

THE ROLE OF SOCIALIST COMPETITION IN ESTABLISHING
LABOUR DISCIPLINE IN THE SOVIET WORKING CLASS
1928 - 1934

by

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1st of 2 files

Introductory material and Part One: chapters 1-4

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SYNOPSIS

Between 1928 and 1934 Soviet society experienced what amounted to two industrial revolutions: the adaptation of a largely non-industrial working population to industry and the introduction of new technologies and methods of management. These radical changes inevitably gave rise to problems of labour discipline, expressed most graphically in soaring rates of labour turnover and absenteeism.

These problems were exacerbated by the pace, intensity and scope of Soviet industrialisation and by the social policies that accompanied this drive. As in any such process these problems had to be tackled by utilising a blend of measures based on compulsion, conviction and incentive.

The present work examines the blend employed by the Soviet regime during the period under review to stimulate, in the shortest possible time scale, a general will for industrialisation and, having established that will and destroyed opposition to it, channel the energies thus generated into the desired directions.

The distinctive element in this blend is identified as socialist competition, which the regime utilised to stimulate support for and stifle opposition to industrialisation, and, subsequently, to raise work skills to the level required by the modern industry being constructed.

Moreover, socialist competition allowed the regime to implement a management system geared to the maximum priority of production interests, while preserving a commitment, albeit in abstract terms, to the concept of a workers' state.

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INTRODUCTION

Despite the many unique features of the Soviet industrialisation drive, the process itself would appear to fit the pattern of economic development experienced by all countries progressing from the stage of largely rural economies to those based on modern industries.

If the Soviet experience stands out for its unprecedented pace, intensity and scope, then these factors merely exacerbated problems that would have arisen anyway as part of the process of industrialisation. The essence of this process is change, and changes do tend to generate problems. The greater the scope and speed of change, therefore, the greater the problems to be expected.

Thus the problem of establishing a labour discipline commensurate with a modern industry was not a new one, nor were those of eliminating old workers' customs and traditions that were no longer held to be compatible with the new industrial order. That is why this thesis opens with an attempt to place the Soviet experience in an international context so as to determine what patterns of worker behaviour might have been expected given the transformations occurring in Soviet society.

For the USSR was experiencing what amounted to two industrial revolutions: the acculturation to industrial life of a labour force originating mainly from the countryside; and the adaptation of both old and new workers to the introduction of new technology and management systems. The telescoping together of these two processes greatly intensified the need for the Soviet regime to establish a new labour discipline, for the work habits of both the new recruits and the existing factory personnel were considered inappropriate to the new demands of production.

The means with which to establish this new discipline at the Soviet regime's disposal were basically the same as were available to any other industrialising 'elite': i.e. methods based on compulsion, conviction or incentive. Obviously, the precise blend of these three components would depend to a large extent on the perceived aims and requirements of the 'elite' responsible for carrying out the policy of industrialisation. It is one of the tasks of the present research to establish the relative weight and interplay between each of these three factors in Soviet society during the period from 1928 to 1934.

In most societies the established pattern would be to stress initially methods of compulsion until such time as adequate incentive systems could be relied upon to produce the desired discipline. Conviction tended to play the relatively subsidiary role of justifying the changes undertaken and encouraging workers to change established habits and routines.

The Soviet leaders were faced, it might appear, with an unusual restraint: how could Soviet managers employ methods of compulsion against workers in what was ostensibly a workers' state? As we now know, in practice this proved to be hardly a restraining factor at all. Indeed, the received perception among Western observers of the Soviet drive to establish labour discipline was that it continued to rely, first and foremost, on coercive methods even after the appropriate incentive systems were in place. According to such a view, there was little or no role for conviction.

Yet, not only have official Soviet histories of this period maintained until this day that the new labour discipline was achieved mainly by means of conviction supplemented by incentive measures (compulsion, they would claim, was used

only against those who were acting against the common interest) ~~but also~~ , they would insist, the contradiction inherent in a management policy geared to maximise the interests of production operating in a workers' state was resolved by allowing the workers to exercise control over the management of industry.

Now for workers in other countries, and for those in the USSR up until 1928, such control over industry would best be effected through their own trade union movement, charged to defend its members' interests against, among other things, encroachments by management and the interests of production.

However, in the Soviet case, quite the reverse occurred: commencing from the VIII Congress of Soviet Trade Unions in December 1928, the Communist Party steadily eroded trade union independence of action to the extent that, by the IV plenum of the Soviet Trade Union Central Council (VTsSPS) in September 1934, when the movement was decimated into 154 little 'production' unions, there was little effective participation for them in the control of industry other than the right to produce more. The progress of this takeover of the trade unions constitutes the main theme of Chapter Two and also provides the parameters, in chronological terms, for the whole thesis.

The alternative means of ensuring worker participation in the management of industry, proposed in the course of Soviet industrialisation, was socialist competition. Originally opposed by the old trade union leadership for its anti-worker essence, this movement did, indeed, embody the 'management' approach to production, with the important qualification that it was a worker initiative and could thus be presented as the expression of 'genuine' worker interests as against the

'narrow craft' and 'trade union' interests being pursued by the old VTsSPS leadership and its supporters.

The essential feature of socialist competition was that it encouraged workers to place the interests of production ahead of their own personal requirements, to adopt a 'socialist attitude to work' before the foundations of a socialist society had even been built. Given the absolute priority given to production during Stalin's rapid industrialisation drive, this in effect entailed the worker foregoing present satisfactions for future promises.

While this attitude, resting firmly upon conviction, may be maintained by the few in the short-run, it was scarcely a recipe for the long-term. Thus, as the initial enthusiasm evaporated and living and working conditions deteriorated from the spring of 1930, more and more workers chose to put their personal interests before those of production, seek better work and conditions and take breaks from the relentless demands of factory life. Thus labour turnover and unsanctioned absenteeism eroded not only the levels of labour discipline, but also threatened the entire policy of rapid industrialisation. Chapter Three examines these two manifestations of worker behaviour.

Despite having outlived its utility as a means of generating genuine enthusiasm for industrialisation, socialist competition did become a useful weapon in the hands of the regime to counter violations of labour discipline and also to free workers from the 'restraints' of labour legislation which limited the length of working days, overtime, number of days without rest and so on. A feature of the period under review was the distinctive interplay between so-called 'socio-political' norms and legal norms. These are analysed in Chapter Four.

In establishing the role of socialist competition in moulding a new labour discipline in Soviet industry during the period under review, three major areas are analysed: the growth of the shock brigade movement during the 'optimistic' phase of the socialist offensive from the birth of the mass movement in the autumn of 1929 until the end of the Leninist Enrolment in March 1930; the rise and fall of one of the many variations of shock work and competition the production communes, which I will argue were the last examples of collective action by the Soviet workers to genuinely exercise a degree of control over production; and the subsequent redirection of the movement to serve more precisely the interests of production by concentrating on raising skills and mastering technology. These are the subjects of Chapters Five, Six and Seven respectively.

Although I have identified socialist competition as essentially a 'management' approach carried out by workers, it is hoped to show that within the movement there was, nonetheless, a conflict between the 'autonomous' and 'management' orientations. The replacement of the production communes by first the cost accounting brigades and, subsequently, by the Stakhanovite movement, represents the total victory of the latter over the former, not least because the moral imperatives that motivated many of the communards were not felt to be as appropriate to the bulk of the Soviet labour force as the material incentives that were duly introduced.

The time span covered by this research slots neatly between the introduction of the seven-hour day in 1928 (which first highlighted the contradictions between the existing levels of discipline and the demands of production) and the birth of the Stakhanovite movement in August 1935 (which provided the Soviet regime with its ideal stereotype of desired worker behaviour and labour discipline).

I have chosen the VIII Congress of the Soviet trade unions as a starting point because this represented the last major forum at which workers' interests were ranged against those of Stalin's general line. Significantly, the incumbent leader of VTsSPS, Tomskii, dismissed the embryonic movement for the 'socialist organisation of work' as premature during his closing speech to the Congress. Similarly, the plenary sessions of VTsSPS in September and December 1934 completed the emasculation of the Soviet trade union movement and ended their existence as an independently functioning force within Soviet society (there was not to be another Congress until nearly 15 more years had elapsed).

The problem is examined very much from the worker's perspective, rather than that of the management, Party, national or local leadership. Concentration is focussed on the workers in heavy industry, which is where the priority of industrialisation lay, with occasional reference to light industry, construction and railway transport. For the same reason, emphasis is given to the situation in the larger enterprises, both reconstructed (AMO, Krasnyi Putilovets etc.) and newly-built (Stalingrad Tractor and Nizhnii Novgorod Auto Works, for example).

The statistical data for this period varies from the reliable to the downright contradictory and is utilised as much to provide a flavour of the situation as to prove a particular point. The same may be said for quotes, which I have used liberally throughout this work. They form part of an attempt to recreate the atmosphere of those whirlwind years for Soviet society. Without a feel for that atmosphere it is easy to overestimate the role of socialist competition, as might the Soviet historian of this period, or deny it had any role at all, which a Western observer might be tempted to do.

PART ONE

LABOUR DISCIPLINE DURING SOVIET INDUSTRIALISATION,
1928 - 1934.

This Section seeks to provide a background against which the role of socialist competition in establishing labour discipline within the period under review may be appraised. It fills the gap in the development of Soviet industrial relations between the introduction of the seven-hour, three-shift working day in 1928 to the appearance of the Stakhanovite movement in 1935.

As each of the topics covered in this Section merits a dissertation all to itself, they are presented not as exhaustive studies, but rather only insofar as they relate to the theme of this thesis.

Thus Chapter One attempts to determine what forms of worker behaviour and levels of labour discipline might have been expected in a society going through the stages of industrialisation experienced by Soviet society between 1928 and 1934.

Chapter Two concentrates on the Party takeover of the Soviet trade union movement, which I consider the most important organisational change that facilitated the victory of a management approach to industrial relations in the world's first socialist state.

In Chapter Three, the two problems that dominated discussions on labour discipline during this period - turnover and absenteeism - are analysed. The underutilisation of work time, which it is suggested presented (and arguably continues to present) the most fundamental problem of labour discipline in Soviet industry, could not be addressed until these problems were solved. Therefore, it falls largely outside the scope of this work.

Finally, the distinctive role of legislation in Soviet society is examined from the perspective of its status, enforceability and interplay with extra-legal norms, not least those emanating from the socialist competition movement.

Inevitably, any treatment of the four topics contained in Part One involves a degree of repetition, such is the overlap between them. However, this has been kept to a minimum without, it is hoped, diminishing the feeling for the interlocking nature of the processes described.

In this way a framework may be provided into which the reader can slot the events and factual information that are dealt with in Part Two.

"The task was finally accomplished, though at needlessly high cost, and a society of ~~peasants~~ peasants, craftsmen and versatile labourers became a society of modern industrial workers; but it is doubtful whether, within the structure of society and industry, the dilemmas of its beginnings have been resolved even today." 1

This Chapter seeks to relate the problems of labour discipline experienced within Soviet industry during the period 1928-1934 to the substantial body of theory and empirical data on the phenomenon in the West. In this way it is hoped to strike a balance between those features of the Soviet industrialisation drive which fit into the general pattern of economic development in other countries and those which appear to be specific to the USSR.

[illegible]

¹ Sidney Pollard, The Genesis of Modern Management, London, 1965, p.208.

However, if we analyse just what are defined in the USSR as problems of discipline in the period under review, it will become apparent that attention is focused first and foremost on uncontrolled labour turnover (tekuchest'), unsanctioned absenteeism (progul) and underutilisation of work time. Not only is there a large body of literature in the West devoted to such phenomena, but also, it emerges, that these problems occur, to a greater or lesser extent, in all societies experiencing the adaption to modern industry of a workforce from a largely non-industrial background. As such a process of adaptation was an integral feature of the initial years of the Soviet industrialisation drive, such problems might be perceived as characteristic of societies at this stage of economic development rather than consequences of Soviet policy per se.

This process of adaptation is best presented in Western works as the new worker's growing commitment to the industrial way of life. This theory stems from Wilbert E. Moore's definition of commitment as involving "both the performance of appropriate actions and the acceptance of the normative system that provides the rules." ² Certain writers ³ contend that the psychological component of this definition renders it different from the purely functional concept of discipline but, if we examine an official Soviet definition of labour discipline during the period under review, we will see that the psychological component is taken for granted:

"Labour discipline means a careful and conscientious fulfilment by the worker of all obligations assumed by him as a participant in the socialist construction of the USSR as defined in collective and personal contracts and in the internal rules regulating enterprises." ⁴

So Moore's committed worker will tend to hold down a steady job, attend work regularly, perform effectively in production and generally have a positive attitude towards industrial life. He will behave, in other words, in what this Soviet definition would presume to be a disciplined way.

W.E. Moore, The Impact of Industry, New Jersey, 1965, p.40.

Morris D. Morris, The Emergence of an Industrial Labour Force in India, Berkeley, 1965
Izvestiya,, 30 December 1930.

However, while this concept of growing commitment is useful for studying the modernisation of largely non-industrial societies, when applied to economic development in general it is found to be too rigid. When viewed as a continual process of change, economic development may be seen to generate various problems of adaptation to new and old workers alike. These include problems arising from the introduction of new technologies, forms of work organisation and changes in the value systems and attitudes of the work force. The greater the intensity and scope of these changes, the greater the problems of adaptation. It is highly significant that, whenever these changes are most profound, the same major problems of adaptation occur, namely absenteeism, labour turnover and underutilisation of work time. It is necessary to examine to what extent this is due to a reassessment by employers of desired worker behaviour to meet new conditions, and how much it is due to worker responses to radical changes in their life and work situation.

Such an examination is crucial to an understanding of the period 1928 to 1934 in Soviet industry. For the unprecedented intensity, scale and relative sophistication (vis-a-vis its population) of the Soviet industrialisation drive necessarily ensured that these problems of adaptation would be exacerbated. Moreover, as we shall see, much more than the mere modernisation of an industrially-backward country was involved.

So it becomes immediately apparent that commitment (or discipline), is not a fixed, objective quality that the worker once acquires never to lose. Rather it is a variable, subjective and relative response to economic development characterised by fluctuations in the levels of commitment during periods of radical change. A striking modern example of this is the growing disillusionment among young people with factory work. This, and related problems, are highlighted in the following statement by the industrial relations manager of Fords (USA) in December 1969;⁵

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5 Auto Work and Its Discontents, B.J. Widick (ed), Baltimore, 1976, p.11.
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"For many traditional motivations of job security money rewards and opportunity for personal advancement are proving insufficient. Large numbers of those we have hired find factory life so distasteful they quit after a brief exposure to it. The general increase in real wage levels in our economy has offered more alternatives for satisfying economic needs.

There is also, again especially among the younger employees, a growing reluctance to accept shop discipline. This is not just a shop phenomenon; rather it is a manifestation in our shops of a trend we see all about us among today's youth.

This would lead one to question whether the process of adaptation is ever complete or irreversible and whether turnover, absenteeism etc. are not natural concomitants of the modern industrial production process. In turn, this gives rise to the concept of tolerable levels of turnover absenteeism and utilisation of work time, which cause these phenomena to be perceived as problems only when such levels are exceeded. This, it seems to me, explains the absence of a general concept of labour discipline in the West at times of gradual economic development, and also the increasing volume of literature devoted to these forms of worker behaviour at times of radical change.

On the other hand, if one concurs with Soviet commentators in rejecting the notion of natural concomitants, but rather perceives these phenomena as manifestations of deviant behaviour, then one will not seek their reduction to tolerable levels but their complete eradication. As the worker behaviour demanded by the state (i.e. the employer) in the USSR is a communist attitude to work, until such time as all workers acquire such an attitude labour discipline will continue to be a subject for propaganda and agitation. Indeed, the observance of labour discipline has been a constitutional obligation since 1936. Nonetheless, it is quite apparent that tolerable levels of discipline are accepted, albeit implicitly. Moreover, it may be observed that in the USSR, too, the volume of literature on these problems expands at times of change.

There are, perhaps, three levels on which a comparison could usefully be made: i) the acculturation of non-industrial workers to factory life;

ii) the adaptation of the work force to radical changes in technology, organisation etc.; and iii) general types of worker behaviour in industrial society. This Chapter deals with the first two levels, the third will be covered in Chapter Three.

Of course, the identification of levels for comparison does not tell us anything about the applicability of Western theories to the Soviet drive for labour discipline during the period under review. There is no problem if one shares the view that the industrialisation of the USSR generally conformed to the overall pattern of economic development. Such is the approach of such diverse theorists as the Marxist who contends that the Soviets "deliberately embraced the capitalist mode of production"⁶ and the convergence school which, despite noting the different 'forced draft' nature of Soviet industrialisation, find a place for it nevertheless in the overall scheme for progress to a post-industrial society.⁷

Soviet scholars would contend that such comparisons are not tenable because the Soviet course of development was qualitatively different from that of the West and that, consequently, labour discipline is not the same in the two systems. Thus, due to class antagonisms, discipline is established in the West first and foremost through compulsion whereas in the USSR, due to the absence of antagonistic classes, it is established mainly through conviction.

My approach in this respect is based upon the conclusion that production processes (and, incidentally, the urban environment) are neutral in industrial societies insofar as they produce the same kinds of tensions for everybody: i.e. the interests of the individual have to be reconciled with the interests of production. The variable element is the ability to accommodate and manage this tension. Viewed thus, the Soviet system, through its educational and character-forming policies, its ideological and patriotic rationalisations and so on, can at best merely reduce the impact of this tension, perhaps even to the extent of rendering it latent. Nevertheless, it seems clear that Soviet workers

6 Harry Braverman, Labour and Monopoly Capital - the Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century, New York, 1974, p.23.

7 Clark Kerr et al, *Industrialism and Industrial Men*, London, 1973,p.72

are not always able to manage this tension and continue, on occasions, to manifest this by putting their own immediate interests before those of production. Such manifestations frequently take the form of turnover absenteeism and poor utilisation of work time. Thus, even if factors facilitating tension management are different (and there is little evidence to support this) the actual process would appear to be the same. On that basis the grounds for comparison between Western and Soviet forms of worker behaviour may be seen to exist.

Despite the divergence of views on the comparability of Soviet and Western concepts of labour discipline, there does exist a measure of agreement on certain points. For example, the usefulness of Western studies of turnover has been cautiously noted in Soviet works both in the period under discussion⁸ and in contemporary tracts.⁹ Furthermore, it is agreed that discipline is not an inborn quality and that, as a consequence, workers must acquire it. More significantly, notions that low levels of discipline are necessarily manifestations of irrational behaviour have been questioned. Thus a Soviet labour expert recently wrote "I think it would be unwise to attribute all reasons for indiscipline...to purely subjective factors alone (to the personal qualities of this or that person, to remnants of out-dated morality or the influence of bourgeois ideology)."¹⁰ She goes on to claim that contradictions exist between the socio-economic and technical-organisational content of work and that dissatisfaction with the latter, combined with insufficiently high level of individual consciousness, leads to violation of discipline.

Similarly, turnover is no longer regarded always as a politico-economic phenomenon (as under Stalin), but rather as a form of worker behaviour in the process of production that stems from the worker's requirements, interests and motives.¹¹ Predictably, Soviet analysts have yet to go as far in this as their East European colleagues. A recent article by a Hungarian labour expert, for example, actually advocated the encouragement of turnover in certain conditions.¹²

8 S. Kheinman, 'O tekuchesti rabocheho sostava promyshlennosti' in Puti industrializatsii, 1929, nos. 13-14, p.42.

9 E.G. Antosenkov and Z.V. Kuprianova, Tendentsii v tekuchesti raboch-
ikh kadrov, Novosibirsk, 1977, p.40.

10 I.I. Changli, Trud- sotsiologicheskie aspekty teorii i metodologii issledovaniya, Moscow, 1973, p.444.

11 Antosenkov and Kuprianova, op. cit., pp.25-26; D.P. Kaidalov and E.I. Suimenko, Aktual'nye problemy sotsiologii truda, Moscow, 1974, p.83.

12 L. Koszegi, 'Labour Turnover and Employment Structure in European Socialist Countries', International Labour Review, vol.117,no.2,May-June 1978,p.313.

Of course, such sociological investigations are restricted as yet to contemporary Soviet society, but there seems no reason why the same methods cannot be applied to the period under review in order to demonstrate the utility of a comparative approach. It is to be hoped that this will provide an alternative to what might be termed the 'humanist' approach to Soviet studies, whereby aspects of Soviet society are analysed only in relation to historically contemporary or, even worse, present day Western societies. This has led many observers to perceive only that which is brutal and coercive in the transformation of Soviet society, emphasising such elements of compulsion as forced labour and terror.¹³ An example of this was provided by a Polish visitor to the Soviet Union in 1932 who wrote:

"Today the whole world is sick but the Western crises and depression are rather like suffering in one's own bed, with a cup of tea at one's elbow and an old novel under the pillow, whereas in Russia the patient is lying on the operating table and undergoing surgical treatment without anaesthetics." 14

Apart from grossly misrepresenting the real condition of millions of working-class people in the West at this time, the writer has clearly failed to recognise that the Soviet Union was experiencing, virtually simultaneously, not only the effects of world depression, but also the impact of two industrial revolutions rolled into one: i) the acculturation of a largely non-industrial work force and ii) the introduction of mass technology and scientific management. History provides ample evidence that the former is characterised by elements of brutality and coercion, and the latter by great social tensions. Given that such transformations inevitably appear to be painful processes, it could at least be argued that a short, sharp pain is preferable to a long drawn out one!

Another well-worn approach I would like to question is that which confines analysis to the Russian or Soviet environment, seeking to attribute, for example, the Russian worker's lack of discipline and lethargy to the long Russian winter or other traits of the national character. There is no evidence, for example, that Russian workers that have emigrated to North America are any less industrious than any others

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13 The best known examples are Solomon S. Schwarz, Labor in the Soviet Union, New York, 1952 and Robert Conquest, Industrial Workers in the USSR, London, 1967.

14 Antoni Slonimski, 'Moja Podroz do Rusgi', Warsaw, 1932, quoted in The Slavonic Review, vol.11, no.33, April 1933, p.725.

It is often assumed mistakenly that the process of acculturation is restricted to 'classical' industrial revolutions. Were this to be so we would be obliged to look at the period of considerable industrial expansion in Russia around the turn of the century, rather than to the years from 1928 to 1934. Such an approach, however, is to reduce each country to just one industrial revolution, to characterise economic development as long periods of static interrupted by giant leaps forward from time to time, rather than as a dynamic process of constant change, punctuated by periods of more intensive and far reaching innovation. In other words, a society can and does have more than one industrial revolution (in Russia, for example, under Peter the Great and Count Witte, in the USSR under Stalin and, arguably, Gorbachev).

No significant redistribution of the population took place during Russia's 'classical' revolution, which was curtailed by war and revolution. Of those that did switch to industry, many retained their links with the countryside. Thus, as late as 1902, 70 per cent of all industrial workers lived outside the large towns.

15 G.V. Rimlinger, 'The Expansion of the Labour Market in Capitalist Russia, 1861-1917' in Journal of Economic History, vol.21, no.1, March 1961, p.211.

Inevitably industrialisation is advocated by the few and imposed upon the many. This is because the initial impetus for industrialisation occurs at a time when two more or less incompatible cultures clash. The old pre-industrial will tend to sanction modes of behaviour, customs and attitudes that are perceived as running counter to the new culture of industrialism. Thus, when it is claimed that industrialisation needs an ideology and an ethic¹⁷, it should not necessarily be assumed that these are foisted upon an unwilling populace by a conspiratorial group of politicians and industrialists. The ideology and ethic will pre-date industrialisation. The industrialising elite will thus perceive themselves to be pioneers and crusaders with a self-righteous belief in their prescriptive policies for the rest of society. Furthermore, the population at large will be more or less receptive to the ethic that is central to the ideology. All ideologies of industrialisation, be they Methodist, Stalinist or nationalist, have embodied the notions that progress is desirable and positive and that self-discipline and self-improvement are virtues. If these values are inherent in the pre-industrial culture, as among the farmers of Japan, then the transition to the new industrial culture will be relatively easy. If, on the other hand, the old culture sanctions what are perceived by the industrialising elite to be wasteful, immoral and irrational modes of behaviour, then the old culture will have to be extirpated and replaced throughout society by a new culture that promotes progress.

16 The urban population rose from 28.4 million (18.5 per cent) by the end of 1928 to 39.1 million (23.7 per cent) by the end of 1932, I. Berlin and Yu, Mebel' 'Strukturnye sdvigi v naselenii i proletariate' in Voprosy truda, 1932, nos 11-12, p.18.

17 Kerr et al, op. cit., p.53.

the discipline. Similarly, factories were not built for the purpose of instilling discipline, but for the maximisation of income through the optimum utilisation of capital which, in turn, demanded a regular and reliable work force. After all, machines and workshops had existed long before the emergence of the factory system. In the pre-industrial culture, however, operatives exercised a degree of control over the pace and intensity of their work, these tending to be prescribed by the well-integrated social system in which they lived. In such systems subsistence, rather than maximisation of income was the prime consideration.

I agree with the view that it is misleading to talk about an idyllic, pastoral,
pre-industrial 'Golden Age' ¹⁸ for the work of both peasant and artisan was hard
and monotonous. It was rendered more or less tolerable, nonetheless, by the
ability to vary the pace and intensity of work. An eminent scholar of the
industrial revolution in England has described this well: ¹⁹

"The working pattern was one of alternate bouts of intense labour and of idleness wherever men were in control of their working lives."

He goes on to suggest that this might represent a natural human work rhythm. Viewed thus, such phenomena as high absentee rates after pay days and rest days, drinking sprees on religious holidays, poor time keeping, fighting and outbursts of violence directed at management and machines were characteristic of the early years of most industrialisation drives, including that of the Soviet Union.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50 51 52 53 54 55 56 57 58 59 60 61 62 63 64 65 66 67 68 69 70 71 72 73 74 75 76 77 78 79 80 81 82 83 84 85 86 87 88 89 90 91 92 93 94 95 96 97 98 99 100

- 18 R. Blauner, 'Work Satisfaction and Industrial Trends in Modern Society', in Problems of Modern Society, P. Worsley (ed.), London, 1973, p.117.
- 19 E.P. Thompson, 'Time, ~~Work-~~Discipline and Industrial Capitalism' in Past and Present, no.38, December 1967, pp. 73-74.
- 20 G. Dukor, 'Sebestoimost', proizvoditel'nost' i trudovaya ditsiplina' in Bol'shevik, 1929, no.7, p. 32.

These were manifestations not of 'low' or 'backward' culture, as was invariably claimed by the industrialisers, but of cultural differences. However, insofar as such phenomena were held to be incompatible with the interests of the industrialisers the latter were obliged to launch a moral attack on the entire culture that spawned and legitimised such modes of behaviour. The banning of traditional sports, feasts and customs, the moral condemnation of habits integral to the old culture and the advocacy of thrift, sobriety and industry seem to have accompanied all industrialisation drives, usually taking the form of a moral crusade (presented in the Soviet Union as the 'sharpening of the class struggle'). As it was the peasantry that best typified the old way of life, it was they that were usually scapegoated for the 'low' culture of the emergent work force, although there is evidence to suggest that the artisan class was at least as guilty in this respect.

Inevitably, the process of adapting to the new culture and evolving new forms of effective human organisation will tend to lag behind the introduction of new technology and the consequent demands for tighter discipline made of the workers. For example, the concept of the maximisation of income may not have been sufficiently inculcated among the non-industrial work force to encourage peasants and artisans to enter the expanding factories for economic reward. However, the ethic of self-improvement that is the impetus behind industrial expansion, will be at work simultaneously in agriculture and the handicraft industries, threatening their independence, increasing mobility (a prerequisite of any industrialisation drive) and encouraging the rural population to seek alternative means of subsistence. Where economic incentive and pressure prove insufficiently effective, physical compulsion will tend to be employed, the coercion of peasant labourers being the rule rather than the exception during industrialisation drives.

21 Compare, for example, the 'wine, women and gambling' life-style of Japanese artisans with the concepts of kokku-benrei (work and study hard) and kinku-chochiku (diligence and thrift) valued by farmers, Japanese Industrialisation and its Social Consequences, Berkeley, 1976, pp.23-24, 40.

22 W F Moore. Industrialisation and Labor, New York, 1951, p.65.

Whereas industrialisation represents for the politician and industrialist a political and economic task, the adaptation by the work force to industrial society represents a social process. Thus the attainment of political and economic objectives allow^s politicians and industrialists to discount the unavoidable high social costs of industrialisation by placing blame on the backwardness of the workers. On the other hand, the brutality, injustice and coercion, as well as the general suffering of the population that usually accompanies the initial stages of industrialisation drives, cause social historians to question the human cost.

This has considerable repercussions in applying Moore's concept of growing labour commitment, as elaborated by Clark Kerr and his associates. In common with most students of industrialising societies they concentrate almost exclusively on the adaptation of the peasant to industry, viewing the break of links with agriculture as the decisive step along the road to becoming a committed worker. A non-committed worker is thus one who enters industry for a fixed period aiming to earn a certain sum in order to return to agriculture when this has been achieved (the so called 'target' workers in the South African mines fall into this category). The next stage is the seasonal worker who regularly supplements his or her income from agriculture with industrial earnings. Clearly, this category of worker is more likely to be susceptible to the industrial culture and more responsive to the economic rewards of factory work, particularly if subsistence on the land is threatened. Many will tend to settle in the towns, thus generally committing themselves to the urban way of life and weakening their links with the countryside.

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23 See note 1 in this Chapter. The author emphasises the fact that the peasantry is not the sole source of new workers. In the Soviet experience this is important as other occupational groups formed a sizeable minority of the new recruits. Thus, of 12.5 million new workers during the First Five-Year Plan, 8.5 million were from the countryside, and 4 million from the towns (including 1.7 million youngsters, 1.4 million adult women 0.4 artisans and 0.5 million students). A.M. Panfilova, Formirovanie rabocheho klassa SSSR v gody pervoi pyatiletki, Moscow, 1964, p. 122.

At this stage the peasant has not yet chosen or settled into a specific job, trade or area. Only when this happens will he or she become a fully committed worker.

In the early stages of industrialisation the 'target' and generally committed workers will predominate, overall levels of commitment will be low and this will be manifested in high rates of turnover and absenteeism. As industrialisation progresses such behaviour will become less and less consistent with the demands of the industrialisers who will introduce a system of incentives and sanctions designed to reduce these rates. Providing that the appropriate system is introduced the worker, becoming more responsive to incentives and sanctions, will tend to adapt his or her behaviour to the system and rates of turnover and absenteeism will fall. Almost by definition, a committed work force presents no major problems of labour discipline. The biographies and memoirs of many of the leading shock workers of the early five-year plans testify that a similar process occurred in the Soviet Union during this period.

However, this view of commitment has two basic flaws. First, it has no place for the new workers of non-rural background. These, it seems to me, do not remain uncommitted due to any links with the land, but because they ^{had} alternative means of subsistence and, consequently, a reduced dependence upon wage-earning. The second major criticism of the commitment theory is that it fails to explain how and why turnover and absentee rates, purportedly the major indicators of commitment, tend to rise when new technologies and organisational methods are introduced or when attitudes amongst the work force change.

The key concept, it seems to me, is security. In the pre-industrial society, this resided in one's ability to perpetuate subsistence, in extended families and tight-knit neighbourhood groups in one's native region. Thus for many housewives

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25 See, for example, A.K. Busygin, *Zhizn' moyai moikh druzyei*, M., 1939.

and children of workers there was little incentive to work for wages until pressure on the family budget increased (either through rising levels of consumption or falling standards of living). Similarly, young people have security in their youth and vigour, their potential and mobility and have a tendency to 'shop around' and see a little of life before committing themselves to a specific career.

Viewed from this perspective, links with the land may be seen as a kind of safety-net in times of hardship in industry. This was utilised by the Soviet working class in the years prior to 'forced' **industrialisation**, in both the flight back to the land during War Communism and by the traditional land-holdings of the predominately **hereditary**, but relatively low-paid industrial workers of the Urals. Once this safety-net was removed (in the Soviet case by the decrees forbidding workers to return to collective farms before the expiry of their work contracts) ²⁶ the dependence on wage-earning was greatly increased and the general levels of commitment raised. Specific, or full, commitment can only be ensured when opportunities for alternative employment within industry are cut to a minimum, this being achieved in the Soviet Union only after a series of decrees restricting mobility and introducing internal passports.

I propose that we substitute commitment with the concept of conscious discipline, by which I mean a conscious acceptance of elaborated and judicially-embodied rules. Clearly, during industrialisation drives, when traditions are being eliminated and the rules are being changed, very few workers will immediately acquire such a conscious discipline. What is more, subsequent radical changes in the work situation will cause further changes in the rules, so that, depending upon the worker's attitude to these changes, further periods of adaptation will be required to maintain the desired levels of discipline.

But if the acquisition of conscious discipline takes time and the new methods of production demand new levels of discipline immediately, what other short term options are available to the industrialisers?

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26 Sovnarkom and TsIK SSSR decree of 17 March 1933, Izvestiya, 18 March 1933; Narkomyust SSSR decree of 14 August 1933, Izvestiya, 15 August 1933.

The answer, perhaps, lies in two other forms of discipline: coercive (under which one is obliged to perform appropriate actions for fear of extreme negative sanctions) and self-discipline (by which one unilaterally opts to perform such actions because they are consistent with convictions held). The respective means for implementing these forms of discipline are coercion and ideological pressure, which we have seen to be characteristic features of most industrialisation drives. However, as coercive discipline can be effective only as a transitional measure and self-discipline is a quality characteristic of the few, the aim will nonetheless be to create eventually a conscious discipline (i.e. the will to work in the desired manner).

This is why the initial stage of an industrialisation drive tends to be characterised by efforts to cultivate among the work force the will to work in the appropriate manner. This is usually achieved by sanctions, but also through utilising incentives both moral and material incentives. As the workers learn to respond to these incentives their behaviour will be modified accordingly and a conscious discipline is gradually acquired. To the degree that this process advances, incentive measures will tend to increase while measures of coercion will be applied only at those manifestly lacking in discipline. As for those with self-discipline, the psychological benefits that accrue with acting according to one's beliefs will be bolstered by material benefits earned through working in the appropriate manner. In this way, even their discipline will become conscious and self-discipline will only be called upon in subsequent periods of radical change.

If we apply this approach to the first stage of Soviet industrialisation (from 1929 to the beginning of 1931) we can see that there was an attempt to foster a general will to work in 'the Bol'shevik manner'. During the second stage, from early 1931 until 1934, the authorities sought to channel the energy thus generated into the appropriate channels. This helps explain why socialist competition was so vigorously promoted during the first stage as a means of destroying old work practices and fashioning new ones. Only once it had become more or

less accepted and institutionalised could attention be switched to increasing quality of output and reducing costs. This is borne out by the fact that during the initial stage the percentage of workers competing rose from virtually nil to 65.5, while in the second phase it rose by only another 7.9 per cent to 73.4 per cent.²⁷ Nonetheless, the results of competition, in terms of cost reduction, productivity and quality were more impressive in the second stage than in the first.

There are interesting parallels to be drawn in the English experience both in the attempt to establish the will to work and in the means employed to achieve this: 28

"This preoccupation (for moral reform) might seem to today's observer to be both impertinent and irrelevant to the worker's performance, but in fact it was critical, for unless the workmen wished to become 'respectable' in the correct sense, none of the other incentives would bite. Such approbrious terms as 'idle' or 'dissolute' should be taken to mean strictly that the worker was indifferent to the employers' deterrents and incentives. According to contemporaries 'it was the irrationality of the poor, quite as much as their irreligion, that was distressing. They took no thought of the morrow... the workers were by nature indolent, improvident and self-indulgent!'"

Indeed, even the concept of competition had its precedent in the English industrial revolution. Such enlightened early industrialists as Arkwright, Marshall and Owen all introduced embryonic forms of competition in their enterprises,²⁹ seeking to foster a new attitude to work. Despite some initial successes such movements were short-lived, not least because they ran counter to the predominant belief of the ruling class that workers were poor through their own inadequacies.

Clearly, a totally-different attitude to the workers existed in the Soviet Union so one might expect incentive measures to be adopted more readily than in the English case. In the latter, coercive methods were

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27 A. Devyakovich, 'Sotssorevnovanie i udarnichestvo' in Voprosy profdvizheniya, 1934, no.5, p.83.

28 Sidney Pollard, 'Factory Discipline in the Industrial Revolution',
in *The Economic History Review*, vol.16, no.2, 1963, p.269.

29 *ibid.*, pp.266-267.

very prominent, especially in regard to child labour,³⁰ and these still represent the chief means of achieving discipline in developing countries.³¹

With the notable exception of comrades' courts, many of the coercive measures that were applied by the Soviet authorities had precedents in earlier industrialisation drives, including self-indentures, passes stating that the worker had left his last place of employment with management permission, eviction from company-owned dwellings etc.³² In most cases they were only marginally effective due to labour shortages.

Thus the Soviet worker's attitude of nazhmut - uidu (if they pressure me, I'll quit) obliged the management to use coercive measures sparingly and selectively, especially given the acute shortage of skilled cadres. It was only when the authorities were able to bring pressure to bear on the managers to carry out coercive measures that the intended effect was achieved.

The most prominent forms of coercion applied during the Soviet industrialisation drive were the restrictions placed upon the freedom of movement (the turnover decrees) and the harsh sanctions imposed on absenteeism. Such a policy was justified at the time by the 'sharpening of the class struggle' theory. This ascribed a level of self-discipline to the workers that the existing work force clearly did not possess. By identifying those few who behaved in the ascribed manner as 'genuine' workers, coercive measures could legitimately be applied to those who did not.

If in the West, conscious discipline was inculcated only after a long hard and sometimes brutal struggle during which sufficient numbers of workers accepted to a greater or lesser degree the bourgeois values of their employers, in the Soviet Union a shorter and more intensive struggle achieved similar results insofar as ascribed working class virtues propagated by the employers (i.e. the Soviet state) came to be accepted as more or less legitimate by sufficient numbers of Soviet workers.

30 *ibid.* p. 263.

31 See, for example, F.H. Harbison and I.A. Ibrahim, 'Some Labor Problems of Industrialisation in Egypt' in The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, vol.35, May 1956, p.119.

32 For comrades' courts, see Chapter Four; for passes, see Daniel T. Rodgers, 'Tradition, Modernity and the American Industrial Worker: Reflections and Critique', The Journal of Interdisciplinary History, vol. VII, no.4, Spring 1977, p.109.

Soviet scholars might well claim that, on the eve of industrialisation, there already existed a large nucleus of second and third generation industrial workers who passed on their conscious discipline to the new workers. However, this presupposes that the levels of discipline existing in 1928 were consistent with the demands of 'forced' industrialisation. In fact, there seems to be inconsistencies between the ascribed modes of behaviour of the 'cadre' workers and their actual behaviour. This inconsistency was enshrined in the Labour Code of 1922, which afforded the workers unprecedented degrees of security (which often has a negative effect on discipline levels) and relied upon them to respond in the desired manner. To some extent there was a favourable response, absentee rates falling from an average of 24.8 days per worker in 1919/1920 to 5.72 days in 1928.³³ However, even this impressive reduction was considered insufficient, especially once the rationalisation drive had commenced in March 1927.

Similarly, it was specifically the conscious discipline that had evolved by 1928 that was the target of attack of socialist competition, an attack spearheaded by self-disciplined Komsomol youngsters. Generally speaking, cadre workers only joined this movement once considerable ideological and moral pressure had been brought to bear and opposition to the Komsomol initiative had been proscribed.

Certainly, both Western and Soviet observers agreed that the levels of labour discipline existing in 1928 were not adequate for the requirements of industrialisation. In March 1929, Georgii Malenkov, in noting significant falls in the levels of discipline in Soviet factories commented that Lenin's criticism that the Russian was a poor worker in comparison with workers of the leading nations "remains valid to this day in spite of the enormous achievements in this respect since then." 34

An American consultant observed "the lack of discipline which is so noticeable in Russian industry is not due...to any lack of rules and regulations, or to their non-enforcement: it is an inner self-discipline that is wanting." ³⁵ His 'inner self-discipline' (i.e. an internalisation of the rules and appropriate modes of behaviour) corresponds to our

33 V.Il'inskii, 'Rabochii god v fabrichno-zavodskoi promyshlennosti SSSR', in Statisticheskoe obozrenie, 1929, no.2, p.35: Trud v SSSR: statisticheskii spravochnik, Moscow, 1936, p. 96.

34 G. Malenkov, 'Povyshenie proizvoditel'nosti truda i zadachi nizovoi partiinoi raboty' in Bol'shevik, 1929, no.6, p.69.

35 Joseph Freeman, The Soviet Worker, London, 1932, p.95.

concept of conscious discipline.

Thus it would appear that, despite the presence of a large proportion of cadre workers, discipline was low. Yet this is not inconsistent with the experience of other countries. In India, for example, at roughly the same time, a very high proportion of operatives had worked in the same textile enterprise for five years or more and yet "discipline at the work place was fundamentally lax and ramshackle" ³⁶. Moreover in Japan, despite the widespread institution of shushin-koyo (lifetime employment with one firm) it is claimed that "the formation of a disciplined and permanent working class was not achieved at least until the 1930's" ³⁷, further indication that security of employment is not necessarily conducive to the improvement of discipline.

However, the existence of large numbers of cadre workers clearly has some advantages. For example, the ethic of modernisation and progress will tend to be stronger amongst them than in the peasantry even though the cultural conflicts that accompany industrialisation will tend to split the working class itself into 'modernist' and 'traditionalist' factions.³⁸ The former's attitude to work and the new forms of organisation will more closely resemble that of the employer than that of the traditionalist colleague.

Several factors lead to the conclusion that there existed a relatively high proportion of 'modernisers' during the Soviet industrialisation drive:

- i) the artificial retarding of economic development, education and urbanisation due to the Tsarist autocracy, war and revolution;
- ii) the consequent delay in the Soviet industrialisation drive combined with the example of a developed West that fostered notions of 'catch up and surpass';
- iii) the Marxist-Leninist ideological commitment to industrialisation, modernisation and progress;
- iv) an ideology that accorded high status to workers in the new industrial society compared to the low status they had hitherto enjoyed;
- v) the relative weakness of craft traditions and trade unions that could perpetuate, in an organised way, traditions, advantages etc

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36 Morris D. Morris, *op. cit.*, pp. 88-90, 117.

37 Japanese Industrialisation, pp.36,62.

38 A. Dawley and P. Faler, 'Working-class Culture and Politics in the Industrial Revolution - Sources of Loyalty and Rebellion', in Journal of Social History, vol.9, no.4, Summer 1976, pp.466-480.

industrialisation, both being eminently suitable for a work force with a largely non-industrial background. We shall examine the impact of piece-rates in Chapter Seven, suffice it to point out that it has been recognised that "work is always task-orientated in non-industrial societies...and...it may be appropriate to tie wages to tasks and not directly to time in newly-developing areas."⁴⁰ Piece work not only provides the best method of task-related payment, but also it represents "a moral force which corresponds to the machine as a physical force"⁴¹ (i.e. it demands discipline insofar as it is geared to the maximisation of income).

The importance of the delegation of responsibility to the first-line supervisor was that it introduced the new worker to a small group discipline which he could relate to his experience in the pre-industrial culture. Thus the Russian starosta (and subsequently the brigadir) had counterparts in the American gang boss, the Japanese oyakota and the Indian sirdar.

Given the intensity of the Soviet industrialisation drive, such a 'divide and rule' policy was arguably more effective than the various forms of compulsion used elsewhere, particularly as the incentive scheme which accompanied its introduction was tailored specifically to appeal to the individualistic and materialistic aspirations of the former peasants. The experienced, self-disciplined workers were more inclined towards collective forms of work and pay in the production communes, which the peasants tended to join only when they perceived their income might rise significantly. The communes provide evidence that worker-inspired forms of work organisation tend to be collective, while management initiatives tend to be directed at more individualistic forms

Thus it may be seen, that the distinctive feature of the Soviet experience as far as the new worker was concerned was the unprecedented pace at which he or she was obliged to adapt to industrial culture. In most other respects, the process of acculturation fitted into the general pattern of earlier and subsequent industrialisation drives.

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40 E.P. Thompson, op. cit., p.91.

41 Herbert C. Gutman, 'Work Culture and Society in Industrializing America. 1815-1919', The American Historical Review, vol.78, no.3, June 1973, p. 565.

The Introduction of Scientific Management

If the initial entry of the new worker into the factory gave rise to profound problems, then the introduction of American efficiency systems came as no less a shock. In the latter case, however, the new worker was not necessarily at a disadvantage in comparison with the experienced industrial worker, for the entire work force was required to adapt. As an observer of this process in Western Europe observed:

"for those with lengthy factory experience the nature of work altered more dramatically during the decades around the turning of the century than at any point since the installation of the factories themselves."

As we have seen, in the early industrial revolutions it was often the old-established workers who were least inclined to observe the new discipline,⁴³ while the first-generation workers would often labour considerably harder than the norm.⁴⁴ During this subsequent process of transformation, the well-developed conscious discipline of the older workers would sometimes prove a bigger barrier to change than the relatively inexperienced newcomers. As was observed in America: ⁴⁵

"There is no question that, in all the industries faced with rapid conversion, the attitude of the established workers was suspicious if not actively hostile - and because of the new scope of technological change this involved a large minority of the whole labor force."

Clearly, the time-lag in Western Europe and America between the initial industrialisation drive and the introduction of the new techniques of scientific management was considerable, the impetus for the latter changes being prompted by the increasing international competition between industrialised countries at the end of the nineteenth century. The new methods were to be applied, therefore, to a committed work force, receptive both to the new norms of discipline required as well as to the new incentive systems that accompanied them. In the Soviet

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42 Peter Stearns, Lives of Labour - Work in a Maturing Industrial Society, London, 1975, p.4.

43 Economic History Review, vol.16, no.2, 1963, p.255 (Sidney Pollard)

44 The Journal of Interdisciplinary History, vol.VII, no.4, Spring 1977
p.667 (Daniel T. Rodgers).

45 Peter Stearns, *op. cit.*, p.129.

Union, on the other hand, the introduction of the new techniques coincided roughly with the massive expansion of the work force during the industrialisation drive, with the result that traditional forms of factory work and resistance to changes were relatively insignificant. Moreover, promotion into the rapidly expanding management apparatus drew the most experienced workers off the shop floor.

Similarly, the successful introduction of the new techniques required that the ethic of modernisation and progress be strong amongst the work force. For obvious reasons, this was more likely to occur with a younger labour force. In Germany, for example, which had a high proportion of young workers, the adaptation was much smoother than in England, where the older, highly-skilled work force put up more resistance. In Western Europe as a whole, the typical reaction to the new production processes was one of "grumbling acceptance" ⁴⁶

The Soviet work force was relatively young at the outset of the industrialisation drive and became younger as the First Five-Year Plan progressed, thanks to the influx of young recruits. The average age of workers at the Serp i Molot metalworks in Moscow, for example, fell from 31.8 years in 1929 to 27.4 years in 1932.⁴⁷ Thus, with a youthful work force, largely unhampered by deeply-ingrained 'customs and practices', relatively receptive to payment-by-results and generally committed to diminishing the West's technological lead, the USSR had several factors that might facilitate the introduction of scientific management into industry. However, until the existing labour organisations and structures were rendered impotent, the newcomers could and did utilise such traditional forms of protest as strikes and go-slows.

The generally-accepted 'father' of scientific management was F.W. Taylor, who elaborated and applied his theories to American industry

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46 Peter Stearns, *op. cit.*, pp. 134, 138-139.

47 Profsoyuznaya perepis' 1932-1933gg, Moscow, 1934, n 15.

around the turn of the century. The basic principle underlying his methods was the separation of planning from the execution of the work, thus giving management exclusive responsibility for the former and control over the latter. The target of his attack was worker control over the production process, usually manifested in customs and practices which he termed 'soldiering'. This, he claimed, was to blame for the "enormous difference between the amount of work which a first-class man can do under favourable circumstances and the work which is actually done by the average man."⁴⁸ Perceiving that both management and workers were losers from the existing system, he sought to devise a system under which both would gain, the former through reduced production costs and the latter through increased earnings.

To achieve this he advocated that work processes be mechanised, simplified and standardised as far as possible, that the optimum time and rate for each job be calculated and that an incentive system be introduced that would encourage the worker to fully utilise work time. For every job there was one best way and it was the management, not the worker, that determined this. Thus: ⁴⁹

"It is only by enforced standardisation of methods, enforced adoption of the best implements and working conditions, and enforced cooperation that this faster work can be assured."

Management was to take sole responsibility for the selection, training, organisation, deployment and disciplining of the work force, the worker's only function being to execute simple, repetitive operations in a machine-intensive process. The symbol of this new process was the stop watch, and the logical conclusion - the assembly line. Prior to World War I time-and-motion studies had swept through Western industry and, by 1913, Henry Ford had introduced the first assembly line.

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48 F.W. Taylor, 'Shop Management' in Scientific Management, New York, 1947, p.24.

49 F.W. Taylor, 'Principles of Scientific Management' in *ibid.*, p.83.

It was not so much the principle underlying Taylor's theory that generated worker opposition as the subsequent rate-cuts that came to be associated with time-studies (in this respect the Soviet worker's attitude to new technologies and methods was similarly soured).⁵⁰

Not suprisingly, such a management theory par excellence soon won the admiration of Lenin and several of his supporters in the Bolshevik leadership, despite reservations about the negative aspects of scientific management as practised under capitalism. However, there was no opportunity to introduce it during his lifetime although interest in Taylor's work remained high even after his death. It was only when Stalin had launched a rationalisation drive in 1927 that elements of scientific management began to appear in Soviet industry and it was not until he had launched the socialist offensive, curbed trade union autonomy, strengthened the principle of one-man management and encouraged the spread of socialist competition that the situation was favourable for the introduction of new technologies and time-and-motion studies on a wide scale.

Clearly, a fundamental difference existed between Taylor's and Lenin's estimation of the working man. Taylor perceived the ideal worker in his system to be the strong, docile, obedient, but unthinking Schmidt (who in the celebrated experiment shifted 47 tons of pig iron in one shift instead of the normal 12½ tons).⁵¹ But for scientific management, Taylor claimed, Schmidt would have worn himself out by midday.⁵² In the same vein, Henry Ford, the most ardent practitioner of Taylor's system observed that "the assembly line is a haven for those who haven't got the brains to do anything else."⁵³

The possibility that the worker might have a mental input into his work was not entertained. In the Soviet Union on the other hand, the worker was actively encouraged to study techniques, make rationalisation suggestions and work on inventions. This not only saved the Soviet

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50 Alan Aldridge, Power, Authority and Restrictive Practices, Oxford, 1976, p. 30.

51 F.W. Taylor, 'Principles...', in *op. cit.*, pp.43-47.

52 *ibid.*, p.59.

53 Auto Work, p.67.

economy millions of roubles, but also provided the Soviet worker with greater job satisfaction, extra income, elevated social status and improved prospects of promotion from the shop floor. Nonetheless, there is more than a hint of Schmidt in some of the super-heroes of the shock construction sites during the first five-year plans.

More importantly, Taylor totally rejected the concept of cooperative work because "no form of cooperation has yet been devised in which each individual is allowed free scope for his personal ambitions. Personal ambition always has been and will remain a more powerful incentive to exertion than a desire for the general welfare."⁵⁴ Not that all labour experts in the West agreed with him, for subsequent research determined that cooperation within work groups and competition between them generally results in higher productivity.⁵⁵

Soviet industry appeared to have developed a means of incorporating all of these characteristics in the cost accounting brigades (see Chapter Seven). These were set group targets but its members were paid by individual results. Furthermore, by retaining the right to appoint the brigade leader, management ensured control over the workers, while delegating responsibility for plan fulfilment, labour discipline and work distribution.

Thus, in the two most widely-noted defects in scientific management: the degradation of the worker and the loss of control by the operative over the work process, the Soviet employee would appear to have fared better than his Western counterpart in the former, while unprotected by independent trade unions, considerably worse in the latter, although the appalling living and working conditions of many Soviet workers were degrading in themselves.

Moreover, there were significant differences in the incentive systems introduced by Taylor, on the one hand, and Stalin, on the other, most notably in the essentially regressive nature of Taylor's piece rates and the ostensibly progressive rates in the Soviet system.

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54 F.W. Taylor, 'Shop Management', in op. cit., p.37.

55 Victor H. Vroom, *Work and Motivation*, New York, 1964, p.230.

Here distinctions must be drawn between theory and practice. For example, Taylor only advocated the use of wage deductions as a disciplinary measure and even suggested that the money accruing from this should be returned to the workers in the form of mutual benefit funds etc. Moreover, he explicitly rejected the Towne-Halsey plan which fixed norms on the work of the fastest worker.⁵⁶ Taylor's preference was to base norms on the work of a first-class man and that he should be encouraged for breaking ranks.⁵⁷ The real loser under this system was "the man who can work hard and who does not" for he "has no place in scientific management"⁵⁸.

As regards the Soviet claim that their piece-rate system protected the earnings of the average worker, here too some qualification is required. Periodic rate cuts and norm revisions, justified and in many cases initiated by the most productive workers, had the effect of obliging the average worker to intensify his work in order to retain his level of earnings. In the final analysis, the opinion expressed by a leading official of the Soviet trade union movement is not that different from Taylor's conclusion:

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"only the worker who fulfils and overfulfils the plan in a Bolshevik manner is entitled to be provided for and have his material well-being improved by the workers' state."

The relative ease with which piece rates were introduced into Soviet industry is probably explained by the weakness of the trade unions and the high proportion of new workers in the work force. For, in Western countries, it would appear to have been the more militant, unionised groups of cadre workers that were most opposed to their introduction and the new, young and lower-skilled that most favoured them, the latter being less sensitive to the exploitative nature of piece rates and lacking the working class solidarity that has traditionally opposed their introduction.

[illegible]

56 F.W. Taylor, 'Shop Management', in op. cit., pp. 38-39, 197.

57 *ibid.*, pp. 51, 57-58.

58 ibid., p.81.

59 Trud, 2 January 1933.

This is not to say that cadre workers were opposed as individuals to piece rates. They were preferable, for example, to constant close supervision and allowed a modicum of control over the pace and intensity of work and, most importantly, their application almost invariably led to immediate increases in earnings. Thus in American industry at end of the last century the Machinists' Union was bitterly opposed to piece rates while many machinists were actively in favour of them.⁶⁰

Whatever the lure of economic rewards, there can be little doubt that the introduction of piece rates and the attendant speed ups caused the situation on the shop floor to deteriorate. This, in turn, led to sharp rises in absentee and turnover rates. At the beginning of the twentieth century, absentee rates rose to 6-10 per cent in German and American industry,⁶¹ while turnover rates in French, German and American industry averaged around one hundred per cent per annum.⁶²

Despite the economic rewards offered in factories utilising new technologies, a high proportion of new workers would leave after the briefest exposure to the assembly line, while many cadre workers would seek refuge in plants still using the old techniques. For these reasons turnover at the Ford plant reached 380 per cent in 1913, the year that the conveyor belt was introduced.⁶³

A feature of labour turnover during periods of new technology is the high level of skilled workers on the move. The rapid expansion of complex technologies creates a shortage of skilled workers and the opportunity for upward mobility increases. In German metal and engineering industries in the first decade of the twentieth century, skilled turnover rates were actually higher than unskilled.⁶⁴ As we shall see, similar trends were to be observed in Soviet factories during the period under review.

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60 Irwin Yellowitz, Industrialization and the American Labor Movement,
New York, 1977, p. 85.

61 Peter Stearns, op. cit., p.242; The Journal of Interdisciplinary History, vol VII, no.4, Spring 1977, p.662 (Daniel T. Rodgers).

62 ibid., p.663; Peter Stearns, *op. cit.*, pp. 243,247.

63 Harry Braverman, op. cit., p.149.

64 Peter Stearns, *op. cit.*, p.244.

Similarly, the less than complete adaptation to the new incentive schemes was demonstrated in the Western countries by workers compensating for the strenuous work by taking frequent one day 'holidays'.⁶⁵ It is tempting to conclude that the 15 November 1932 decree on absenteeism that made one day's absence a firing offence, was evidence of the same process in Soviet industry.

Thus it may be seen that high turnover and absentee rates were to be anticipated in the Soviet industrialisation drive. Indeed, if one allows for the effects of the exceptionally poor living and working conditions, the rates were not excessively higher than those in other countries at similar stages of economic development.

The point is that they were perceived as being too high in a society bent on creating a modern industry and an appropriately disciplined work force in an unprecedentedly short time span.

The 'success' of the Soviet drive for labour discipline was that an incentive system was eventually found that was most suitable for the work force then existing, thus maximising sources of loyal support without having to jettison the illusion of workers' control. The 'failure' was that the energy and resources expended on the political need to prevent the worker from his natural tendency to exercise actual control over his work process, objectively were unjustified in terms of economic benefits and social costs. The belatedly recognised need to apply Western methods of sociological inquiry into worker behaviour is evidence of this.

However, it is not enough to copy Western methods of work organisation and management. That lesson should have been learned during the period under review. As a Western commentator observes a propos the Soviet metalworking industry in the thirties: 66

"such copying was impossible because technology and production organisation are inseparably linked, and becaused matured, intricate organisational methods cannot be 'adopted'"

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65 Peter Stearns, *op. cit.* p.242.

66 David Granick, 'Economic Development and Productivity Analysis: the Case of Soviet Metalworking', in Quarterly Journal of Economics, May 1957, p.232.

CHAPTER TWO

THE ORGANISATIONAL BACKGROUND TO THE DRIVE FOR LABOUR DISCIPLINE.

The dispute over the state of labour discipline among industrial workers formed an integral part of the intra-Party struggles over the rates of industrialisation. Those who advocated forcing the pace as quickly as possible clearly perceived the existing levels of discipline as an obstacle to the implementation of this policy, whereas those that sought a more moderate, balanced pace were apt to devote more attention to the human and social costs involved. At the beginning of the period under review, in the latter half of 1928, both sides were hardening their respective attitudes to the question of labour discipline.

In organisational terms, the sides might best be presented as, on the one hand, the All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions (VTsSPS) - the body charged with leading the defence of the economic and material interests of the workers, and on the other, the People's Commissariat of Labour (Narkomtrud) - the State organ entrusted with the supervision and inspection of labour legislation. On the other side stood the Supreme Economic Council (Vesenkha) - the State body representing the management of nationalised industry and thus immediately responsible for production discipline, and the Communist Party and Komsomol, insofar as these organisations generated the political will for rapid industrialisation.

The forum for much of the dispute was the Press, represented on the one side by Trud (the trade union daily) and Voprosy truda (the monthly journal of Narkomtrud) and on the other by Pravda and Komsomol'skaya Pravda (the daily organs of the Party and Komsomol respectively) and Vesenkha's daily publication Torgovo-promyshlennaya gazeta, which from 1 January 1930 became known, appropriately as Za industrializatsiyu (or 'For Industrialisation').

However, there was considerable overlapping within these groups. Tomskii, Chairman of VTsSPS from 1922 to 1929 and the successive Commissars of Labour, Shmidt (1918-1928) and Uglanov (1928-1930), were still prominent members of the Communist Party leadership, as were their allies in the Right Opposition, Bukharin (Editor of Pravda) and Rykov (Chairman of Sovnarkom - the Council of People's Commissars). The argument for Stalin's 'general Party line' was carried within the trade union leadership by Kaganovich, with assistance from Veinberg and, subsequently, Shvernik.

The Party 'Shake Up' of the Trade Unions

When the conflict came to a head at the VIII VTsSPS Congress in December 1928, the management representatives, led by Vesenkha Chairman Kuibyshev, pressed the mainly economic case for stricter one-man management and tighter labour discipline, while the union spokesmen, led by Tomskii, laid greater stress on the social need for defending the workers' interests and improving their standard of living. However, the outcome of the debates was decided by the fact that Stalin's 'general line' came down firmly on the management side and labelled the trade union leadership's policies as khvostism (the head following the tail) and tred-unionism (putting economic interests ahead of political as the Western trade unions had done).

It would be wrong, however, to depict the struggle at the VIII Congress as between 'managers' and 'workers' for the leaders of both camps belonged to the 'industrialisers' who sought to improve output, develop a socialist work discipline and modernise Soviet industry: the disagreement stemmed from how best to achieve this and who should bear the brunt of the burden entailed.

Indeed, foreign trade unionists at this time often found it difficult to distinguish between the warring factions of "Moscow communists" who they accused of adopting "a sixteenth century conception of strategy and tactics" in maintaining Party control over the unions.¹ Tomskii had done little to dispel their fears when, at the VII VTsSPS Congress in 1926, he had declared that "we do not conceal from anyone that the trade union movement has been, is and will be directed by the Communist Party in the most centralised fashion."²

In opposing Soviet membership of international trade union organisations, the official journal of the British TUC and Labour Party explained in 1928 that:³

"In spite, therefore, of our strong, genuine desire to see Soviet Russia develop into the world's first Socialist State, despite our fixed determination that Soviet Russia be given a free hand in its internal development, free from outside Imperialist interference, despite our natural solidarity with all workers, of whatever creed, race, or colour, no good purpose at the present stage can possibly be served by proposals for joint committees, joint conferences, or affiliation of the Russian unions to our own organisations whilst they remain the tools of a narrow fanatic Marxian sect.

This highlights the contradictory position of trade unions in the USSR during the New Economic Policy. On the one hand, they served as 'transmission belts' between the Party and the workers and thus were obliged to help improve production as well as to foster a socialist work discipline amongst the workers, while at the same time they were charged with defending their members' interests. As the cornerstone of Stalin's industrialisation drive was the absolute priority of the interests of production, it became a prime necessity to get the trade unions to shift their emphasis from defensive work and turn their 'faces to production'.

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1 The Labour Magazine, vol.7, no.8, December 1928, p.357.

2 Quoted in 'The Trade Union Movement in Soviet Russia', ILO Studies and Reports, Series A (Industrial Relations), no.26, Geneva, 1927, p.253.

3 The Labour Magazine, vol.7, no.4, August 1928, p.154.

The change effected in the trade union leaders' perceptions of their responsibilities within the period under review are evident when comparing the following quotes. First, Tomskii in December 1928:⁴

"Trade unions unite workers irrespective of their political or religious beliefs. If we exclude all believers, who are we left with? The borders of our union would not be much wider than those of the Communist Party, i.e. one hundred per cent orthodox communists. A worker is a worker in spite of his prejudices."

Now Shvernik, VTsSPS First Secretary, speaking in June 1933:⁵

In the defence of the interests of the working class and of socialist industry, we can no longer tolerate that a flitter or loafer be supplied on an equal basis with the foremost shock worker. The trade unions will not allow it!"

In other words, Tomskii was using a socio-economic definition of a worker (i.e. all workers), whereas Shvernik utilised a narrowly political definition (i.e. only 'genuine' workers). Herein lies the crux of the organisational changes within labour relations, for labour discipline became a political requirement that happened to coincide with the economic demands that management were making while running counter to certain social demands that the workers were forwarding.

However, it would be wrong to assume that the winning over of the trade unions to the 'management' line, represented a complete abrogation of the commitment to improve workers' living standards. There remained throughout a political imperative to keep alive the notion that the USSR was a genuine workers' state and that all policies adopted by its Government and Communist Party were in the interests of the workers. Indeed, those workers that followed the 'general' line most actively tended to be among the main beneficiaries of industrialisation (e.g. Brezhnev, Ustinov and so on).

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4 Vos'moi s'ezd, p. 186.

5 N. Shvernik, New Functions of the Soviet Trade Unions, Moscow-Leningrad, 1933, p.24.

What changed during this period was the definition of the worker. In effect it was only the worker with the psychology of a manager (i.e. willing and able to put the interests of production before immediate personal needs) that was to be regarded as a 'genuine' worker. The others, irrespective of how experienced, proletarian or skilled they might be, might well be labelled 'backward' or 'a class alien element' on such occasions as they put their own interests first. The ideological justification for such a narrow definition was provided by the now-discredited theory of the 'sharpening of the class struggle'.

A ready and useful scapegoat for manifestations of 'backward' culture was provided during the conflict over labour discipline by the mass influx into the work force of rural migrants in the latter half of the 1920's. The increase in the number of reported incidents of drunkenness, hooliganism, abuse of administrative personnel and other types of 'backward' culture would appear to coincide with this influx. However, it is by no means clear that only the newcomers were to blame. For example, in 1925/26, before the flood of recruits had made its presence felt, the rate of unsanctioned absenteeism (generally accepted as the best gauge of labour discipline) stood at 8.04 days per worker, a figure which had fallen to 4.09 days by 1929.⁶ Yet the census of 1926 reveals that 53.4 per cent of all industrial workers could be classified as skilled, and a further 26.3 per cent as unskilled, levels that were not to be achieved again during the period under review.⁷

This would suggest that skill levels and industrial experience were not necessarily conducive to high levels of discipline. There is certainly no shortage of evidence on the indisciplined behaviour of 'cadre' workers.⁸

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6 V. Usol'tsev, 'Poteri rabocheho vremeni i ikh ispol'zovanie v sisteme nepreryvnogo proizvodstva', in Voprosy truda, 1930, no. 6, p.36; Narodnoe khozyaistvo SSSR: statisticheskii spravochnik, Moscow, 1932, p.446.

7 Izmenenie v chislennosti i sostave sovetskogo rabocheho klassa, Moscow, 1961, p.112.

8. See, for example, I. Povalyaev, 'Avtobiografiya udarnika', in Bor'ba klassov, 1931, nos. 3-4, p.79.

Similarly, industrial experience (stazh) was not always a reliable indicator of cultural levels. If one accepts that the literacy rate is the best gauge in this respect, one may see from the results of the following survey, conducted among union members in 1929, that cultural levels varied widely according to region and industry:

TABLE 1

Industry & Region	% workers entering production prior 1917	Average <u>stazh</u> (in years)	% workers illit.
Coal (Donbas)	33.2	8.7	15.2
Cotton (Ivanovo)	61.6	13.9	20.1
Oil (Baku)	54.6	13.2	25.0
" (Groznyi)	40.6	9.7	7.9
Metalworking (Leningrad)	51.5	11.3	2.8
" (Urals)	42.6	10.4	8.7
All industry	60.7	11.9	13.9

Source: Trud v SSSR, 1926-1930, Moscow 1930, pp. 26,30.

Thus, on the eve of the forced industrialisation drive, more than sixty per cent of the industrial workers had started work prior to the Revolution, had an average stazh of almost 12 years (i.e. precisely to the Revolution), and yet one in every seven was illiterate. If the level of discipline of this work force was considered inadequate, then one would expect that during the Five-Year plan, when the proportion of new workers rose sharply, the average length of industrial experience consequently fell and the illiteracy rate rose, that there would be a further deterioration.

However, these average figures mask the extraordinary heterogeneity of the Soviet working class at this time. For example, the seasonal labourers pictured at the Magnitogorsk construction site bear a striking resemblance to Repin's celebrated Volga boatmen⁹, and in cultural terms, were worlds

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9 See Louis Fischer, Machines and Men in Russia, New York, 1932, opposite p.74.

away from the skilled Leningrad metalworker with years of experience in American industry¹⁰. It is important to bear in mind, however, that it was the latter who might soon be classified as backward, and the former as 'advanced', depending upon their respective attitudes to the changes taking place in Soviet industry. Moreover, whereas over half of the industrial workers in 1929 were 'hereditary' proletarians (i.e. at least second or third generation workers)¹¹, the situation changed dramatically as ~~the Five-Year Plan~~ progressed, 68 per cent of the increment of workers and employees in industry came from the peasantry.¹² Just how the situation changed may be seen from the fact that, at the Khar'k ov electro-mechanical works, 55.5 per cent of the workers in 1928/29 had been hereditary proletarians and 33.9 per cent peasants. By 1932 the respective figures were 37.6 and 62.4 per cent.¹³

During his speech to the VIII VTsSPS Congress, Tomskii had drawn attention to this heterogeneity (as, indeed, had Kuibyshev), and had urged a differentiated approach towards the various sections of the working class. He drew clear distinctions, for example, between the skilled workers of large-scale industry who (like Tomskii himself and many of his colleagues in the State, Party and union bureaucracy) had fought for and defended the Revolution and the ordinary 'cadre' workers who had broadly supported Soviet power, but were by no means 'active builders of socialism'. This was an important distinction for the 1922 Labour Code (piloted into effect by Shmidt, the Labour Commissar) appeared to reflect the qualities of the former group and ascribe them to the latter, who, naturally enough turned this to their advantage. As industrialisation got under way, Soviet industry was virtually denuded of the first category of workers (and large numbers of the second) due to the demands of collectivisation

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10 N.B. Lebedeva and O.I. Shkaratan, Ocherki istorii sotsialisticheskogo sorevnovaniya, Leningrad, 1966, p.17.

11 Trud v SSSR, 1926-1930gg., Moscow, 1930, p.26.

12 See J.D. Barber, 'The Composition of the Soviet Working Class, 1928-41', CREES Discussion Papers, SIPS no.16, University of Birmingham, 1978, p.16.

13 L.E. Ankudinova, 'Izmeneniya v sostave rabocheho klassa SSSR v periode postroeniya sotsializma. 1917-1937gg.' in Iz istorii rabocheho klassa SSSR, Leningrad, 1962, p.134.

promotion into the State apparatus and expanded study facilities.

A more obvious distinction was to be drawn, however, between the two aforementioned groups of experienced workers and the newcomers originating from the countryside who, in Tomskii's words "regard the factory as a place to which need has driven them" ¹⁴ and who "live their own kind of inner life, are not being absorbed into the mass of workers and who have not yet been touched by the proletarian community in our socialist plants and factories." ¹⁵ Nonetheless, he warned cadre workers not to dismiss these newcomers as mere 'country bumpkins' (derevenshchina), reminding them that "our entire class at one time lacked culture." ¹⁶

Another group that was to play a crucial role in breaking down the customs and practices of the old, established working class consisted of new, young workers from an urban, proletarian background. The first beneficiaries of the Soviet educational system, their literacy levels were higher than any other group. However, as Tomskii observed, they had not been tried and tested in revolutionary battles and had an alarming tendency to demand that which could not be given for another five or ten years.¹⁷ It was this group, both in the Komsomol organisation and on the shop floor that was to prove the main support for the 'management' line on discipline.

For if the scapegoats for indisciplined behaviour were to be the rural newcomers, the initial examples of the new attitude to work (and the new socialist discipline) were provided by the urban youngsters rather than the cadre workers. The latter harboured many undesirable qualities, a fact recognised by both sides in the dispute over labour discipline.

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14 Vos'moi s'ezd, p. 28.

15 ibid., p.31.

16 ibid., p.32.

17 ibid., p.29.

In the sort of realistic appraisal of the Soviet worker that was soon to disappear from discussions on questions of labour in the USSR, Bukharin suggested that "the 'ideal' type of 'good lad' ('ideal'nyi tip 'khoroshego parnya'), who drank heavily, played cards, fought, swore and loafed around at work, should be "spiritually shot" (dukhovno rastrelyan)¹⁸

The danger of ascribing values mistakenly to workers, rather than appraise them realistically is well exemplified by the regime's attitude to religion. In 1929 an all-out assault on religion was launched, most demonstrably by blowing up the Cathedral of the Redeemer in Moscow to clear a space for a massive new Palace of Soviets to be built in time for the fifteenth anniversary of the Revolution in November 1932.¹⁹ An even greater impact was achieved, however, by the introduction of a continuous working week in October 1929, which effectively dispensed with Sundays along with all the old religious holidays. As part of the same process it was even contemplated changing the names of the week, calculating the year from the anniversary of the October Revolution and using this event, rather than the birth of Christ, as the basis of the calendar.²⁰

Yet in 1928/29 more than 38 per cent of workers' families in Moscow and Leningrad (and over sixty per cent in other Soviet cities) still hung icons on the walls of their dwellings.²¹ Of course, these figures more than likely reflected custom and tradition rather than religious devotion, as did the sharp increase in expenditure on alcohol and the high absentee rates on former religious holidays. However, Toms-kii had noted that religion was on the increase in his speech to the VIII VTsSPS Congress, remarking that many workers were turning to the baptists. He laid the blame for this squarely on the inadequate facilities provided by the workers' clubs,

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18 Quoted in S. Bezborodov, Vreditel' u stanka, Leningrad, 1930, p.44.

19 George A. Burrell, An American Engineer Looks at Russia, Boston, 1932, p.210.

20 Trud, 3 October 1929.

21 A.V. Vvedenskii, Zhilishchnoe polozhenie fabrichno-zavodskogo proletariata SSSR, M-L, 1932, p.57.

claiming that "if the club cannot fulfil his needs, he will go to the baptists or to the inn (traktir)", concluding that "the struggle against alcoholism, baptism, anti-semitism and so on, is a struggle within the working class."²²

The opposing view, in defining the worker in narrow political terms, maintained that the alcoholic, baptist and anti-semite by definition could not be 'genuine' workers and therefore should be a prime target for the unions in their struggle for tighter labour discipline. Tomskii had cautioned against such an approach, warning:²³

"The attempt to turn trade unions into poor little political departments...which are to struggle only for the raising of productivity, and for labour discipline...is mistaken."

Indeed, there were those amongst his followers in the trade union movement, notably, Kozelev, who not only maintained that production discipline was largely a question for management, but also, somewhat disingenuously, commented that as trade unions were not primarily political bodies, they should not be dragged into the intra-Party dispute.²⁴

Of the questions generated by the dispute over labour discipline at the VIII VTsSPS Congress, two stand out: i) which side, the 'Rightists' or the 'Stalinists' was more closely in touch with the demands and aspirations of the workers and ii) who or what was to blame for the falling levels of discipline, if indeed they were falling?

It is generally conceded that the trade union movement in Soviet Russia had lost touch with its membership during the Civil War. However, the same charge might well be levelled at the Party and Komsomol, let alone the management organs. Certainly, Tomskii appeared to reflect the

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22 Vos'moi s'ezd, p.46.

23 ibid., p.44.

24 ibid., pp.96-97; quoted by Shvernik at XVI Party Congress
XVI S'ezd vsesoyuznoi kommunisticheskoi partii (b),: stenograficheskii otchet, 2nd.ed., Moscow-Len, 1931, p.646

views of the majority of the delegates gathered at the Congress, even if his platform was defeated, whereas his most vociferous opponent, Zhdanov (representing the Komsomol) was greeted with stony silence.²⁵ However, as the latter was putting forward not only the Party's 'general line', but also that of the young urban workers who were showing increasing impatience with the slow pace of progress towards socialism, the 'Stalinists' too could claim to represent 'real' workers. The truth was, of course, that the Soviet working class was itself deeply divided over the question of industrialisation, being for in general terms but not always prepared to achieve this through personal sacrifice. There was no doubt that sacrifices were going to have to be made, Stalin himself had made this quite clear during his address to the V Komsomol Conference in March 1927,²⁶ and one of his spokesmen at the trade union forum reiterated the point thus:²⁷

"We must explain to the masses that huge sacrifices on the part of the working class still lie ahead if we are to complete that which we have started to build."

To judge from the contribution of a previous speaker, representing the Shakt^hty mining district, those sacrifices were already quite considerable:²⁸

"The living conditions of the miners in general are still extremely hard. The lack of accommodation at the mines makes it impossible to create a solid cadre of workers skilled in production. We have to date accommodation for only 13 to 15 per cent of the workers. Due to lack of rooms, the remaining workers are forced to seek accommodation in the neighbouring villages, hamlets and peasant settlements. This obliges the workers to expend much time and energy, more especially due to the lack of roads in our district and a shortage of requisite footwear. From this we get absenteeism, losses in production, and a fall in discipline."

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25 Vos'moi s'ezd, p.111; Tomskii, by contrast was given a standing ovation, ibid., p.55.

26 I.V. Stalin, Sochineniya, vol.9, Moscow, 1949, pp.197-8.

27 Veinberg at Vos'moi s'ezd, p.109.

28 Shelokhayev, Vos'moi s'ezd, p.106.

Tomskii would appear to have been displaying a deal more realism, therefore, when he drew much attention in his speech to the appalling living conditions endured by Soviet workers:²⁹

"Surely we can see that the workers live in crowded, awful housing, that they lack the elementary everyday comforts, that there are nurseries enough only for a trifling percentage of workers' children, that our canteens are disgusting, that wages are still low? Surely we see this, surely we want things to be better for the workers?"

The two approaches may be seen to characterise the dual nature of the Soviet trade unions as 'transmission belts', the one side utilising the union forum to bring to the attention of the Party the needs and sufferings of the working class, and the other attempting to coopt the unions to the struggle of winning over the masses to the policy of industrialisation advocated by the Party.

The fact that, from a purely economic point of view, the two policies were not necessarily incompatible, was highlighted by Kuibyshev on behalf of Vesenkha. He assured Congress that among the basic aims of the Five-Year Plan was the systematic raising of the material and cultural levels of working people. However, he made a point of listing this aim behind those of industrialising the national economy and strengthening the country's defence capacity, serving notice of where his priorities lay.³⁰

However, whatever the merits of the respective arguments put forward at the Congress, the political battle had already been lost. In objecting to the introduction of Kaganovich into the VTsSPS leadership, Tomskii had tendered his resignation even before the Congress had opened. This was formerly rejected on 9 February 1929 at a meeting of the Party's Politburo (and the Presidium of the Central

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29 Vos'moi s'ezd, p.50

30 ibid., p.372.

Control Committee)³¹, although Tomskii took no further part in VTsSPS affairs after the Congress. After Krol', an opponent of the Party 'shake up' (peretryakhivaniya) of the unions had tried unsuccessfully to propose a motion approving the political line and general direction taken by VTsSPS, Tomskii observed with, one suspects, an element of irony directed at the Party General Secretary:³²

"In the Leninist Communist Party there must be a discipline not only of iron, but of steel (stal'naya)"

Thus, even if Tomskii and his supporters were more in touch with the workers, their political struggle had already effectively been lost and was about to be crushed. On the question of the levels of discipline, the evidence would appear to be contradictory. Absentee rates continued to fall consistently until the spring of 1930 and there was no apparent rise in other forms of violations (it should be borne in mind that labour turnover, at this stage, was not classified as a violation of labour discipline). Yet the calls for tighter discipline, which had commenced in 1925 and had intensified with the launch of the policy of rationalisation in 1927, had become a matter of grave concern by 1928 a year which saw the first enterprises being switched to the seven-hour day.³³

Contemporary accounts suggest that the deterioration in labour discipline commenced in the Donbas coalmines in May 1928 and spread to other areas and industries. Two relevant observations may be made in this respect. Firstly, the Donbas mines were in the glare of nationwide publicity in May 1928 due to the trial of the 'bourgeois wreckers' that commenced in Shakhty in May 1928,³⁴ The effect of this trial was that administrative and technical personnel became wary of issuing orders to the workers, let alone make mistakes in

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31 KPSS v rezolyutsiyakh i resheniyakh s'ezdov, konferentsii i plenumov TsK, chast' II, , 7th ed., M, 1954, pp.556-567

32 Vos'moi s'ezd, p. 207.

33 See 'The Seven-Hour Day in Soviet Russia' in International Labour Review, vol.XXII, no.3, September 1930, Geneva, pp.329-357.

34 Pravda, 19 May 1928

in their work, for fear of being labelled a 'Shakhty wreck-
er' (Shakhtiinskii vreditel')³⁵. Incidences of abuse and
attacks directed at specialists were reported from all over
the country and 'spets baiting' (spetseedstvo) figured prom-
inently on the pages of the national press.³⁶ Discipline,
particularly in the Donbas region, was consequently felt
to be deteriorating, whatever the official figures might
report.

Secondly, as we have seen, conditions in the Donbas were
amongst the worst in the country and the fall in living
standards, which was soon to be the lot of the average
Soviet industrial worker, appeared to have commenced earlier
here. Moreover, the number of rural migrants seeking work
in the Donbas anticipated the national trend. The 1929
union census revealed that 63 per cent of all Donbas miners
were children of peasants,³⁷ whereas the figure for all
industries and regions was 42.6 per cent.³⁸ As it was this
group of workers that was being made scapegoat for the fall
in discipline, it would make sense for the authorities to
concentrate attention in the campaign against violations
in the areas where such 'backward' workers predominated.

Although the appeals for tighter discipline issued by
the Party plenum in November and the VIII VTsSPS Congress
in December of 1928 appear to have made no calculable impact
there were a number of victories for those push-
ing for a harder line on this question. Thus Vesenkha
persuaded VTsSPS at the end of 1928 to include undertakings
on raising productivity in the new collective agreements
about to be signed. These agreements, concluded annually by
representatives of management and trade unions, determined
wages, output standards and other conditions of work, and
were to become a major target for those who sought to reduce

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- 35 Torgovo-promyshlennaya gazeta, 24 February 1929.
36 N. Lampert, The Technical Intelligentsia & the Soviet State, 1928-1935, London, 1979, pp.125-126.
37 A. Rashin, Sostav fabrichno-zavodskogo proletariata, M, 1930, p.17.
38 Trud v SSSR. Spravochnik 1926-1930gg. p.27.

the power of the trade unions.

Another victory in the campaign for labour discipline was the establishment by the Council for Labour and Defence (STO) of a Government commission under Narkomtrud to study the question. The commission met for the first time on 13 February 1929,³⁹ but, although some findings were published,⁴⁰ its work became increasingly irrelevant as socialist competition became the new universal panacea to such problems and any suggested remedies were pre-empted by the passing ^{on 6 March} of a Government decree on labour discipline that gave management the right to sack indisciplined workers without the approval of the unions.⁴¹

Union approval in such matters had been enshrined in the Labour Code by the Rate-Setting and Disputes Committees (Rastsenochno-konfliktnye kommissii or RKKs), which had equal numbers of management and union representatives. The new rules for these commissions, adopted as recently as 29 August 1928,⁴² confirmed that all cases of worker dismissal had to be approved by the RKK. Early in 1929, Kraval', a Vesenkha spokesman, complained of a 'vicious circle' in which the management would fire a worker and the RKK would reinstate him; or, if the dismissal was approved, the worker would be reinstated by a labour inspector or court; and even if all instances upheld the verdict, the labour exchange would nonetheless send the worker back to the very same job at the same plant. There is evidence that Kraval's complaint was justified. At the Krasnoe Sormovo shipyards in Nizhnii Novgorod, for example, of 769 cases brought by management to the RKK in 1928 to seek approval of dismissal, only 374 (48.6 per cent) were upheld, a further 223 resulted in more lenient sentences and 172 were totally rejected.⁴³ Thus, despite

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39 Trud, 13 February 1929.

40 The best review of these findings is in A. Sokol'skii, Profsoyuzy v bor'be za trudovuyu distsiplinu, M, 1929.

41 Decree of Sovnarkom SSSR "On measures for Strengthening Labour Discipline in State Enterprises", Sobranie zakonov i rasporyazhenii SSSR, 1929, no.19, art. 167.

42 ibid., 1928, no.56, art.495.

43 Metallist, 17 May 1929.

the fact that it contravened the Labour Code, the new law extending management rights in the enterprise represented an important shift of power towards the administration.

However, throughout this period of change, the 'Rightists' were still occupying positions of power in VTsSPS, the regional union councils, individual unions and in Narkomtrud. The 'shake up' of the unions could only be effected, therefore, when the Opposition had been defeated within the Party itself. To all intents and purposes, this was achieved in April 1929.

On 15 April, Bukharin, Rykov and Tomskii had voted for amendments to the Five-Year Plan at a meeting of the Party's Politburo.⁴⁴ On 23 April a joint session of the Central Committee and Central Control Committee adopted not only a draft resolution on the Plan (for forwarding to the forthcoming XVI Party Conference), but also a resolution "On Intra-Party Affairs", which removed from their posts Tomskii (VTsSPS) and Bukharin (Pravda and Comintern).⁴⁵

The XVI Party Conference, meeting later that month, duly endorsed both resolutions and the following month the V Congress of Soviets approved the Five-Year Plan in its Stalinist variant and it became law. From this point on, the planned economy, implying control over wages and output standards, reduced significantly the status of the collective agreement, hitherto the focal point of trade union power in the Soviet economy.

The resolution on intra-Party matters had turned its attention specifically to the role of trade unions in this new phase, demanding that:⁴⁶

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44 Shestnadtsataya konferentsiya VKP (b)- aprel' 1929g: stenograficheskii otchet, Moscow, 1962, p.ix.

45 KPSS v rezolyutsiyakh, chast' II, pp. 549-556.

46 ibid., p.553.

"Trade unions, which are called upon to play a decisive role in the construction of socialist industry, in the upsurge of labour productivity and labour discipline, in organising the production initiative of the working class and socialist competition, and also the education on a class basis of new strata of the proletariat, must decisively squeeze out all remnants of narrow class exclusiveness and trade-unionism, as well as bureaucratic inattention to the masses and a scornful attitude to the tasks of defending the everyday needs and interests of the working class."

Earlier in April the Party's Central Committee had issued a decree "On the Cultural and Educational Work of Trade Unions"⁴⁷, which stated that "the most important task of the union's cultural work must be the cultivation in the workers of a conscientious attitude to production and...the intensification of the struggle to raise labour discipline." The decree then offered an ideological justification for this:

"In connection with the sharpening of the class struggle within the country and the active attempts by kulak and capitalist elements to spread their influence among petty-bourgeois strata, and even among individual cross strata of the proletariat, the trade unions, relying mainly on the mass of workers at large, must intensify the struggle against petty-bourgeois views and attitudes (money-grubbing, slackness) among backward elements especially new strata of the working class that have come from the countryside. Trade unions must launch an intensified campaign against religious trends, especially against sectism, as well as against anti-semitism, exposing their counter-revolutionary essence.

Thus, even as the removal of Tomskii was proceeding, the Soviet trade unions were adopting stances that he had specifically warned against at the VIII Congress. In the event the II VTsSPS plenum which formalised Tomskii's dismissal, along with that of Mikhailov and Ugarov (chairmen of the Moscow and Leningrad trade union councils respectively), Melnichanskii (Textile Union) and Yaglom (former editor of Trud and head of the Postal and Telegraph Union) and many other Tomskii supporters, did not meet until the end of May. Aleksandr Dogadov was appointed First Secretary, as it turned out on a temporary basis - within a year he would also be denounced as an Oppositionist and replaced by

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47 KPSS o profsoyuzakh, 3rd. ed, Moscow, 1957, p. 330.

by Shvernik.⁴⁸ Nonetheless, it was significant that no replacement was found for Tomskii as Chairman, power having shifted decisively to the VTsSPS Secretariat.

The plenum undertook to carry out a thoroughgoing purge of the trade union hierarchy. The Moscow Regional Trade Union Council had its membership changed by 93 per cent and its Leningrad equivalent by 100 per cent!⁴⁹ In his report to the IX VTsSPS Congress in 1932 (trade union congresses were supposed to convene every two years, but four years were to elapse between the VIII and IX, and a further seventeen before the X VTsSPS Congress met in 1949!), one of the major beneficiaries of the shake up, Veinberg, described how representatives of the leading workers were sent to work in place of the dismissed 'Rightists', claiming that "the shock worker became the central figure not only in production, but also in the trade union movement."⁵⁰

Kaganovich, the Party secretary that Stalin had sent to VTsSPS to ensure political control, summed up the process thus, in his address to the XVI Party Congress in 1930: ⁵¹

"The greater part of the leadership both of VTsSPS and of individual unions has been replaced. It could be said that this was a violation of proletarian democracy, but, comrades, it has long been known that for us Bolsheviks democracy is no fetish."

Almost immediately following the VTsSPS plenum, the management newspaper, Torgovo-promyshlennaya gazeta, talked of the trade union leadership crisis being overcome:⁵²

"Until recently the trade union leaders were inclined to omit from their everyday duties their share in the campaign for tightening labour discipline, raising individual output and fulfilling the plan. They also considered the signing of collective agreements to be the best means of extracting maximum concessions from industrial

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48 Trud, 2 June 1929; XVI S'ezd, pp.275-276.

49 Profsoyuzy Moskvy: ocherki istorii, M, 1975, p.199;
Voprosy profsoyuznogo stroitel'stva, Len, 1930, p.15.

50 G. Veinberg, Profsoyuzy na novom etape, M, 1932, p.24.

51 XVI S'ezd, p.63.

52 Torgovo-promyshlennaya gazeta, 4 June 1929.

managers at the minimum cost to the unions. But the situation has changed and, unless we are mistaken, the change will be real and lasting."

Of course, the Party shake up of the trade unions could not but effect Narkomtrud. The Commissariat's organisational position in labour relations of midway between the management and the unions had been confirmed in a Government statute of 26 September 1928.⁵³ However, the significant shift in power at the work place in favour of the managers, had left Narkomtrud seemingly high and dry on the union side, all the more so as their leaders actively supported the 'Rightists'. Indeed, the Labour Commissar, Uglanov, had told the VIII VTsSPS Congress only the previous December that "Narkomtrud was and is the brainchild of the trade unions."⁵⁴ As such, Narkomtrud's efforts in the early months of 1929 were geared more to ensuring that existing labour legislation was being observed than to carrying on a campaign for tighter discipline. The pages of the Commissariat's journal, Voprosy truda, thus gave more space to criticism of management infringements of work and safety regulations than to workers' violations of internal rules.

Moreover, the early findings of the Narkomtrud investigations into the state of labour discipline notably avoided any reference to 'class enemies' or 'sharpening of class struggles', but laid much of the blame for the poor state of discipline on poor organisation and management.⁵⁵

However, the Chairman of the Narkomtrud committee, and Deputy Commissar of Labour, Tolstopyatov, was astute enough to see which way the wind was blowing and had published in the June issue of Voprosy truda, an article entitled "On New Rails" in which he offered the following assessment of

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53 Statute of the People's Commissariat of Labour of the USSR, approved by TsIk and Sovnarkom SSSR on 26 September 1928, Izvestiya Narkomtruda SSSR, 1928, nos.44-45, 673-676.

54 Vos'moi s'ezd, p.362

55 A. Sokol'skii, op. cit., pp. 47, 63, 88.

the situation: 56

"The most immense importance is acquired by the work of labour sections dealing with the raising of labour discipline, which, as a result of the ever increasing increment of the ranks of workers with new cadres, coming in the main from the countryside and not having acquired sufficient production skills, not yet accustomed to the iron discipline of the factory and not having been remoulded in the factory crucible, will demand even greater attention. As regards the self-seekers, money grubbers and loafers, there can be no other policy than the strict implementation of the rules of internal order and as much assistance in this as possible from organs of Narkomtrud, management and union organisations. In the struggle for tightening labour discipline, methods of coercion in regard to the backward workers will have and must have a place in the immediate future, but, in applying methods of administrative coercion, it is necessary to combine them with measures of social influence and re-education

However, given the importance of Narkomtrud's work in the sphere of unemployment and sorting out labour legislation, it was not felt necessary at this stage to conduct such a thoroughgoing purge of this Commissariat as had been visited on the unions. Further clashes lay ahead, however, the first being over the introduction of the continuous working week (nepreryvka).

This was the first bold new initiative to be introduced by management following the shake up of the trade unions. Larin had raised the issue at the V Congress of Soviets in May but, according to one commentator, was not taken seriously by anyone other than Stalin. Yet by the middle of June the press was full of little else. On 8 June 1929, Trud reported that Vesenkha RSFSR had instructed its rationalisation department to work out a model plan for a continuous working week. In the same issue, the RSFSR Labour Commissar, Bakhutov, expressed reservations over the idea, as did Uglanov later in the month.⁵⁷ Larin responded vigorously, urging that "the scorn of the masses" should be turned upon

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56 I. Tolstopyatov, 'Na novye rel'sy', in Voprosy truda, 1929, no. 6, p.8.

57 Trud, 23 July 1929.

this "bureaucratic sabotage of our economic successes" by the vacillators, adding that, perhaps, the GPU ought to investigate the matter.⁵⁸

Bakhutov was eventually dismissed just prior to the introduction of the continuous working week, to be replaced by Romanov. Uglanov distanced himself from Tomskii and Bukharin by recanting his views publicly in Pravda on 18 November 1929, just prior to the Party plenum that launched the 'socialist offensive'. However, his opposition to the continuous working week was brought up against him when he was removed in the summer of 1930.⁵⁹

The nepreryvka, which was eventually adopted in its five-day variant (i.e. each worker would have four days work in every five) serves as a good example of the contradictions between the policies of the Party and the perceived interests of the workers themselves. Thus the Party portrayed this innovation as striking a great blow against religion and the old ways of life and as a major means of raising productivity. The latter opposed it on mainly social grounds as the following complaints from workers at Moscow's Serp i Molot works illustrate (they were printed in Pravda on 1 October 1929, the day of the projected introduction of the nepreryvka:

"Is there to be no rest at all? What is there for us to do at home, if our wives are in the factory, our children are at school and nobody can visit us, so that there is nothing to do but go to a State-run cafe? What sort of life is it if we are to rest in shifts and not together as a whole proletariat? It is no holiday if you have to have it alone, is it?"

Rather like the other Stalinist innovation into industry in 1929, socialist competition, the authorities provided impressive statistics proving the quantitative growth of the proportion of workers on the continuous working week (it was claimed that by 1 April 1930 63 per cent of all industrial workers were covered by it).⁶⁰ However, just as with

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58 Quoted in 'The Continuous Working Week in Soviet Russia', International Labour Review, vol.XXIII, no.2, February 1931, p.162.

59 Uglanov was replaced by Tsikhon in July-August 1930, Na trudovom fronte, 1930, no. 2, p.1.

60 Pravda, 25 June 1930.

socialist competition, the figures were clearly inflated, and obscured the widespread opposition to these changes. In 1931, a start was made to return to a six-day interrupted working week in major industrial establishments. Stalin blamed the nepreryvka for dragging in an unwanted 'companion' (nezakonnaya sputnitsa) into industry in the shape of 'lack of responsibility' (obezlichka), the elimination of which was the third of six conditions in his "New Situation - New Tasks" speech in June 1931.⁶¹

Of course, concerted union action would have prevented the introduction of the continuous work week, but the resistance of VTsSPS had already been broken. At the XVI Party Congress in the summer of 1930^{Tamskii} was obliged to recant his errors and admit that the Party shake up of the unions had been justified.⁶² Shortly afterwards Veinberg came to the podium and gave the 'official' version of the take over of VTsSPS:⁶³

"The Party drew the corresponding conclusions: they removed from office the old leadership, put an end to the system of feudal trade-union princedom with its distinctive monopoly in the defence of workers' interests and its specific 'trade-unionist' understanding of this defence."

As for the current tasks of the VTsSPS, Veinberg was brief:

"The basic task of the trade unions is that very slogan that the working masses have advanced 'the five-year plan in four years'".

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61 I.V. Stalin, Sochineniya, vol.13, M.,1952, p.61.

62 XVI S"ezd, pp. 142-145.

63 ibid., p.191.

Faces to Production

Within twenty-four ^{hours} in early September 1929, two measures were introduced that were to set the course towards Stalin's vision of labour relations. On 5 September, the Party Central Committee issued a decree "On Measures to Regulate the Management of Production and to Implement One-Man Management"⁶⁴. The following day Trud published what amounted to the manifesto of the new trade union leadership: the appeal from the VTsSPS Presidium to all trade union organisations, union members and all working men and women to 'turn their faces to production' and develop socialist competition.⁶⁵

One-man management and socialist competition were to be the two main planks of Stalin's industrial relations' platform. The Party decree sharply defined the separate roles within production of the factory 'triangle': the director, Party secretary and trade union organiser. The director and his management staff were now to be directly responsible for fulfilment of the industrial and financial plan (prom-finplan) and for all production tasks. The trade unions were to concentrate on servicing the cultural and everyday needs of their members while, at the same time, being energetic organisers of such mass activity as socialist competition. They were expressly forbidden to interfere directly in the management of the enterprise. This last proviso applied also to Party organisations in the factory who were to concentrate on ensuring that Party directives were implemented by management and unions.

In a tacit admission that the workers might not understand the necessity for such measures, the Party decree entrusted Party and union officials in the enterprises with the task of making the workers aware that management directives were in the interests of the workers' well-being and would help consolidate the dictatorship of the proletariat.

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64 Resheniya partii i pravitel'stva po khozyaistvennym voprosam, 1917-1967, vol.2, Moscow, 1967, p.125.

65 Trud, 6 September 1929.

Thus, by the time Stalin had made his keynote speech "The Year of the Great Breakthrough" on 7 November 1929, most of the factors which were to change industrial relations in Soviet industry during the course of the next decade and beyond were already in place: the seven-hour, three-shift day and the continuous working week, which were to soak up not only all the unemployed but also the mass inflow of migrant labour from the countryside as collectivisation got underway; one-man management, under which the director could determine what were the interests of production in the enterprise he was responsible for (which in effect invariably meant sacrificing resources earmarked for social and cultural purposes and diverting them towards production); socialist competition and shock work, which were to provide the worker with an opportunity to participate in the management of production (even if, in practice this meant little more than the right to produce more).

By the time the Party plenum met in mid-November 1929, Stalin's position was strong enough to oust Bukharin and effectively isolate Tomskii and Rykov and to push ahead with an increased pace of industrialisation. It was left to Kaganovich to report on the Party gathering to the III VTsSPS plenum at the end of November 1929. Although Dogadov retained his position as First Secretary, the Party faction was strengthened by the addition of Polonskii to the Secretariat.⁶⁶

In his main report Dogadov appeared to follow the correct line by roundly criticising the old leadership, maintaining that "the basic link of trade union work and of their re-organisation in order to face production and get closer to the masses, is socialist competition, which reflects the development of new forms of communist labour..." and insisting that the centre of gravity of union work should shift from the factory committee to the group, section and shop.⁶⁷

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66 S. Shvarts, 'Profsoyuzy pered XVI-ym s"ezdom', in Sotsialisticheskii vestnik, 14 June 1930.

67 Rezolyutsii II i III plenumov VTsSPS. Vos'mogo sozyva, M, 1932, pp.68-72.

In his report on the plenum in the Party journal, Evreinov (who had taken over the editorship of Trud from Yaglom but was shortly to be fired from that post ⁶⁸), confirmed that "socialist competition was directed at craftsmanship and trade-unionism...", mapping out the long-term future of the union movement thus:⁶⁹

"The protective functions of trade unions will remain until the disappearance of bureaucratic distortions in the state apparatus, until the unions themselves, freed from narrow craft interests and all remnants of the capitalist past and having raised the cultural level and class consciousness of the masses united in them, grow into the state and comprise with it an integral whole."

However, as we have seen, protective functions were to be supplemented by production activity in union work. This took the form of promoting socialist competition and shock work. On the basis of the Party decree on one-man management, a joint enactment by Vesenkha SSSR and VTsSPS led to the appointing of the chairman of Production Conferences (see Chapter Five) in 100 major enterprises as assistants to the plant director with special responsibility for organising socialist competition.⁷⁰ Another joint directive by the two bodies on the same day "On the Collective Agreement"⁷¹, made this document a two-sided contract by imposing upon the workers the duty to fulfil the enterprise promfinplan during the course of the economic year, and hitting out at money-grubbing attitudes among certain backward workers.

Within just a year of Tomskii dismissing 'socialist' forms of work organisation as premature, his successors among the VTsSPS leadership took the lead in praising competition at the Congress of Shock Workers in December 1929.⁷² And it was VTsSPS that, in conjunction with the Komsomol Central Committee, launched on 21 January 1930 the Leninist

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68 Trud, 5 December 1929. He was replaced by D.B. Bogdanov

69 N. Evreinov, 'Profsoyuzy v period rekonstruktsii', in Bol'shevik, 1929, no. 21, pp.34-36.

70 Torgovo-promyshlennaya gazeta, 19 November 1929.

71 Trud, 20 November 1929.

72 Trud, 5 December 1929 published a greeting from the III VTsSPS plenum to the Congress in which it called shock work "not only an example of labour heroism, but also the cornerstone of rationalisation measures at the factory."

Enrolment of Shock Workers.⁷³

At the same time, in the sphere of organisational questions, attention was being focussed on union re-elections. By this time the link between the production and organisational sides of union work was explicit. Thus, the Party appeal of 25 January 1930⁷⁴ that approved of the Leninist Enrolment called specifically for the election of shock workers into union organisations. The example in this was to be set by the million-strong Metalworkers' union, led since October 1929 by Nikolai Shvernik, who was to preside over the Soviet trade union movement during its very darkest years and was, for his pains, elected Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet.⁷⁵

Thus it may be seen that, from a long-term perspective, the III VTsSPS plenum did mark a turning point. It not only started the shift of power away from the factory committee, which Tomskii at the VIII VTsSPS Congress had called "a historically-formed organisation, having the greatest revolutionary traditions that are known to every worker" and "one of the greatest hubs of our revolution",⁷⁶ but also irrevocably weakened opposition within the trade union movement, an opposition characterised by one observer as:⁷⁷

"Displaying inertia, conservatism, a petty-bourgeois lack of faith and vacillation in the face of difficulties...defending trade-unionist' trends within the union movement...narrow craft attitudes and manifestations of bureaucratic ossification in a part of the trade union apparatus, they presented and continue to present opposition to the reorganisation (perestroika) of trade union work."

In an attempt to finally rid itself of such elements, VTsSPS 'invited' the Workers' and Peasants' Inspectorate (Rabkrin) to purge its membership of those who had created within the union structure "a solid nest of routine and

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73 Trud, 21 January 1930

74 Direktivy VKP (b) po khozyaistvennym voprosam, Moscow, 1931, p. 664.

75 KPSS o profsoyuzakh, p.409.

76 Vos'moi s'ezd, p.35.

77 I. Reznikov, 'Na perelome' in Voprosy truda, 1930, no.1,p

ossification, bureaucracy and alienation from the masses, sluggishness and procrastination in their pace of work."

Although resistance to the shake up of the unions appeared to manifest itself in the trade union structure, there is little evidence of organised worker opposition to the move. This is probably because, by the beginning of 1930, the workers could perceive that the unions were an ineffective counter balance to the management. A Party journal reports at this time of workers and "even some communists" complaining that "the director can do what he likes", "the working class was in charge only in 1918 and 1919" and "the Communist Party is gradually replacing democracy with one-man management".⁷⁸

At the same time, it should be recalled, the factory committee re-elections were taking place against the background of the headiest days of the Leninist Enrolment, when the mood of optimism at least among a section of the working class, was at its greatest. In some areas and individual enterprises, shock workers had virtually taken over the role of workers' representatives on union committees. As Kaganovich was able to report to the XVI Congress, in the Metalworkers' union, shock workers now constituted 51 per cent of all those elected to the new factory committees in Moscow, 70.5 per cent in Leningrad and 84.6 per cent in Nizhnii Novgorod. At the Krasnyi Putilovets and Baltic shipyards in Leningrad, the respective figures were 95 and 72 per cent.⁷⁹

If the II VTsSPS plenum witnessed the first stages of the union shake up and the III plenum took that process a stage further, then the IV plenum that met in May 1930, cemented, once and for all, Party control over the union movement. The appointment of Nikolai Shvernik as First Secretary put an end to any remaining contradictions in the way that VTsSPS fitted into the overall scheme of industrialisation. Like Tomskii, Shvernik had been a skilled

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78 P. Zimin, 'Ne raskachalis'', in Partiinoe stroitel'stvo, 1930, no.2, p.57.

79 XVI S'ezd, p.64.

worker before the Revolution, but unlike him had no previous experience of trade union work until taking over the Metalworkers' union in October 1929. The IV plenum relieved not only Dogadov of his post, but also Akulov (the second secretary) and nine other members of the VTsSPS Presidium of theirs.⁸⁰ This effectively left only Veinberg and Evreinov (who had both supported the 'general line' at the VIII VTsSPS Congress) as survivors of the leadership elected less than eighteen months previously. Having shaken up the personnel of the trade unions, the new leadership was now set to attack the very structure of the movement.

By the time the XVI Party Congress opened on 26 June 1930 the new VTsSPS leadership was quite in step with the Party line that was to triumph so resoundingly at this forum. Congress heard a major debate on the new tasks of the trade unions and passed a resolution embodying the new policy. Entitled "On the Tasks of Trade Unions in the Reconstruction Period", the resolution:⁸¹

"Fully and wholly approves of the measures taken by the Central Committee in strengthening the Leninist-Bolshevik leadership of the union movement. The most important task of the Party and trade unions is the raising to a new plane of the movement for socialist competition and shock work, genuinely transforming this movement into a school of class instruction of the working masses, the improvement of the leadership of this movement, the one hundred per cent involvement in the shortest possible time in socialist competition and shock work of all communists and Komsomol members working in enterprises, the raising of production skills of communists and the genuine shifting of emphasis in Party and union work to the workshop and the brigade...

...The XVI Congress most emphatically stresses that the decisive, fundamental link in activating and improving the entire work of trade unions and in the involvement of the wide working masses in the management of production is socialist competition and its brain child shock work, which is the greatest movement of the proletariat."

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80 Sotsialisticheskii vestnik, 14 June 1930. (S. Shvarts)

81 KPSS rezolyutsiyakh, chast' III, p.65.

Despite the crushing victory of the Stalinists at the Congress, voices of doubt about the Party policy toward the unions were still to be heard, both within and outside the Party itself. With the movement towards shock workshops, shock factories and factory communes shades of a syndicalist threat were perceived, while at the other extreme calls for the introduction of labour conscription were made.⁸²

Even at plants where the shock workers had taken over the factory committee such as at Krasnyi Putilovets, there were still reports of 'apolitical' moods and speeches.⁸³ There was much talk about the various unions getting together to form one big union. The Party journal was quick to condemn this:⁸⁴

"The 'theoreticians' of one union usually wax eloquent about the 'interests of the workers', of the enormous economic resources, the significantly higher level of the working class, on the growth of communist workshops and so on...

...Some 'leftists' want all production in the hands of the union...this is a profound political mistake."

At the XVI Congress, Shvernik too, had been keen to dispel any thoughts about trade union power:⁸⁵

"The trade unions must coordinate their work on improving the material situation of workers in the closest harmony with production tasks... at the same time all talk about the immediate concentration in the hands of the trade unions of the entire management of production must be denounced."

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- 82 For example, the 130-strong collective (named after Lenin) at the Zlatoust Machine Works was "against one-man management and for self-management", Sotsialisticheskoe sorevnovanie v promyshlennosti SSSR, M, 1930, p.160. For labour conscription, see 'Problemy rynka truda' in Voprosy truda, 1930, no. 1, p.34.
- 83 M. Rafail, 'Profsoyuzy v epokhu sotsialisticheskoi rekonstruktsii' in Bol'shevik, 1930, no. 10, p.22
- 84 ibid., pp.23-24.
- 85 N.M. Shvernik, Zadachi profsoyuzov v rekonstruktivnyi period, Moscow-Leningrad, 1930, p.13.

Throughout the Congress and after, Shvernik's speech had generated controversy and discussion on the pages of the trade union daily, Trud. Thus, on 17 July 1930, it had published a discussion on possible mergers between trade unions, one participant advocating 11 bigger unions instead of the existing 23.

Other opponents to the Party policy towards the workers, as embodied in its trade union policy, emerged as a result of the XVI Congress. On 4 July 1930, Trud had noted with satisfaction the prolonged applause accorded at the Congress to the speech of Sergei Syrtsov, Chairman of the RSFSR Sovnarkom. While praising socialist competition and shock work as "the greatest idea" (velichaishaya ideya), he had strongly criticised the degree of banality (izvestnyi shablon) with which it had been implemented:

"Methods of shock work are natural and necessary, but not always, not in every sphere, and not in every form."

Along with Lominadze, another Bolshevik who had spoken candidly at the Congress about the falling level of real wages and deteriorating living conditions for workers, he was acknowledged leader of the so-called 'Right-"leftist" bloc. Until their removal by Party decree on 1 December 1930, Syrtsov and Lominadze kept up their criticism of Stalin's attack on the living standards of the workers and the 'yo-heave-ho' mentality that this had brought to production (not least through Stalin's new planned targets set at the Congress).

Such protests were dismissed as manifestations of 'worker adoration' (rabochelyubiye). However, as the industrial crisis of the summer of 1930 deepened, the 'right-"leftists"' did seem to mirror a general feeling of discontent. Workers were asking in the summer of 1930 what the unions had left to defend;⁸⁶ and were beginning to

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86 Reported in Zin. Grishin, Sotsialisticheskaya organizatsiya i distsiplina truda i voprosy sovetskogo trudovogo prava, Moscow, 1934, p.85

vote with their feet, in search of better conditions. Labour turnover in July 1930 reached unprecedented levels, particularly in the producer goods industries.⁸⁷

In this month Uglanov was finally removed from his post as Labour Commissar, to be replaced shortly thereafter by Anton Tsikhon, formerly chairman of the Builders' union. He was to preside over the Commissariat until it was merged with VTsSPS in 1933. Before long Voprosy truda was criticising Uglanov and the old leadership for blaming turnover on poor management and living conditions and for neglecting to mention "the sharpening of the class struggle and the strengthening of petty-bourgeois influence on certain backward sections of workers."⁸⁸

This criticism was echoed in the Party decree of 20 October 1930 which complained that Narkomtrud and its local organs had been unable under the "old opportunistic leadership" to reorganise their work in accordance with the tasks set before them in the reconstruction period. Particular criticism was aimed at the old leadership's attitude to unemployment, accusing them of maintaining hundreds of thousands of 'unemployed' at the labour exchanges at a cost of tens of millions of rubles.⁸⁹

The elimination of unemployment (ironically by the Narkomtrud decree of 9 October 1930)⁹⁰ meant that the Commissariat had lost one of its central functions. Tsikhon, speaking at an All-Union Conference on Labour in November summed up the new orientation with commendable brevity: ⁹¹

"The most fundamental and central of all decisions is contained in three words - (the) socialist organisation (of) labour: the organs of Narkomtrud, the employees of Narkomtrud, must become the active organisers of labour."

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87 See Chapter Three

88 P. Pekman, 'K Vsesoyuznomy soveshchaniyu po trudu' in Voprosy truda, 1930, no. 9, p.7.

89 Pravda, 22 October 1930.

90 Izvestiya, 11 November 1930.

91 Rezolyutsii Vsesoyuznogo soveshchaniya organov truda, Moscow, 1930, p.14.

The Conference on Labour had been convened to discuss the future responsibilities of labour organs now that unemployment had been eliminated, to discuss ways of best combatting labour turnover and to begin drafting a new Labour Code to replace the existing one, which all agreed was of little relevance to the current situation. However, there was evidently still some opposition left both in VTsSPS and in the remodelled Narkomtrud as the following quote illustrates: 92

"The existing Labour Code is not just inadequate, it needs to be broken up completely and fundamentally reworked and this, besides, in an atmosphere of well-known opposition on the part of Narkomtrud (and VTsSPS) especially in the shape of their 'proverbial' legal experts."

The conflict between the legal apparatus and the bureaucracies within the trade union and labour organs is also highlighted: 93

"Legal practice, albeit timidly, introduces absolutely necessary changes which 'worsen' the position of the worker, on the basis of experience it expresses the wish for new laws to be published. These wishes are met with a rebuff, or at least, are held up by both trade union and Narkomtrud organisations."

Anticipating complaints that such an approach might be against the interests of the workers, the author unequivocally states that "all other interests must be subordinated to the interests of production." 94

In the event the Labour Code became one of the casualties of the switch to material incentives during the course of 1931, when the work of Narkomtrud was further re-directed to the training of cadres for production.

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92 P. Stuchka, 'Po puti velikogo pereloma' in Sovetskoe trudovoe pravo na novom etape: sbornik statei, Mbscow-Leningrad, 1931, p.13.

93 ibid., p.10.

94 ibid., p.8.

Thus, despite these remnants of opposition, there could be little doubt by the end of 1930 that Stalin's line had triumphed. The old leaderships had been driven out of the unions and Narkomtrud, the last major oppositional grouping within the Party had been isolated, show trials were being staged or prepared for dissenting planners, economists and statisticians in order to discourage further opposition and a package of new legislation was being piloted through that would considerably restrict the liberty of the worker to change jobs. Everyone, it seemed, now had their 'faces to production'. What was now required was a reorganisation of all aspects of the production process to ensure that it improved its performance.

The Break Up of the Trade Unions, 1931-1934.

The first hint of a reorganisation of the unions came, appropriately enough, in the management newspaper, Za Industrializatsiyu, on 13 January 1931. It took a further four days for Trud to announce, on 17 January, that a special commission set up by the VTsSPS Secretariat had approved the scheme. Nonetheless, the resolution passed at the V plenum of VTsSPS that broke up the existing 23 unions into 45 new ones, came as a shock when published in Trud on 6 February.

Entitled "On Further Improving the Work of Trade Unions", the resolution explained that the reorganisation had been carried through on the production principle with the aim of decentralising union work. Kaganovich, in his speech to the IX VTsSPS Congress in 1932, went so far as to call them production unions, adding that the move "completes the struggle against the Rightists on organisational questions". The object of the exercise, in Kaganovich's view was to carry on a "twin fight against inter-union cooperation and caste-like shop activity." 95 In effect, the new Central Committee

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95 L.M. Kaganovich, O zadachakh profsoyuzov SSSR na dannom etape razvitiya, Moscow, 1932, p.3.

of each of the new unions was to take over questions of production, labour organisation, wages, rate-setting, labour protection, housing etc. while VTsSPS would only be left with the more general problems of legislation, cultural and international work.

Thus came to an end the revolutionary tradition of such unions as the Metalworkers' whose 1.5 million workers were now to be split among seven unions, the Miners' (into four new Unions), the Textile Workers' (into four) and the Building Workers' (into four). Ostensibly this reorganisation was to bring the smaller unions closer to the masses, but one can imagine the concern with which the regime watched these old unions grow as the numbers of industrial workers rose sharply upwards.

A second, and no less important, aspect of the reorganisation was the further weakening of the other great tradition of Soviet trade unions, the factory committees, by shifting the focus of union work onto the trade union group (profgruppa) on the shop floor.* This clearly made sense if the improvement of production was to be the union's main task.

The fruits of the reform were not long in ripening. An early example was provided by the first congress of the new Coal Miners' Union at the end of May 1931. Despite the appalling living conditions, turnover rates and accident record, the congress concentrated almost exclusively on production questions (falling productivity in the coal mines was one of the major headaches for the planners in 1931).⁹⁶

It was reported to the congress, however, that only 72 per cent of workers in the industry were members of the union.⁹⁷ This was no doubt partly due to the high proportion of new workers flooding into the industry, but the union policy of setting the pace in reviewing output standards and cutting rates could not have endeared them to all.

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96 'Congress of Coal Miners in the Soviet Union', in Industrial and Labour Information, vol.39, no.1, July 1931, pp.14-16.

97 ibid., p.16.

* Confirmed by the Party decree "On Party and Mass Work in the Shop and Brigade", Pravda, 25 March 1931.

However, at this stage the unions were merely following the Party line. Almost immediately before the announcement of the union reform had been made, Stalin had made his keynote speech to the industrial managers (on 4 February 1931) in which he ushered in a new phase of industrial policy under the slogan "technology is decisive".⁹⁸

The subsequent emphasis on individual planning targets and rewards for productive work had the effect of loosening worker solidarity and collective action. So, although union membership fell throughout the first nine months of 1931, it was due as much to the turmoil caused by the influx of new workers, the high turnover rates and the confusing new union structure. By the time that the unions were in a position to launch a concerted campaign for membership, Stalin had already introduced measures such as the wage reforms in heavy industry and preferential provisions for shock workers that would make union membership a logical step for any worker seeking to improve his or her standard of living.

Nonetheless, the fall in union membership in 1931 did give cause for concern. In the year from 1 October 1930 the percentage of workers who were members of a union fell from 74.7 per cent to 69.7 per cent.⁹⁹ Moreover, only 68 per cent of members, it was claimed, were paying their dues at this time.¹⁰⁰ This would imply that less than half of the labour force were fully paid-up members of unions. However, the average figure for membership mask wide variations from plant to plant, ranging from 45.2 per cent at the Magnitogorsk construction site to 97 per cent at the Nizhnii auto-works and 97.5 per cent at Krasnyi Treugol'nik¹⁰¹

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98 I.V. Stalin, Sochineniya, vol. 13, Moscow, 1952, p.29.

99 Sotsialisticheskoe stroitel'stvo SSSR, M, 1936, p.515.

100 N. Shvernik, Profsoyuzy v bor'be za organizatsiyu truda i zarplaty, M, 1932, p.42

101 Trud v SSSR; statisticheskii spravochnik, M, 1932, p.178

The union recruiting drive coincided with the next round of elections to the factory committees, which brought a fresh wave of shock workers into the union organisations in November 1931.¹⁰² By the end of the year virtually all (97 per cent) of union members were paying their dues.¹⁰³ Thereafter membership continued to rise, reaching 74 per cent by 1 October 1932 and nearly 80 per cent by the end of 1934.¹⁰⁴ This was due, in part, to a halving of union subscriptions from two to one per cent of wages in September 1933.¹⁰⁵

While taking the lead in promoting reviews of output standards and rate-cuts, the unions had also thrown their weight behind the cost accounting brigades which spread rapidly throughout Soviet industry in 1931 (see Chapter Seven). This was yet another example of the new leadership ignoring the experience of Tomskii who, as long ago as 1923 had warned:¹⁰⁶

"The very fact of the necessity to concentrate all the attention of trade unions on the defence of the economic interests of the workers is in sharp contrast to the participation of unions in industry, as it is not possible at one and the same time to run a factory on the basis of cost accounting and be the spokesman and defender of the economic interests of wage earners."

However, as Stalin had made cost accounting the sixth of his conditions in his speech "New Situation - New Tasks" on 23 June 1931 there was every reason to ignore the advice of the former union leader.

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102 N. Shvernik, Profsoyuzy SSSR nakanune vtoroi pyatiletki, Moscow, 1932, p.94.

103 N. Shvernik, Profsoyuzy v bor'be, p.42:

104 Sotsialisticheskoe stroitel'stvo SSSR, p.515.

105 Izvestiya, 17 August 1933

106 Quoted by Kaganovich at XVI Party Congress, XVI S'ezd, p.63.

The VI plenum of the VTsSPS in December 1931 concentrated almost exclusively on questions of technical standard setting, evidence of how far the unions had moved in 1931 towards becoming an arm of management. During the year VTsSPS had presided over the break up of the old traditional unions, had emasculated the factory committee, implemented preferential provisions for shock workers, had helped stamp out the production communes (see Chapter Six) and had been in the forefront of the campaign to raise output standards and cut rates. They still negotiated the collective contract, but this had now become a localised contract served the interests of production to the extent that it really only left the worker with the right to produce more.

Early in 1932, the unions were to effectively lose any control over another of their former safeguards. The XVII Party Conference in January-February 1932 in making the foreman and brigade leader the "immediate organisers of production" gave them the right to discipline the workers under their control without the worker having recourse to the Rate-Setting and Disputes Commission.

Shortly thereafter the IX VTsSPS Congress was finally convened (it should have met in December 1930 when it was preparing the break up of the old unions). The Party line on trade union affairs was accepted totally, there being none of the controversy that had characterised the VIII Congress. Virtually all of the worker delegates were members of cost accounting or shock brigades and 76 per cent of all delegates were affiliated to the Communist Party. 107

The relationship between the Soviet trade unionist and the Party was made explicit by Veinberg, writing in Trud

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107 'Soviet Trade Union Congress', in Industrial and Labour Information, vol.43, no.2, July 1932, pp 65-72

on 24 January 1933:

"We must treat trade unionists who repudiate the directions of the Communist Party in the matter of wages with the same severity as the Party applies to members who disorganise the grain front or any other battle front of the socialist economy. Trade unionists are sometimes heard to ask whether, as unionists, they ought to protest when wages above the standard rates are paid. These unionists are afraid of what the workers will think of them. This is an absolute disgrace and reveals a complete misunderstanding of the duties of Soviet trade unions. It is typical 'trade-unionism'. We must have done with this sort of 'protection of the workers' interests."

Small wonder that it was not deemed necessary to convene another Trade Union Congress until 1949!

Veinberg was commenting in the wake of the Government decrees making one day's arbitrary absenteeism an offence which obliged managers to fire the offender and passing factory housing and workers' provisions into the hands of management. As the managers were by now also solely responsible for rate-setting and pay, the promotion of socialist competition appeared to be the only area of trade union activity left in their competence.

However, in 1933 even competition seemed to be on the wane, even though the official figures showed that more than two out of every three workers were competing. The cost accounting brigades were certainly in terminal decline and no other major initiative in shock work had taken their place. There appeared a very real danger in mid-1933 that the trade unions really did have nothing left to defend.

Ostensibly on the personal initiative of Stalin, a decree was promulgated on 23 June 1933 merging Narkomtrud and VTsSPS "in order to meet the requirements of the trade

unions and secure a better execution of the duties of the Labour Commissariat of the USSR".¹⁰⁸

At the III plenum (of the ninth convocation) of VTsSPS on 29 June, a resolution was adopted approving of the move which was characterised as "a decision which stems from the entire course of socialist construction." ¹⁰⁹

In fact, of course, Narkomtrud had very little left to do: unemployment was gone, wages and hiring of personnel were the job of management and labour legislation was reduced to ad hoc decrees. It did still have responsibility for the ~~four~~ billion ruble social insurance budget¹¹⁰. It was this function that the regime obviously felt could be better handled by the unions. Indeed, the plenary resolution stated that "benefits and assistance will be based on shock worker and union cadres" and used against "flitters, truants and money grubbers".¹¹¹

The IV VTsSPS plenum, which was not held until September 1934 had a similar surprise, also on the personal initiative of Stalin. Due to the fast growth of the existing unions, it was felt that they were getting too big (four of the forty-seven had more than one million members), and it was resolved to "reorganise" them into 154 new unions (sixty five of which would be based outside Moscow). Thus the old Iron and Steelworkers' union was split into South, East and Central).¹¹²

On 31 December 1934, the very last day of the period under review, Shvernik quoted with approval Stalin's speech of a few days earlier in which he had introduced the slogan "cadres that have mastered technology are decisive".¹¹³ In his speech to the closing session of the V VTsSPS plenum on that day, Shvernik felt it necessary to advise his colleagues "One must remember that the union official is not a clerk, but an organiser of the masses."¹¹⁴

108 Izvestiya, 24 June 1933.

109 Trud, 12 July 1933.

110 N.M. Shvernik, Speech at the Seventeenth Congress of the CPSU, Moscow-Leningrad, 1934, p.8.

111 Trud, 12 July 1933.

112 N. Shvernik, O perestroike profsoyuzov, M, 1934, pp 4-17.

113 N. Shvernik, 'Ob itogakh V plenuma VTsSPS', in Voprosy profdvizheniya, 1934, no. 12, p.20.

114 ibid., p.18.

In reviewing the changes that had taken place since the shake up of the unions had commenced with the introduction of Kaganovich into VTsSPS, a writer in Voprosy profdvizheniya at the beginning of 1935 remarked:¹¹⁴

"These measures were part of the general reorganisation (perestroika) undertaken by the Party in our country with the aim of raising organisational work to the level of the political tasks."

So successful and thorough was the Party takeover of the Soviet trade unions that, before 1935 had ended, Stalin was expressing concern at the passivity of union organisations and established a commission of enquiry to discover the reasons. The man that he chose to head this commission was, of course, Kaganovich! ¹¹⁵

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114 S. Kotlyar, 'VII s'ezd sovetov i zadachi profsoyuzov' in Voprosy profdvizheniya, 1935, no.1, p.11.

115 Robert Conquest, Industrial Workers in the USSR, London, 1967, p. 153.

CHAPTER THREE

THE STATE OF LABOUR DISCIPLINE,
1928 - 1934

As we have seen, the demands for labour discipline vary from society to society and from one period to another. If we agree that the demand is usually for a pattern of behaviour that is perceived to be consistent with the production processes utilised, then it follows that, as the production processes change (for example, with the introduction of new technology), then the demands for discipline also change. Thus the harm done to production by a worker being arbitrarily absent for one day is likely to be greater in a factory using complex technology than that caused by a worker on a less sophisticated process taking three days off. By the same token, certain manifestations of worker behaviour, such as voluntarily quitting work, may be considered a violation of labour discipline during one historical epoch, but not in another.

Insofar as it tends to be the employer (factory owner or State) that determines just what constitutes discipline, usually within certain parameters established by Government legislation and sometimes with the approval of trade unions or other associations of employees, problems of labour discipline may be said to occur when the actual behaviour of workers falls to a given degree short of the expectations of management. If expectations are set too high, then more problems of discipline will occur.

Thus, in the Soviet Union during the period under review, too many workers were quitting their jobs voluntarily and too many were absent without permission. Labour turnover and absenteeism came, therefore, to be perceived as the two most serious manifestations of indiscipline, although there was a progressively increasing perception that many workers' overall attitude to work was falling well below expectations.

Usually the demand for labour discipline is part of an economic contract between employer and worker, the former utilising incentives and sanctions in order to persuade the employee to subordinate his immediate personal interests to those of production. If the employee does not respond he may be fired and the contract is terminated. In the Soviet Union the situation is more complicated, for the employment contract implicitly embodies certain social and political considerations as well as purely economic. Part of the social contract might be said to be the understanding that the interests of production are geared towards the interests of society, of which the workers are the acknowledged masters. The political contract is, therefore, that the interests of production are indivisible from those of the worker, who must needs have a disciplined and conscientious attitude to production. Indisciplined behaviour in a Soviet factory may thus be portrayed as anti-social behaviour worthy of political censure.

However, if in spite of such social and political pressure sufficient numbers of Soviet workers continue to put their personal interests before those of production and quit their jobs, take unsanctioned holidays and work only as hard as they can get away with, then the Soviet manager is basically in the same position as his Western counterpart and has recourse to either the 'carrot' (incentives) or the 'stick' (sanctions).

The situation is further complicated, however, by the political need to present conviction as the major factor in establishing discipline. This is where socialist competition plays an important role. Once competition had failed to prove the panacea to all of Soviet industry's ills in the early years of the industrialisation drive, but had helped establish firm management control over production ,

it lost all spontaneity and became a formalised ritual within the matrix of Soviet industrial relations. Few workers, and one suspects, even fewer managers, really believe in competition as a source of discipline: the former have little conception of being 'genuine masters of production' and the latter know only too well that the mass of workers will respond only to incentives or sanctions. However, as participation in competition is one of the indices by which both managers and workers are judged, and as it has long since become part of the tradition of the Soviet work place, both pay it the necessary lip service.

The evolution of the attitude of the authorities towards the question of establishing labour discipline is graphically illustrated by comparing the following quotes. The first was written before the spread of mass competition: ¹

"The Soviet worker also strives first and foremost to obtain as high a wage as possible, and in doing so does not think that he, as a member of the working class, is in the last resort interested in giving as much as possible to the Soviet state. In consequence, one may not rarely come across an absence of labour discipline, and the existence of absenteeism etc. in the State enterprises...This forces the Soviet organs (in agreement with the trade unions) to ensure that the very forms of wages should incite them to increased diligence. This explains the existence of standards of output and piece rate payment in Soviet state industry. Obviously, in distinction from the capitalist system, these measures are of a temporary character in Soviet Russia: as the socialist consciousness of the worker is developed and as the old individualistic outlook is outlived, both piece work and the compulsory minimum standard will become unnecessary."

The second was written during the 'optimistic' phase of the socialist offensive during the Leninist Enrolment: ²

"Together with normative (collective agreement, legislation, rules of internal order etc.) and material

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1 I. Lapidus and K. Ostrovityanov, An Outline of Political Economy, London, 1929, p.132.

2 I. Reznikov, 'Sotsialisticheskoe sorevnovanie i Narkomtrud', in Voprosy truda, 1930, no.2, pp. 7-8.

(incentive systems of pay, deductions for producing waste etc.) factors that determine a given level of labour discipline, a new factor has appeared on the scene - the voluntary self-discipline, conscious self-limitation of the worker who has taken the path of communist labour...

...A shock workshop is not just three or five hundred workers, it is a collective of pioneers of communist labour, voluntarily and consciously subordinating their personal interests to the interests of socialist production and to general class principles.

The struggle with the loafer and the money grubber in production at the present time represents a specific reflection of the class struggle in the country. Therefore, they are not just breaking the rules, therefore, but enemies of the people.

Therefore one must not approach infringements of labour discipline with a formal juridical approach: here is required first and foremost a social, class approach."

And, thirdly, an article written in 1934:³

"The task of educating these new cadres with a socialist labour discipline and a socialist attitude to work acquires significance of the first order; it must be resolved on the basis of intensive work on conviction, the explanation of new forms of relationships between people which the socialist enterprise creates, and also on the basis of compulsion, a pitiless struggle with loafers, layabouts, truants and flitters. In conditions of modern technology the violation of socialist labour discipline causes huge losses to the state and to the conscientious shock worker."

The continued presence of piece rates and output standards in Soviet industry to this day would suggest that the socialist consciousness foreseen in the first quote and identified among the shock workers in the other two, has never become the norm among industrial workers in the USSR.

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3 N. Golyandin, 'Osvoenie tekhniki i problema kadrov' in Trud v pervoi pyatiletki, Moscow, 1934. p. 39.

Labour Turnover

During the period under review tekuchest' (turnover), along with progul (absenteeism) came to be regarded as one of the major problems of labour discipline in Soviet industry. Similarly, the term letun (flitter) became a form of abuse on the level of progul'shchik (truant), lodyr' (loafer), rvach (money grubber), and shkurnik (self seeker).

As these epithets tended to be applied to whole cross strata of the working class, it was found expedient to counter them with a term describing a worker who did display the desired qualities in production. This was found in the udarnik (shock worker), who by definition, would not be expected to quit his job voluntarily or take days off without permission, but could be relied on to work conscientiously and productively. Thus at the Sverdlov textile mill (Moscow) in 1931, a worker had to score 100 points on the following criteria in order to become a shock worker (and qualify for the special provision card):⁴

1. Self-indenture to the end of the Five-Year Plan	30	points
2. Actively engage in social work.....	10	"
3. Rationalising suggestions.....	5	"
4. Fully utilise work day and be punctual.....	10	"
5. Solicitous attitude to tools and machinery	5	"
6. Economical use of materials.....	10	"
7. High quality output.....	15	"
8. Rewards	10	"
9. Good attendance record.....	5	"
10 No abs ences.....	10	"

This reveals the relative importance attached to various elements of discipline and illustrates the serious attention accorded to labour turnover. At this factory, in principle, one could not become a shock worker without promising to stay at the plant. Whether this list of criteria was effective is

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4 Zin. Grishin, op. cit., p.151.

open to some doubt. Just a year earlier, for example, this factory was suffering badly from labour turnover because its production had little room for raising skills.⁵ Moreover, given the widespread practice of 'luring' (pere-manivanie)⁶ in which factories competed for the services of skilled, disciplined workers, one would imagine that anyone qualifying as a shock worker at the above plant would be much sought after.

This introduces the notion of 'beneficial' turnover, whereby a worker might put his or her talents to better use, improve qualifications, move to a more important sector of the economy or to improve his family situation. In a rapidly-expanding economy such as the USSR's during the period under review, with its educational and technical training policies, opportunities for rapid mobility upwards and the heavy priority given to certain industries, regions and individual projects, much of the job changing that occurred during the first years of industrialisation must have brought some benefit to the economy.

It could even be argued that, as anything from one quarter to one third of all Soviet workers leaving their jobs were being dismissed for breaches of labour discipline, then this had the beneficial effect of clearing the factory of undesirable elements (were it not for the fact that, given the labour shortage, they would find employment with little effort elsewhere). Finally, given the significant proportion of temporary or seasonal workers in Soviet industry, particularly during the early years of industrialisation, then the 'lay offs' and 'end of contract' dismissals were hardly manifestations of indiscipline.

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5 Z. Mokhov, 'Rost tekuchesti rabochei sily v 1929/30g' in Voprosy truda, 1930, no.6, p.23.

6 Mokhov, ibid., p.25, termed it an everyday phenomenon, noting that the Deputy Director at Moscow's Dinamo works had challenged the AMO management to a competition in luring!

What remains are the so-called 'voluntary quits', when workers terminate their employment at an enterprise for their own personal reasons. As we have seen this is a characteristic feature of industrialising societies employing large numbers of new workers from a predominantly rural background (who have not yet adjusted to urban industrial life) or youngsters (who will tend to be more likely to improve skills, shop around etc.) Given the wide variations in pay, living and working conditions within industries and areas of the Soviet Union during the period under review one might expect a high turnover rate.

Moreover, new technologies were being introduced to old and new factories alike during this period, effecting radical changes among the small, spontaneous. social systems that industrial sociologists now recognise play such a major role in worker satisfaction. Wherever this occurred on a wide-scale in countries that had industrialised prior to the USSR, turnover rates had risen sharply as workers either sought refuge in plants utilising the old technology or found it easier to adapt to the changes in a completely new environment. The speed and scope of industrial innovation in the Soviet Union during the period under review must, therefore, have been expected to push up turnover rates, especially in heavy industry.

Thus the rates were perceived to be intolerably high at a time when, from an objective standpoint, they were not excessively so, given the appalling state of living and working conditions that obtained. Indeed, the figure of 85 per cent (of the average number of workers) leaving Soviet industry in 1935 was considerably higher than those being experienced in Western countries at that time, let alone the levels accepted tolerable in modern industrial society ⁷, but approximated the levels in Western industries at the turn of the century.

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7 In German industry in 1967-1972 the turnover rate was 5 per cent, in the USA in 1970 it was 4.8 per cent and in the USSR in 1971 it was 21 per cent, Wolfgang Teckenberg, 'Labour Turnover and Job Satisfaction: indicators of Industrial Conflict in the USSR?', in Soviet Studies, vol.XXX, April 1978, no.2, p.194.

Moreover, the Soviet turnover rate adhered to more general trends elsewhere.

For example, it has been well established that the new worker is much more likely to leave than the 'cadre' worker. Therefore, the more new workers at a given plant the higher the rate of turnover to be expected. The following table illustrates the scale of the problem involved in Soviet industry:

TABLE 2

Absolute Numbers for Hiring & Firing in Soviet Industry

(in thousands)			<u>1929-1933</u>
<u>Year</u>	<u>No. Hired</u>	<u>No. Fired</u>	<u>Net change</u>
1929	3577	3367	+ 232
1930	6482	5600	+752
1931	6983	6318	+944
1932	6554	6987	+534
1933	6347	6286	no rise

Source: Byulleten' ekonomicheskogo kabineta prof. S.N. Prokopovicha, no. 116, October 1934, Prague, p.14.

Thus, although the increment in the number of industrial workers in Soviet industry rose between 1929 and 1933 by just over two million , nearly thirty million were hired (and almost 28 million fired) during this period.

This affected, in particular, the Group 'A' (producer goods) industries. Thus, in 1931, 4.3 million workers were hired and 3.9 million left and in 1932 4.2. million arrived and 4.4 million left. As light industry (Group 'B') witnessed a slower growth in its labour force, its turnover rate was correspondingly lower (in 1931 1.9 million came and 1.8 million left, and in 1932 1.7 million came and 1.8 million left).⁸

Viewed thus, 1932 was a worse year for turnover than 1930, despite the fact that the overall rate had dropped from 152.4 per cent in 1930 to 135.3 per cent in 1932. However, it was perceived as being a greater problem in the former year and that is when measures began to be adopted to restrict the freedom of movement of Soviet labour.

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8 Byulleten' Prokopovicha, no.116, p.15.

Similarly, it has been established that the first three months of work at a factory represent the period in which the worker is most likely to leave.⁹ After this he or she is more likely to respond to incentives, become better integrated into the work environment and seek other means, notably absenteeism, of putting personal interests ahead of those of production). Given the huge numbers of hirings (over 6 million in every year from 1930 to 1933) it would thus be reasonable to expect that a proportion of these workers would change jobs twice, three times or even more during the course of one year.

Thus, a 100 per cent turnover rate does not necessarily indicate that the entire staff is replenished annually, but is more likely to represent a work force in which a proportion is stable, a smaller proportion changes once or twice per year and the remainder come and go in an endless stream. What is not reflected in these figures at all is the amount of internal turnover (switching jobs within the same factory). In the larger plants this could assume enormous scales, being estimated at 5000 per cent per annum in one large metalworks early in 1930.¹⁰

Soviet data suggest that, in common with the experience of other industrialising countries, it is the process of change rather than lack of stazh at a given plant that is the unsettling factor causing turnover. According to an investigation in 1929 of Moscow regional industry, 52.7 per cent of those leaving in the first three months quit voluntarily and a further 13.9 per cent were sacked for unsuitability. The respective figures for the 'cadre' workers (with more than five years experience) were 20.3 and 0.4 per cent.¹¹ Figures for the Rykov metal

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9 Mary Harris, 'Social Aspects of Labour Turnover in the USSR' in British Journal of Industrial Relations, vol.11; no.3, November 1964, pp.410-411.

10 Z. Mordukhovich, Na bor'bu s tekuchest'yu rabochei sily, Moscow-Leningrad, 1931, p.62.

11 M. Vovsi and R. Shostak, 'K voprosu o tekuchesti rabochei sily v promyshlennosti' in Puti industrializatsii, 1930, no.14, p.30.

works in the period 1926 to 1928, reveal that workers with less than three months service accounted for only 5.2 per cent of the labour force, but 40.8 per cent of the turnover, whereas those with five years or more service at the plant constituted 10.9 per cent of the work force and just 0.4 per cent of those quitting.¹²

Several other generalisations may be drawn from the turnover figures. Thus women tend to have lower turnover rates than men,¹³ workers in light industry tend to leave more infrequently than workers in heavy industry,¹⁴ skilled have lower rates than unskilled¹⁵, and lower paid groups are more likely to quit than higher grade groups¹⁶.

However, it should be stressed that these are only correlates of turnover, revealing the groups most likely to quit. The main determinants of labour turnover are pay and conditions (in the Soviet case during the period under review the latter, arguably, were of more importance). This was recognised even by Stalin, who identified 'wage levelling' (uravnilovka) as the main cause of turnover in his key speech to the industrial managers on 23 June 1931.¹⁷

In their turn, pay and conditions are a factor in the level of job satisfaction, which is the variable that most influences the decision to stay or quit. If the worker is more or less satisfied with his or her overall work and living situation and can perceive no alternative means of bettering it, he or she will tend to stay at the factory.

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12 S. Kheinman, 'O tekuchesti rabocheho sostava promyshlennosti SSSR', in Puti industrializatsii, 1929, nos 13-14, p.41

13 Thus the cotton industry, which employed predominantly women, had well below average turnover figures throughout the period under review, see Appendix B.

14 See Appendix B

15 M Rakovskii, 'Sotsorevnovanie i tekuchest' rabochei sily', Puti industrializatsii, 1930, nos. 15-16, p.32 claims that in spring of 1929 in the metal industry, skilled turnover was 8 per cent and unskilled 25 per cent, rates which had doubled by the first half of 1930.

16 A. Mints, 'Rynok truda v periode rekonstruktsii' in Puti industrializatsii, 1930, nos. 11-12, p.73

17 I.V. Stalin, Sochineniya, vol.13, M. 1952, pp.55-56.

If dissatisfied, or perceiving better conditions elsewhere the worker will tend to quit as and when the opportunity arises or levels of dissatisfaction become high.

Thus, it would have been highly unlikely if there had been a high level of satisfaction among workers sleeping on earth floors, near starving for lack of adequate provisions, or those who had been sent to the most unpleasant and difficult work on arriving fresh from the countryside. No amount of moral appeals, laws restricting movement or even improvements in pay would solve this particular problem until the living and working conditions had been tackled. Stalin admitted this in his June 1931 speech, too.

Consequently, the extremely high turnover rates for the coal industry (in the Donbas mines, turnover had already reached 300 per cent in 1926/7)¹⁸, came down not so much after the wage reforms in the autumn of 1931, but when provisions and housing conditions finally started to improve in the spring of 1933 (see Appendix C). Similarly, for the country as a whole, turnover rates started to fall not so much following the Government legislation of late 1930 - early 1931, but when the food situation started to get better in 1933. The same trend may be seen in the sphere of housing, which fell from 5.73 square metres per urban dweller at the beginning of 1929 to 4.64 square metres by 1 January 1933.¹⁹

Indeed, it may be argued that the turnover rates commenced to rise in the second half of 1928/29 (i.e. from April 1929) with the fall in the level of real wages and the start of the deterioration in living standards that was to characterise the situation in the Soviet towns throughout the First Five-Year plan. However, analysts of turnover at

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18 V. Hoffding, 'Labour Conditions in Soviet Russia', in The Slavonic (and East European) Review, vol.7, no.20, January 1929, p.359.

19 Istoriya SSSR, vtoraya seriya, vol.8, Moscow, 1967, p.513

this period identify the inadequately rapid promotion of workers to higher skill grades as the major reason for voluntary quits, followed by wage differentiation. Only the indisciplined behaviour of the cohort of middle-aged, unskilled workers is attributed directly to shortcomings among the workers, the bulk of the blame for turnover being laid squarely on the management and planning organs.²⁰

Throughout this period, indeed until the mass campaign against turnover commenced in the summer of 1930, it was regarded as, first and foremost an economic and social problem. However, the findings of the Government committee on labour discipline, reached in early 1929, prompted one analyst to conclude that "turnover is the main evil in establishing the correct labour discipline."²¹

Although, as we have seen, the peasant migrants into the work force became the scapegoat for all forms of falling discipline, there is evidence that links with the land could have a stabilising effect. In 1927/8, the Krasnoe Sormovo shipyards in Nizhnii Novgorod had one of the lowest turnover rates in heavy industry (25-30 per cent), due in part to the fact that 70 per cent of its workers were connected with the land.²² The Moscow regional survey detects no significant patterns of leaving between workers with or those without land, other than the obvious fact that the former constituted a higher proportion of those laid off.²³

It seems to have been the effects of collectivisation that sent the workers scurrying back to the countryside. In early 1930, Krasnoe Sormovo was reporting that "as a rule it is the best and most highly-skilled section of workers that leaves the factory in such increased outflows of manpower."²⁴ Morale at this enterprise was by now very low. During the collectivisation campaign village workers

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20 Puti industrializatsii, 1930, no.14, p.36 (Vovsi and Shostak);

21 A. Sokol'skii, op. cit., p.49.

22 ibid., p.51.

23 Puti industrializatsii, 1930, no 14, p.31 (Vovsi and Shostak)

24 Voprosy truda, 1930, no.6, p.22 (Mokhov)

had been obliged to join the collective farms or be sacked. Following Stalin's "Dizzy with Success" speech in March 1930 "they all quit".²⁵

The first article to draw attention to the sharp rise in turnover was in the management newspaper, Za industrializatsiyu, which on 8 May 1930 had complained of the tendency for workers to "go to new places to sniff life for themselves (sobstvennym nosom). Within days of this article the Metalworkers' journal reported that groups of planers in the machine and boiler shops of Krasnyi Putilovets had undertaken not to quit the plant without permission until the Five-Year Plan had been fulfilled.²⁶ However, the same issue pointed out that the luring of metalworkers by representatives of other factories had "assumed the most disgraceful forms". At Krasnyi Putilovets, for example, it was stated that "our factory is suffering from the hirers...people come ostensibly on a tour and walk around asking if you are agreeable to go to this or that factory."²⁷

A feature of the first articles on turnover was the high proportion of skilled workers reported to be leaving. In a desperate attempt to hold on to their better workers, managers would refuse to allow workers to leave "at their own request". This, in turn, led to skilled workers deliberately violating discipline in order to get the sack. Even so, managers were reluctant to fire them and the workers would take management to the Rate-Setting and Disputes Commissions for not applying the law that required dismissal after three days' absenteeism.²⁸

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25 Metallist, 20 May, 1930.

26 ibid.,

27 Voprosy truda, 1930, no. 6, p.25 (Mokhov)

28 ibid., p.26

The early articles on turnover, particularly those in the Narkomtrud journals, Voprosy truda and Na trudovom fronte, continued to blame management, poor living conditions and the shortage of skilled cadres for the rise.²⁹ This was reflected in the Narkomtrud decree of 30 May 1930 which listed the following reasons:³⁰

1. Poor organisation of work due to low level of technical standard setting. The utilisation of too many temporary workers.
2. Differentiation in rates of pay.
3. Poor system of promotion.
4. Inadequate training levels.
5. Desire of rural workers to move from small towns to larger ones.
6. Lack of permanent cadres in some sectors covered by large numbers of rural seasonal workers.
7. Lack of selection in manpower.

These were the solutions that the Labour Commissariat proposed:³¹

1. More training, especially in heavy industry.
2. Expand standard setting.
3. Introduce benefits for long-service workers.
4. Organise more promotion within the enterprise.
5. Cut down on temporary workers.
6. Introduce given period of contracts for skilled workers and engineering and technical personnel.
7. Graduates from factory schools must serve out their time in the enterprise.
8. Improve housing and living conditions.

Again, the onus for much of the problem is laid on management rather than blaming 'backward' or 'class alien elements'. However, not all of Narkomtrud's regional offices were so complacent. The Leningrad labour office was taken to task by Na trudovom fronte for trying to solve the problem of labour turnover by the "militarisation of labour".³²

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29 Na trudovom fronte, 1930, no.17. pp.10-11; nos. 19-20, p.9; Voprosy truda, 1930, no.6, pp.22-28, (Mokhov)

30 Voprosy truda, 1930, no.6, p.27 (Mokhov)

31 ibid., p.28.

32 Na trudovom fronte, 1930, no.17, p.10.

One should recall that the 'Rightist', Uglanov, still headed Narkomtrud at this stage and one can only assume that his diagnosis and suggested cures help^{ed} speed his own demise. However, the XVI Congress of the Communist Party, held in June - July at the height of the discussions about turnover, paid them relatively little attention, although, ominously, on 30 June Lominadze was warning Congress about "serious production difficulties in a number of industrial cities",³³ a point supplemented on the following day by Mirzoyan, a delegate from the Urals:³⁴

"Comrades, I think that no other detachment of our working class lives in such bad conditions as the Urals worker. In the largest workers' settlements there are no baths, no cinemas, no clubs, no paved streets..."

Moreover, as he went on to inform the delegates, the Urals worker was getting 20 per cent lower wages than the national average. In fact, the situation was even more complicated than he made them out to be for figures published in a trade union survey conducted in March 1930 revealed the following daily rates for a 7th grade (i.e. high-skilled) fitter (slesar) in a variety of industries and areas:³⁵

Electrotechnical	8.67	rubles
Iron & Steel (Ukr)	5.42	"
" " (Ural)	5.92	"
Transport eng,	7.80	"
Special engineering	7.20	"
Coal (Ukraine)	4.23	"
" (Urals)	3.94	"
Textiles	4.59	"
Rubber	7.27	"

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33 XVI S'ezd, p.197.

34 ibid., p. 265.

35 Z. Mordukhovich, op. cit., p.54; the same author notes that skilled textile workers in Leningrad were earning 75 to 80 rubles a month, while unskilled labourers were getting from 95 to 130 rubles in the metal works, ibid., p.57; on 13 March 1930 a VTsSPS investigation into turnover resulted in a decree "On the Campaign Against Labour Turnover", which called for the correction of such anomalies, see ibid., p.55; See also I. Zaromskii, 'Na bor'bu s tekuchest'yu rabochei sily' in Voprosy truda, 1930, no.9, p.2

In other words, the Urals miner was getting only 45.4 per cent of the wage of a worker of the same skill grade in the electrotechnical industry. Given the shortage of all skilled workers, there would be ample opportunity for him to move and improve his situation. He was also ^{receiving} only two-thirds of the pay of a fellow Urals' worker of the same skill in the iron and steel industry.

Nonetheless, the main reason for turnover in the coal industry remained the poor housing facilities. A delegate from the Kusbass district in Siberia claimed that there was living space for just 18 to 19 per cent of the permanent miners there.³⁶ Eikhe, the local Party secretary, also complained that some Kuzbas miners had only 1.4 square metres living space and blamed this for a turnover rate that he claimed was 94 per cent per month!³⁷

Ironically, it was subsequently claimed that the mass outflow from the Donbas coalmines commenced at the end of June (i.e. precisely as the Congress was sitting). In less than two months the mines lost 70,000 workers (or one-third of its complement). Again housing and working conditions were chiefly held to blame. ³⁸

In the autumn of 1930 the regime launched a three-pronged attack at turnover. Firstly, with the elimination of unemployment, Narkomtrud was entrusted with the job of organising the hire of labour through 'staff offices' (upravleniye kadrov), thus, it was hoped, stemming the free flow (samotek) of labour from the countryside in favour of orgnabor (organised hire). Secondly, legislation was introduced to encourage workers to stay at their enterprise through moral appeals for self-indentures, increased benefits for 'cadre' (in this case with two years' service) and shock workers and attempts to improve living and working

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³⁶ Kopylev, XVI S'ezd, p.384.

³⁷ Trud, 10 February 1931.

³⁸ A. Izrailovich, 'Bor'ba za ugot'', in Bol'shevik, 1931, no.18, p.37; Trud, 17 July 1930.

conditions. Thirdly, a much tougher line was taken against the 'flitters'. This was initiated by the Party appeal of 3 September 1930,³⁹ and the decree issued by RSFSR Sovnarkom on 6 September 1930, which first stated that quitting work arbitrarily was tantamount to violating labour discipline.⁴⁰ This was the first in a series of decrees to be issued over the next six months that sought to bring this problem under control.⁴¹

It would be wrong to claim that none of these approaches led to any improvement in the situation, although they were far from successful in eliminating the problem of turnover. Rates never again reached the heights of July 1930 either in industry as a whole (14.6 per cent or an annual rate of 175.2 per cent), or in heavy industry (18.9 per cent or an annual rate of 226.8 per cent), including its worst sector, coal mining (38.2 per cent or an annual rate of 458.4 per cent), although light industry turnover peaked somewhat later, in October 1930 (at 12.6 per cent or 151.2 per annum)⁴²

Certainly orgnabor made some inroads into the excessively high rates of turnover among collective farm migrants, even if the overall level in the industries where they worked remained high. Thus in the mines of the Ugol' amalgamation in the Ukraine, in September 1931, 26,481 workers who had arrived by samotek had left and only 14,622 had arrived, whereas of the 39,276 arriving through orgnabor, only 8,922 (23 per cent) had left.⁴³ On the other hand, of 7,000 miners coming to the Moscow mines in the period from July to September 1931, 5,000 (71.5 per cent) left.⁴⁴

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39 See Chapter Five.

40 Izvestiya, 8 September 1930.

41 See Chapter Four.

42 Sotsialisticheskoe stroitel'stvo SSSR, M, 1934, p.342.

43 Trud v SSSR - materialy k otchetu narkomtruda SSSR na IX VSPS, Moscow-Leningrad, 1932, p.17.

44 A. Tsikhon, Doklad narkomtruda . . IX s"ezdu profsoyuzov, M, 1932, p.10.

Other aspects of the Party's campaign against turnover also met with only partial success. Self-indentures in Leningrad covered 24.2 per cent of all Leningrad workers by the end of September 1930 and had reached impressive figures at individual enterprises by the end of the year.⁴⁵ By the beginning of December, a survey revealed that 44.7 per cent of metal workers studied had signed, as had 51.5 per cent of communication workers, 33.5 per cent of textile and 27.5 per cent of woodworkers.⁴⁶

However, as long as the shortage of skilled and semi-skilled workers remained, there was little chance of getting these pledges to stick, especially when living conditions deteriorated in 1931 and 1932.

The switch to raising skills by means of material incentives and an extensive programme of training was heralded by Stalin's speech of 4 February and initiated with his address of 23 June 1931, to meetings of industrial managers. At the latter Stalin complained:⁴⁷

"You will be hard put to find an enterprise where the labour force has not changed in the course of the last half year, or even quarter, at least by 30 to 40 per cent. What is the reason for labour turnover? It is in the incorrect organisation of wages, in the incorrect pay scales, in the 'leftist' wage levelling in the sphere of wages."

Stalin's new policy was aimed at eliminating turnover by means of the abolition of wage levelling, the organisation

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45 Sotsialisticheskoe sorevnovanie na predpriyatiyakh Leningrada v gody pervoi pyatiletki, (1928-1932gg), 1961, p.176.

46 M. Rafail, 'Profsoyuzy posle XVI s"ezda partii' in Boľ'shevik, 1931, no.5, p.52.

47 I.V. Stalin, Sochineniya, vol.13, p.56.

of wages so as to give priority to the key industries, and the improvement of workers' living conditions.

The first industry to get a taste of the new policy was the Donbas coalfield which, in July 1931, was ordered to scrap wage levelling within two months. Then in September 1931 the economic organs were given the right to hire labour without going through the labour organs who, it was claimed, had only "inexperienced workers and idlers" on their books.⁴⁸

A week later key wage reforms in the metal and mining industries were introduced that pointed the way to wage differentiations both between skilled and unskilled workers, but also between priority and non-priority industry.⁴⁹

At the XVII Party Conference early in 1932, Postyshev was able to report that the wage reforms had improved the skilled turnover rates in the iron and steel industry, quoting figures from Southern metalworks as evidence.⁵⁰ However, a contemporary account suggested that the reforms may have come too late for "the old steel smelters have disbanded and work as navvies on the new construction sites"⁵¹

Despite the opportunities for higher earnings and the priority provisions directed to these new sites, they were experiencing great difficulty in holding on to their workers. More than 10,000 left Magnitogorsk every month from July to November 1931.⁵² Certain areas were still reporting extremely ^{high} turnover rates in both the coal and metal industries in 1931. ⁵³

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48 Izvestiya, 19 September 1931

49 Trud, 23 September, 1931

50 XVII Konferentsiya VKP (b): stenograficheskie otcheti, M, 1932, p.52.

51 G. Lauer, 'Perevypol'nit' plan chernoi metallurgii v 1932g', in Bol'shevik, 1932, no.3, p.35.

52 P.Pochinshchikov, S. Syskov, 'O rabote nizovogo partiinogo zvena (na opyte partorganizatsii Magnitostroya)', in Bol'shevik, 1931, nos. 19-20, p.62.

53 For Donbas, see Na trudovom fronte, 1931, nos 23-24, p.22; for Vostokstal', see V. Reutov, 'Tekuchest' rabsily - zleishii vrug sotsialisticheskogo stroitel'stva, Voprosy truda, 1933, no.1, p.65.

The year of 1932 was to bring little relief to those leading the campaign against turnover. At the beginning of the year it was estimated that only 60 per cent of Donbas workers had worked at the same pit for the whole of January, 21.6 per cent had worked in two, and no less than 18.3 per cent in three or more! ⁵⁴

Throughout 1932 came reports of high turnover rates, especially amongst skilled cadres, from all over the country. A particular feature was the unprecedented rise in light industry, which was catching up with heavy industry.

In virtually every case the reasons given for the turnover were the same: dissatisfaction with wages, lack of housing and poor provisions. All these factors were confirmed in a major article on turnover in the trade union journal early in 1933, noting that in the coal industry poor labour organisation and living conditions were the main reasons, in metallurgy - failure to introduce wage reforms and living conditions, in engineering - standard setting and in textiles - wages. ⁵⁵

At the Stalingrad Tractor Works in September 1932, 10 per cent of all workers left, but 12.9 per cent of planers, 12.5 per cent fitters, 11.8 per cent of turners and 11 per cent of electrical fitters. At Krasnoe Sormovo, whereas 7.5 per cent of all workers had left, the figures for turners and moulders were 10.2 and 20.2 per cent respectively. ⁵⁶ In 6 Leningrad light industry factories in August 1932, 62.3 per cent of all workers leaving were semi-skilled or skilled workers. ⁵⁷

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54 Na trudovom fronte, 1932, nos. 17-18, p.9

55 Pershman, 'Tekuchest' rabochei sily i zadachi prof-soyuzov', in Voprosy profdvizheniya, 1933, no.3, p.42.

56 Pravda, 9 December 1932.

57 P. Vasil'ev, Ya Leipunskii, Voprosy oborachivaemosti rabocheho sostava v legkoi promyshlennosti, M, 1933; p.93.

However, by the end of the summer of 1932 absenteeism had replaced turnover as the major problem of discipline. To some extent turnover was to blame for this, as more and more workers were deliberately being absent for three days in order to get sacked, so that they could move on to other jobs. Both these problems were tackled in the series of decrees on absenteeism and the control of provisions which were introduced by the end of the year.⁵⁸

Many writers drew a comparison between the 'flitter' and the 'truant' calling both "the class enemies of the proletariat" ⁵⁹ and trade union organisations were advised that "the struggle against turnover and absenteeism, the struggle for a socialist labour discipline is the most important form of class struggle at the present stage." ⁶⁰

However, the task set before the trade unions to eliminate turnover in 1933 was clearly so much rhetoric. Midway through the year, when the unions took over Narkomtrud, Shvernik launched a vicious attack on "malingerers", flitters shirkers and money grubbers for whom the interests of socialist construction are of utterly no interest or concern." ⁶¹

Labour turnover disappeared from the pages of labour and union journals as a matter of priority concern during 1934 and was not a major subject of discussion at the XVII Congress in January - February of that year. The undoubted rise in living standards and the improved skill levels of the Soviet workforce combined with a reduction of new workers entering industry helped to maintain turnover levels below 100 per cent for the rest of the decade.

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58 See Chapter Four

59 Voprosy profdvizheniya, 1933, no.3, p.50 (Persman)

60 ibid., p.51

61 S. Kuril'skii, 'O sliyanie Narkomtruda SSSR i VTsSPS' in Sovetskoe stroitel'stvo, 1933, no.11, p.16.

ABSENTEEISM

As with labour turnover, a distinction should be drawn between simple correlates of absenteeism (age, gender, size of plant, time of year etc.) and determinants (i.e. why workers take unsanctioned days off). It immediately becomes apparent that the main determinants of turnover (pay and living conditions) are by no means necessarily the main causes of absenteeism. On the other hand, such factors as the level of the worker's integration in the workplace, working conditions and job satisfaction may be seen to contribute to both forms of behaviour.

Absenteeism would seem to be a feature of all industrial societies, although it is evident that it is not typical of all or even most workers. At the same time, the attendance record of one Zabolotin, a fitter at the October tram depot, who in thirty-five years of service had never once been absent without permission except during the October Revolution,⁶² is quite unusual.

It does appear that absenteeism becomes more prevalent during periods of intensive changes in the work and life situation of workers, seemingly acting as a safety-valve during the process of adaptation that falls short of the more drastic solution of quitting.

From Lenin onwards, Soviet leaders have displayed a particular distaste for this form of worker behaviour, perhaps because absenteeism is so overtly at odds with the desired attitude to work in a socialist society. It is the most explicit example of a worker placing his or her immediate personal interests before those of production. For this reason, it is probable that successive Soviet leaders have devoted too much effort to the largely political task of eliminating unsanctioned absenteeism, and

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62 Trud, 5 July 1930.

too little to the social task of tackling the underlying reasons that give rise to it.

Thus the utility of virtually eliminating unsanctioned absenteeism in Soviet industry (where it currently constitutes a small proportion of all work days lost)⁶³, may be questioned, particularly in view of the comparatively high rates of sickness, sanctioned absenteeism and underutilisation of the working day.

A parallel might be drawn here with the long-standing Soviet attitude to strikes. Their effective elimination from industrial relations in the USSR from 1929 undoubtedly provided the regime with an important political victory, but it is by no means obvious that the absence of strikes has been a great boon to the Soviet economy. For example, during 1931 and 1932 each British worker lost on average less than two-thirds of one day per annum through strikes,⁶⁴ one-tenth of the unsanctioned absentee rate in Soviet industry during those years.⁶⁵

Moreover, there is evidence that the lack of strikes tends to push up both absentee and sickness rates.⁶⁶ Thus, if the Soviet worker is effectively prevented from striking or arbitrarily taking a day off, one would expect that worker to find other means of accommodating the tensions produced by work in modern industry by taking unauthorised breaks, idling, malingering and working half-heartedly.

Absenteeism, therefore, illustrates most graphically some

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63 The unsanctioned absentee rate has remained under 1 day per worker throughout the post-war period, see Yu. L. Sokol'nikov, 'Sotsialisticheskaya disziplina truda i puti ee uluchsheniya', in Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniya, 1976, no. 1, p.93.

64 International Labour Organisation Year Book, 1934-35, vol. 2, Geneva, 1935, pp. 27, 75.

65 See Appendix D

66 Richard Hyman, Strikes, London, 1972, pp. 34, 54-55.

of the conflicts between the political and economic imperatives of Soviet society. Having adopted the political decision to eliminate unsanctioned absenteeism (progul) as a manifestation of the petty-bourgeois attitudes of certain workers, the absentee laws that flowed from that of 15 November 1932, treated all absenteeism without good reason as anti-social, deviant behaviour.

This was clearly too inflexible a policy for application to a labour force living and working under the exigent conditions of the first five-year plans. For the law made no distinction between the good worker who lived 15 kms from the plant and failed to turn up for work due to transport difficulties and the habitual drunkard who took a day off to cure a hangover.

Obviously, it would be in the interests of the plant management to make such a distinction, particularly as it would have been far more aware of local conditions, the characters of the workers involved and the economic desirability of firing either or both of them. As managers were judged, first and foremost, on their economic performance, they might find it in their interests to defy the law and sanction the first worker's absence, albeit in retrospect.

Similarly, in the first years of the industrialisation drive, local management would be able to gauge, more or less, the level of absenteeism on any given day and would keep on their books sufficient numbers of surplus workers to cover the truants. This is common practice in industrialising countries.

The combination of laws insisting that factories shed their surplus labour and the introduction of more complex technological processes inevitably made absenteeism into

a more pressing problem than it had hitherto been. For the loss caused by absence in such conditions would be all the greater.

It has been estimated that progul cost the Soviet economy 225 million rubles in the economic year 1927/28. In that year 13 million working days were lost (at 6.04 days per worker)⁶⁷. It may be calculated, therefore, that each day's absence cost the economy a little over 17 rubles. In 1931, the cost of absenteeism had risen to 714 million rubles through 24.6 million days being lost (at 5.96 days per worker)⁶⁸, which works out at almost exactly 29 rubles per absence. In other words, over this short time span, the cost to the economy of each day's absence had almost doubled.

This helps explain why Vesenkha officials were more concerned with the fact that Soviet industry had lost virtually as much through absenteeism in the first five months of 1929 as it had for the whole of 1928,⁶⁹ than it was with the substantial reduction in rates of absenteeism during that period.

However, it is useful to keep a sense of perspective when discussing the cost of absenteeism, for it was by no means the costliest form of behaviour by the Soviet worker. In 1927/28, for example, workers were estimated to have drunk spirits to the value of 1.5 milliard rubles, equivalent to the entire budget for capital construction that year.⁷⁰

Moreover, if one might assume that the cost of a day's sick leave is the same as that of an absence then the day's lost through illness (including maternity leave) would have cost the country a staggering 1.88 milliard rubles in 1931, more than 260 per cent higher than the cost of progul.⁷¹

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67 T.A. Tirzbanurt, Za trudovuyu distsiplinu, 2nd. ed., Moscow-Leningrad, 1929, p.33.

68 Pravda, 1 December 1932.

69 Trud, 25 July 1929.

70 T.A. Tirzbanurt, op. cit., p.55.

71 Calculated from Trud v SSSR: statisticheskii spravochnik, 1936, p.96.

It was never precisely calculated just how much labour turnover cost the economy. However, one author did note in this connection that the cost of hiring one worker in American industry was the equivalent of 72 rubles.⁷² He does not suggest that the figure in Soviet industry was lower, but makes the point that the 7 million workers that had to be hired in 1931 to achieve an overall increment to the working class of one million cost the economy a substantial amount. If we accept the American figures, for argument's sake, as being roughly applicable in Soviet industry, then the cost of hiring manpower alone would work out at well over 400 million rubles, more than half the cost of absenteeism. The total cost of turnover must have been considerably greater.

This highlights an important feature of absenteeism in relation to the statistics on labour discipline. Because it is relatively easy to keep records on, absenteeism tended to dominate the statistics during the period under review, at least until the 1932 law. For example, in the eight factories of Yugostal' studied in 1927/28, of the 103,568 breaches of discipline recorded, no fewer than 77,828 (75.1 per cent) were cases of unsanctioned absenteeism, with only 5,276 (5.1 per cent) incidents of disobeying management orders, 2,178 (2.1 per cent) sleeping at work and 2,950 (2.8 per cent) for leaving work early.⁷³

However, if progul accounted for three out of every four violations of labour discipline, why was there such a heated discussion over falling levels from May 1928 onwards at a time when absentee rates were being reduced substantially? In the economic year 1928/29 the rate fell by more than 26 per cent to 4.46 days per worker from 6.04 days in 1927/28.⁷⁴

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72 S. Kheinman in Pravda, 9 December 1932.

73 G. Dukor, 'Sebestoimost', proizvoditel'nost' truda i trudovaya distsiplina', in Bol'shevik, 1929, no.7, p.32.

74 Trud v SSSR. Spravochnik 1926-1930gg. p.19.

Apart from the aforementioned rising cost of each day's absence, the main cause of concern was probably the growing impatience on the part of the authorities with the perceived state of labour discipline, particularly since the introduction from 1928 of the seven-hour, three-shift working day.⁷⁵

The Government commission on labour discipline reflected this, reporting in 1929 that, although absentee rates were falling, this was more than compensated for by a rise in all other violations.⁷⁶ A commentator on these findings concluded: ⁷⁷

"The important thing , insofar as the question of labour discipline is concerned, is that its overall condition does not guarantee the pace of work undertaken by the enterprises."

In the absence of reliable statistics on other forms of indiscipline, one can neither prove nor disprove this, although the oft-repeated accusation that managements were turning a blind eye to violations was probably justified.

However, what may be gleaned from the statistics is that the total number of days lost for all reasons other than rest days and days when the factory stood idle was falling.

In 1927/28, for example, 10.6 per cent of days per calendar year were lost through annual leave, sickness and all forms of absenteeism. Unsanctioned absenteeism accounted for just 1.7 per cent.⁷⁸

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75 See 'The Seven-Hour Day in Soviet Russia', International Labour Review, vol. XXII, no.3, September 1930, pp 329-357.

76 A. Sokol'skii, op. cit., p.5

77 ibid., p.6

78 Trud v SSSR. Spravochnik 1926-1930gg., pp. 18-19.

This is how the situation changed in the period under review:

TABLE 3

Progul and all no shows as a percentage of all calendar days

<u>Year</u>	<u>Unsanctioned Absenteeism</u>	<u>All No Shows</u>	
1928	1.6	10.6	5.84.
1929	1.1	10.1	4.02
1930	1.2	10.7	4.38
1931	1.6	11.2	5.84
1932	1.6	11.1	5.84
1933	0.25	8.9	0.91
1934	0.20	8.8	0.73

Source: Trud v SSSR: statisticheskii spravochnik, 1936, p. 96

However, as it was conservatively estimated that one hour in every seven was lost in unproductive work in 1927/28, it may be calculated that as much time was lost through the underutilisation of the working day as through all the above causes combined. ⁷⁹

In other words, more than six times the losses caused by unsanctioned absenteeism were brought about through under-utilisation of the working day. This helps explain why the authorities sought to tackle this problem once absenteeism had been brought under control in 1933.

What was required, therefore, at the start of the period under review, was a complete change of attitude to work by the entire work force. This is where socialist competition played such a major role. It provided an example of worker behaviour that approximated that desired by management and Party.

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79 T.A. Tirzbanort, op. cit., p.37.

One should also bear in mind that there is evidence to show that a growing proportion of the labour force was observing labour discipline at this time. Thus, among workers in the Donbas in December 1927, only 48.5 per cent had no unsanctioned absences during that month whereas 17 per cent had four or more! By December 1928, the figures were 57.5 and 10 per cent respectively. In both years roughly one-third of all workers had been absent from between one and three days.⁸⁰

This introduces another specific feature of progul in Soviet industry. In most other industrialised countries there was no concept of a maximum number of days that might be taken off for no reason, whereas in the USSR the Government decree of 22 August 1927⁸¹ had given workers the right to have up to two days off per month without attracting dismissal. Reports indicate that some workers were systematically taking advantage of this right.⁸²

It was in this context that the 15 November 1932 decree⁸³ described the existing law as "an incitement to absenteeism". Certainly it was utilised throughout the First Five-Year Plan by workers as a means of getting the sack and thus expediting their getting a better job elsewhere.⁸⁴ It became particularly prevalent among skilled workers during the summer of 1932, when managers were most reluctant to let them go.⁸⁵ It was probably this phenomenon that prompted the Government (the Party wisely did not add its signature to this decree) to adopt a law that made it obligatory for management to sack a worker, and deprive him of ration card and housing, for just one day's unsanctioned absenteeism.

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80 A. Sokol'skii, op. cit., pp. 18-19.

81 Sobranie uzakonenii i rasporyazhenii RSFSR, 1927, no.87,

82 Metallist, 8 April 1929.

83 Izvestiya, 16 November 1932.

84 Z. Mordukhovich, op. cit., pp. 115-116; Metallist, 10 July 1930; B. Fal'k and E. Kalachevskaya, 'Itogi semi-chasovogo rabocheho dnya v promyshlennosti', in Voprosy truda, 1931, no.5, p.51; Zin. Grishin, op. cit., p.127.

85 Voprosy profdvizheniya, 1933, nos 1-2, p.26 (Pershtman).

In other words, until November 1932 managers had the option of sacking absent workers. It would appear that they were reluctant to do so. In the period from October to December 1928, for example, of 1484 workers reprimanded for absenteeism at the Proletarskaya Diktatura factory in Orekho-Zuevo, only 53 (3.6 per cent) were dismissed. 86

Things had not improved significantly by November 1932, judging by figures during the last ten days of that month (i.e. after the new law had been introduced) at the Voronezh sewing mill, where of 147 workers only 4 (2.7 per cent) had been sacked. 87

At Moscow's Serp i Molot works in the ten days prior to the November decree just 72 out of 875 truants (8.5 per cent) had been fired, whereas in the ten days following the new law 117 out of 355 (33 per cent) had been dismissed, an indication, perhaps, that workers were responding more quickly than management. 88

However, there was an important difference between the situation in 1928 and that in 1932. For in the former year absentee rates continued to fall, whereas in the latter they were rising sharply until the decree of 15 November, as the following table indicates:

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86 Trud, 14 March 1929.

87 N. Aleksandrov, 'Bor'ba s progulami na proizvodstve' in Sovetskoe gosudarstvo i revolyutsiya prava, 1933, no.5, p.57.

88 'O bor'be s progulami', Bol'shevik, 1932, no.21,p.5.

TABLE 4

Unsanctioned Absenteeism Rates in Soviet Industry, 1928-1934
(in days per quarter)

<u>January-March</u>	<u>April-June</u>	<u>July-September</u>	<u>October-December</u>
I	II	III	IV
1928 1.57	1.39	1.48	1.28 5.72 5.84
1929 1.17	0.96	1.05	0.91 4.59 4.02
1930 0.80	0.94	1.40	1.35 4.49 4.38
1931 1.31	1.36	1.78	1.51 5.96 5.84
1932 1.22	1.42	2.12	1.20 5.96 5.84
1933 0.61	0.55	0.62	0.61 2.39 0.91
1934 0.43	0.45	0.50	0.45 1.82 0.73

Sources:

Trud v SSSR. Spravochnik 1926-1930gg., p.74.
Byulleten' po uchetu truda: itogi 1931 goda, Moscow, 1932, p85
S. Kheinman, K voprosu proizvoditel'nosti truda v SSSR, M,
1933, p.40.
Trud v SSSR (1934 god) Ezhegodnik, Moscow, 1935, p.198.

The period under review can thus be divided into three distinct periods as far as the absentee rates are concerned: a consistent drop from the beginning of 1928 to the first quarter of 1930 (continuing a trend that had commenced with a high point of 12.4 days in the fourth quarter of 1920/21)⁸⁹ then a steady rise until the autumn of 1932, followed by a sharp drop coinciding with the absentee decree of 15 November.

Thus the fall in absenteeism coincided with the 'optimistic' phase of the socialist offensive up until the end of the Leninist Appeal on 1 March 1930.

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89 Statisticheskoe obozrenie, 1929, no.2, p.40 (Il'inskii).

A second major difference in the structure of absenteeism in 1928, compared with 1932 was its distribution between Group 'A' (producer goods) and Group 'B' (consumer goods) industries. Thus, in 1928/29, the worker in Group 'A' lost on average 7.09 days in the year due to unsanctioned absenteeism, nearly five times more than a worker in Group 'B' (1.50 days). This is only partly explained by the fact that the consumer goods' industries employed many more women workers, a proportion of whom would have a natural break from the monotony of factory life in the way of maternity leave (an average of 5.59 days), or that the textile mills, in particular stood idle for a total of nearly three days due to breaks in supply of raw material and organisational problems connected with the transfer to the seven-hour day, three-shift system.⁹⁰

The main reasons for such a pronounced difference in absentee rates would appear to be the larger number of new workers flowing into Group 'A' and the more arduous nature of work and working conditions in those industries.

No subsequent breakdown of figures for absenteeism between Groups 'A' and 'B' appeared until those for 1933, (i.e. until after the decree on progul), when the rates were 1.05 days per worker in Group 'A' and 0.66 days for Group 'B'. Although the former rate is still some sixty per cent higher than the latter, it may be seen that the gap between the two groups had narrowed considerably since 1928/29.⁹¹ Nonetheless, the figures also indicate that behavioural patterns characterising a particular industry or group of industries did survive even the most profound changes in the laws governing industrial relations.

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90 'Poteri gosudarstvennoi promyshlennosti v svyazi s progulami i prostoyami' in Puti industrializatsii, 1930, no.4, p.76.

91 Trud v SSSR (1934 god) Ezhegodnik, p. 142.

There are regional figures, however, for absenteeism in 1932 that allow conclusions to be drawn on differences between the two groups before the November decree.

In Moscow regional industry, for example, the rate for 1932 was higher in Group 'B' (at 5.44 days per worker) than in Group 'A' (4.99 days). However, if one examines the figures for the first six months of 1932, it will be seen that the rate is higher for Group 'A' (2.18 days) than for Group 'B' (2.13 days). It was precisely in the third quarter (July to September 1932) that Group 'B' rates rose sharply, exceeding those for the previous six months. This is particularly evident in the data for the cotton industry, the rates for which almost doubled between the second and third quarters. ⁹²

Thus, newspaper reports of skilled textile workers quitting in the summer of 1932 might indicate that a high proportion of absenteeism was deliberate in order to get the sack. This is also borne out by figures from Leningrad, which show absentee rates in regional cotton industry almost doubling between June and August 1932, ⁹³ and points too the poor wage structure which affected both the general labourers and the highly-skilled workers and led to rapid rises in the turnover rate. ⁹⁴

Once the new absentee laws took effect, it would appear that light industry reverted to its traditionally lower absentee rate. Thus, if one compares the iron and steel, coal and cotton industries (with traditionally medium, high and low absentee rates respectively) the following picture emerges.

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92 Moskovskaya oblast': ekonomiko-statisticheskii spravochnik
Moscow, 1934, pp. 14-15.

93 P. Vasil'ev and Ya. Leipunskii, op. cit., p.99.

94 ibid., p.67.

TABLE 5

Comparison of Industries with High, Medium & Low Absenteeism

<u>Industry</u>	<u>1927/28</u>	<u>1928/29</u>	<u>1933</u>	<u>1934</u>	(days per worker)
Coal	22.16	18.03	1.93	1.33	
Iron & Steel	6.05	4.19	0.54	0.45	
Cotton	1.83	1.05	0.68	0.36	
All industry	6.04	4.46	0.93	0.67	

Sources: Trud v SSSR. Spravochnik 1926-1930gg. p.19
Trud v SSSR (1934 god) Ezhegodnik, pp. 142-143.

However, if we take the figures for August 1932, the worst single month for absenteeism without reason during the period under review a very different picture emerges:

TABLE 6

Comparison of Absenteeism at Enterprises in Various

Industries in August 1932 (days per worker)

<u>Coal Mining</u>	October mine	0.93
	Makeyev "	1.64
	Lisichanskoe mine	1.29
	Dzerzhinskoe "	0.81
<u>Iron & Steel</u>	Makeyev metalworks	0.53
	Stalino "	0.50
	<u>Krasnyi Oktyabr</u>	0.47
<u>Textiles</u>	<u>Trekhgorka</u>	0.47
	Glukhovskoe	2.80
	Melanzhevskii	2.56
<u>All industry</u>		0.78

Source: S. Kheinman, K voprosu o proizvoditel'nosti truda,
pp.39-40.

Thus it is not unreasonable to suggest that the unusual economic situation in the country, exacerbated by the policies being pursued in Soviet industry (i.e. priority to heavy industry) artificially altered traditional patterns.

The third major difference between 1928 and 1932, as far as absenteeism is concerned, was the rapid growth of the industrial work force, which nearly doubled from the beginning of 1928 to the end of 1932 (from 2,398,600 to 4,676,400)⁹⁵. This obviously had profound implications for the absenteeism rate, for although this was roughly the same in 1928 and 1932, there were in fact almost twice as many man days being lost, as the table below illustrates:

TABLE 7

Absolute No. of Working Days Lost through Progul, 1928-1934

<u>Year</u>	<u>Av. no. of workers</u>	<u>Absentee rate</u>	<u>Days lost</u>
1928	2,598,673	5.72	14,864,409
1929	2,860,918	4.09	11,701,154
1930	3,404,901	4.49	15,288,005
1931	4,167,300	5.96	24,837,108
1932	4,668,500	5.96	27,824,260
1933	4,576,400	0.93	4,256,052
1934	4,949,000	0.67	3,315,830

Sources: For average number of workers per year, see Appendix A.
Absentee rates, Trud v SSSR (1936), p.96.

The above figures reveal not only the dramatic reduction achieved in days lost through unsanctioned absenteeism following the November 1932 decree, but also that the rate almost trebled between 1929 and 1932 (especially if one bears in mind that the latter figure includes 1½ months during which the new law was in effect - I have calculated that the total days lost in 1932 without the decree would have been just under 30 million days.⁹⁶

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95 Sotsialisticheskoe stroitel'stvo v SSSR, M, 1934, pp.324-325

96 By taking the average of the ten months of 1932 before the decree and multiplying by 1.2 one arrives at an annual rate for the year of 6,42 days per worker and a total of 29,971,700 days lost, calculated from S. Kheinman, K voprosu o proizvoditel'nosti truda, p.40.

Although the figures in the above table for the total number of days lost through unsanctioned absenteeism roughly correspond to those published for the years 1930 to 1934,⁹⁷ I have not come across the figure for 1929 anywhere in my researches. However, Shvernik did report to the XVI Party Congress in the summer of 1930 that the total number of days lost for the half-year from October 1929 to March 1930 (i.e. during the rapid rise of the shock worker movement) was 5,520,000 .⁹⁸ Thereafter, one assumes, any reference to the relatively low figures for 1929 would have proved an embarrassment to the authorities.

This conveniently introduces the last basis of comparison between absentee rates in 1928 and 1932 that will be dealt with here: the fact that socialist competition and shock work could have made no impact on the 1928 figures as the movement began only in 1929, and should have made maximum impact in 1932 when the number of workers engaged in competition topped three million.⁹⁹

On the face of it, the reverse happened for, as we have seen, absentee rates were falling in 1928 and rising in 1932. Yet this does not tell the whole story. For in the 'optimistic' phase of the socialist offensive (i.e. from October 1929 to March 1930) when shock work experienced its most rapid growth, absentee rates reached unprecedentedly low levels.

The following table illustrates how the pattern developed from month to month:

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97 The figures generally given for 1930 are 15,715,000, and for 1931 24,620,760, see Sovetskoe gosudarstvo, 1933, no.5 p.53 (Aleksandrov).

98 XVI S'ezd, p.653.

99 See Appendix E

TABLE 8

	<u>Jan</u>	<u>Feb</u>	<u>Mar</u>	<u>Apr</u>	<u>May</u>	<u>Jun</u>	<u>Jul</u>	<u>Aug</u>	<u>Sep</u>	<u>Oct</u>	<u>Nov</u>	<u>Dec</u>
1929	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.33	0.29	0.29
1930	0.28	0.25	0.27	0.30	0.30	0.34	0.41	0.51	0.48	0.46	0.44	0.45
1931	0.49	0.42	0.40	0.42	0.47	0.47	0.58	0.64	0.56	0.54	0.50	0.47
1932	0.42	0.38	0.42	0.40	0.50	0.52	0.68	0.78	0.66	0.59	0.43	0.18

Sources: Trud v SSSR. Spravochnik 1926-1930gg. pp. 18-19.
Byulleten' po uchetu truda: itogi 1931, p.85
S. Kheinman, K voprosu o proizvoditel'nosti truda,
p.40.

Thus the fall in absentee rates ends in February 1930, the month of the most intensive growth of shock work, and then rises steadily until August 1932 with sharper rises during the summer months. Thus, despite the continued numerical growth of the shock worker movement throughout the period under review (see Appendix E), the absentee rate more than trebled between the best month (February 1930) and the worst (August 1932).

It would seem, therefore, that the socialist competition movement was unable to accommodate either the huge increase in the number of workers joining industry, or the deteriorating living and working conditions from 1930 to 1932.

Nonetheless, had the rate of improvement from October 1929 to February 1930 continued throughout the First Five-Year Plan, unsanctioned absenteeism would have virtually disappeared by the end of 1932, whereas even with the law on absenteeism it only fell to levels foreseen by the original Five-Year Plan.¹⁰⁰

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100 B. Markus in Osnovnye voprosy truda v pyatiletke, Moscow-Leningrad, 1929, suggests that the absentee rate (sanctioned and unsanctioned) would fall to 5 days by the end of the economic year 1932/33. As absenteeism without reason usually accounts for 75 per cent of all absences, the rate should have fallen to about 0.3 days per month.

The Impact of the Law of 15 November 1932

It is important to emphasise that the law on dismissal for one day's unsanctioned absenteeism was intended to be implemented much more strictly than had the decree on turnover.¹⁰¹ Thus managers were obliged to fire absent workers whether they wished to or not. A contradiction had arisen between the political and economic definition of the truant. This was because absenteeism was no longer restricted to certain groups of workers (the least skilled, the heavy drinkers and work shy etc.) but now covered "a rather significant stratum¹⁰² of workers, including some who did not readily fit the description of 'agents of the class enemy' (such as skilled, cadre and hereditary proletarians).

For whereas in September 1931 it could be reported from Leningrad's Krasnyi Treugol'nik works that "old, skilled workers are not absent or flitting. Virtually no one leaves after five or six years,"¹⁰³ the situation had changed radically a year later, when the press was reporting an outflow of skilled workers, some of whom would be deliberately absent for three days in order to secure dismissal.

A twin campaign was launched in the press following the introduction of the new law in order to bring pressure on managers to adopt a strict approach to the implementation of the law while portraying the actions of the absent workers in the worst possible light. Thus, the Party journal, Bol'shevik, declared that:¹⁰⁴

"The truant is the enemy of socialism in staying away from work. Through this disorganising and destructive action he aids the class enemy."

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101 Pravda, on 15 December 1932 (the second anniversary of the turnover decree) complained that the six-month ban on flitters was not being implemented.

102 Pravda, 1 December 1932, commented "Truants comprise a rather significant stratum of spongers and parasitic elements from which society, constructing socialism, must cleanse itself without mercy, 'with an iron hand'".

103 Na trudovom fronte, 1931, nos. 26-27, p.11

104 'O bor'be s progulami', Bol'shevik, 1932, no.21,p.3.

The same article claimed that the decree was sought and supported by the most advanced workers:¹⁰⁵

"...leading shock workers and the best production workers have been demanding that decisive action be taken against truants - disorganisers of production - and they welcome the Government decree on the struggle against truants and are actively assisting its implementation."

In the week following publication of the decree the central press carried reports of workers' meetings and individuals of unimpeachable proletarian background approving of the measure: on 18 November 1932, Izvestiya related how four steel-rollers at Krasnyi Vyborzhets, each with a stazh of between 25 and 35 years and not a progul between them gave the decree their blessing; Trud on the same day carried a similar endorsement from a 52-year old shock worker, again with no progul, from the Ordzhonikidze metalworks; and on 20 November, Pravda gave an example of how 'advanced' workers could assist in implementing the decree, when a cadre worker from the Khar'k ov locoworks, with no unsanctioned absences since the Revolution, named three recidivist truants.

Other sources, however, were reporting quite different reactions from the shop floor, such as "they demand discipline, yet feed us badly", "they might as well chain us up and stop us leaving the factory" and "for one day's absence they take away your apartment, but they don't supply you with protective clothing". These, and similar statements, were characterised as expressing the views of 'the class enemy'.¹⁰⁶

However, the workers clearly were not alone in their cynical response to the new law. A union representative

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105 ibid., p.4.

106 Sovetskoe gosudarstvo, 1933, no. 5, p.55 (Aleksandrov).

at the Voronezh sewing mill complained that "if you fire every worker who has been absent for just one day then you could end up with no workers at all". A graphic example, claimed the author, of political short-sightedness!¹⁰⁷

Another union official at the Kolemenskoe cement works issued instructions to the effect that "if the truant is a good worker, you can let him off with a reprimand". A clear case, claimed the author, of rotten liberalism.¹⁰⁸

The Bol'shevik article elaborated on this last definition by declaring that it was a manifestation of 'Rightist opportunism' and cited the case of the head of a machine-shop at Krasnyi Proletariat, who had decided that "a needed worker may be kept on even if he misses eight days".¹⁰⁹ The quality of the 'Rightists' that the article alluded to was, it would seem, worker adoration.

There were also reports of absenteeism with reason increasing after the introduction of the decree ¹¹⁰, as well as Party members and cadre workers being reinstated,¹¹¹ and unsanctioned absenteeism being sanctioned retrospectively.¹¹²

Further evidence that the new law artificially changed worker behaviour is provided by the results of a survey of eight Baku enterprises in late 1932. This revealed that, in the last four months of the year 30.2 per cent of all absences without reason were by workers with less than six months work at the given plant, 38 per cent with from six to twelve months and 31.8 per cent with over one year.¹¹³

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107 ibid., p.57.

108 ibid., p.58.

109 Bol'shevik, 1932, no. 21, p.6

110 Sovetskoe gosudarstvo, 1933, no.5, p.58, (Aleksandrov)

111 K. Abashidze, 'Bor'ba s progulami v ZSFSR' in Voprosy truda, 1933, no.5, p.79.

112 M. Nadezhdin, 'Bor'ba s progulami i reforma rabochego snabzheniya', Voprosy profdvizheniya, 1933, no.5, p.46.

113 Voprosy truda, 1933, no.5, p.80.(Abashidze).

Such figures are consistent with patterns of absenteeism in other countries ¹¹⁴, and Soviet industry during the early years of industrialisation ¹¹⁵, with most absences being attributable to the category of workers that has been at the factory for six months or more. In December 1932, however, in the first full month of the new law's implementation, the absolute number for the group with less than six months work was 110 (47.4 per cent), for the group with six months to one year 84 (17.2 per cent) and for the group with more than one year's work experience at the plant just 38 (16.4 per cent).¹¹⁶

Similar results are found in a survey of 10 enterprises in Moscow, where of 535 dismissed after the decree, 362 (67.7 per cent) had less than six months work experience at the given plant, and at the Lenin works in Leningrad where 124 out of 200 (62 per cent) fell into this category.¹¹⁷

The authorities also kept pressure on managers to carry out the provisions on evicting truants from factory housing and depriving them of their food-and-goods card. A survey of 13 enterprises in Azerbaidjan revealed that by the end of the year only 0.4 per cent of truants had been evicted and 10 per cent deprived of their cards.¹¹⁸ A similar situation obtained at the Petrovskii works in Dnepropetrovsk, where of 1833 sacked workers, only 261 (14 per cent) had been evicted and 349 (19 per cent) deprived of ration cards.¹¹⁹ Accusations of 'spinelessness' (³myakotelost') and 'flabbiness' (kisel'nost') abounded.¹²⁰ [^]

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114 See J.M.M. Hill and E.L. Trist, Industrial Accidents, Sickness and Other Absences, London, 1962, pp. 5-6.

115 Puti industrializatsii, 1930, no.14, p.30 (Vovsi i Shostak).

116 Voprosy truda, 1933, no.5, p.80 (K.Abashidze)

117 Voprosy profdvizheniya, 1933, no.5, p.46 (Nadezhdin)

118 G. Aslanov and M. Kontorivich, 'Bor'ba s progulami v Azerbaidzhane', Voprosy truda, 1933, no.4, p.62.

119 Sovetskoe gosudarstvo, 1933, no.5, p.57 (Aleksandrov).

120 P. Fedorov, 'Sovety i bor'ba za trudovuyu distsiplinu' in Sovetskoe stroitel'stvo, 1933, no.1, p.23.

The combined effect of these measures and the management take-over of provisions at the major plants from 4 December 1932,¹²¹ had a dramatic effect on unsanctioned absentee rates, which showed significant falls everywhere:

TABLE 9

Unsanctioned Absentee Rates before & after the Govt. Decree

<u>Enterprise</u>	<u>Aug</u>	<u>Sep</u>	<u>Oct</u>	<u>Nov</u>	<u>Dec</u>	(days per worker)
Oktyabr' mine	0.93	0.73	1.05	0.54	0.22	
Makeyev "	1.64	1.59	1.57	1.29	0.34	
Stalino metalworks	0.50	0.50	0.50	0.30	0.06	
Krasnyi Profintern	0.36	0.36	0.35	0.36	0.08	
Krasnyi Putilovets	1.32	1.05	0.89	0.67	0.14	
Baltic Shipyards	0.87	0.69	0.46	0.37	0.11	
Krasnyi Proletariat	1.00	0.73	0.60	0.28	0.06	
Kolomenskoe loco.	0.70	0.56	0.66	0.42	0.06	
Elektrozavod	0.37	0.31	0.26	0.20	0.04	
Svetlana (Len)	1.85	0.57	0.49	0.34	0.07	
Zinoviev factory	2.48	2.21	2.02	1.67	0.23	
Proletarka	0.14	0.12	0.10	0.06	0.01	
Trekhgorka	0.47	0.87	0.32	0.19	0.03	
Glukhovskoe mill	2.80	2.39	2.59	1.46	0.31	
Melanzhevskii mill	2.56	2.04	0.72	1.43	0.45	
ALL INDUSTRY	0.78	0.66	0.59	0.43	0.18	

Source: S. Kheinman, K voprosu o proizvoditel'nosti truda, p.40.

Continued pressure by Party and Government, backed up by the trade union and worker aktiv, ensured that absenteeism without good reason, never again approached the levels of mid-1932. However, despite clarifications on this matter, managements were reluctant to implement the decree to the extent of firing workers who were more than 15 minutes late for work as absentees.¹²² This was enforced only in December 1938, when 20 minutes became the limit allowed.

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121 Sobranie zakonov, 1932, no.80, art. 489. (See Chapter Four).

122 Voprosy profdvizheniya, 1933, no.5, p. 52 (nadezhdin); B. Simakov, 'Kak realizuetsya v ChPO postanovlenie TsIK i SNK ot 15.xi.32 o bor'be s progulami', in Voprosy truda, 1933, no.6, p.77.

Conclusion

By mid-1933 articles in the periodical press about turnover began to disappear, indicating that the authorities no longer considered it the priority problem of labour discipline that it had been since the summer of 1930. At the same time satisfaction was being expressed at the good results of the Government decree on absenteeism.¹²³

Attention henceforward began to shift to the more basic problem of underutilisation of work time, as the following quote illustrates:¹²⁴

"...The task of strengthening labour discipline is not exhausted by the struggle against absenteeism. The class enemy, idler and truant still tries to disorganise production through subverting labour discipline at work, through aimless wandering about the workshop, hiding behind every fault in production and idle time occasioned by organisational reasons, and using them for the useless expenditure of work time..."

Until the end of the period under review the main thrust against indiscipline at work was directed at a more productive utilisation of the working day. However, the problem was not solved within the time-scale of this study, although in January 1935, the trade union journal was able to announce that "the campaign for labour discipline and a better organisation of work has led to a reduction in lateness, and a fuller utilisation of the working day".¹²⁵

However, as most reports still claimed that up to thirty per cent of work time was not being utilised, the costs of this problem to Soviet industry far outweighed those of absenteeism.¹²⁶ However, the objective of a more or less stable work force had in the main been achieved by 1934.

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123 'K itogam III plenuma VTsSPS', in Voprosy profdvizheniya, 1933, no.7, p.9

124 ibid., p.9.

125 I. Reznikovskii, 'Trudovaya distsiplina na zavodakh tyazheloi promyshlennosti Leningrad', Voprosy profdvizheniya, 1935, nos. 2-3, p.64.

126 B. Bukhaneyich, 'Profsoyuzy v bor'be za uplotnennyyi rabochii den', Voprosy profdvizheniya, 1934, no.7, pp.41-52.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE ROLE OF LEGISLATION IN ESTABLISHING LABOUR DISCIPLINE , 1928-1934

One of the paradoxes of the industrialisation drive in the USSR was that the Soviet worker entered the period under review protected by what was generally regarded as a radical and progressive labour legislation, only to witness the gradual whittling away of many of its most liberal provisions to be replaced by a number of restrictive laws, culminating in the infamous decrees of 1938 and 1940.

However, in many ways the Labour Code of the RSFSR, which was the foundation stone of labour relations during the New Economic Policy, was in itself a paradox. Adopted after the rigours of Revolution, Civil War and economic devastation in 1922 it enshrined ideologically-based norms that ascribed qualities to the Soviet worker, that by no means all the labour force possessed. Moreover, most of those workers that did display such qualities of self-sacrifice and hard work were swiftly coopted into the ever-growing state bureaucracy. Those that remained on the shop floor generally took advantage of the existing rules and were enjoying a slow but perceptible improvement in their living conditions.

The contradiction that arose between the desired and actual forms of worker behaviour were resolved by passing functional legislation, which prescribed the norms deemed necessary. It was a distinctive feature of the period under review that the latter laws were of more consequence than the Labour Code which, ostensibly, was the fundamental law. Of course, such a state of affairs required ideological justification and this was found in the theory of the sharpening of the class struggle.

Certain other features of the Soviet law and the role it played in Soviet society during this period deserve attention

Of particular significance was the interplay between the so-called 'juridic al' and 'socio-political' (obshchestvenno-politicheskie) norms. In practice, the former set out the minimum rights for the Soviet worker, whereas the latter sought not only to place a maximum limit upon these rights, but also allow for them to be 'voluntarily' foregone. As will be illustrated in the following Chapter, the latter norms became the basis for the movement of socialist competition and shock work, which was to make redundant many of the existing laws. The fact that the 'voluntary' principle was honoured more in the breach than in observance served to assist this process.

The all-encompassing role of the Party-State (which in the present case gradually came to include the trade unions) had the effect of politicising industrial relations to the extent that violations of production discipline became subject to criminal as well as civil law. Of course, this applies equally to the manager and the worker. However, given the absolute priority given to the interests of production during this period, it might well have been the case that the manager who cut corners in order to fulfil the plan might be tolerated in a way that a worker who demanded his legal rights would not.

The next feature is the problem of law enforcement in such a vast country as the USSR, with a population that was still only semi-literate and an inefficient and unwieldy bureaucracy standing between the law and its implementation. Thus it was of little consequence whether legislation was introduced by Party, state or union bodies in a situation in which the Party bore ultimate responsibility for enforcing the law. Nonetheless, the list of organisations that

issued acts relating to labour discipline was a long one. it encompassed not just organs of State such as the Central Executive Committee (TsIK), the Council of Peoples' Commissars (Sovnarkom), the Commissariat of Labour (Narkomtrud) and the Supreme Economic Council (Vesenkha), but also the Communist Party, the Komsomol and trade unions (VTsSPS). These acts might be decrees, resolutions, directive letters or appeals.

The most important of these would be printed in the national daily newspapers (Pravda, Izvestiya, Trud, Za industrializatsiyu, Komsomol'skaya pravda etc. or in the various official publications or departmental bulletins.¹ However, it was not required that a law be published for it to come into effect, and often they were published late or not at all.²

The legislative inflation was such that the then Labour Commissar, Shmidt, declared in 1925 "it is better for the time being to leave the old muddle rather than to create a new one."³ By 1927 it had got to the stage when "it was beyond the power even of a qualified Narkomtrud official, dealing with this legislation on a permanent basis, to get to grips with it."⁴

Thus, at the beginning of the period under review, the rule of law, of sorts, governed industrial relations. However, the poor state of labour inspection and the reluctance or fear of management to discipline the workers (particularly after the Shakhty trial) led to an unsatisfactory state of affairs in the factories and calls for changes in the law

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1 Lists of the relevant publications are given in P. Tarshis 'Osnovnye zadachi i metody uproshcheniya trudovogo zakonodatel'stva', in Voprosy truda, 1930, no.2, pp.22-25.

2 ibid., p. 23; for example the decree of Sovnarkom RSFSR dated 11 January 1930 "On Measures to Reduce Labour Turn-over in Industry was not published but referred to in a subsequent decree.

3 Voprosy truda, 1930, no.2 p.27 (Tarshis)

4 ibid., p. 24.

so as to shift power on the shop floor towards management. Indeed, the story of legislation in this period is the gradual encroachment of management or Party-inspired measures to limit the freedoms of the workers enshrined in the Labour Code.

Particular targets at the beginning of this process were the collective agreement, which management sought to turn into a two-sided document that would oblige the workers to raise productivity; the Rate-Setting and Disputes Committees (RKK), which were reinstating violators of labour discipline and thus undermining management control; and the overall state of discipline on the shop floor.

Naturally enough, the trade unions initially resisted these encroachments and were assisted by the officials of Narkomtrud, who still saw their main task as codifying and simplifying the existing legislation, followed by supervision of labour protection.⁵ Trud, on 26 February 1929 claimed that the existing legislation was sufficient to deal with the problem of labour discipline, but complained that it was not being implemented.

However, the Party and management leaders were determined that radical changes would be made. A Party letter of 21 February to all its local organisations had called for a decisive plan of action to improve discipline, accusing the unions (and some Party organs) of displaying 'tail endism' and hindering the work of management.⁶

The result was the Government decree of 6 March 1929 "On Measures for Strengthening Labour Discipline in State Enterprises" which gave management the right to impose fines on violators of discipline and obliged labour exchanges to

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5 See I. Tolstopyatov, 'Ob itogakh i perspektivakh NKT SSSR' in Gosudarstvennoe regulirovanie truda i profsoyuzy, M, 1929, pp.113-114.

6 Resheniya partii i pravitel'stva, vol.2, pp.9-12

give preferential treatment to those with a clean discipline record. 7 As the Labour Code had given the RKK the right to decide disciplinary penalties for violators, and only the Central Executive Committee could amend the Code, the Sovnarkom decree was technically in breach of the law. However, as the Party had been the main impetus behind the measure, and the raising of discipline had now become a political priority, the issue was as good as settled.

Just two days after the Sovnarkom decree was issued, Narkomtrud sent out a circular to all its subsidiary bodies calling for action against "absenteeism, drunkenness, sleep at work, hooliganism, artificial lowering of productivity, spoiling materials, machines and equipment, abuse and assault on specialists, carelessness and negligence in observing safety rules, theft, malingering etc."⁸ This could best be done by tightening up the work of the RKKs .

The hard line on violators of discipline was taken one stage further when the RSFSR Commissariat of Justice issued a circular asking labour courts to get tough with offenders,⁹ and on 26 March 1929, Trud published a VTsSPS circular calling upon unions to take a firmer line.

Thus it can be seen how a Party initiative has not just become law, but also activated other concerned organisations in order to struggle for the successful implementation of this policy. The Komsomol, meanwhile was making its own distinctive contribution to the campaign for discipline by launching a nationwide socialist competition. It is important to emphasise that the Party letter on discipline made no mention of competition or shock work, although Vesenkha, the management organ, had immediately welcomed the initiative.¹⁰

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7 Sobranie zakonov, 1929, no.19, art. 167.

8 Izvestiya Narkomtruda SSSR, 1929, no. 14.

9 ibid., 1929, no.22-23.

10 See Chapter Five.

Another 'extra-legal' component of the drive for discipline that was attracting attention at this time were the Comrades' Courts (tovarishcheskie sudy), which like many other features of the Socialist competition movement had first made their appearance during the Civil War (in 1919) and had made a comeback later in the 1920's. Although the first courts in this new wave had appeared early in 1928, by 1 June 1929 there were only 147 in all Soviet enterprises.¹¹ Apparently the Tomskii leadership of the trade unions was cool towards the new courts, on the basis that the very idea was in contradiction to the basic function of the union, which was to defend its members, not to try them.¹²

Nonetheless, by the time Trud appraised the work of the courts on 20 March 1929, Tomskii was effectively ousted as leader of the VTsSPS. The trade union paper concluded that the courts had justified their existence, had cut out much legal red-tape, were good educative organs and ought to be expanded. A Moscow City conference of comrades' courts at the end of May 1929 had agreed with this assessment and by mid-November 1929 there were 674 operating in Soviet factories.¹³ After a Government decree of 30 December 1929 the movement really began to spread and the courts were given a more active role in dealing with minor violations of discipline.¹⁴

The role envisaged for the courts was the creation of that atmosphere of moral guilt at the workplace, as Malenkov described it in the Party journal "a method of social compulsion for use against backward elements".¹⁵

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11 K. Digurov, 'Tovarishcheskie sudy na fabrichno-zavodskom predpriyatii i zadachi profsoyuznykh organov' in Voprosy Truda, 1930, no.1, p.47

12 ibid., p.46

13 ibid., p.47

14 Sobranie zakonov, 1930, no.4,

15 G. Malenkov, 'Povyshenie proizvoditel'nosti truda i zadachi nizovoi partiinoi raboty, in Bol'shevik, 1929, no.6, p.79.

Thus, the initial drive against violations of labour discipline in 1929 combined elements of legal and social compulsion. However, as Stalin's general line swept away opposition within the Party, the interests of production became so paramount that all areas of society, including the law had to be pressed into service for this overriding aim. No sooner had the old VTsSPS leadership been removed than the Stalin faction set about implementing aspects of its industrial policy, commencing with the law "On One-Man Management" on 5 September 1929¹⁶ and following that with the decree on the continuous working week.¹⁷ On 23 November 1929 the Government passed a law "On the Criminal Responsibility for Turning Out Poor-Quality Products"¹⁸ and on 5 December 1929 a decree of the Party "On the Reorganisation of Management in Industry" made the enterprise the basic link in the production process and sought to introduce cost accounting into every plant.¹⁹

During this time Vesenkha and VTsSPS had issued a joint directive making the collective agreement a two-sided obligation.²⁰ Again, taken together these separate acts form a cohesive policy, but not one that the worker on the shop floor might necessarily agree with.

Anticipating protests from the workers, who had seen their legal and economic position been weakened considerably in the course of the year, the official journal of Narkomtrud explained the situation thus:²¹

"The most immediate task of the Soviet working class is the industrialisation of the USSR. The orientation and rate of industrialisation are of fundamental sig-

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16 Resheniya partii i pravitel'stva, vol.2, p.125.

17 Byulleten' finansovogo i khozyaistvennogo zakonodatel'stva 1929, no.39, p.30.

18 Sobranie zakonov. 1930, no.2, art.9.

19 Torgovo-promyshlennaya gazeta, 14 December 1929.

20 Trud, 20 November 1929.

21 B. Tsaregorodtsev, 'Problemy planovosti v trudovom zakonodatel'stve' in Voprosy truda, 1929, no.12, p.10 (emphasis as in original)

nificance to the legislative and contractual regulation of labour. As heavy industry must be developed first and foremost, their wages must go up. Questions of wages constitute the most characteristic example of the subordination of work norms to the interests of the economic management of the country; however, other work norms (hours, leave etc.) must not contradict the tasks set by the economic policy either."

Then the author arrives at the most delicate question*²²

"the limiting of maximum norms of freedom of labour and collective agreements represents the realisation of the principle of the supremacy of the whole, i.e. the supremacy of the production and political interests of the working class at large."

Finally, hinting with foresight at what lay ahead:²³

"...in the immediate future (in connection with the shortage of skilled manpower in a situation of continual economic growth) the compulsory nature of work (compulsory labour in forms which are in accordance with the existing economic system) must acquire more significance.

Bearing in mind the fact that this was written when work days were being lengthened and days off waived as part of the shock work movement, the workers were beginning to get a fair idea what was meant by "the compulsory nature of work". As early as 1 August 1929, Trud had noted that socialist competition was violating labour legislation.

Indeed, in the run up to the Shock Workers' Congress in December 1929 and the launching of the Leninist Appeal in January 1930, shock work and competition appeared to have taken over from legislation as the means of determining working conditions.

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22 ibid., p.13.

23 ibid., p.14

Clearly the old Labour Code was already redundant for the most part and, on 11 February 1930, a Government decree ordered Narkomtrud and VTsSPS to work out a new Code. The Labour Commissariat had swum against the tide of shock work when, on 27 February 1930, it issued a decree "On the Inadmissability of Lengthening the Working Day and Non-Utilisation of Rest Days"²⁴, but the essence of shock work as being portrayed in the press was of worker heroes who gave not a fig for working hours or days off.

By the time that the socialist offensive had started to splutter, in the early summer of 1930, problems of labour discipline were to re-emerge with a vengeance. Peasants were flooding into industry from the newly collectivised farms and the gains in labour discipline achieved through the shock movement were wiped away. "Absenteeism grows not by the day, but by the hour" commented an official at the Krasnoe Znamya works in Ramenskii.²⁵

But it was labour turnover that was causing the most concern. From May 1930 until Stalin's switch of emphasis towards the mastering of technology, the question of turnover dominated the agenda for labour and management organs. The Party had signalled the end of the 'great leap forward' into socialism by issuing a decree "On Work to Reorganise the Way of Life"²⁶ which put an end to the more Utopian dreams of 'socialist towns' and 'living communes'.

The Party Congress in the summer of 1930 had set the course for eliminating unemployment, but it was not until the early autumn that a concerted attack was launched

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24 Izvestiya, 28 February 1930

25 A. Khain, V. Khandros, Kto oni - novye lyudi na proizvodstve, M, 1930, p.6

26 Decree of TsK VKP(b) dated 16 May 1930, Spravochnik partiinogo rabotnika, vyp.8, M, 1934, pp.733-734.

This was to encompass the single most intensive period of labour legislation during the period under review, representing an attempt by legislative means to remedy a problem that socialist competition, on its own, could not solve.

The onslaught followed a by now familiar pattern. First the Party launched a rousing appeal "to all Party, economic, trade union and Komsomol organisations", then the State bodies and VTsSPS followed this up in a series of practical measures. Thus the Appeal, issued on 3 September 1930, set out the parameters for the campaign, including a rallying-call to shock workers to pledge to stay at their plants until the end of the Five-Year Plan, a demand that conditions for cadre and shock workers be improved on a preferential basis, and a warning that a merciless struggle was to be fought against the 'flitters'.²⁷

Just three days later Sovnarkom RSFSR issued a decree serving notice that the arbitrary quitting of one's job would henceforth be regarded as tantamount to a violation of labour discipline.²⁸ This was followed by two decrees issued on 23 September 1930: Narkomtrud, Vesenkha RSFSR and VTsSPS "On Supplementary Measures to Counter Labour Turnover and to Improve the System of Hiring", which ordered that the reason for a worker's dismissal be entered into his wage book (another example of functional legislation contravening the Labour Code)²⁹; and a Narkomtrud RSFSR decree which sought to utilise as quickly as possible the manpower still on the books of labour exchanges.³⁰

On 8 September, the Presidium of VTsSPS approved new rules for Comrades' Courts (which they called Production-Comrades' Courts), the main task of which was defined as: "a struggle against all disorganisers of production and those who harm socialist competition and shock work..."³¹

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27 Pravda, 3 September 1930.

28 Izvestiya, 8 September 1930

29 Izvestiya Narkomtruda, 1930, nos. 26-27.

30 ibid., loc. cit.

31 Trud, 9 September 1930.

On 22 September 1930, together with Narkomtrud, VTsSPS issued a decree "On the Inadmissability of Work on Rest Days or Lengthening the Working Day", which implied that the decree on the same subject issued by Narkomtrud in February (see note 24) was having little effect. Management was urged to overcome 'bottlenecks' in production by a more rational use of the labour force. ³²

Implementing another provision of the Party appeal, on 25 September the Presidium of Vesenkha and VTsSPS decreed that shock workers be rewarded with medals and trips abroad to raise skills and that outstanding enterprises be awarded funds for extra communal facilities. ³³

Then, on 9 October 1930, Narkomtrud peremptorily ordered the cessation of paying unemployment benefit and that the unemployed be sent immediately to work. ³⁴ This historic decree eliminating unemployment in the USSR did not come as a complete surprise for Shvernik had indicated that this was Party policy at the XVI Congress a few months earlier. ³⁵

By presenting the ending of unemployment as a great triumph, the Party was able to take advantage of the favourable climate that ensued by expediting the issue of a decree "On Measures for the Planned Supply of Manpower to the Economy and the Struggle against Turnover" on 20 October 1930, which gave Narkomtrud the right to transfer skilled workers from non-priority to priority industries. ³⁶ A contemporary legal commentator described this decree as "one of those historic acts in which our revolution is so rich." ³⁷

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32 Trud, 23 September 1930.

33 Izvestiya, 27 September 1930.

34 Sobranie zakonov, 1930, no.47, art. 488.

35 XVI S"ezd, p.658.

36 Pravda, 22 October 1930.

37 Sovetskoe trudovoe pravo na novom etape, p.5 (Stuchka)

The decree also addressed the problem of luring, warning that managements would be held responsible for tempting skilled workers away from other plants. A clarification by the Supreme Court of RSFSR on 6 November 1930 made luring a criminal offence.³⁸

This Party decree also called for a stop to be made in promoting shop-floor workers into management and urged further measures against 'flitters'. The Party line on turnover was implemented by the TsIK and Sovnarkom decree of 15 December 1930 "On the Procedure for the Engagement and Distribution of Labour and the Campaign against Labour Turnover". This major legislative act marked an important stage in the imposition of restrictions limiting the freedoms enshrined in the Labour Code. It aimed to clamp down on 'flitters', who were termed 'disorganisers of production' by banning them from working in industry or transport for six months if they left work of their own volition.³⁹ Although this proved hard to implement, given the continuing shortage of skilled labour, it set a precedent which could be utilised when the law against absenteeism was introduced in November 1932. The decree was similarly ineffective, initially in insisting that skilled workers and specialists work only in their own trades. This was to prevent, it was hoped, skilled craftsmen quitting their specialities to work as unskilled labour in industries where the pay was better.

The six-month ban on 'disorganisers of production' was incorporated into the new "Rules of Internal Order for Enterprises and Establishments in the Socialised Sector" approved by Narkomtrud on 17 December.⁴⁰ For violations of discipline the worker might be given a reprimand,

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38 Izvestiya Narkomtruda, 1930, no.33.

39 Izvestiya, 17 December 1930.

40 Izvestiya Narkomtruda, 1930, no.36.

referred to the comrades' court or, if the violation was systematic or malicious, fired and banned for six months. The new Rules also laid down what constituted good grounds for absenteeism (in effect, only a serious illness in the family, a natural calamity or the legal pursuit of civic or social duties). Just to emphasise that the Rules were intended for management as well as workers, the non-implementation of fines for violations of discipline was itself defined as a violation, as was an "unsolicitous attitude to shock work and socialist competition". As for the workers, among the "acts of hooliganism and lack of conscientiousness" were the forging of passes and self-mutilation!

In order to accommodate those who had been barred for six months from working in industry, Narkomtrud issued a decree on 23 December 1930 "On the Registration and Despatch of Persons Seeking Work" allowing such workers to be sent to "mass physical work" (peat-digging, clearing snow, loading and unloading etc.). This was to be handled by the 'staff offices' (upravlenie kadrov), the reorganised labour exchanges. The statute of these 'staff offices' was confirmed by Narkomtrud on 28 December 1930 (on the basis, incidentally of another unpublished Sovnarkom SSSR decree of two days previous).⁴¹

The elaboration of the new duties for Narkomtrud following the elimination of unemployment was meant to be the first step in the transfer to the planned hiring of manpower. A series of decrees in the New Year confirmed that, henceforth, enterprises were obliged to hire all labour (with the exception of administrative and specialist staff) exclusively through the 'staff offices'.⁴²

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41 Byulleten' finansovogo i khozyaistvennogo zakonodatel'stva, 1931, no.5, pp.40-43.

42 Decrees of Narkomtrud SSSR on 4 January 1931 "On the Planned Supply of Manpower to the Economy" and "On the Procedure for Hiring Manpower", Izvestiya Narkomtruda, 1930, nos. 1-2, 3; and on 13 January 1931 "On the Procedure for the Supply of Manpower to Construction in 1931" Byulleten' finansovogo i khozyaistvennogo zakonodatel'stva, 1931, no.6, pp.36-39.

Thus the flurry of legislative activity continued over into 1931. In early January the third session of the Central Executive Committee decreed that managements might not exceed their established wage fund in an attempt by the Government to cut down on the surplus labour being retained by the enterprises and the amount of overtime being worked to fulfil the promfinplan.⁴³ In another decree issued on the same day, TsIK entrusted Narkomtrud with the task of training two million extra workers and employees for industry. Anticipating the problems such an influx of new workers would create, Narkomtrud was also given the task of developing educational (vospitatel'nuyu) work among the newcomers.⁴⁴

On 16 January 1931, Narkomtrud took another step in controlling the free flow of workers when it issued, in conjunction with Narkomput (the Commissariat of Transport and Communications), a decree "On the Return to Railway Transport Work People Formerly Employed in the Transport Service". Under the provisions of this decree all those who had left the railways in the previous five years were to report back to their former place of employment within five days! ⁴⁵ This represented another stage in the semi-militarisation of railway work.

Two days later Narkomtrud issued a decree "On the Definition of Persons Regarded as Vicious Disorganisers of Production" (in agreement with VTsSPS). ⁴⁶ First on this list were "those who leave work in the socialist sector without fair notice being given to management, or not waiting until a replacement be found, or before the agreed date", followed by "those leaving an enterprise more than once during a twelve-month period...". The reason for dismissal, it was confirmed, must be entered in the worker's wage book.

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43 Sobranie zakonov, 1931, no.5, art. 60.

44 ibid., no.5, art. 63.

45 Izvestiya, 18 January 1931.

46 Izvestiya Narkomtruda, 1931, no.4.

The next logical step in the tightening up on the freedom of the workers to move to other jobs or to 'violate' discipline in any other manner would have been to introduce Work Books (trudovye knizhki), a sort of production passport which would list the worker's awards and punishments. The press was full of articles on this subject at this time but, as we shall see, events caught up with them and the idea was dropped along with that for a new Labour Code.

For suddenly, in February 1931, there was a perceptible shift of emphasis away from the 'hard line' legislative approach and towards an intensive programme for raising skills. Although this shift had been heralded at the third session of TsIK mentioned above, the basic momentum was provided by Stalin's "technology is decisive" slogan advanced in his speech to the gathering of industrial managers on 4 February.

Why then was the 'hard line' approach abandoned for the time being? Had it achieved what it set out to do? Apparently not if one judges by the high turnover figures that persisted through 1931 and 1932, particularly amongst skilled workers. Did the regime realise that they had pushed the workers too far? From the outset of the campaign great pains had been taken to present the 'hard line' as a response to the demands of the workers themselves. Thus one of the first reactions to the Party appeal that launched the campaign came from workers at Moscow's Kalinin engineering works (which had taken patronage over Narkomtrud in January 1930) in a letter addressed to TsIK, Narkomtrud and VTsSPS.⁴⁷ The letter catalogued the workers demands for action in such a way that it read like the Party's manifesto for the campaign. For this reason it is worth listing all the points:

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47 Na trudovom fronte, 1930, nos. 26-27, p.4.

1. Management must not hire manpower other than through the labour exchange.
2. Luring must be stamped out.
3. The suggestion of the Karl Marx shock workers on socialist voluntary contracts should be implemented.
4. Stop speculation and overexpenditure of wages.
5. Level out rates for workers of similar skills.
6. Only the director or his deputy should have the right to hire and fire.
7. Use the skills of the existing labour force rationally.
8. Punish those to blame for idle time and non-punctual issue of tools.
9. Improve food and supplies.
10. Supply goods preferentially to those long-serving workers.
11. Give preference to long-serving workers in housing, schooling and holidays.
12. Give longer holidays to long-serving workers.
13. Give their children first option of work at that enterprise or places in factory schools.
14. Strengthen the punishments for violation of labour discipline.
15. In particular, amend article 47 of the Labour Code.
16. Utilise the comrades' courts to deal with absenteeism and other serious violations.
17. Deprive flitters, money grubbers, deserters from the labour front and violators of discipline of unemployment benefit.
18. Quitters, or those fired for violating labour discipline should be deprived of ration cards.
19. They should be evicted from factory housing.
20. Labour exchanges should take on flitters and violators only after a certain time has elapsed since the offence.
21. Severe measures should be applied to those 'unemployed' refusing work offered them.
22. The list of those qualifying to register at labour exchanges should be extended to cover all those on the electoral role.

When one considers how many of these demands were implemented the regime had some justification in claiming, if this letter was a true reflection of feeling on the shop floor, that the campaign for tighter labour discipline had the support of the workers.

When the 'hard line' was about to be abandoned, it was the Kalinin workers once again who led the workers' chorus in demanding the introduction of work books.⁴⁸ So why the shift of emphasis?

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48 Izvestiya, 14 January 1931.

My guess is that it was a question of priorities. By the beginning of 1931 it was beginning to dawn on the Party leadership that all the enthusiasm and shock work in the world was meaningless if the skill was not sufficient to tackle the job in hand. The Party battles had been won, now was the time to channel the energies of the workers into the most productive direction and that meant a massive commitment to skill-raising and training. In the long run this was to prove as successful in improving labour discipline as any of the laws introduced during the winter of 1930/31.

The Curious Episode of the Labour Code and Work Books

As noted above, the first call for a new Labour Code was contained in the Sovnarkom decree of 11 February 1930 which called upon Narkomtrud, in collaboration with VTsSPS and management organs, to elaborate a draft All-Union Code of Labour Laws which would reflect the new conditions brought about by the continuous working week, socialist competition, the shock brigade movement, the despatch of production workers to collective farms or to study etc.⁴⁹

In the summer of 1930 Narkomtrud had appealed to workers to submit suggestions on simplifying labour legislation. The September issue of Voprosy truda revealed that this had provoked little reaction,⁵⁰ reflecting perhaps the general falling off in enthusiasm for the industrialisation drive that was apparent following the end of the Leninist Appeal. The next issue was the first to be edited by Kraval', the Vesenkha official who had led the attack on the Rate-Setting and Disputes Commissions in early 1929.

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49 Sovetskoe trudovoe pravo na novom etape, p.14
(Voitinskii).

50 V. Ch, 'K voprosu ob uproshchenii trudovikh zakonov',
in Voprosy truda, 1930, no. 9, p.70.

It was in this issue that Tsikhon, the new Labour Commissar, gave a report on the All-Union Conference of Labour Organs which opened in Moscow on 14 November 1930. At this gathering much attention was devoted to the introduction of both a new Labour Code and Work Books. Referring to the latter Tsikhon explained:⁵¹

"with the aim of struggling against flitters and labour deserters, Narkomtrud SSSR is working on the question of introducing permanent work books for all working people. Such a book will assist in exposing alien elements in enterprises and will create the opportunity of compiling a picture of the worker's production record, insofar as here will be entered all honours bestowed and fines imposed on the worker. The introduction of the work book has the aim of stimulating a socialist attitude to production as in it will be noted all work done for hire and the attitude of the worker to socialist construction."

During the Conference Trud had printed an editorial calling for a new Labour Code of Socialist Reconstruction to replace the old Code.⁵² At the closing session of the gathering a resolution was passed calling upon Narkomtrud to elaborate and submit for discussion a draft new Code by 1 January 1931.⁵³

That work was in progress on both initiatives was made evident early in the New Year. On 4 January 1931 Tsikhon threw the matter of Work Books open to public discussion in an article in Izvestiya. On 14 January 1931 the same newspaper printed the first replies, all of which were in favour of the introduction of Work Books. The letter accorded the most space came from the treugol'nik at the Kalinin engineering work in Moscow (and not, significantly, from the workers' general meeting). This confirmed Tsikhon's claim in the 4 January article that the idea had originated among 'leading shock workers', and made it clear that it

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51 A. Tsikhon, 'Na bol'shevistskie rel'sy - k itogam vsesoyuznogo soveshchaniya organov truda', in Voprosy truda, 1930, nos. 10-11, p.8.

52 Trud, 17 November 1930.

53 Trud, 22 November 1930.

was aimed first and foremost at violators of labour discipline. The letter from the Kalinin works was printed also in Na trudovom fronte 54, with a supplementary article that complained that the worker's existing documents: the union card wages book and work pass "do not tell the biography of the worker".55 The previous issue of the journal, in a leading article, had stated that "it is impossible to ignore the initiative of the working masses themselves who have proposed the idea of work books, a kind of production passport for all workers." 56

In an article in Narkomtrud's other journal, Voprosy truda, at the same time, Tsikhon revealed that the open discussion on the Work Books was to enable "the workers at large to decide for themselves which are the best ways and means of exposing alien elements in the enterprises and learning the production character (kharakteristika) of each worker."

Later in the same article Tsikhon turned his attention to the other initiative in hand, claiming that "the working masses are resolutely suggesting that Narkomtrud radically reviews and amends labour legislation in accordance with the planned reconstruction of the economy. The New Code must serve the interests of production, the socialist organisation and rationalisation of work and the tasks of improving the material and cultural situation of the working class." 57

Further evidence that the Code was still under preparation came in another of the letters to Izvestiya on 14 January 1931, this one from a brigade for the study of the new draft Labour Code at the AMO motorworks was entitled "Clip the wings of the 'flitters'". That a draft was in preparation was confirmed in the January issue of Voprosy truda, which claimed that it was being worked out at

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54 Na trudovom fronte, 1931, no.2., p.6.

55 A.P., 'Vvedem proizvodstvennye passporta', in ibid, p.7.

56 Na trudovom fronte, 1931, no.1, pp. 3-4.

57 A. Tsikhon, 'Vypolnit' boevuyu programmu rabotu' in
1931, no.1, pp. 7, 9.

"at a shock pace".⁵⁸

On 13 February 1931, Kraval' (who was also Deputy Commissar of Labour) revealed in an article in Izvestiya that a decree introducing Work Books had been submitted by Narkomtrud to the Government for approval. An article in the March-April issue of Voprosy truda still referred to "the suggested transfer to a system of standard work books".⁵⁹

The last mention of the Work Books during this period comes in an article in Na trudovom fronte in May 1931 entitled "For a standard work book" (Za edinuyu trudovuyu knizhku). The article claims that Narkomtrud had issued a decree in February 1931 asking for grass roots reaction to the idea, but had got no reaction.⁶⁰

"Even the workers at the Kalinin works, the initiators of this proposal, the workers at Trekhgorka, AMO, Krasnyi Treugol'nik and other plants, who at one time supported this suggestion or forwarded analogous ideas, have of late become quiet and are not displaying any further active interest in this matter."

The idea had not yet been dropped, however, and Narkomtrud was reported to have set up a special commission in which Rabkrin and other organs played an active part. This commission had produced a draft work book and distributed it for discussion by interested parties.

Nothing more was heard of Work Books until their eventual introduction on 20 December 1938! ⁶¹

A similar fate would appear to have befallen the Labour Code. In January 1931 a Draft Code, edited by legal experts Grishin and Voitinskii, was approved by the directorate of the Institute of Soviet Construction and Law in the Communist Academy and ratified by the Section of Labour Law at the I All-Union Congress of Marxists working in the sphere

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58 A. Belov, 'K proektu novogo KZoT', in Voprosy truda, 1931, no.1, p.84.

59 P. Ognev-Levenstern, 'Spornye voprosy v zakonodatel'stve po naimu i otkazu ot raboty trudyashcheyusya', in Voprosy truda, 1931, nos.3-4, p.142.

60 Na trudovom fronte, 1931, no.15, p.13

61 Sbornik postanovlenii SSSR, 1938, no.58, art.329.

of Soviet Construction and Law.⁶² In introducing the new Draft Code Grishin wrote:⁶³

"The fundamental demand of the new code is the clear reflection in it of the general line of the VKP (b) on questions of labour: the further consolidation of socialist competition, shock work and other manifestations of work enthusiasm by the masses and of a communist attitude to work; the decisive turn to face production and reorganisation of the unions, organs of Nar-komtrud, all organisations of the working class and all labour legislation on the basis of socialist competition and shock work; the consolidation of the planned basis in all spheres of labour; the Bolshevik solution to the problems of seeking labour resources, of training and supplying the economy with cadres; the further continual improvement of the material, cultural and living standards of the working class...the decisive battle for an iron labour discipline."

and, just in case anyone had missed the point, he added:⁶⁴

"Arising out of the necessity to mobilise the masses for the struggle for the general line of our Party, for victorious socialist construction in our country, the new Labour Code must ensure the all-round support of initiatives of the masses, the further mighty development of socialist work organisation on the basis of socialist competition, shock work and other forms of the collective nature of work. The Code must ensure the further consolidation of socialist planning in all spheres of labour and the mobilisation of the masses for socialist labour discipline, for iron proletarian order in socialist enterprises."

Despite admitting that there was a "problem in the inter-relationship between state-legal norms and those of public influence in the Code", ⁶⁵ the latter found ample reflection in the provisions of the new Draft. Indeed, a whole Chapter was devoted to "The Socialist Organisation of Work and Labour Discipline", which embodied rules on turnover, bonus payments for shock workers and the activities of Comrades' Courts.⁶⁶

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62 Zin. Grishin, 'O novom trudovom kodekse' (Tezisy), in Sovetskoe trudovoe pravo na novom etape, p.79.

63 ibid., p.81.

64 ibid., pp. 83-84.

65 ibid., p.84.

66 ibid., p.94.

Then the Code appears to have shared the same fate as the Work Books. Writing in July 1933 in the trade union journal, Grishin uncharitably condemns his fellow compiler of the Draft Code, Voitinskii, as a Right-'leftist'.⁶⁷ In a book published in 1934, Grishin claims that:⁶⁸

"The Thesis for the new Code was dropped because it clearly failed to emphasise that, in the epoch of the dictatorship of the proletariat, the economic and political conditions are being prepared for the withering away of outwardly-compulsive standards of labour following the elimination of classes and the remnants of a class society."

It is my contention that both the Work Book and the Labour Code were dropped because both reflected a situation in which, ostensibly, the enthusiasm and discipline of the many would support a 'hard line' being taken against the few. The apathy that greeted appeals for suggestions on both initiatives suggests that this was not a true reflection of the situation.

By the time the drafts were ready, the Party leadership appears to have re-evaluated the policy of relying on such 'enthusiasm' and had made the raising of skills and the planned hiring of manpower for the economy its top priorities as far as the work of Narkomtrud was concerned. The immense extra work involved in handling Work Books and a new Code would have been counterproductive in this respect.

In the event the bulk of labour legislation in the subsequent period right up until the renewed campaign against absenteeism in the autumn of 1932 was directed

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67 Zin. Grishin, 'Bor'ba s general'noi linii partii v voprosakh trudy i trudovogo prava', in Voprosy prof-dvizheniya, 1933, no.9, p.33.

68 Zin. Grishin, Sotsialisticheskaya organizatsiya truda, p.91.

at raising skills ⁶⁹, extending benefits to shock workers ⁷⁰, reforming the wage system ⁷¹, improving the system of hiring manpower ⁷² and tightening up on the rules for payment for defective output, idle time etc.⁷³

The decisive switch of emphasis in 1931 away from the pace of industrialisation to the mastery of technology had swept away plans to introduce both the new Labour Code and Work Books, sparing the Soviet worker for a few more years the indignity of the ~~latter~~ document and extending the life of the virtually redundant 1922 Code until the 1970 All-Union Principles of Labour Legislation were adopted in 1970.

The Campaign against Absenteeism

We have already discerned several distinct periods in the policy on labour legislation during the First Five-Year Plan: after an initial package of laws, enacted within the framework of 'juridic al' norms, in 1929 had consolidated one-man management and made the necessary amendments and innovations in industrial relations as would facilitate the implementation of the general line on rapid industrialisation, there followed, from late 1929 until the autumn of 1930, a period in which emphasis was placed on 'socio-political' norms enshrined in shock work; then the 'hard line' described above sought to clamp down on the violators of labour discipline through a mixture of legal and public pressure, ostensibly with the support of the vast majority of the working masses united in the shock brigades; this, in its turn, was replaced early in 1931 by a policy which stressed the urgent priority of

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69 See, for example, decree of Presidium of VTsSPS "On the Technical Instruction of Shock Workers", dated 8 March 1931, Profsoyuzy SSSR: dokumenty i materialy, vol.II,M, 1963, pp.622-623;

70 See, for example, Instruction of VTsSPS, Narkomsnab and Tsentrosoyuz "On the Preferential Provision of Shock Workers", dated 7 April 1931, Trud, 7 April 1931.

71 See decree of VTsSPS and Vesenkha SSSR "On Re-Structuring the Wage System in the Metal and Coal Industries", dated 20 September 1931, Trud 23 September 1931.

72 See decree of TsIK and Sovnarkom SSSR, dated 13 September 1931, Izvestiya, 19 September 1931.

73 See decree of Narkomtrud, dated 1 June 1932 "On Property Responsibility", Izvestiya Narkomtruda, 1932, nos. 17-18.

mastering technology.

However, this last policy was implemented against a deteriorating situation in provisions, housing and working conditions which led to the maintenance of high rates of turnover, especially in the summer of 1932 of skilled workers, and absenteeism, not least among workers deliberately being absent for three or more days in order to get the sack and expedite their departure for alternative work.

By the summer of 1932, both problems had reached threatening proportions: turnover in Group 'A' industries reached 14.1 and 14 per cent in July and August respectively, and the rates for Group 'B' industries - at 10.5 and 11.7 per cent - were not far behind;⁷⁴ the absentee rate for July was 0.68 days per worker (equivalent to 8.16 days per year) and for August 0.78 days (or 9.36 days per year).⁷⁵ By comparison, in February 1930 (the best month in terms of labour discipline during the entire period under review) the absentee rate was 0.22 days per worker (or 2.64 days per year).⁷⁶ In other words, the rate had increased by more than 350 per cent in eighteen months. Moreover, the size of the working class had increased substantially during that time and the 'cost' per absenteeism had risen as the technological processes utilised in Soviet industry increased.

An early hint of a return to the 'hard line' was given on 7 August 1932 when pilfering from collective farms became punishable by death.⁷⁷ Just before the previous package of tough legislative measures had tailed off early in 1931, a Government decree had called for "the highest measure of social defence"(i.e. the death penalty) to be applied against violators of discipline on the railways.
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⁷⁴ See Appendix B.

⁷⁵ S. Kheinman, K voprosu o proizvoditel'nosti truda, p.40.

⁷⁶ Trud v SSSR. Spravochnik, 1926-1930gg., p.19.

⁷⁷ Sobranie zakonov, 1932, no.62, art. 360.

On 15 November 1932 TsIK and Sovnarkom issued a brief decree amending article 47 of the Labour Code and allowing dismissal for just one day's absenteeism.⁷⁸ Unlike all the previous major legislative initiatives, this had not been preceded by a Party appeal, decree or directive. One is tempted to conclude that the Party wished to distance itself from any accusation that it might have been the original source for the clamp down, although this was quite clearly the case.

In addition to being dismissed from the factory for one day's unsanctioned absenteeism, the worker was to be deprived of his food-and-goods card and evicted from factory housing. In many respects these latter penalties probably made a greater impact than the first, for it served notice that the authorities fully intended to implement this decree. Previous laws on labour discipline had not ^{been} enforced and had been violated almost with impunity. The best example of this was the turnover decree of 15 December 1930, which should have prevented the flitter from receiving work for a period of six months. In January 1932 The Times correspondent reported "workers no longer have the slightest fear of losing their jobs. 'You will be sent away with a bad "character", one worker was told. 'I hope so', he answered, 'I have five in my pocket now and each time I add a new one to my collection I find better work.'" ⁷⁹

As illustrated in the previous Chapter, the effects of the decree on absenteeism were felt immediately and keenly. In an attempt to ensure that this law was carried out to the letter on 20 November ⁸⁰ and 26 November 1932 ⁸¹, VTsIK and Sovnarkom RSFSR; and Narkomtrud SSSR respectively

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78 Izvestiya, 16 November 1932.

79 The Times, 21 January 1932.

80 Izvestiya Narkomtruda, 1933, nos.1-2.

81 Byulleten' finansovogo i khozyiatvennogo zakonodatel'stva, 1933, no.13, pp.40-41.

ordered that the provision on evicting truants from factory housing must be carried out immediately, without offering alternative accommodation or means of transportation and at any time of year (it was, remember, November!).

Even during the previous 'hard line' period Trud had been moved to declare, on 6 January 1931, in reviewing a case in which a worker had been evicted:

"It is necessary once and for all to explain to the officials of the judiciary that the proletarian court is first and foremost a class court. There neither is, nor can there be, a law in which a worker's family is turned out onto the streets in a January frost."

In January 1933, the Petrovskii works in Dnepropetrovsk attracted criticism for only having evicted 261 truants out of the 1833 sacked in December 1932.⁸²

The Party eventually exposed its hand when, on 4 December 1932, a joint decree issued by the Central Committee and Sovnarkom SSSR "On Extending the Rights of Factory Managements in Provisions for Workers and Improving the Rationing System" placed the issue of food-and-goods cards in the hands of factory management.⁸³ New 'departments of workers' provisions' (otdely rabochego snabzheniya - ORS) replaced the 'closed workers' cooperatives (zakrytye rabochie kooperativy - ZRK) in 262 of the country's largest enterprises.⁸⁴ Ration books were to be distributed only to workers at the given plant and their families. As an article in Izvestiya on the following day, 5 December 1932, entitled "Subordinate Workers' Provisions to the Interests of Production", implied this decree was aimed as much at turnover as it was absenteeism.

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82 Sovetskoe gosudarstvo, 1933, no.5, p.57 (Aleksandrov)

83 Sobranie zakonov, 1932, no.80, art. 489.

84 An incomplete list of these enterprises is given in Za proletarskuyu ditsiplinu truda, M, 1933, pp.43-44.

The pressure to fully implement both the absentee and provisions decrees led to further instructions being issued on each. A circular from the RSFSR Health Commissariat and Narkomtrud RSFSR on 13 December required doctors to desist giving sick notes to truants or drunks and called for the factory aktiv to organise raids on the homes of absent workers especially before and after rest days.⁸⁵

On 19 December 1932 a Sovnarkom SSSR and Party Central Committee decree (signed by Molotov and Stalin) criticised local organisations for carrying out the 4 December decree poorly and insisted that January coupons be issued by 28 December.⁸⁶

A final measure in 1932 which assisted the creation of a more stable population was the Government decree of 27 December 1932 "On the Issue of Passports to Citizens of the USSR", introduced ostensibly:⁸⁷

"In order to obtain better statistics of the population in towns, workers' settlements and settlements built around newly-constructed factories, and also in order to secure the deportation from these places of persons who are not connected with industry...and are not engaged in socially useful labour...and also in order to cleanse these places from kulak, criminal and other anti-social elements which find a refuge there..."

As the peasant population were not issued with passports, the decree put a stop to the free flow of migrants from the countryside into the town, while at the same time enabling the authorities to get rid of any unwanted or troublesome workers. On 31 January 1933, Izvestiya served notice that there was to be a reduction of workers by 2 per cent in industry and 26 per cent in construction during 1933. This, too, inevitably, would have a beneficial effect on turnover.
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85 Byulleten' finansovogo i khozyaistvennogo zakonodatel'stva, 1933, no.14, pp. 43-44.

86 Sobranie zakonov, 1932, no 82, art. 501.

87 Izvestiya, 28 December 1932.

We have seen in the previous Chapter the dramatic effect that these decrees had on the rate of absenteeism, which fell from 0.59 days in October (the last full month before the decree on dismissal for one day's unsanctioned absenteeism was published) to 0.08 days in January 1933.⁸⁸ On 18 March 1933, Za industrializatsiyu published the findings of a Party investigation into the implementation of the November and December decrees, in which it was claimed that, by the end of 1932, 237,000 workers had been struck off the registers of 74 enterprises in heavy industry. Nonetheless, the Party accused managers of not being firm enough in dealing with offenders.

Pressure was being put not only on management to get tough with violators of discipline. On 11 February 1933 Trud published a VTsSPS decree on labour discipline which warned union organs that "any toleration of truants and those guilty of specifically hindering the decisions of the Government will be regarded as an open display of opportunism in practice and will ensure that severe measures are brought to bear against the leaders of these organisations."

With the restrictions on absenteeism and turnover at last appearing to have some effect, the authorities' attention in the sphere of labour discipline could be diverted towards other problems. The above VTsSPS decree referred to "hidden absenteeism" (sleeping at work, unpunctuality) and an article in Trud on 23 June 1933 claimed that, at the Frunze motor-works, labour discipline was "limping on all fours" due to "internal absenteeism" (smoking, walking about, chatting etc) which accounted for 32 per cent of all work time. A survey into non-utilisation of the working day carried out by the Commissariat of Heavy Industry (Narkomtyazhprom) in the

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88 Sovetskoe gosudarstvo, 1933, no.5, p.55 (Aleksandrov).

summer of 1933 revealed that, on average, ~~one and a half~~ ~~to two~~ hours out of a seven-hour working day (i.e. from 21.4 to 28.6 per cent) were not being utilised, the equivalent of 66 days per worker for the entire year! ⁸⁹

The year of 1933 was most notable, however, as far as labour discipline was concerned by i) the merger between VTsSPS and Narkomtrud in June 1933 ⁹⁰, and ii) the Party takeover of responsibility for discipline on railway transport, with the aim of introducing a discipline of the military type among railway workers. ⁹¹ Political departments, made up of "communists and non-Party activists" were to be held responsible to the Party Central Committee and the Commissariat of Transport for this, although, as the Party decree of July 1933 establishing the departments made clear, even these cadres had not distinguished themselves: ⁹²

"Communists and non-Party activists not only fail to oppose slackers and other violators of labour discipline, but, on the contrary, are loafers and slackers themselves."

In 1934, a Government decree amended the Labour Code provision that had hitherto guaranteed the worker at least two-thirds of his pay rates if the plan was not fulfilled, even when this was his own fault. Under the new law, he would be paid on the basis of actual output if the under-fulfilment was due to him. ⁹³ This switch to payment for work done, combined with the spread of progressive piece-rates and the abolishing of the rationing system was to prepare the ground in 1935 for the rise of Stakhanovism.

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89 Za industrializatsiyu, 18 March 1933

90 Izvestiya, 24 June 1933; on 21 August 1934, VTsSPS was given responsibility for issuing instructions, rules and clarifications on labour legislation subject to confirmation by Sovnarkom SSSR, Sobranie zakonov, 1934, no.43, art.342.

91 Decree of Sovnarkom SSSR and TsK VKP (b) "On the Work of Railway Transport", Sobranie zakonov, 1933, no.40, art.237

92 Izvestiya, 11 July, 1933.

93 Sobranie zakonov, 1934, no.15, art. 109.

Conclusion

By the end of the period under review the relevant legislation had been introduced to control, more or less, the problems of turnover and absenteeism. The more basic problem of 'internal' absenteeism (i.e. underutilisation of work time) was to prove harder to legislate against.⁹⁴

Although immediate responsibility for labour legislation had passed into the hands of the trade unions, the status and relevance of the law in this sphere had diminished significantly.⁹⁵ For it was management that had direct responsibility for production, and this, as we have seen, was the overriding priority in Soviet industry at this time. Thus managers could and did utilise socialist competition to infringe the laws on overtime and rest Days.⁹⁶

On the other hand, the managers themselves were held politically responsible for fulfilling quantitative plans and criminally responsible for failing to fulfil qualitative plans.⁹⁷ There was little incentive, therefore, for them to obey the letter of the labour laws. Indeed, by the end of 1934, a writer in the trade union journal was moved to complain that "the managers crudely violate Soviet laws, firing workers for the least reason, for example, for not answering the telephone promptly." ⁹⁸

The legacy of such a cavalier attitude to labour laws continues to burden Soviet industry to this day. For example, Brezhnev's last decree on labour discipline, published in Pravda on 12 January 1980, was subsequently found to have been implemented in only 18.5 per cent of Soviet enterprises and not at all in forty per cent! ⁹⁹

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94 Narkomtyazhprom issued a decree on this on 27 September 1933, Voprosy profdvizheniya, 1934, no. 5, p.90. (Devyakovich).

95 See S. Samokhin, 'Zametki o sostoyanii trudovogo zakonodatel'stva' in Voprosy profdvizheniya, 1934, no. 12, p.23.

96 Trud, 14 March 1934.

97 A Government decree of 8 December 1933 made managers liable to at least five years imprisonment for systematically producing poor quality output, Sobranie zakonov, 1933, no.73, art. 442.

98 Voprosy profdvizheniya, 1934, no.12, p.24 (Samokhin).

99 David Wedgwood Benn, 'Problems of Authority in the Soviet Union', The World Today, vol.40, no.3, March 1984, p.112