

Stalin's Five-Year Plan

In 1927 Stalin's advisers told him that with the modernization of farming the Soviet Union would require an extra 250,000 tractors. As well as tractors there was also a need to develop the oil fields to provide the necessary petrol to drive the machines. Power stations also had to be built to supply the farms with electricity. Since the October Revolution industrial progress had been slow and there was still a lot of work that needed to be done. It was not until 1927 that production had reached the levels achieved before the start of the First World War. Stalin decided that he would use his control over the country to increase production.

The first Five Year Plan, introduced in 1928, concentrated on the development of iron and steel, machine tools, electric power and transport. Joseph Stalin set high targets for the workers to achieve. He demanded a 110% increase in coal production, 200% increase in iron production and 335% increase in electric power. He justified these demands by claiming that if rapid industrialization did not take place, the Soviet Union would not be able to defend itself against an invasion from capitalist countries in the west.

Every factory had large display boards erected that showed the output of workers. Those that failed to reach the required targets were publicly criticized and humiliated. Some workers could not cope with this pressure and began to quit their jobs and desert. This led to even more repressive measures being introduced. Records were kept of workers' lateness, absenteeism, and bad workmanship. If the worker's record was poor, he was accused of trying to sabotage the Five Year Plan and if found guilty he could be shot or sent to work as forced laborer.

With the introduction of the Five Year Plan, Stalin argued that it was necessary to pay higher wages to certain workers in order to encourage increased output. Some of his opponents claimed that this inequality was a betrayal of socialism, that everyone was to be paid and treated equally, and would create a new class system in the Soviet Union. Stalin had his way regardless, and during the 1930s, the gap between the wages of the laborers and the skilled workers increased.

Some people complained that the Soviet Union was being industrialized too fast. Joseph Stalin was heard saying: "No comrades... the pace must not be slackened! On the contrary, we must quicken it as much as is within our powers and possibilities. To slacken the pace would mean to lag behind; and those who lag behind are beaten... The history of old Russia... was that she was ceaselessly beaten for her backwardness. She was beaten by the Mongol Khans, she was beaten by Turks, she was beaten by Swedish feudal lords, she was beaten by Polish-Lithuanians, she was beaten by Anglo-French capitalists, she was beaten by Japanese, she was beaten by all - for her backwardness...

We are fifty or a hundred years behind the advanced countries. We must make good this lag in years. Either we do it or they crush us."

"We are the Realization of the Plan

In 1932 Walter Duranty won the Pulitzer Prize for his reporting of the Five Year Plan. In his acceptance speech he argued: "I went to the Baltic states viciously anti-Bolshevik. From the French standpoint the Bolsheviks had betrayed the allies to Germany [during World War I]... and were enemies of the human race. I discovered that the Bolsheviks were sincere enthusiasts, trying to regenerate a people that had been shockingly misgoverned, and I decided to try to give them their fair break. I still believe they are doing the best for the Russian masses and I believe in Bolshevism - for Russia - but more and more I am convinced it is unsuitable for the United States and Western Europe. It won't spread westward unless a new war wrecks the established system."