might as well presume it already

[1] Tamara Kondrat'eva, *Kormit' i pravit'*, 107; Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, 96-97.

[2] Nikolaj P. Cyplenkov, *Povarennaia kniga: 200 bliud dlija domashnogo stola* (Moskva: Gostorgizdat, 1939), 4, quoted in Edward Geist, "Cooking Bolshevik", 301.

[3] Gian Piero Piretto, "Tasty and Healthy", 92.

[4] Irina V. Glushchenko. *Obshchepit*, 139.

had"[1]. As an example, Geist refers to the final chapter of the book, "Dry Breakfasts", which,

> devoted to quick breakfast foods, features items including *tolokno* (traditional Russian porridge made of fine oat flour), "Hercules" rolled oatmeal, cornflakes, wheat flakes, rice flakes, puffed rice, bran flakes, shredded bran, puffed wheat, *greip-nots* (grape nuts), and shredded wheat biscuits, each receiving a paragraph or two describing their use. But only three of these were available at the time of publication, as acknowledged by the chapter's introduction: "at the present time *tolokno*, rolled oats, and cornflakes are being produced in the Soviet Union. In coming years the food industry will embark on mass production of dry breakfasts".[2]

This was just a matter of time, as the way leading to the best future was already set.

The pillars of Stalinist culinary ideology were "Prosperity. Abundance. Quantity"[3] and the cookbook turned out to be at the same time "a practical culinary textbook, an original utopia, and an instrument of propaganda".[4] It showed that the Soviet power was concerned with the people's wellbeing, that it was looking after its citizens, and fed them in the best way, taking care both of the quality of food, according to scientific recommendation, and its quantity, relating to the different kind of work each person had to do. In pre-revolutionary times, or in the contemporary bourgeois countries, people were "hostage of the producers' and foodstuff traders' strivings for gain"[5], while in the wonderful Soviet present people could trust the power to give them the most "delicious" and "healthy" food. In a paternalistic conception of power, Stalin almost literally was supposed "to feed" the Soviet people. Often disregarded in Russian revolutionary movements, food became an important element in the propaganda of the Soviet way of life.

[1] Edward Geist, "Cooking Bolshevik", 308.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Irina V. Glushchenko. *Obshchepit*, 100.
[4] Ibid., 109.
[5] Irina V. Sokhan', "Osobennosti russkoj gastronomicheskoj kul'tury", *Vestnik Tomskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta. Filosofija. Sociologija. Politologija*, no.347 (2011): 65.

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