

of NEP is not necessary . . . On this question the difference between the centrists and the rightists is one of tempo: the rightists are proposing a consistently rightist policy, the centrists a policy with ultra-left intervals . . .

The whole political wisdom of the centrist and right-centrist leadership has consisted in suppressing the masses' feelings of political independence, human dignity and pride, and in encouraging and organizing the autocracy of the apparatus. The exceptional ingenuity of the centrist leadership and especially of the general secretary has been entirely devoted – and still is – to establishing this autocracy. The strength of the party leadership is in the party apparatus, but it is also the source of its weakness.

Source: Christian Rakovsky, Selected Writings on Opposition in the USSR (London, Allison & Busby, 1980), pp. 162–3, 166, 168, 170, 173.

While in certain respects accurate, above all in its characterisation of the new ruling elite, this analysis was also spectacularly misconceived: the so-called 'centrists' were pursuing far more than 'a policy with ultra-left intervals'. The damage inflicted on the rural economy contributed to the devastating famine of 1932–3 in Ukraine and the Kuban. Stalin continued to export grain, placed soldiers around the affected region, and refused to release strategic grain reserves until too late for the millions who died or who were reduced to cannibalism.

Industrialisation and the Creation of a New Intelligentsia

Collectivisation was justified on the grounds that grain could be exported to provide vital investment resources and to provide cheap food for the growing industrial working class, quite apart from its primary aim of eliminating the 'peasant contradiction', a workers' state dependent for supplies on a commodity-producing private peasantry. Grain collection in 1929 surpassed that of 1928 by 1.5 times, and in 1930 was double the 1928 level, most of which was exported to buy machines. The first five-year plan (FYP) was launched in 1928, yet its targets were soon doubled, tripled and accelerated to a fevered pace of industrial construction. This was not 'planning' in any serious sense but a command economy in the hands of leaders drugged by the power of steel. There was an enormous amount of waste and disruption that actually led to falls in output in some areas. Yet the first FYP was completed (officially) in four years and three months (January 1933), and the USSR joined the ranks of the industrial superpowers.

Document 5.7 Stalin on Industrialisation

Industrialisation was proceeding at a breakneck and equally wasteful pace. This was a period marked by huge achievements in terms of industrial objects built, but also by chaos and the wasteful use of resources. In the speech below Stalin outlined the need for traditional discipline and managerial authority, while at the same time stressing the security rationale for accelerated industrialisation.

A Bolshevik's word is his bond. Bolsheviks are in the habit of fulfilling their pledges. But what does the pledge to fulfil the control figures for 1931 mean? It means ensuring a general increase of industrial output by 45 per cent. And this is a very big task. More than that. Such a pledge means that you not only promise to fulfil our Five-Year Plan in four years – that is decided, and no more resolutions are needed on that score – *it means that you promise to fulfil it in three years in all the basic, decisive branches of industry* . . .

How is it that we Bolsheviks, who have made three revolutions, who emerged victorious from the bitter Civil War, who have swung the peasantry to the path of socialism – how is it that in the matter of directing production we bow to a slip of paper? The reason is that it is easier to sign papers than to direct production . . .

Life itself has more than once signalled that not all was well in this field. The Shakhty case showed that the Party organizations and the trade unions lacked revolutionary vigilance. It showed that our business executives were disgracefully backward in regard to the knowledge of technology; that some of the old engineers and technicians, working without supervision, were more prone to engage in wrecking activities, especially as they were constantly being besieged by 'offers' from our enemies abroad . . .

Hence, the task is for us to master technique ourselves, to become the masters of the job ourselves. This is the sole guarantee that our plans will be carried out in full, and that one-man management will be established.

This, of course, is no easy matter; but it can certainly be accomplished. Science, technical experience, knowledge, are all things that can be acquired. We may not have them today, but tomorrow we will. The main thing is to have the passionate Bolshevik desire to master technique, to master the science of production. Everything can be achieved, everything can be overcome, if there is a passionate desire to do so.

It is sometimes asked whether it is not possible to slow down the tempo somewhat, to put a check on the movement. No, comrades, it is not possible! The tempo must not be reduced! On the contrary, we must increase it as much as is within our powers and possibilities. This is dictated to us by our obligations to the workers and peasants of the USSR. This is dictated to us by our obligations to the working class of the whole world.

To slacken the tempo would mean falling behind. And those who fall behind get beaten. But we do not want to be beaten. No, we refuse to be beaten! One feature of the history of old Russia was the continual beatings she suffered because of her backwardness. She was beaten by the Mongol khans. She was beaten by the Turkish beys. She was beaten by the Swedish feudal lords. She was beaten by the Polish and Lithuanian gentry. She was beaten by the British and French capitalists. She was beaten by the Japanese barons. All beat her – for her backwardness: for military backwardness, for cultural backwardness, for political backwardness, for industrial backwardness, for agricultural backwardness. She was beaten because to do so was

profitable and could be done with impunity... Such is the law of the exploiters – to beat the backward and the weak. It is the jungle law of capitalism. You are backward, you are weak – therefore you are wrong; hence, you can be beaten and enslaved. You are mighty – therefore you are right; hence, we must be wary of you.

That is why we must no longer lag behind.

In the past we had no fatherland, nor could we have one. But now that we have overthrown capitalism and power is in our hands, in the hands of the people, we have a fatherland, and we will defend its independence. Do you want our socialist fatherland to be beaten and to lose its independence? If you do not want this you must put an end to its backwardness in the shortest possible time and develop genuine Bolshevik tempo in building up its socialist system of economy. There is no other way. That is why Lenin said no on the eve of the October Revolution: 'Either perish, or overtake and outstrip the advanced capitalist countries.'

We are fifty or a hundred years behind the advanced countries. We must make good this distance in ten years. Either we do it, or we shall be crushed...

In ten years at most we must make good the distance which separates us from the advanced capitalist countries. We have all the 'objective' possibilities for this. The only thing lacking is the ability to take proper advantage of these possibilities. And that depends on us. *Only on us!* It is time we learned to take advantage of these possibilities. It is time to put an end to the rotten policy of non-interference in production. It is time to adopt a new policy, a policy adapted to the present times – the policy of interfering in everything. If you are a factory manager, then interfere in all the affairs of the factory, look into everything, let nothing escape you, learn and learn again. Bolsheviks must master technique. It is time Bolsheviks themselves became experts. In the period of reconstruction technique decides everything. And a business executive who does not want to study technique, who does not want to master technique, is a joke and not an executive.

It is said that it is hard to master technique. That is not true! There are no fortresses which Bolsheviks cannot capture. We have assumed power. We have built up a huge socialist industry. We have swung the middle peasants to the path of socialism. We have already accomplished what is most important from the point of view of construction. What remains to be done is not so much: to study technique, to master science. And when we have done that we will develop a tempo of which we dare not even dream at present. And we can do this if we really want to.

Source: Stalin, 'The Tasks of Business Executives', speech at the First All-Union Conference of Managers of Socialist Industry, 4 February 1931, in *Problems of Leninism*, pp. 350, 354–5, 355–5, 357–8.

Document 5.8 Against Wage Equality and the Creation of a New Intelligentsia

Traditional socialist notions of wage equality and collectivism were now jettisoned in favour of individual responsibility and incentives, a theme Stalin returned to later (Document 5.18). In June 1931 Stalin condemned *uravnilovka* ('wage-levelling' or 'equality-mongering'), allowing the development of wide wage differentials. What this had in common with Marxism remains disputed, and certainly reversed the Utopianism of *The ABC of Communism* (Document 3.17). In Soviet parlance *uravnilovka* joined the pantheon of sins against the Soviet state. The remnants of the tsarist intelligentsia were to be replaced by new Soviet-trained specialists. A 'proletarian advancement' (*vydvizhenie*) movement was launched whereby workers were promoted to become engineers and administrators through a process of accelerated training. Universities and colleges were opened up to adults even if they lacked the necessary prerequisites. A massive new cohort of 'red specialists' (of whom Kravchenko was one) replaced the old generation of specialists and retained leadership positions for the next two generations. A new 'Soviet' intelligentsia came into being.

What is the cause of the heavy turnover of labour power?

The cause is the wrong structure of wages, the wrong wage scales, the 'leftist' practice of wage equalization. In a number of our factories wage scales are drawn up in such a way as practically to wipe out the difference between skilled and unskilled labour, between heavy and light work. The consequence of wage equalization is that the unskilled worker lacks the incentive to become a skilled worker and is thus deprived of the prospect of advancement; as a result he feels himself a 'sojourner' in the factory, working only temporarily so as to 'earn a little' and then go off to 'seek his fortune' elsewhere. The consequence of wage equalization is that the skilled worker is obligated to wander from factory to factory until he finds one where his skill is properly appreciated.

Hence, the 'general' drift from factory to factory; hence, the heavy turnover of labour power.

In order to put an end to this evil we must abolish wage equalization and discard the old wage scales. In order to put an end to this evil we must draw up wage scales that will take into account the difference between skilled and unskilled labour, between heavy and light work...

No ruling class has managed without its own intelligentsia. There are no grounds for believing that the working class of the USSR can manage without its own industrial and technical intelligentsia.

The Soviet government has taken this fact into account and has opened wide the doors of all the higher educational institutions in every branch of national economy to members of the working class and labouring peasantry. You know that tens of thousands of working class and peasant youths are now

attending higher educational institutions. Formerly, under capitalism, the higher educational institutions were the monopoly of the scions of the rich – today, under the Soviet system, the working class and peasant youth predominate in these institutions. There is no doubt that our educational institutions will soon be turning out thousands of new technicians and engineers, new leaders for our industries.

Source: Stalin, 'New Conditions – New Tasks in Economic Construction', speech at a conference of business executives, 23 June 1931, in Problems of Leninism, pp. 362–3, 369.

Document 5.9 The Stakhanovite Movement

The Stakhanovite movement from 1935 served important functions in disciplining and inspiring workers. The subject of innumerable frenzied speeches and articles, the whole movement was a fraud from beginning to end. As an industrial manager, Kravchenko saw at first hand its artificial and disruptive character.

In September, 1935, a 'miracle' occurred in the Donetz Basin coal region. A worker named Stakhanov mined 102 tons of coal in one shift – fourteen times the normal output per miner! Few events in all modern history have been greeted with such sustained, hysterical and histrionic acclaim. It was, to be sure, a quite mundane miracle and a bit shabby at the edges. To a practical engineer the elements of deceit in it were fairly transparent. It was obvious that special conditions and special tools and assistance had been provided to enable Stakhanov to achieve the record. It was a miracle made to order for the Kremlin in launching a new religion – the religion of speed-up.

What Stakhanov had done, all miners could do! What miners could do all other industries could do! There you have a summary of the new religion. Doubters were damned and would not have to wait for the next life for their share of inferno. Technicians who raised practical objections were defeatists, enemies of Stakhanovism! Workers who could not toe the mark set by the Donetz miner were slackers!

Moscow screamed the new Stakhanovite slogans. Telegraphic orders began to pour into Nikopol from Kharkov and Moscow headquarters. Every order was a blunt threat. We must instantly create Stakhanovite brigades, as pace-setters for the slowpokes. Engineers or superintendents who raised objections would be treated as saboteurs . . .

In the end, in my own sub-plant, I was obliged to resort to artificial speed-up which, in my heart, I considered a crime against the machines and the workers alike. On direct orders from the Party Committee, I regrouped my labour, putting the best workers, foremen and engineers into one shift. Then we selected the best tools and materials, setting them aside for the special shift. Having thus stacked the cards, we gave the signal for the specious game to start.

At eleven o'clock one evening, with reporters and photographers present, the 'Stakhanovite' shift got under way. As expected, it 'overfulfilled' the normal quota by 8 per cent. There were flaming headlines. Congratulations arrived from officials in the capitals. Everyone breathed more freely – we had diverted the lightning. As the responsible technical leader I was given a lot of the credit.

But this 'victory' on the industrial front merely left me heartsick. It was, at bottom, fraudulent and must boomerang. The other two shifts, deprived of their best personnel and their best tools, lost more than the fevered group had won. By contrast they seemed ineffective if not actually 'lazy'. They naturally resented being made the scapegoats. They cursed the lucky ones and the officials.

Throughout the Soviet land the speed-up drive turned into a furious campaign unfolded in the familiar atmosphere of fright and repressions. Thousands of administrators were dismissed, many of them were arrested, for sabotage of the new 'socialist production' and for 'failure to provide the proper Stakhanovite conditions'. Every lag in output was blamed upon the engineers and technicians. The picture created in the public mind was that of workers eager to step up production but intentionally 'held back' by scheming managers.

A wedge was thus driven between workers and technical staffs.

Even to the simplest-minded factory hand or miner it was apparent that the new records set by forced speed-up would soon be set up as 'norms' for everybody.

Source: Kravchenko, I Chose Freedom, p. 188.

Cultural Transformation

Cultural transformation was an essential part of the revolution from above. The 1920s were marked by the relative diversity of intellectual life and a degree of tolerance of different views. This period came to an end at this time and strict controls were imposed over all aspects of creative work. The only approach allowed was that of class war. Communists and non-communists alike who evinced any independence from the party line were purged or imprisoned. Philosophers were among the first in the firing line, but the main emphasis was on controlling history.

Document 5.10 Bringing History to Order

In the infamous letter reproduced below Stalin brought the historical profession to heel. Condemning an article that had questioned Lenin's infallibility, Stalin made it clear that the pursuit of truth was no more than 'rotten liberalism', and that in future it would be the party that decided what was true or not.

Russian churches. Today there are six – and these are to be transformed into ‘public offices’ in the next two years.

In the southern towns many of the older people are still believers, but the younger generation, which has been trained in the atheist schools, is bitterly hostile to all forms of worship, and any kind of spiritual faith is ridiculed as ‘bourgeois ideology’.

Source: John Brown, *I Saw for Myself* (London, Selwyn and Blount, n.d.), pp. 218–19, 219–20.

Document 5.16 The Defeat of Time

Stalinism represented the triumph of human endeavour over the physical environment. One of the classics of early Stalinist literature celebrating the building of socialism was Kataev's novel *Forward, Oh Time!*, reflecting the belief that through the hard work of this generation in building a modern industrial infrastructure, generations to come would enjoy a better life. Happiness was measured in tons of steel produced, a theme reflected in another representative novel of the time, Nikolai Ostrovsky's *How the Steel Was Tempered*. Note the staccato, breathless style considered proper for a direct, proletarian approach in the school of socialist realism.

There would be a flagstone under the fifth battery. On the flagstone sixty-nine coke ovens would be erected. Blast furnaces need coke. The blast furnaces were being put together. The mountain would be blown up. The ore would be extracted. The ore would go into the blast furnaces. The coke would be lighted. Molten iron would flow. The molten iron would be boiled into steel. They would make rails, wagons, saws, axes, ploughs, machines.

And all this would be for the needs, for the happiness of ‘him’.

To make life happy, it was not enough to say good words. It was not enough. One needed steel, steel, steel! With steel, there will be a new, happy life, a life that has never been before, a life that has never been seen before!

And all this was for ‘him’. And ‘he’ – that is I. And ‘he’ and I – are we. And we – that is life!

Until now, life had gone by like a river, from backwater to backwater, from lake to lake. Time was life. Life flowed as it wished. When it wished, it flowed slowly. When it wished, it flowed swiftly.

Now Ishchenko opened his eyes, and, for the first time in his life, looked down the entire length of time. It flowed too slowly. But it flowed for him. The past flowed for the future.

And it lay securely in his hands.

Oh, how good life was, after all!

Source: Valentine Kataev, *Forward, Oh Time!*, translated by Charles Malamuth (London, Victor Gollancz, 1934), pp. 175–6.

Anticipating the Terror

The debate over the origins and logic of the purges continues. Were they provoked by Stalin's paranoia and morbid suspiciousness, or was there a deeper purpose behind them? Alarmed by the rise of Nazism in Germany, was Stalin securing the rear by destroying all potential opponents, or were the purges no more than the logical outcome of the establishment of an all-powerful bureaucratic system?

Document 5.17 The ‘Ryutin Group’

Amid the imagined plots against Stalin there were genuine expressions of dissatisfaction with his personalised regime of terror. Already in late 1929 Beso Lominadze and Sergei Syrtsov, formerly Stalin's supporters, gave voice to their concerns; they were denounced and expelled from the Central Committee. In 1932 a group around Mikhail Ryutin, calling itself ‘The Union of Marxists-Leninists’, called for a shift of priorities from industry and agriculture to consumer goods. There appeared to be growing pressure for a relaxation of the pressure against society following the successful completion of collectivisation and the first stages of industrialisation. Alarmed by the analysis reproduced below, for the first time Stalin demanded the death penalty against a ranking party oppositionist; the Politburo refused his wish and Ryutin was sentenced to ten years in the Gulag. This was to be one of the last times that Stalin's bloodthirsty vengefulness was thwarted.

Stalin and the Crisis of the Proletarian Dictatorship

A regime of unheard of terror and colossal spying, achieved through an extraordinarily centralised and ramified gigantic apparatus, concentrating in its hands all the material resources of the country and placing in direct dependence on itself the physical survival of tens of millions of people, this is the main basis of Stalin's dictatorship. The whole state apparatus, including the party, terrorises others and at the same time itself lives under the constant Damocles sword of terror, is like a machine, despite the consciousness of each individual cell, forced to move and fulfil the will of the ‘mechanic’.

But having entered a dead end and established throughout the country, in the most diverse forms, the dominance of terror, Stalin has deprived himself of any path of retreat or the possibility of an evolutionary outcome of the crisis. He has placed himself on a pedestal like an infallible pope and cannot admit either the criminality of his policies or even the smallest mistake. The dictator cannot make a mistake – only his subordinates can be at fault . . .

In practice the sum of measures required to remove the party and the country from the crisis and the dead end can be summarised as follows:

I In the party sphere.

1 The elimination of Stalin's dictatorship and that of his clique.

2 The immediate replacement of the entire leadership of the party apparatus and new elections to party organs on the basis of genuine intra-party