Foreword

Mr. leon goure's book on the siege of Leningrad is a distinguished achievement. Based on the most careful analysis of sources, both Soviet and German, and making effective use of the memoirs and reminiscences of a host of survivors, it re-creates the conditions of the siege in a memorable fashion. To read this story of the nine hundred days of Leningrad's torment is a traumatic experience, all the more moving because the author spares us rhetoric and lets the facts convey their own horror.

From August 1941 until January 1944, when the Nazis finally retreated, Leningrad was almost completely encircled, thrown back on its own resources, with only a thin trickle of supplies reaching it either by air or through the escape hatch of Lake Ladoga. During this period Leningrad suffered as few cities have been permitted to suffer, with the death toll from starvation, disease, bombardment, and front casualties running into the hundreds of thousands. Yet, somehow, the city held together, enduring the unendurable and hanging on desperately when there was every reason to despair.

The task which Mr. Goure has set himself in this volume is to explain why Leningrad survived. The tendency among Soviet writers is to cite the magnificent courage and heroism of the Leningraders as proof of the superior virtues of the Soviet system, and particularly of its capacity to tap reservoirs of loyalty and self-sacrifice that no other social or political order can command. Without in any way detracting from the feats of endurance and fortitude that Leningraders performed during the siege, Mr. Goure suggests that the explanation of their conduct is far more complex than Soviet official versions would concede. It is true that at no point in the siege were there any risings against the Communist authorities nor was there any disposition to surrender en masse to the Nazis. But he also cites evidence to indicate that, in the early period of the siege, at least, there were some who looked forward to

a Nazi occupation of the city and that there were also occasional deserters who found their way through the German lines. As Mr. Goure points out, the news of Nazi atrocities helped to harden the will to resist, and the patriotism of the Leningraders, their deep attachment to their beautiful city and their love of country, intensified their desire to hold out.

Mr. Goure places special stress on the strength of the Communist control apparatus in Leningrad, on the fact that it did not collapse in the face of danger, and that it largely maintained its hold on the population throughout the siege. Its efficiency left much to be desired and the population suffered unnecessarily because of its mistakes, but for all its inadequacies it did not lose its nerve, and it kept a firm hand on the throttle. The high proportion of Party members in Leningrad helped to strengthen its power, while the passivity and inertia of the ordinary citizen in the face of authority, qualities that had been instilled and reinforced by more than twenty years of totalitarian rule, eased the problem of control.

Yet, as Mr. Goure also notes, it would be a mistake to conclude that the obedience of the populace was purely a product of terror and effective control. The authorities, to be sure, indulged in a wave of preventive arrests to eliminate the potentially disloyal, and they took stern measures against defeatists, panicmongers, and alleged spies. But as the siege lengthened and suffering intensified, terror lost its force, and Party elite and rank-and-file were driven together in the common desire to survive. With nothing to help them except their own impulse to live, the Leningraders responded with a multitude of ingenious improvisations, doing their best to subsist, to keep industry moving and the front supplied.

Precisely what mixture of motives inspired their sacrifices must remain an ultimate mystery. Hatred of the enemy, love of country, attachment to the cause of Communism, fear of the authorities, and the sheer desire to live were all operative factors. The role that each factor played varied over time, and the reactions of individual Leningraders reflected their place in Soviet society, their past experience, their immediate involvements, and their future hopes. The rich data which Mr. Goure has gathered together and analyzed in this volume illuminate the variety of attitudes that came to the surface during the siege, and even if they cannot be measured with mathematical precision, they nevertheless provide vivid insights into the sources of strain and cohesiveness that characterized Leningrad's behavior under conditions of extreme stress.

Finally, Mr. Goure's study has a broader significance that the alert reader will not miss. The most severe test to which any political system

can be subjected is its response to crisis and catastrophe. In so far as the siege of Leningrad can be assumed to have wider meaning, it suggests that the Soviet control apparatus has a toughness and durability capable of sustaining great shocks. No one who reads this volume closely is likely to underestimate the power of Soviet totalitarianism, though he will come away with an appreciation of its weaknesses as well as its strengths. Mr. Goure's balanced appraisal of the implications of the Leningrad experience adds a new dimension to our understanding of the nature of modern totalitarianism, and it deserves to be widely read.

MERLE FAINSOD

Preface

The nine hundred days' siege of Leningrad appears an anachronism in a war characterized by the mobility of its military operations. Besieging cities and starving them into surrender had ceased to be regarded as a major form of warfare more than a century earlier, when defensive walls lost their power to protect the inhabitants against bombardment. By the second half of the nineteenth century, cities were no longer valued as refuges for military forces too weak to defeat the enemy in the field. In the wars of the twentieth century there have been few prolonged sieges of cities, and those few were usually unplanned. When sieges occurred, it was because the cities had been transformed into military strong points, and in most instances because they were strategic seaports that the defenders tried to deny to the enemy. (Among the port cities that were besieged during World War II were Riga, Tallin, Odessa, Sevastopol, Tobruk, Cherbourg, and the ports of Brittany.) The civilian population played little or no part in the defense, and the issue was settled before the survival of the inhabitants became a major problem.

The siege of Leningrad is unique in modern history both in terms of its duration—it lasted 28 months—and in terms of the hardships and losses suffered by the civilian population. Leningrad, with its more than three million inhabitants, was the largest city to be invested since the siege of Paris in 1870. Unlike most former sieges, in which the population played little part, Leningrad's siege lasted so long, and its industrial facilities were so important, that the population was able to play a vital role both in the defense of the city and in the operation of its war factories. Hence it provides an unusual opportunity for studying the workings of a Soviet urban administrative and political system as well as the attitudes and behavior of a population under extreme stress. The present study attempts to describe the interplay between the population and administrative controls and, at the same time, to give as com-

plete a picture as possible of the appalling conditions in which these controls were maintained.

The documents on the siege of Leningrad are both more numerous and more comprehensive than those dealing with administrative controls and popular reaction to them in other besieged Soviet cities during World War II. Every effort was made to exhaust all Soviet and other printed sources available in this country. Up to 1956, Soviet publications on the siege were largely limited to participants' accounts, a few novels, and the Leningrad newspapers. In 1956 a Soviet historian, A. V. Karasev, pointed out that in the postwar years no significant work on the subject had been published, and that since no effort had been made to exploit the large collections of documentary material available on the siege, people held many erroneous views about it. Between 1958 and 1960 several books and monographs on various aspects of the siege finally appeared. Based on Soviet archives, they provided valuable information for this study. I was fortunate in being able to obtain a microfilm of the *Bulletin of the Leningrad City Soviet of Workers' Deputies* for 1941 and 1944, which was procured by the Library of Congress from the Leningrad Public Library. During a trip to the Soviet Union in 1960, I was also able to visit Leningrad and to see some materials held in the Leningrad Public Library that are not available in the West. Equally valuable and informative were a number of diaries and eyewitness accounts published in the Soviet Union and abroad.

Various Soviet accounts of special problems connected with the siege yielded important data. In the description of military operations, use was made of the unpublished diary of General Franz Halder, former Chief of Staff of the German Army; of most of the available German, Finnish, and Soviet war histories; and of published memoirs of officers who participated in the campaign.

A great deal of information was obtained from a large collection of unpublished German military documents dealing with the siege. Of special interest were German interrogations of Russian defectors and prisoners of war, diaries found on dead or captured Russian soldiers on the Leningrad front, and intercepted letters and radio conversations from Leningrad. To supplement the published and documentary sources seven former Leningraders, who were eyewitnesses to the events described in the study, were interviewed at great length and provided much information not found in printed sources.

I am indebted to many people who gave generously of their time and advice during the preparation and writing of this study.

Special appreciation must be expressed to the seven Russian inform-

Chapter 8

THE DYING CITY

December 15, 1941–March 1942

FROM A MILITARY point of view December 1941 proved to be a turning point in the war on the eastern front. The German *Blitzkrieg* had collapsed with Hitler's failure to capture either Leningrad or Moscow, and the weakened German forces had to bear the brunt of a general Soviet counteroffensive that came close to destroying the German invasion armies. The Germans were forced to carry out extensive and very costly retreats. Army Group North held out better than the others, but it was forced to retreat from Tikhvin, thus giving up the possibility of carrying out a complete encirclement of Leningrad; moreover, in the subsequent months it was repeatedly placed in a precarious situation by the Soviet offensive, so that for a while it seemed even possible that the siege would be lifted.

In January the Soviet forces encircled Kholm, and in early February they succeeded in cutting off a large German force on the left flank of Army Group North. After several months the encircled forces were freed, but the whole operation proved very costly for the Germans.[1]

In January the Soviet Army attempted to lift the siege of Leningrad by a direct attack north of Lake Ilmen. On January 13 the Second Soviet Assault Army crossed the Volkhov River in the area of Miasnoi-Bor, north of Novgorod, while other forces attacked in the Pogoste area, in an attempt to effect a junction at Liuban on the main rail line to Leningrad. By the end of January, after heavy fighting, the Second Assault Army penetrated some 35 miles into the German-held area and was a scant 10 miles short of Liuban. But the Germans were able to contain this advance as well as the Soviet attacks at Pogoste. In mid-March the Germans succeeded in encircling the Second Assault Army, which then fought on until its complete destruction in June 1942.

Its last commander, Lt. Gen. A. A. Vlasov, who surrendered only in July, later achieved a measure of dubious fame as the head of the German-sponsored Russian Army of Liberation. With the failure of these offensives all hope for the relief of Leningrad in 1942 had to be abandoned.[2]

Meanwhile, the fact that, contrary to all expectations, Leningrad had failed to surrender naturally exasperated Hitler, who consoled himself with accounts of the starvation in the city.[3] He still asserted that the Neva River would form the border between Germany and Finland, and that Leningrad, emptied of its population, would be left to fall into ruin. Although the Germans had neither the planes nor the artillery to destroy the city as Hitler wanted, he still hopefully anticipated Leningrad's collapse after the melting of the Ladoga ice. Nevertheless he was growing impatient with the situation, and no longer being certain of Leningrad's surrender, he began to contemplate a renewed assault on the city. New plans, which the Germans hoped would remove this thorn from their side, were therefore drafted in the summer of 1942.

While the military situation had improved somewhat, the city itself was living through its most trying days. Shrouded in snow and ice, silent except for the noise of gunfire at the front, Leningrad in the winter of 1941–42 resembled a ghost town more than a city still harboring several million inhabitants. Its citizens "lived like arctic explorers, hibernating in darkness and cold, mustering all their will power and firmly determined to put up with everything and survive until the spring brought warmth and light again, sometimes having to summon their last ounce of strength to carry on the daily work for the front and the city."[4] As for the appearance of the city: "Snowdrifts lay in the streets in those days, lumps of ice were slipping from the roofs, the pavements were hidden under layers of frozen snow, dirt was piled up in mounds, the yards were choked up with refuse, the debris of shattered walls lay scattered over the streets. There were bricks, broken barrels frozen into the snow, twisted, broken pipes, shattered window frames, piles of broken glass."[5] Many of the sewage and water pipes froze and burst; it looked as if even the bakeries might have to close down. All public transportation had stopped; the streets, except for an occasional supply or army truck, were empty of vehicles. Nearly every factory was at a standstill.

Yet these same months brought the first real ray of hope for the city. The Soviet counteroffensive reduced the German military threat to Leningrad. More important still, the ice road became firmly established and well enough organized to permit the authorities to increase the level of food rations and to evacuate a substantial part of the noncombatant population. But the effect of the ice road on conditions in the city could only be perceived slowly. A life-and-death race was being run between

the improvements that the road provided and the deterioration of the physical condition of the city and its inhabitants.

By mid-December the food and supply situation was so disastrous that the city's survival depended wholly on the ice road. Yet it was by no means clear whether the road would be able to bring in enough to save the city. Inexperience, lack of equipment, very poor road conditions, the great distances involved, the winter weather, and the German air attacks—all these factors continued to prevent the road from fulfilling the transportation plan drafted by the Military Council of the Leningrad Front.[6] However, when Tikhvin was recaptured, the main supply base was moved there, so that the length of the truck road was reduced from 190 miles to 112 miles. The increasing thickness of the Ladoga ice allowed the trucks to drive faster and to carry heavier loads. Nevertheless, in late December the daily amount of supplies carried over the ice road barely exceeded 600 tons instead of the planned 2,000 tons.[7]

At the end of December and in early January various steps were taken to improve the efficiency of the ice road. Tow trucks, fuel dumps, mobile repair teams, and numerous traffic control points were organized. In order to speed up the movement of trucks across Lake Ladoga and reduce their vulnerability to air attacks, six parallel tracks were cleared across the ice.[8]

In mid-January Soviet military successes allowed the authorities to move the main supply bases from Tikhvin to the railroad stations of Voibokalo and Zhikharevo, thus reducing the length of the truck route to 27 and 36 miles, respectively. On January 11 the State Defense Committee ordered the construction of a rail line linking Voibokalo with Lavrovo on the shore of Lake Ladoga, a distance of 22 miles. At the same time, a special truck convoy of 60 three-ton trucks was ordered to carry a daily load of 150 tons of supplies from Voibokalo to Osinovets. The rail link to Lavrovo was completed on February 11, thereby reducing the truck route to the 18-mile stretch across the ice of the lake.[9]

The operation of supplying Leningrad with food was administered from Moscow. To ensure a steady source of supply, certain *oblasts*, *krais*, and republics were ordered to provide specified quantities of food exclusively for Leningrad.[10]

Nevertheless, the ice road was still plagued by bottlenecks: at the loading stations, on the road, and at the unloading points. The single-track rail line between Leningrad and Lake Ladoga was unable to handle the volume of traffic. There was a shortage of railroad engines, as well as of fuel, water, and electric power. Many railroad workers were ill. In the period of December to February, 10,939 railroad workers fell ill and 2,346 died.[11] The tracks were often blocked by snowdrifts, switches were frozen, and there was a shortage of sidings.

The first public order concerning the ice road was not issued until a

month and a half after the road began to operate. On January 5 Zhdanov sent the following letter to the workers of the ice road:

Dear Comrades:

The front-line truck road continues to operate very badly. Each day it delivers not more than one-third of the absolute minimum of requirements for Leningrad and its troops in food and gasoline, requirements that have already been cut to the bone. This means that the supplying of Leningrad and of the front constantly hangs by a hair and that the troops suffer terrible privations. This is even more inadmissible since the supplies for Leningrad and the front are available. It is clear that it is up to you, the workers of the front-line truck road, and only up to you, to improve this situation quickly and to ease the needs of Leningrad and the front.[12]

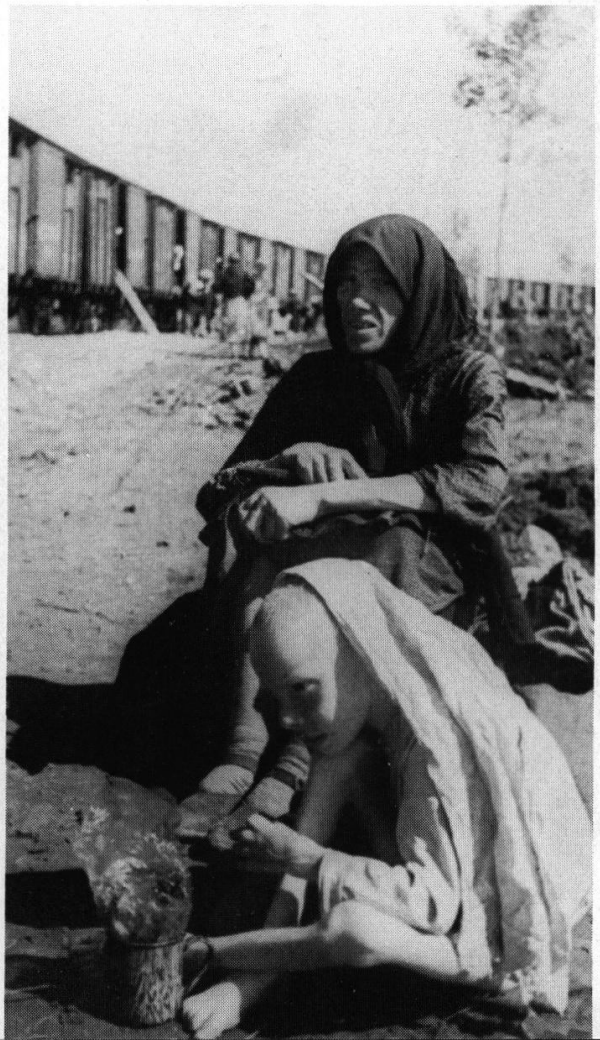
On January 9 the Executive Committee of the Leningrad City Soviet mobilized a part of the population to clear the railroad of accumulated snow and ice. The plan called for 5,000 persons to work on this task daily, but because of illness and weather conditions, only 400 to 500 persons reported each day for work.[13]

To back up Zhdanov's appeal and speed up the traffic, 700 Red Army political workers and city Party members were sent to the ice road. The appeal and the political supervision were not without effect. On the day after the political workers arrived, the number of trucks unloaded is said to have doubled, although perhaps this occurred not so much in reality as on paper.[14] The convoy system was abandoned by the road administration in favor of a system by which each driver was required to make two independent trips. To speed up the loading and unloading, the "best political workers"—that is, NKVD and Party members and Komsomols—were assigned to the staffs of the supply points. It was decided that the trucks would drive at night with their headlights on despite German air attacks. In all, some 19,000 people worked on the ice road.[15]

At the same time, similar pressure was brought to bear on the October Railroad workers and on the workers who were building the new lines on the eastern shore of the lake. On January 9 the Leningrad City Party Committee sent an appeal to the railroad workers asking them to improve their performance and to assure the uninterrupted transportation of increasing quantities of supplies.[16] A few days later Popkov stated to a correspondent of *Leningradskaia pravda*:

I must say that the improvement of the supply of food for the city depends in many ways on the performance of the October Railroad, at whose head stands Comrade Kolpakov. One must admit that the railroad has worked badly and been unprepared to carry out its sacred duty in the matter of assuring the uninterrupted transportation of food. The comrade railroad workers and their administrative, Party, and trade-union leaders must bear very clearly in mind the full extent of the responsibility that rests on their

PAGE 3: *Above:* With the breakdown of public transportation, people go everywhere by foot; the weak and sick are dragged on sleds. Note the predominance of women. *Below, left:* A starving Leningrader carries his meager daily bread ration from the food store (Winter, 1941–42). *Below, right:* Survivors of the first winter of siege wait for the departure of their evacuation train (Spring, 1942).



PAGE 6: *Above, left:* Children who have survived the first winter of siege seek the warmth of the early spring sun. *Above, right:* The bombardment forces the inmates of children's homes to spend long hours in air-raid shelters. *Below:* Infants in a children's nursery get some fresh air between shellings.

Chapter 10

CONCLUSIONS

A PROTRACTED SIEGE had not been foreseen by either side. It came about largely as a result of a deliberate change in the strategic objectives of the Germans in their Russian campaign. They made a decision to besiege Leningrad just at the moment when a concentrated assault on the city, it seems, would have brought certain success. The Soviet leaders, who rightly assumed Leningrad was a major objective of the German invasion, did not anticipate either the rapid approach of the Germans or the reluctance of the victorious enemy to exploit his immediate chance of capturing the city. They therefore made no preparations for a prolonged siege. Hence most steps taken by the city's authorities in the first six months of the war were emergency measures devised in response to the growing threat to the city.

On the whole, these measures were quite sensible and very similar to those taken in England after the outbreak of the war, particularly after Dunkirk. In both cases one finds the emergency construction of fortifications, the hurried raising of volunteer defense units, preparations to defend factories, the fear of enemy agents and saboteurs, the hurried organization of civil defense measures, and civilian evacuations.* In Leningrad, as in England, enemy aliens and persons with suspicious backgrounds were often interned. In both places there was food and fuel rationing. The German advance on Leningrad, like the

* The parallel between the British Local Defense Volunteers (later Home Guard), armed with shotguns and old rifles, and the *opolchenie*, for example, is obvious enough. Had the Germans carried out "Operation Sea Lion" in 1940, however, it is doubtful whether the British volunteers, despite their high morale and determination, would have been of greater military worth than the *opolchenie*. During that year Lord Beaverbrook, the British Minister for Aircraft Production, had taken measures to defend individual factories against land attacks. The British population had been alerted to watch out for spies and saboteurs, and "Cooper's Snoopers," so named after the Minister of Information, Duff Cooper, had caused the arrest and trial of various persons for alleged defeatism.

Dunkirk evacuation, provided a great impetus to the construction of shelters and slit trenches and to extensive popular participation in civil defense activities. The authorities in both places were by no means certain that they could prevent an enemy invasion, and consequently both appealed to the population to participate in a last-ditch stand, which in England was epitomized by the slogan "You can take one with you." In both Leningrad and England emergency measures often conflicted with one another and suffered in their execution both from bureaucratic dogmatism and from exaggerated enthusiasm on the part of local authorities and excited amateurs.

Despite many similarities, however, there were also great differences between the reactions of England in 1940 and Leningrad in 1941. These differences arose out of the totalitarian character of the Soviet regime, the techniques of Soviet administrative control and the degree to which they were employed, and the cultural and social factors that conditioned the responses of the Soviet population.

The decision of the Soviet leadership to prolong the defense of Leningrad as long as possible was justifiable from the military point of view because the fall of the city would have constituted a severe strategic, economic, and moral loss to the Soviet regime. The leaders took the stand that there would be no voluntary surrender of the city; its loss would be excusable only if it fell to an overwhelming German assault. In making this decision the Soviet leaders were prepared to accept for the city's population far greater loss and suffering than would probably have been regarded as justifiable by Western standards. It is doubtful whether Western governments would have been able or willing to require their soldiers and civilians to continue to resist enemy attack under conditions of actual starvation. The Soviet authorities apparently were not influenced by such considerations. They accepted the death of about one-third of Leningrad's population as a necessary price to pay for the contribution that the continuing defense of the city made to the over-all Soviet defense effort. While they never questioned their right to demand such sacrifices of the Leningraders, since from their point of view the rights and welfare of the population were subordinate to the interests of the state and of the Party, they had some doubts about how much privation the inhabitants were willing to bear and at what point the city's defense would collapse. These doubts were partly the product of the deeply rooted distrust that the leadership felt, even before the war, concerning the political loyalty of the population. The complex and overlapping Soviet administrative and political control systems, by which the authorities sought to control and direct the behavior of each person, were in effect perfectly designed for a permanent state of siege. It is not surprising, therefore, that when war came there was little need

to tighten administrative controls or to undertake a major administrative reorganization.

The political leadership ensured the retention of its powers by preserving the supremacy of the Party and the police over all levels of governmental, military, and administrative machinery. Although some further concentration of power occurred during the war as a result of the organization of the State Defense Committee and of the military councils, the Party leadership kept control of these organizations by supplying most of the members. The authority of Party officials, from the city government level down to that of the political organizers in apartment houses, remained undiminished throughout the war.

The war also made little change in the inefficiencies inherent in the highly centralized decision-making process and in the methods of implementing decisions. The extreme degree of control that the Moscow authorities exercised over all decisions became a real handicap to Leningrad's leadership. Although the latter included some very prominent Party leaders, such as Zhdanov and Voroshilov, most of their decisions, even minor ones, still had to be initiated, or at least approved, by the central leadership in Moscow—despite the fact that Moscow was often not in a position to assess the real situation in Leningrad. Thus Stalin reprimanded Zhdanov for organizing a defense council in the city and insisted on changing its membership. The State Defense Committee had to approve the decision to convert a bottling plant in Leningrad to the production of Molotov cocktails. When the wife of a medical officer applied for permission to leave Leningrad, the Evacuation Committee of the USSR passed on the case. The various commissariats in Moscow continued to issue instructions on how Leningrad was to use its industrial resources and which enterprises were to be evacuated.

These practices tended to deprive the city's leaders of initiative and limited their ability to make effective use of local facilities and resources. For example, despite the critical shortage of firewood during the winter of 1941–42, the Leningrad authorities did not organize either the production of emergency stoves or the tearing down of wooden buildings for fuel, although these measures would have saved many people from freezing to death. Similarly, in the fall of 1941 much industrial machinery was dismantled for evacuation by order of the authorities in Moscow, although it was impossible to get it out of the city.

The lower echelons of the Party and bureaucracy generally proved unwilling to show initiative. Their main concern was to demonstrate the proper degree of zeal and loyalty, with little regard for the effectiveness of their activities. The emphasis on the "fulfillment and overfulfillment of plans" and the preoccupation with keeping up appearances were fully in accord with the usual means by which the local Soviet