

Pre-War Factory Relations in Stalin's Soviet Union (1924–1941)

by

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Abstract

This thesis analyzes the rapidly changing labour relations in the Soviet Union from the period of 1924 to 1941. While the Soviet Union proclaimed itself to be a workers' state, the legislative changes introduced by Stalin created continuously harsher conditions for Soviet workers. The worker-director relationship in factories is examined in this thesis, along with how important legislative changes impacted this relationship. Accounts provided by former Soviet workers, including a set of interviews from the Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System, are used to determine how the workers viewed their role in the Soviet factory and their relationship with their directors. Collaborative efforts between workers and directors were necessary, even when legislation forbade it, so the factories could meet their constantly increasing quotas. Despite the Soviet state at times mandating factory directors to be ruthless and distant from their workers, the workers often understood that the directors had no choice in how they acted, as they were forced by the Soviet state to enforce strict laws or face harsh repercussions.

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Glossary

Glavk: Main industry administration under the ministry level

Gosplan: State Planning Committee

Kolkhoz: Collective farm

Komsomol: All-Union Leninist Communist League of Youth

Narkom: People's Commissar (minister)

Narkomat: People's Commissariat (ministry)

Oblast: Province, a large regional administrative unit divided into raions (districts)

Obkom: Regional Communist party committee

Ostarbeiter: Nazi slave labourer from Eastern Europe, literary "Eastern worker"

Politburo: The top executive body of the Communist party

Politotdel: A political department in some institution

Promakademiiia: Industrial academy, a university for industrial managers with
little education who had been promoted from below

Raikom: District party committee

Raion: District, a regional administrative unit

Spetsotdel: Special section, an OGPU/NKVD office at major industrial
enterprises

Udarnik: Shock worker

Abbreviations

FYP: Five-Year Plan

HPSSS: Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System

NEP: New Economic Policy

NKVD: People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs

OGPU: Joint State Political Directorate

Dedication

Dedicated to my dog Zlata who always kept me company as I wrote. To the memory of my father John who first encouraged me to change degrees to History. To my sister Heather who greatly helped to suggest revisions. And to my mom Valerie and brother Andrew who always provide support however they can. I would also like to thank my supervisor Dr. Serhy Yekelchuk for patiently guiding me through this process.

Introduction

My thesis explores the relationship between factory directors and factory workers in the Soviet Union from the death of Vladimir Lenin until the German invasion of the Soviet Union during World War II (1924-1941). The year 1924 also marked the introduction of a stable currency and the start of the Soviet Union's industry recovering from its prior collapse. Thus, 1924 to 1941 was a distinct period of rapid industrial growth in the Soviet Union. This work explores how the worker-director relationship developed, what influenced changes in them, and how this relationship affected the social fabric of the factory while tracing the constantly changing power structures and shifting collective identities. The Soviet Union portrayed itself as a workers' state, where the working class had control over the means of production and held political power. However, under Stalin, the exploitation of workers was immense, and they faced similar abuses as they had under the tsarist regime; in many cases, workers' Soviet experience surpassed the abusive conditions before the Russian Revolution. In an attempt to enforce the authority of factory directors, the Soviet state enacted a series of strict labour laws. However, several conflicting policies and a series of purges contravened this aim, making it vital for directors and workers to collaborate to fulfill their factories' plans. This thesis analyzes the relationship between factory directors and their workers by using statements from former Soviet workers to explain how the Soviet Union's policies forced directors and workers to work together to run their factories effectively. My main thesis is that

the Soviet state's vision of creating an efficient factory by empowering the directors was contravened by its unintentional formation of a symbiotic relationship between directors and their workers.

The extent to which their respective political and ideological backgrounds conditioned the relations between the distinct groups of workers and directors and how this shaped their relationships will also be discussed. For most of this period, nearly all factory directors were Communist Party members, while the majority of workers were not. This thesis will also focus more on the aspects not fully covered in the historiography of labour relations under Stalin. The existing scholarship concentrates on the technical or practical side of the relationship rather than the personal, social and political aspects.

The introduction of this thesis provides an overview of the Soviet Union's economic background and some information on worker-management relations in pre-Revolutionary Russia. I will also provide a brief overview of important legislation passed in the Soviet Union that had a significant impact on factories and their workers. The literature on the subject, including primary sources, will be discussed in the first chapter, and the second and third chapters will present the analysis of the source material.

A significant portion of the primary-source material for this thesis comes from a corpus of interviews from the Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System (HPSSS). The HPSSS is a collection of 707 interviews conducted after World War II with refugees who fled the Soviet Union. This study contained interviews with 331 individuals in New York and Berlin and was commissioned by the US Air

Force.¹ All of the interviews were recorded in English translation only, they are freely available online, and can be easily accessed and searched. These sources will be discussed further in the first chapter of this thesis.

I picked the years 1924 to 1941² for this thesis because the majority of the information from these interviews refers to this period. This period begins with the industrial revival post-Civil War and covers many important legislative changes impacting the factories, but it was less chaotic than the immediate years following the Russian Revolution and during World War II. In addition, the people being interviewed largely fled during World War II, often finding themselves on the territory occupied by the invading Nazis. The interviewees' fleeing the Soviet Union resulted in incomplete coverage of the factory relations during the war. In rare cases, some of the interviewees remained in the Soviet Union after the end of World War II, and fled sometime before the interviews took place in 1950. The situation in factories during World War II also quickly changed as new laws were passed that further restricted the rights of workers.

The focus on labour relations in factories rather than all Soviet institutions, such as schools, hospitals, or mining operations, is justified because the power structure of these organizations was fundamentally different. While many interviews discuss these various other institutions, the sample size is small

¹ As people were interviewed multiple times, the total number of interviews (707) greatly outnumbers the number of people interviewed (331). Subjects were given A-Schedule (personal) and B-Schedule (specialized) interviews, as well as an occasional group interview.

² Until the end of 1932, the Soviet economic calendar began on 1 October and ended on 30 September. After that, the economic years began at the start of the new year (1 January).

compared to factory workers and management, making it difficult to determine general trends.

Labour Relations in the Late Imperial Russia and Early Bolshevik State

To provide historical context for the development of worker relations in the Soviet Union, the nature of factory workplaces in Imperial Russia and revolutionary times must be explained. In the era of rapid industrialization in Imperial Russia, beginning in the late 1880s, the peasantry was rapidly recruited into factory workplaces. The factory owners subjected them to long, harsh workdays, often under the cruel control of their foremen, supervisors and managers. Workers would recognize that they had common economic interests, and it became common to take collective action against the bosses they viewed as abusive by engaging in labour-related violence. These bouts of violence would be a precursor to more extensive collective actions during revolutionary times. The violence would come in reaction to specific abusive managers. There were larger periods of disorder, with thousands engaging in riotous behaviour, burning factories and houses, or destroying machinery.³ Although the violence often came in reaction to specific abusive managers, workers' class consciousness was also developing. Abusive managers and foremen risked being beaten and humiliated by the workers, but, in 1894, a Moscow factory inspector blamed

³ Daniel R. Brower, "Labor Violence in Russia in the late Nineteenth Century," *Slavic Review* 41, no. 3 (Autumn 1982), 419.

workers' grievances on the general enmity they displayed towards their superiors and the immunity they allegedly received from any form of official sanction.⁴

The actions against managers and foremen continued into the revolutionary times (1905 to 1917), when workers would ambush “unpopular foremen and managers, [place] them into wheelbarrows and dump them in the river.”⁵ By the time the chaos of the revolutionary turmoil began to subside, and Stalin began consolidating his power, these actions against foremen and managers would become rarer. However, the attitudes that existed towards them would not just disappear with the change from pre-revolutionary personnel to Soviet-promoted bosses. Under different circumstances and in a less collective manner, attacks on management renewed in the late 1930s, with the commencement of a period of denunciations and purges.

After the Revolution, the technical intelligentsia inherited from the old regime found themselves at the centre of the ensuing economic upheaval. Management largely stayed the same as the Bolsheviks sought to maintain production as much as possible during the economic collapse in the aftermath of the Civil War. Officially, the Soviets granted workers political control of the factory through workers' organizations and committees, while the old intelligentsia continued handling the production side. The pre-Soviet management met these

⁴ Brower, “Labor and Violence in Russia,” 430-431.

⁵ Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution*, 4th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 55.

changes with significant resistance, leading to many factories shutting down or the state taking them over.⁶

Economic Periods and Changing Labour Laws

Several distinct periods in the economic history of interwar Soviet Union need to be outlined to explain how labour relations changed. The first period is that of the New Economic Policy (NEP), which was instituted under Lenin in 1921 and continued after Lenin's death until 1928. At the time, the Soviet Union was facing a demographic crisis as the country had lost some 30 million people because of World War I, the Civil War, and other tumultuous events, including epidemics and famines.⁷ The population of major cities had suffered greatly, with Moscow having lost half of its population. Of particular note was the flight of the managerial and administrative class at the end of the Civil War, which left the Soviet Union with a lack of technical and managerial talent.⁸

Prior to the institution of the NEP, production was as low as less than 20% of pre-World War I levels.⁹ This meant the state had to take radical action to reconstruct its lost industrial capacity. The NEP had the state take control of certain industries, such as trade, banking, and heavy industry, but left agriculture and other industries to be run without strict, centralized control. While this meant

⁶ Nicholas Lampert, *The Technical Intelligentsia and the Soviet State: A Study of Managers and Technicians 1928-1935*, Studies in Soviet History & Society (London and Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1979), 13-14.

⁷ Moshe Lewin, "Society and the Stalinist State in the Period of the Five Year Plans," *Social History* 1, no.2 (May 1976): 144.

⁸ Lewin, "Society and the Stalinist State," 144.

⁹ Edward A. Reese, "Lenin and the New Economic Policy," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Leninist Political Philosophy*, ed. Tom Rockmore and Norman Levine (London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 485.

that a majority of factories were still privately run, most factory personnel were now employed by the state.¹⁰ By 1923, the pre-revolutionary managers began to be replaced by red directors so the state would have increased influence over production.¹¹ The red directors of this period were largely undereducated, with 88.4% lacking elementary education and 97.4% lacking a completed higher education degree. Their lack of technical expertise was contrasted by the deputy directors, who were largely non-Communist but significantly more educated.¹²

Heavy industry fared poorly under the NEP, while light industry managed to rebound significantly.¹³ Directors exercised significant power during this time; they had leverage over the workers due to their ability in times of high unemployment to threaten them with being fired. Under the NEP, it was challenging for urban workers to find new jobs.¹⁴ The administrative class below the director level was still mostly educated in pre-revolutionary times and was considered old specialists. These engineers and bureaucrats made independent decisions related to production and lacked absolute loyalty to the Soviet state. The state placed great emphasis on efficiency, leading to tense workplace relations and increasingly dangerous workplaces.¹⁵

By 1926, the state's priorities shifted towards large industrial projects to help modernize the Soviet economy. Soviet leadership believed that the period of

¹⁰ Michael Gelb, "Roots of Soviet Industrial Management 1917-1941," *Review of Radical Political Economics* 13 (1981): 57.

¹¹ Lampert, *The Technical Intelligentsia*, 22.

¹² Hiroaki Kuromiya, *Stalin's Industrial Revolution: Politics and Workers, 1928-1932* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 52.

¹³ Reese, "Lenin and New Economic Policy," 494

¹⁴ In 1925, urban unemployment was as high as 9%. See Reese, "Lenin and the New Economic Policy," 496.

¹⁵ Gelb, "Roots of Soviet Industrial Management," 58.

lifting the economy from its depths had ended, and full-scale industrialization could now begin.¹⁶ At this point, the urban population had rebounded to pre-World War I levels. However, the country was still largely agrarian, with 77% of the population working in agriculture and 82% living rurally.¹⁷ Urban unemployment was high, managers were receiving significantly more compensation than floor-level factory workers were, and the economy was perceived as being still run by the bourgeoisie. These issues caused a reevaluation of the principles of the NEP by left-wing groups within the Bolshevik Party.¹⁸ The great power and ambition of the old pre-revolutionary managerial class of this time, who tended to have technical knowledge, was eventually curbed through several show trials that prosecuted these manager technocrats. They were replaced with a new wave of the so-called “red directors,” who were meant to pursue the state’s agenda faithfully.¹⁹

The replacement of factory management was possible because of the decisions taken at the Twelfth Party Congress in 1923 when Stalin gained control over the assignment of the top industrial directors. Stalin could now personally appoint loyal directors in key industries and oust Trotskyists and old specialists in favour of the less-educated red directors. Just five years after the Twelfth Party

¹⁶ Reese, “Lenin and the New Economic Policy,” 496.

¹⁷ Lewin, “Society and the Stalinist State”, 145.

¹⁸ Reese, “Lenin and the New Economic Policy,” 496.

¹⁹ Gelb, “Roots of Soviet Industrial Management,” 59.

Congress, Communist Party members made up around 80% of directors and industrial officials.²⁰

By the late 1920s, Stalin was firmly in power as the secretary of the Central Committee. He then embraced the agenda of his former political opponents by moving away from the NEP to begin a rapid industrialization drive. The catalytic event that marked this shift was the 1928 Shakhty Affair, a show trial of “old specialists” as alleged wreckers that heralded a new era of class warfare. Once a strong proponent of the NEP, Stalin now attacked its class-conciliatory nature and pushed for speedy industrialization.²¹ Over the next four years, thousands of engineers were tried, including those with the foremost expertise in industry, due to them being educated in Imperial Russia and thus being ideologically alien.²² Historian Hiroaki Kuromiya attributes to the Shakhty Affair the worsening of relations between workers and management. He states that penalties against workers in 1928-29 tripled in some factories, primarily against unskilled workers, due to the instability created by the trial.²³

In the same year, Stalin instituted the First Five-Year Plan (FYP) (1928–1932), which marked a new era of transformation in Soviet factories. This ambitious program of rapid industrialization was implemented during a time when the real wages of workers were declining, as the grain crisis drove up the cost of

²⁰ Kendall E. Bailes, *Technology and Society under Lenin and Stalin: Origins of the Soviet Technical Intelligentsia, 1917-1941* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1978), 65-66

²¹ Kuromiya, *Stalin's Industrial Revolution*, 15-17.

²² Bailes, *Technology and Society*, 68.

²³ Kuromiya, *Stalin's Industrial Revolution*, 94-95.

living in the Soviet Union.²⁴ During the First FYP, state investment in factories would increase substantially, especially in heavy industry. Steel mills and iron plants received the largest investment. Extensive new plants, such as the Magnitogorsk Iron and Steel Works, were constructed.²⁵

The rapid pace of industrialization during the First FYP created a massive societal and demographical change. In 1928, industrial workers constituted only three percent of the total population.²⁶ However, the First FYP started a period of large-scale population movements, as people left or moved around the countryside, and created a sharp increase in the size of the industrial working class. By 1932, the number of industrial workers would nearly double, while the number of construction workers quadrupled.²⁷ The bulk of these new workers came from peasant origins.²⁸ From 1926 to 1939, 45% of new factory workers were the children of peasants. This is roughly equal to the 46.3% that were the children of workers. Overall, 20% of workers in 1929 had joined the workforce in the last three years. These new workers would often lack political literacy, causing tensions between themselves and older workers, as well as management, leading to many incidents in the workplace.²⁹ People who left their agrarian lives behind did not find better standards of living when they received jobs in industry in the cities and new factory towns, often leading to

²⁴ Kuromiya, *Stalin's Industrial Revolution*, 81.

²⁵ Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution*, 132.

²⁶ Kuromiya, *Stalin's Industrial Revolution*, 17.

²⁷ Donald Filtzer, *Soviet Workers and Stalinist Industrialization: The Formation of Modern Soviet Production Relations, 1928-1941* (London, Pluto Press Limited: 1986), 45.

²⁸ Lewin, "Society and the Stalinist State", 150.

²⁹ Kuromiya, *Stalin's Industrial Revolution*, 91-98.

dissatisfaction with their new roles, resulting in increased turnover rates.³⁰ In the first year of the First FYP, turnover in all industries was 92.4%, which caused significant disruption of operations for a factory.³¹

The goals of the First FYP were incredibly ambitious, often lacking any realistic chance of being successfully implemented. Directors, now Soviet-educated technocrats or political appointees lacking technical expertise, would struggle with new production norms set by the Gosplan, which were frequently revised upwards.³² Production bottlenecks caused by a lack of workforce or raw materials were often blamed for failing to meet production quotas. Directors were also put under pressure, as, according to the new legislation, failure to meet quality standards could now be punished, enforced by a new quality control bureaus. Despite rarely being enforced, this threat put stress on the directors' relationships with their workers, as they would blame each other for production issues in an attempt to avoid repercussions.³³ This created a tense atmosphere where workers and specialists would maintain paper trails to show that they were following either illegal or unwise orders, so that when a project failed, or fraud was detected, they could provide evidence to authorities that management was to blame.³⁴

³⁰ Stefan Link, *Soviet Fordism in Practice – Building and operating the Soviet River Rouge, 1927-1945*, 42-43, http://www.econ.yale.edu/~egcenter/Link_Soviet%20Fordism%20in%20Practice.pdf

³¹ Filtzer, *Soviet Workers and Stalinist Industrialization*, 28.

³² Kuromiya, *Stalin's Industrial Revolution*, 175.

³³ Bailes, *Technology and Society*, 300.

³⁴ Bailes, *Technology and Society*, 302-304.

With the First FYP came the implementation of a planned economy, shifting away from the hybrid market economy practiced under the NEP.³⁵ “Shock workers” first started receiving official praise in 1927-8, when Komsomol members began organizing and promoting workplace initiatives. In January 1929, the idea of socialist competition was promoted in a prominent article in the newspaper *Pravda*.³⁶ Socialist competition was meant to encourage workers to produce goods at a much more efficient rate.³⁷

Overall, the population of cities rose by 44% during the First FYP. This led to some stratification of workers in the factory, as a large number of new workers lacked the skills to work efficiently, often leading to production bottlenecks. This would create tension as norms would be raised based on the performance of the highly efficient shock workers, but overall production volume would often not meet the production targets of the factory. This also affected older workers, who were often incapable of keeping up with this new breakneck pace.³⁸ The percentage of workers who were paid on a piece-rate system substantially increased. In 1923, 40.6% of workers were paid on a piece-rate system.³⁹ By 1933, 70% of workers were being paid by piecework.⁴⁰ The combination of high

³⁵ Reese, “Lenin and the New Economic Policy, 497.

³⁶ Lewis Siegelbaum, *Stakhanovism and the Politics of Productivity in the USSR, 1935-1941* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 40-41.

³⁷ Filtzer, *Soviet Workers and Stalinist Industrialization*, 40.

³⁸ Filtzer, *Soviet Workers and Stalinist Industrialization*, 77.

³⁹ Filtzer, *Soviet Workers and Stalinist Industrialization*, 26.

⁴⁰ *The Soviet Wages System*, trans. Ted Crawford, February 1938, 1, <https://files.libcom.org/files/The%20Soviet%20Wages%20System.pdf>.

norms, more consistent quality control, and fines for waste upset workers who were paid using the piecework system.⁴¹

Directors were also pressured to increase the productivity of their workers. Mikhail Kaganovich, a deputy to the head of the People's Commissariat of Heavy Industry, taught directors to rule using fear. They were instructed to act as factory tsars, encouraged to differentiate pay for productive and unproductive workers, and told to give increased benefits to shock workers.⁴² Efforts to curb labour indiscipline were introduced by Stalin in 1931 by creating a system where each worker would have their records kept in workbooks, which included each instance of indiscipline.⁴³ These workbooks would have to be given to new employers before workers could be hired.⁴⁴

Directors received more authority in the factory at the expense of the rest of the factory's management. During the First FYP, numerous purges shook up the power structure of factories. From 1928 to 1931, in the Donbas, 50% of technical workers and engineers were arrested.⁴⁵ During this period, many workers were promoted and accepted into the Communist Party, thus providing the cadre for the new managerial class. The state now focused on training the new generation of directors to have technical expertise while also being loyal Communist Party members. This would also help implement the new method of single-person management, which was necessary to legitimize the directors'

⁴¹ Bailes, *Technology and Society*, 302.

⁴² Lewin, "Society and the Stalinist State," 160.

⁴³ Bailes, *Technology and Society*, 319.

⁴⁴ Gelb, "Roots of Soviet Industrial Management," 61.

⁴⁵ Kuromiya, *Stalin's Industrial Revolution*, 50.

authority.⁴⁶ It was officially introduced in 1929 but implemented over several years.

The First FYP ended up lasting four and a half years and officially ended at the end of 1932.⁴⁷ The Second FYP, officially instituted at the start of 1933, once again placed a greater emphasis on heavy industry and, like the First FYP, placed expected production norms at much higher levels than was achievable. The rapid industrialization of this period meant that in the ten years from 1928 to 1937, the number of industrial workers increased by 254%, or from 3,124,000 to 7,924,000 workers.⁴⁸ Starting in November 1932, just months before the implementation of the Second FYP, new laws were passed that allowed factory directors to dismiss workers for a single day's absence, giving the directors significantly more power over their workers.⁴⁹ The penalties for absenteeism were harsh, as aside from being fired, they could have their access to food shops cut off and be evicted from their housing.⁵⁰ Absenteeism was defined as being late by just twenty minutes; very few excuses were accepted, and most needed a doctor's corroboration.⁵¹ Prior to the introduction of laws on absenteeism, the average worker in 1931 in all industries was absent 5.96 days per year without permission. Once the new laws were in effect, unexcused absences plummeted

⁴⁶ Kuromiya, *Stalin's Industrial Revolution*, 53.

⁴⁷ Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution*, 153.

⁴⁸ Lewin, "Society and the Stalinist state," 159.

⁴⁹ Yiannis Kokosalakis, "Bolshevik Bargaining in Soviet Industry: Communists between State and Society in the Interwar Soviet Union," *The Journal of Modern History* 93 (June 2021): 345.

⁵⁰ Lewin, "Society and the Stalinist State," 160.

⁵¹ Victor Kravchenko, *I Chose Freedom: The Personal and Political Life of a Soviet Official* (London, UK: Robert Hale Limited, 1947): 313.

89% to 0.67 per year, creating an extra week of production for each worker.⁵²

Another law introduced harsh penalties for the theft of goods, giving up to ten years imprisonment for stealing goods from factories, with the possibility of a death sentence.⁵³

A police registration system was enacted in 1933, which forced people to register to receive a passport that would allow them to relocate within the Soviet Union. For villagers, this would require permission from their kolkhoz and proof of employment in their intended place of relocation.⁵⁴ This measure represented a further restriction of workers' movements that attempted to reduce turnover. However, it had little success, as directors of other factories would poach workers, promising them better conditions, in an effort to help meet the high norms set by the state.⁵⁵ This meant that factories constantly had to retrain unskilled workers. The constant turnover and need to reach production norms gave the workers leverage, as they knew that management wanted to keep as many employees as possible. This would cause the underreporting of infractions that the state wanted to crack down on. While maintaining complete control of the workforce was state policy, the actual implementation of it would vary from factory to factory.⁵⁶ The end of the Second FYP was marked by the undermining of the directors' authority through mass repression in the form of the Great

⁵² Filtzer, *Soviet Workers and Stalinist Industrialization*, 52.

⁵³ Lewin, "Society and the Stalinist State," 158; Bailes, *Technology and Society*, 319.

⁵⁴ Lewin, "Society and the Stalinist State," 153.

⁵⁵ Lewin, "Society and the Stalinist State," 153.

⁵⁶ Lewin, "Society and the Stalinist State," 159.

Terror, as tensions in the workplace rose and accusations of wrecking became commonplace.⁵⁷

With the beginning of Stalin's turn toward conservative social values, a set of new formal workplace relationship guidelines were introduced in 1937, which discouraged friendly relations between workers and management, a marked departure from the stated goal of creating a classless society. Proper etiquette was encouraged, where workers would not sit in front of a superior, including having to stand when the upper management of a factory walked through the shop floor.⁵⁸

By the start of World War II, labour laws had progressively become more restrictive. From June 1940, workers could no longer quit their jobs without facing criminal prosecution.⁵⁹ The Third FYP, which had been inaugurated in 1938, placed greater emphasis on arms production due to shifts in international relations. At this point, the purges had been slowing down. Because the terror had disproportionately targeted the managers and engineers, the authority of factory management had been tarnished, and the state had to work to rebuild it. Slanderers were denounced, and in general, public accusations of wrecking became less common.⁶⁰ The development of the Third FYP was marked by conflict between Stalin and the head of the People's Commissariat of Heavy Industry, Sergo Ordzhonikidze, and his supporters. Despite Ordzhonikidze dying before the plan was created, factory managers who were seen as loyal to

⁵⁷ Kokosalakis, "Bolshevik Bargaining," 351.

⁵⁸ Bailes, *Technology and Society*, 322.

⁵⁹ Kokosalakis, "Bolshevik Bargaining," 324.

⁶⁰ Kokosalakis, "Bolshevik Bargaining," 355-356.

Ordzhonikidze became targets of purges. They were perceived as replaceable due to the creation of a new class of Soviet-educated technical specialists. Despite this, by 1939, only 26% of technical staff had obtained relevant higher education in the Commissariat of Heavy Machine Building, which was one of the industries with higher-educated personnel.⁶¹

The successor of Ordzhonikidze, Lazar Kaganovich, attempted to enforce discipline in factories by making management legally responsible for workers' indiscipline. This campaign created a situation where management would risk either having their workers imprisoned for an unexcused absence or being imprisoned themselves if they did not report the workers.⁶²

Compared to pre-revolutionary times, factory directors and workers had an implicit mutual understanding that they were both victims of the whims of the Soviet state. When the directors were not cruel and did not unnecessarily interfere with work, they were generally respected by their workers despite their relatively privileged place in Soviet society.

The first chapter of this thesis explains the sources I had access to, discusses the utility and limitations of the primary sources being used, and provides an overview and brief analysis of existing research. The primary source material will then be used in the second and third chapters to determine how constantly shifting labour laws and the evolving nature of the Soviet state influenced relationships between directors and workers in the Soviet factory. The second chapter will focus on the period from 1924 to the early 1930s, while the

⁶¹ Bailes, *Technology and Society*, 284-285.

⁶² Bailes, *Technology and Society*, 321.

third chapter will explore the latter part of the pre-war period and briefly discuss how labour relations would continue to develop after the period of my research.

Chapter One: Historiography and Source Base

The period of Soviet history being discussed here has been intensively researched for decades, with comprehensive works on Soviet politics being written by Western historians since the 1920s, albeit with many dramatic shifts in approaches to explaining Soviet history. Labour relations and industry in the Soviet Union have received extensive attention due to their connection to the issues of social stability and industrial capacity. World War II resulted in a significant number of Soviet citizens defecting to the West. This led to the creation of many English-language primary sources, as the Cold War made the experience of Soviet citizens a relevant topic. At the same time, strict censorship in the Soviet Union meant that people who remained could not write honestly about their experiences.

The Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System

The Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System (HPSSS) interviews, which were conducted by graduate students with good command of Russian or Ukrainian on behalf of the US Air Force, are split into A-Schedule, which covered the personal lives of the interviewees, and B-Schedule, which delved into more specialized topics, covering such areas as nationalities, social classes, professions, government, and economics. The A-Schedule interviews give more information on the participants' attitudes towards various subjects and thus are of more use for this research. While the interviews do not provide a representative

sample of Soviet society, they are the best available primary source for this thesis. The people being interviewed became refugees, usually after being captured as POWs, working as an Ostarbeiter,⁶³ or collaborating with the Nazis.⁶⁴

The perspective of factory directors in the HPSSS is lacking compared to those of workers, who were extensively interviewed about their experiences. Some Russian-language primary sources written by former directors will be used, which provide important details that would be otherwise hard to come by. However, there are many sources in the HPSSS for middle managers who had close working relationships with the directors. Many of the interviews only touch on the technical and structural side of factory work, which makes them largely unhelpful for researching the social history of the factories. However, a significant number of interviewees were asked about their relationship with their bosses, the directors of the factories. Most of the refugees being interviewed were or presented themselves as staunch anti-communists who often had no respect for the directors, who commonly lacked technical expertise in their field. Despite this, most worker interviewees did not view directors with scorn or contempt. Rather, directors were seen as victims of the Soviet system, just as likely to be disposed of as the lower-ranked employees were, but with fancier accommodations and a car. Only 6% of the respondents claimed that they were formerly members of the Communist Party, and 18% stated that they had been part of the Komsomol

⁶³ An Ostarbeiter was someone captured by the Nazis and forced to work as slave labour in Germany. Its literal translation is “Eastern worker”, designating that the conscripts were taken from Central and Eastern Europe, largely from Ukraine.

⁶⁴ David Brandenberger, “A Guide to Working with the Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System Online,” HPSSSguide2020.pdf, 2020, <https://library.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/static/collections/hpsss/HPSSSguide2020.pdf> (accessed 19 March 2022), 12.

youth league. The majority of those interviewed were middle-aged men, making women and older workers underrepresented.⁶⁵

The project has often been criticized for its limitations, including only working with the people who did not want to return to the Soviet Union. The people being interviewed could potentially lie or exaggerate to give the answers they felt that the interviewers were seeking or to hide some details of their prewar and wartime experiences.⁶⁶ There were also cases where interviewees would not divulge certain information that they felt could harm people they knew who had remained in the Soviet Union, such as those who previously had belonged to anti-Soviet organizations.⁶⁷ It is important to acknowledge these limitations when analyzing the interviewees' answers.

The HPSSS provides significant information on what the grievances of workers were in the factory and what they saw as the major workplace issues. The place that factory leadership had within these discussions is important, as it demonstrates whom workers would blame for the factory's deficiencies.

The language used by the interviewees can be a good determinant of their views. Some of them would call the directors "red directors" as a way to demonstrate that they viewed the directors as communists. Workers using "red director" in the interviews might not mean that the workers hate the director. Rather, it means that the worker believes that the director is a loyal party member, and thus, they cannot talk freely around them.

⁶⁵ Brandenberger, "A Guide to Working with the Harvard Project," 13-14.

⁶⁶ Leonard Schapiro, "The Soviet Citizen. Daily Life in a Totalitarian Society," (review article), *The British Journal of Sociology* 11, no. 3 (Sept. 1960), 291.

⁶⁷ HPSSS, Schedule A, Vol. 17, Case 335, 64.

Russian-Language & Other Sources

While the interviews in the HPSSS were conducted in Russian and Ukrainian, they were only recorded in English. A limited number of Russian-language sources have been used in my research, mostly consisting of biographies of individual directors. While their overall usefulness is low compared to the HPSSS due to Soviet censors and some memoirs potentially being ghost-written, they help by providing an alternative perspective from people who were not represented in the HPSSS interviews, and from people who did not flee the Soviet Union during World War II.

Other primary source material comes from memoirs of Soviet defectors who had worked in the industry, such as Victor Kravchenko, who wrote about his life as a metallurgic engineer in the Urals and the Donbas. He also describes the period when he had been a director of a metallurgical plant, thus providing insight into how directors viewed their own role in the Soviet system and their thoughts on how they interacted with workers. *Thirteen Who Fled* is a collection of thirteen chapters written by people who fled the Soviet Union, including chapters by Oleg Lukov, a construction engineer, and Nikolai Markov, a skilled labourer who went on to become a foreman in a Moscow mechanical shop.⁶⁸ Markov cites some direct conversations he had with factory directors and records the attitudes that he had toward them.

⁶⁸ Nikolai Markov, "The Trials of a Soviet Workingman," in *Thirteen who Fled*, ed. Louis Fischer and Boris A. Yakovlev, trans. Gloria Fischer and Victor Fischer (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1949), 135.

Historiography of Soviet Labour Relations

Research focus in the field of Soviet labour history has often shifted since the topic began being researched. The general historiographical trends of the pre-World War II Stalinist era of Soviet history were heavily influenced by the writers' political views. An early paradigm formed in the 1950s, known as the totalitarian model, emphasized a top-down power structure starting with Stalin. It assumes a near-total control of society by the leader and implies that Soviet citizens played a passive role and that through social engineering the leaders of the Marxist-Leninist state controlled the people through propaganda and terror.⁶⁹ This theory gained popularity in the context of a post-World War II era of Soviet-Western relations. The Soviet government was portrayed as unpopular and illegitimate, but one that had such a strong hold over propaganda and culture that they shaped society, and any social movements were fractured and crushed.⁷⁰

In 1957, Joseph Berliner, one of the researchers who interviewed subjects for the HPSSS, published *Factory and Manager in the USSR*, one of the earliest works discussing factory managers in the Soviet Union. Using the interviews, this book explained managers' role in Soviet society. The work focused on the managers' perspectives, as much of the text was based on the HPSSS interviews with 41 individuals who had worked in managerial positions in various

⁶⁹ Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Revisionism in Soviet History," *History and Theory* 46, no. 4 (2007): 80; Igal Halfin and Jochen Hellbeck, "Rethinking the Stalinist Subject: Stephen Kotkin's "Magnetic Mountain" and the State of Soviet Historical Studies," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, 44, no. 3 (1996): 456.

⁷⁰ Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution*, 7.

industries, including a single deputy director of a factory.⁷¹ As a result, the study did not utilize the workers' perspective in the factory and did not provide a comprehensive view of workplace relations. The interviews used in this book also were primarily contained to post-1938, which puts most of the information outside the parameters of my thesis.⁷² Labourers were treated as a monolith who existed as a group the managers had to plan around rather than a group that could exert influence on the managers. This did not mean the topic was entirely avoided, as some segments did include interactions from the managerial perspective, such as a foreman explaining how he treated women in the workplace.⁷³ Of course, as the text was written from the perspective of management, it contained a narrower view than the works that would follow. Such a perspective reinforced the totalitarian model.

Also during the 1950s, Merle Fainsod used the Smolensk Archive, a cache of documents captured by the advancing Germans in 1941 and eventually taken by U.S. Army Intelligence after the war, to write a book about how the city fared under Soviet rule and dedicated a chapter to workers. The Smolensk Archive is important for the historiography of the Soviet Union, as Smolensk was one of the few areas where the retreating Soviets did not destroy the archives during the early days of World War II.⁷⁴ This made it a unique repository of information that came to the West after World War II, giving insight into the inner

⁷¹ Joseph S. Berliner, *Factory and Manager in the USSR* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press: 1957), 8, 333.

⁷² Berliner, *Factory and Manager*, 9.

⁷³ Berliner, *Factory and Manager*, 172.

⁷⁴ Merle Fainsod, *Smolensk under Soviet Rule* (London, UK, MacMillan, 1958), 3.

workings of life in the Soviet Union. Unfortunately, only a relatively small portion of the archive was dedicated to the industrial labour force.⁷⁵ It covers the grievances workers had with Soviet rule and factory life and instances of worker indiscipline. Using reports from the Joint State Political Directorate (OGPU) and the NKVD, instances of conflict between workers and management are noted in recorded conversations of workers. The research conducted by Fainsod is limited to discussing the grievances of workers, excluding any documents that involved workers providing positive opinions. Reports by the OGPU and NKVD would be sent to the raikom in the form of *svodki* (summaries). These reports summarized the popular mood of workers that informants provided.⁷⁶ Informants and compilers likely embellished details of their reports, and information contained in them often cannot be corroborated by other sources.⁷⁷ Nonetheless, the Smolensk Archive offers significant value, as it contains candid conversations between workers recorded at the time they happened, which helps to demonstrate some of the workers' feelings. Fainsod noted that workers in the 1930s rarely bought into state propaganda, and anti-Soviet attitudes were pervasive throughout the factory.⁷⁸ This study differed from successive research because it claimed, quite in line with the tenets of the Totalitarian School, that the working class, despite having paths for grievances, could never actually exert power and influence on Soviet society.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ Fainsod, *Smolensk under Soviet Rule*, 306.

⁷⁶ Sarah Davies, *Popular Opinion in Stalin's Russia: Terror, Propaganda and Dissent, 1934-1941* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 10-11.

⁷⁷ Davies, *Popular Opinion in Stalin's Russia*, 12.

⁷⁸ Fainsod, *Smolensk under Soviet Rule*, 322-323.

⁷⁹ Fainsod, *Smolensk under Soviet Rule*, 324.

The totalitarian model began to be challenged in the 1960s by the Revisionist School, although it did not become as accepted until the 1970s and 1980s.⁸⁰ By this period, access to dissident literature from the Soviet Union and limited access by Western scholars to Soviet archives and libraries was granted, increasing the potential for people to study the field. Access to archives would continue to increase throughout the 1980s until the 1990s when the majority of restrictions were lifted.⁸¹ The revisionist historians who focused on Soviet social history challenged the totalitarian model's unnuanced approach to Soviet history and attacked the claim that Stalin held total control over Soviet society. Instead, they showed that various institutions held their own power in society and that society did not just have to react to Soviet leadership, but the leadership had to react to Soviet society as well. Michael Gelb provided an example of this in 1981 when he wrote about how production quotas would be revised downwards based on directors in both the factory and trust level petitioning higher officials, believing the targets to be unrealistic, requiring perfect conditions to meet. There would be power struggles at various levels of the government, which demonstrated the lack of total control from above and the power that individual institutions could wield.⁸²

Sheila Fitzpatrick became a prominent name in the revisionist school in the 1980s when she renewed the attack on the totalitarian model and took a more social approach to history. The social historians of the 1960s-80s

⁸⁰ Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Revisionism in Soviet History," *History and Theory* 46, no. 4 (2007): 77.

⁸¹ Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution*, 8.

⁸² Gelb, "Roots of Soviet Industrial Management," 60.

conducted further research on politics in the workplace and expanded the research on class structures. The earlier totalitarian approach made Soviet society a footnote, believing that society was controlled entirely from above, making social history seen as unimportant for the workings of the state.⁸³ Thus, for the purposes of this thesis, early totalitarian-model writings are significantly less useful due to their lack of coverage of social relationships. The First FYP has been labelled by revisionists of the 1970s and 1980s as a “revolution from below,” signifying their view that the shock workers worked hand-in-hand with Stalin’s top-down approach to restructuring Soviet society.

At first, the revisionist school also lacked a complete picture of Soviet society, as it only briefly covered how female workers played a role in the workplace. Gender, along with class, would later become a more prominent subject in the early 1970s but was still mostly present in writings rather than being their focus.⁸⁴ The revisionists demonstrated that Soviet leadership had pushed for the equality of women in at least one sphere of society: production. From 1929 to 1932, more than one million women were added to the industrial workforce.⁸⁵ The male workers’ wives were encouraged to work at their husbands’ factories as they were often already housed in the factory’s dormitories and thus it would not incur additional costs to the state while

⁸³ Sheila Fitzpatrick, “New Perspectives on Stalinism,” *The Russian Review* 45, no. 4 (October 1986): 358.

⁸⁴ Lewis H. Siegelbaum and Ronald Grigor Suny, “Class Backwards? In Search of the Soviet Working Class,” in *Making Workers Soviet: Power, Class, and Identity*, ed. Lewis H. Siegelbaum and Ronald Grigor Suny (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1994), 7-8.

⁸⁵ Thomas G. Schrand, “Soviet ‘Civic-Minded Women’ in the 1930s: Gender, Class, and Industrialization in a Socialist Society,” *Journal of Women’s History* 11, no. 3 (Autumn 1999), 129-130.

providing the factory a larger workforce. Despite the Soviet state identifying women's' status based on their husbands' occupation, they played an important role in the workplace, making them an important topic for research. Looking at just the relationships of the men in the factories would exclude a large segment of the workforce, and the unique interactions that they had.⁸⁶

With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the opening of the Soviet archives in the 1990s, the then-dominant revisionist paradigm began to be challenged by a new school of thinking, known as the post-revisionists, which matched the larger trend of social history being overtaken by cultural history and the "linguistic turn." This era of post-Soviet history was less politically charged, as personal loyalties and political persuasions were perceived as less important with the end of the Cold War.⁸⁷ Post-Soviet and Western scholars could also now freely collaborate, erasing the distinction between the two ideologically incompatible spheres of academia. With this new access, researchers could now use a vast array of letters and diaries, giving a new view into the social aspects of life in the Soviet Union. This allowed the field to shift towards the cultural aspects of Soviet society.⁸⁸

Stephen Kotkin studied Soviet industrial relations using a post-revisionist lens, taking inspiration from previous models while recognizing that Bolshevik ideology had a significant impact on Soviet society. The importance of ideology in the life of the Soviet citizenry was now given more emphasis. Kotkin studied the

⁸⁶ Schrand, "Soviet 'Civic-Minded Women'," 135-136.

⁸⁷ Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Revisionism in Soviet History," *History and Theory* 46, no. 4 (2007): 88.

⁸⁸ Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution*, 8.

use of Bolshevik vocabulary to help determine the perspectives of individual Soviet citizens.⁸⁹ He would, like in the revisionist model, give agency to the workers and explain how their views would affect the actions of the state and how the ideology of the Bolshevik government would also shape the people. Thus, this view reconciles totalitarian and revisionist viewpoints.

These paradigm shifts influenced the view on labour relations and created very different approaches to how the inner workings of a factory were perceived. The totalitarian school, as it took agency away from the workers, used the assumption that labour relations were dictated by state policy. Early theories explained this through two different approaches. The first stated that state oppression curbed any chance at collective or individual worker action, while the second explained the lack of activism by the destruction of the working class during the Civil War and the influx of peasants into the workforce.⁹⁰ These initial approaches lessened the importance of personal relationships, as the factory ultimately was influenced by the actions of the state rather than the individuals in the factory. Communism was assumed to have such a psychological hold on the population that all worldview would come from above and easily be imposed on Soviet society.

Revisionist historians began giving the workers more agency, creating a very different picture of how factories were run. The mobility of workers and their role in controlling production began to be discussed despite the state's efforts to

⁸⁹ Halfin and Hellbeck, "Rethinking the Stalinist Subject," 457.

⁹⁰ Stephen Kotkin, "Coercion and Identity: Workers' Lives in Stalin's Showcase City," in *Making Workers Soviet: Power, Class, and Identity*, ed. Lewis H. Siegelbaum and Ronald Grigor Suny (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1994), 275-276.

curb the workers' influence.⁹¹ Some revisionist theories stated that a lack of political activism by workers was instead of passivity based on their support for the Stalinist initiatives and policies.⁹² Revisionists demonstrated that group conflict existed within the bureaucratic elements of the government. This showed that totalitarianism may have been Stalin's intent, but the reality of the situation was that the presence of multiple internal conflicts and diverging interests of social groups meant that he never had a true monopoly over power that defined a totalitarian society.⁹³ These theories created the opportunity to see what the workers' roles were in group conflict. A prominent scholar of Russian history, Donald Filtzer, advanced the argument that the possibility of collective action by workers was eliminated during industrialization and that any individual actions were now apolitical in nature and restricted to "changing jobs and getting drunk."⁹⁴ More effort was put into researching workers' discontent and how this affected their productivity and attitudes in the workplace. Discontent was emphasized due to its pervasiveness in the factories, leading to workers refusing orders and widespread ignoring of the laws and proclamations set by the Soviet government. However, the revisionist model did not entirely utilize the workers' own statements about their identities. William J. Chase explains in his book on labour in Moscow that the realm of workers was described mainly from a top-

⁹¹ Siegelbaum and Suny, "Class Backwards," 22-23.

⁹² Kotkin, "Coercion and Identity," 276.

⁹³ Bailes, *Technology and Society*, 11-12.

⁹⁴ Kotkin, "Coercion and Identity," 277.

down perspective due to the false assumption that it was not possible to access enough sources that provided the perspective of workers.⁹⁵

Historians Nicholas Lampert and Kendall E. Bailes have written about the management of factories. Books by these authors explain how management functioned in the factories and what their interactions with higher bureaucratic elements were. Bailes explains that the management of factories actually exerted a larger influence on the Soviet government than was thought and that factory workers, through the management, would have more power than previously acknowledged.⁹⁶ The degree of conflict and relationships between the technical staff and factory director receives some discussion, but this only covers a small segment of workers in heavy industry, giving only a cursory glance at the unskilled labourers.⁹⁷

Lampert takes the stance that “the concept of ‘politics in command’—which we accept—is not the same as the concept of an all-powerful officialdom, which could do anything it wanted with ‘society’,” refuting the totalitarian-school concept of the state having total control over the social realm.⁹⁸ He does agree with the revisionists of his time, stating that directors had to react to the pressures of their workers, and the burgeoning power of the directors under the system of single-person management did not do much to eliminate conflict between director and worker.⁹⁹

⁹⁵ William J. Chase, *Workers, Society, and the Soviet State: Labor and Life in Moscow, 1918-1929* (Urbana and Chicago, University of Illinois Press: 1987), 4-5.

⁹⁶ Bailes, *Technology and Society*, 7-8.

⁹⁷ Bailes, *Technology and Society*, 299-300.

⁹⁸ Lampert, *The Technical Intelligentsia*, 6.

⁹⁹ Lampert, *The Technical Intelligentsia*, 131.

Donald Filtzer, in *Stalinism and the Working Class in the 1930s*, discusses the rapid growth of the Soviet working class and the hardships the workers endured. While he touches on the pressures that management faced and how this impacted workers, there is minimal discussion about how this affected the worker-director relationship. He did write about how, from the directors' perspective, they usually wanted to be lenient and have a mutually beneficial relationship in order to meet their targets. There is little analysis of the workers' perspectives.¹⁰⁰ Filtzer wrote more extensively about workers in *Soviet Workers and Stalinist Industrialization*, where he provided an extensive analysis of factory relations, discussing issues like absenteeism and labour discipline. He explains the attitude of workers towards the workplace and how managers had to deal with workplace issues, but the book lacks individual accounts of how the workers viewed their relationship with their director, instead focusing on how they treated their job. Filtzer explains that despite the increasing strictness of labour laws and party officials becoming the major source of new directorial hires, they still were more lenient towards their workforce than the laws dictated due to their perceived vulnerabilities.¹⁰¹ This lax enforcement demonstrates that the directives of the Soviet government were not always followed, even when the enforcement was assigned to the supposedly loyal red directors. Filtzer also explains the importance of denunciations of directors during the trials of 1937, as the authority

¹⁰⁰ Donald Filtzer, "Stalinism and the Working Class in the 1930s," in *Politics, Society and Stalinism in the USSR*, ed. John Channon (New York: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 1998).

¹⁰¹ Donald Filtzer, *Soviet Workers and Stalinist Industrialization: The Formation of Modern Soviet Production Relations, 1928-1941* (London: Pluto Press Limited, 1986), 130-131.

of directors was put into question when it became encouraged to accuse management of wrecking or being foreign agents.

Moshe Lewin provides an overview of the social history of the Soviet Union under the first three Five Year Plans (until 1941). He discusses the changing laws and how they affected the way factories were run, but outside of the implementation of some laws, there is little on the social history of the workers.¹⁰² *Stalin's Industrial Revolution* by Hiroaki Kuromiya discusses industrialization under Stalin from the NEP until the end of the First FYP. He discusses the rapid drive for industrialization under Stalin and how this impacted workers. Kuromiya analyzes how specific laws and events changed worker-manager relationships, but they are not the book's primary focus.¹⁰³

Kotkin, with his use of cultural theory to study Stalinism, challenges the revisionist view of workers as not being able to resist the Soviet state due to a lack of collective identity by arguing that new Stalinist identities were created, rather than old identities being repressed.¹⁰⁴ People became shaped into a new mindset that would have them self-enforce the idea of a Stalinist identity and its necessary vocabulary.¹⁰⁵ This new Stalinist mindset showed that Soviet society, while not necessarily consisting only of believers in Soviet ideology, still shaped their identities due to necessity, as the potential for punishment for displaying a different identity was high. Even the occasions where people would criticize

¹⁰² Lewin, "Society and the Stalinist State."

¹⁰³ Kuromiya, *Stalin's Industrial Revolution*.

¹⁰⁴ Anna Krylova, "Soviet Modernity: Stephen Kotkin and the Bolshevik Predicament," *Contemporary European History* 23, no. 2 (2014), 173-174; Halfin and Hellbeck, "Rethinking the Stalinist Subject," 457-458.

¹⁰⁵ Halfin and Hellbeck, "Rethinking the Stalinist Subject," 458.

Soviet leadership were part of the Soviet framework, thus still making the workers active participants in the Soviet system.¹⁰⁶

Kotkin popularized the idea of “socialist modernity,” which related to the concept of people “speaking Bolshevik.” More recent scholarship has questioned this idea of having a unified cultural language, but rather suggested that the Soviet Union developed multiple divergent languages. Anna Krylova proposes that the idea of Soviet modernity becoming set in the 1930s is incorrect and claims that there was uneven development and multiple cultural forms, which Krylova would define as Bolshevik and post-Bolshevik.¹⁰⁷

An important source for these historians came from the minutes of factory meetings that became available after 1991. In the 1930s, meetings became a frequent, virtually mandatory event, where workers from a factory or trust would discuss issues with production, work conditions, or management, among other things. Here, workers could complain about or denounce their bosses, and in some periods, this happened frequently. These meetings provide a source of information on how workers would speak about their directors in a public forum. While the minutes of these meetings have their limitations as sources, due to some people either fearing or feeling compelled to speak, they still show what grievances were common. As these meetings often came up in interviews in the HPSSS, the workers' statements at the meetings can be compared with what the interviewees said about how they acted in the meetings, and why, and how they compared to their real attitudes. By the end of the period I studied, these

¹⁰⁶ Halfin and Hellbeck, “Rethinking the Stalinist Subject,” 460.

¹⁰⁷ Krylova, “Soviet Modernity,” 171.

meetings became less prominent, as denunciations became less common, and the power of the trade unions was stifled.

My approach to this thesis will focus on examining the personal statements of former workers in their HPSSS interviews and general societal trends to demonstrate the complex relationship that workers had with their directors and how policy changes would shape it. Forms of work discipline, implementation of production targets, and the identities and loyalties of workers and directors will be examined and contextualized to demonstrate how workers viewed their role in the workplace and Soviet society and how this affected hierarchical relationships within the factory.

Chapter Two: Soviet Labour Laws and the Structure of the Stalinist Factory

The start of the First FYP created a massive restructuring of the Soviet workplace. State-run enterprises used a completely new top-down system to oversee production. With this new system came a bevy of new rules and laws that would drastically change how employees in a Soviet factory would work and act.

Structure of Factory Administration

The upper management of a factory was always answerable to the state, but who the management directly reported to depended on the importance and size of the factory. Enterprises were put into four categories: raion, oblast, republic, or all-union. These enterprises would be “responsible to the Raikom, Obkom, Raifinplan, or Oblfinplan, to a republican or to a Union organ.”¹⁰⁸ For directors of moderate-sized factories, they would work directly over the shop chiefs and directly under the kombinat director, who would oversee a group of enterprises as an intermediary trust.¹⁰⁹ The kombinat director would then be answerable to the Glavk chief, who in turn worked under the Narkom.¹¹⁰

The relationships of the officials above the factory director will only be discussed for how they relate to how a director run their factory, and how that

¹⁰⁸ HPSSS, Schedule B, Vol. 4, Case 396 & 403, 2.

Raifinplan and Oblfinplan were financial planning institutions at the district and province level.

¹⁰⁹ Alexander Vucinich, “The Structure of Factory Control in the Soviet Union,” *American Sociological Review* 15, no.2 (April 1950), 180.

¹¹⁰ HPSSS, Schedule B, Vol. 4, Case 396 & 403, 3.

influenced the relations of the director with their subordinates. Early on, in practical aspects, the chief engineer or the technical director shared power with the factory director. The union and Party also maintained separate power structures in the factory with their own authority. However, during the start of the First FYP, this was eliminated in favour of single-person control by the factory director. While this gave the director significantly more power, it also imbued in them additional responsibility towards the efficient running of their factory. The union and party representatives were also eliminated from making managerial decisions.¹¹¹ These organs still existed in the factory but worked to help the director rather than taking independent actions. The unions became an organization that helped identify problems and offered solutions, without the actual ability to implement the solutions themselves.¹¹² Workers in the HPSSS interviews repeatedly emphasized that the trade union was generally useless at actually resolving any issues that they would have, and they would instead use other means.

A factory's managerial staff too did not have full authority on what the norms of the Gosplan would be set to, and thus felt that they were given increased responsibility, but not the proper tools to achieve the set goals. The chief engineer did not just work under the director but also had to answer to higher party organs. Other management in the factory answered to the director or chief engineer, depending on their role. This included the various chiefs of departments, bookkeepers, and accountants. The exact role and number of

¹¹¹ Kuromiya, *Stalin's Industrial Revolution*, 72.

¹¹² Kuromiya, *Stalin's Industrial Revolution*, 73.

managerial staff depended on the type and size of the enterprise. The shop chiefs, who controlled the individual shops in the factory, interacted with the workers regularly, and answered to either the chief engineer or director, depending on the factory. In larger factories, the shop chiefs sometimes had their own shop chief engineers, mechanics, and accountants, and these staff had people organized under them. Under the shop chief were the shift engineers and foremen, who communicated with the brigade leaders. The foremen were the lowest tier of management in the factory, with the brigade leaders acting as liaisons to the management.¹¹³ Foremen punished workers, and directly delivered the orders from upper management to their subordinates.¹¹⁴

Factory Workers and Their Changing Role

While single-person management conveyed the impression that directors had complete control of their factory, Stalin also pushed the concept of “control from below”, which theoretically gave workers powers to ensure the directors were working as intended and following the law. Meetings where self-criticism took place, workers frequently being promoted into administrative positions, and the shock-worker movement were all ways by which the state sought to enforce control from below.¹¹⁵

The unskilled workforce at the bottom of the factory was not homogenous. Class origins, age, and ability were all factors that significantly affected how the

¹¹³ Berliner, *Factory and Manager*, 14-15.

¹¹⁴ Vucinich, “The Structure of Factory Control in the Soviet Union,” 181.

¹¹⁵ Kuromiya, *Stalin's Industrial Revolution*, 61-62.

workers acted and were treated. Tensions between older and newer workers were common, as the more experienced ones claimed the new workers would lack proper workplace discipline. The opposite could also happen, where new workers worked long overtime days, thus raising the quotas for everyone else and upsetting the veteran workers.¹¹⁶

Skilled workers were critical during the NEP, but by the start of the First FYP, they had lost much of their bargaining power and higher wages due to an increase in the unskilled workforce and the modernization of factories. Skilled workers nominally stayed above the unskilled workforce in the factory hierarchy. However, this trend was less pronounced than in pre-revolutionary times.¹¹⁷

Stalin favoured the new workers as the older group of skilled workers had worked under the capitalist system and experienced first-hand the decline in quality of life that had resulted from the revolution.¹¹⁸

Shock brigades made up of low-level and predominantly young but skilled workers officially began being promoted at the beginning of 1929. Workers in shock brigades had a tenuous relationship with management—while directors appreciated the increase in production, which helped them meet their norms, the militant attitude of the shock workers threatened directors, as they would be very critical of perceived managerial incompetence.¹¹⁹ Shock workers also had a tense relationship with the other workers, especially the older skilled labourers

¹¹⁶ Kuromiya, *Stalin's Industrial Revolution*, 95.

¹¹⁷ Kuromiya, *Stalin's Industrial Revolution*, 104-105.

¹¹⁸ Kuromiya, *Stalin's Industrial Revolution*, 105-106.

¹¹⁹ Siegelbaum, *Stakhanovism*, 43.

and the newer workers with peasant origins.¹²⁰ Violent attacks by workers against shock workers and management occurred throughout the Soviet Union, including several murders that were reported in the Soviet press.¹²¹ The relationship of shock workers with management requires a separate analysis, as they were not a representative set of factory workers. By the end of the First FYP, the tensions subsided and their fellow workers generally deemed the shock brigades acceptable.¹²²

Workers could have their voices heard at yearly production conferences. During these conferences, workers could suggest ways to improve production by changing how the management ran the factory.¹²³ While not all workers were comfortable speaking openly at these events, they are important because workers could discuss how they felt about the factory's management and because many of these documents have survived and been studied.¹²⁴ The Shakhty Affair emboldened many workers, who felt more comfortable speaking in production conferences after 1928.¹²⁵ This show trial was part of the campaign to balance single-person leadership with bottom-up control.

The press also played an important role, from local newspapers to union papers. In these, there would be denunciations and discussions of events around the factory. Mistreated or disgruntled workers could denounce their director through the local newspaper. Newspapers had the backing of the district

¹²⁰ Kuromiya, *Stalin's Industrial Revolution*, 128.

¹²¹ Filtzer, *Soviet Workers and Stalinist Industrialization*, 79.

¹²² Kuromiya, *Stalin's Industrial Revolution*, 133-134.

¹²³ Kuromiya, *Stalin's Industrial Revolution*, 116.

¹²⁴ Kokosalakis, "Bolshevik Bargaining in Soviet Industry," 327-329.

¹²⁵ Kuromiya, *Stalin's Industrial Revolution*, 117.

or city party committee if not a higher party organ and thus could publish denunciations without worrying about repercussions. Newspapers also were used to promote initiatives such as shock brigades or other new methods to increase efficiency.¹²⁶ As early as 1922, newspapers would publish the names of unpopular directors, who could face repercussions, including imprisonment, for these denunciations at the behest of workers.¹²⁷ However, the ability of workers to use the press to denounce directors greatly diminished over time, as by the early-1930s complaints only mattered if the director was already falling out of favour with the Party.¹²⁸

During Stalin's rule, women were considered a crucial source of labour. Before the Russian Civil War, women had already established themselves in factories, with 22% of factory jobs held by women in 1885. Women in some industries such as textiles comprised nearly half of the workforce, at 47%.¹²⁹ By 1930, the proportional growth of women in Soviet industry had stabilized at 28.4%. Still, their opportunities had not grown as much as official Soviet rhetoric would imply, with more and more women being pushed out of traditionally male industries, making them underrepresented in heavy industry.¹³⁰ Those working in heavy industry were largely unskilled and had little hope of attaining higher roles in the factory. Despite the directors being encouraged to hire more women, there

¹²⁶ Kuromiya, *Stalin's Industrial Revolution*, 119.

¹²⁷ Diane P. Koenker, "Factory Tales: Narratives of Industrial Relations in the Transition to NEP," *The Russian Review* 55, no. 3 (July 1996), 386.

¹²⁸ HPSSS, Schedule A, Vol. 12, Case 149, 31.

¹²⁹ Wendy Z. Goldman, *Women at the Gates: Gender and Industry in Stalin's Russia* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 9.

¹³⁰ Goldman, *Women at the Gates*, 12-14.

was still not a significant increase in the number of women employed as skilled workers, in part because of the lukewarm support of the managers.¹³¹ As discrimination from managers also meant that women rarely rose through the ranks, factories seldom had women in leadership positions. Even in traditionally female industries, women rarely had higher roles, and this was partially explained by the managers not believing they could continue after starting a family. These attitudes existed despite the generally high job turnover rate in the Soviet Union, regardless of gender.¹³² The relationship between factory management and workers was largely characterized by male bosses primarily interacting with the male skilled workers and foremen while having less interaction with female unskilled workers. This can also be attributed to a lack of respect for the latter group. This attitude came from managers and their male coworkers, who often did not welcome women as equals into the factory.¹³³

By 1941, women began graduating in greater numbers from engineering schools, making up 14% of graduates. Still, they comprised “only 3.2% of directors of factories, 3.9% of the chief engineers, and 7.6% of the shop heads.”¹³⁴ Qualified women were often relegated to powerless clerical positions and remained not entirely accepted in the workplace.

While ethnicity may have played a role in workplace relations, it will not receive adequate analysis in this thesis, as the primary source materials being studied do not provide sufficient information on the topic. The lack of information

¹³¹ Goldman, *Women at the Gates*, 195-198.

¹³² Goldman, *Women at the Gates*, 214.

¹³³ Goldman, *Women at the Gates*, 199.

¹³⁴ Bailes, *Technology and Society*, 312.

regarding ethnicity means the research will look at a reality that appears monolithic despite the workers in Soviet factories coming from a large variety of ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Ethnic tensions in factories did exist, such as in Ukraine, where technicians and engineers in 1928 were only 14% Ukrainian, despite most workers being Ukrainian.¹³⁵ The disproportionality of the ethnicity of management evoked strife in Ukrainian factories, especially due to issues with what language people spoke in the workplace. This ethnic strife existed in many different regions of the Soviet Union. These minority groups were temporarily appeased, with proportions of local ethnicities increasing in management roles, until Russian nationalism in the late 1930s became more prominent, and efforts to promote the local cadre were curbed.¹³⁶

Compared to pre-Soviet times, directors, until 1937, were viewed as less of a separate, higher social group. A worker pointed out that directors could be spotted sitting with workers, which would not have happened under the tsarist regime.¹³⁷ These interactions did not mean that the director's subordinates would want to be seen as their personal friends, as one non-Party member director of production stated:

As a rule I had no relations whatsoever with my directors. The result of a too open mouth and of a close relationship could be the concentration camp. I mostly did not know who the directors were, as they constantly shifted. They were from good to poor. The good ones were soon replaced, while the bad ones were soon removed.¹³⁸

¹³⁵ Bailes, *Technology and Society*, 314.

¹³⁶ Bailes, *Technology and Society*, 314-315.

¹³⁷ HPSSS, Schedule B, Vol. 20, Case 470, 24.

¹³⁸ HPSSS, Schedule A, Vol. 31, Case 307/(NY)1069, 17.

The constant turnover of directors, and the high turnover rate of workers, made it difficult for any long-term relationships to develop between them. Most people received a short glimpse of each director, and unless they worked very closely with them, they could only base their opinions on a few interactions, or on what other workers were willing to say.

The Political Dimension

Various incarnations of Soviet security police oversaw the situation in factories. These organizations would report on disloyalty and potential wrecking or sabotage by workers. Their cells existed outside the traditional factory hierarchy and thus could report on the workers and administration.

The OGPU, which existed from 1923 to 1934, frequently arrested alleged wreckers, whom the state claimed prevented factories from meeting their norms. Directors whose enterprises underproduced could be arrested and charged with sabotage or anti-state activities.¹³⁹ The security police monitored the attitudes and opinions of workers and keep track of unrest in the workplace.¹⁴⁰ These actions would continue under the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD), which succeeded the OGPU. The agents and informers infiltrated factories so they could report instances of disloyalty and act to punish the alleged perpetrators when anything went wrong. The NKVD or their informers would also secretly attend factory meetings, and as workers knew this, it must be taken into

¹³⁹ Yannis Kokosalakis, "Soviet Communists on the Factory Floor: 1926-1941," *EuropeNow*, April 17, 2018, <https://www.europenowjournal.org/2018/04/16/soviet-communists-on-the-factory-floor-1926-1941/> (accessed 14 February 2024).

¹⁴⁰ Fainsod, *Smolensk under Soviet Rule*, 318-322.

account that they knew what they said in these meetings was calibrated accordingly.¹⁴¹ The hiring process involving the workers with criminal pasts (including convictions for political crimes) also involved the NKVD, with directors having to seek permission to hire former prisoners so the NKVD could know and keep track of potential dissidents in the workplace.¹⁴²

The workplace had so many informers that nobody felt comfortable speaking honestly about anything political. Some workers stated that they would only speak honestly with their spouses and friends of over a decade.¹⁴³ Workers were afraid to discuss their views on how factories were being run, and, as a result, many primary sources lack nuanced perspectives from their coworkers. Often, a worker would be labelled as a potential undesirable by the Soviet state. In some cases, police discovered something about their past, potentially getting them into legal trouble. Directors in these situations could either help the worker or sit idly as the NKVD arrested them. Many cases in the HPSSS interviews show that directors attempted to help their workers avoid legal trouble by allowing them to leave the factory, warning them, or helping to cover up their past. In one instance, a director warned a bookkeeper that he should leave his job as a fellow worker was investigating his past. This same worker was almost arrested due to a scheme involving the director confiscating materials for personal use. Despite this, the worker appeared to hold no grudge against the

¹⁴¹ HPSSS, Schedule B, Vol. 19, Case 147, 5.

¹⁴² Kravchenko, *I Chose Freedom*, 180.

¹⁴³ HPSSS, Schedule A, Vol. 34, Case 149/(NY)1486, 15.

management of the factory but instead appeared thankful for the director's help.¹⁴⁴

In one instance, a worker with an undesirable political past could not acquire a job. Despite this, she proclaimed that:

If I were a director at that time, I think I would have behaved in the same manner. I would have watched out for my own skin first and would not, in all probability, have given employment to such a person as I was. The NKVD were just waiting like hungry hyenas for any insignificant action to jump on a person and clamp him in jail under the popular guise of [being an] enemy of the proletariat.¹⁴⁵

Even the workers the regime persecuted for their associations showed a sense of understanding of the Soviet power structure and did not view the directors as enemies. Interestingly, the interviewer noted that a future director likely kept this worker on board because he was attracted to her and paid her significantly lower rates than her position would usually receive due to her desperation. This alleged attraction was not something that the interviewee discussed at all. While there are examples of directors abusing their position to favour people they were attracted to, there was no indication that this was true in this case. None of these actions appeared to have changed her seemingly apathetic view of directors.¹⁴⁶

In several cases where a director could provide help for their workers coming to the attention of security police, the director provided it despite it coming with some personal risk.¹⁴⁷ Directors assisting workers in these situations

¹⁴⁴ HPSSS, Schedule A, Vol. 9, Case 114, 7-10.

¹⁴⁵ HPSSS, Schedule A, Vol. 35, Case 355/(NY)1498, 4.

¹⁴⁶ HPSSS, Schedule A, Vol. 35, Case 355/(NY)1498, 6.

¹⁴⁷ HPSSS, Schedule A, Vol. 9, Case 114, 7-10; Schedule B, Vol. 3, Case 16, 32.

helps explain why many workers understood that when workers broke the more strictly enforced laws, the director was not to blame for offering them help.

In the mandatory factory meetings that all employees were required to attend, accusations of wrecking or sabotage occurred in a general sense, as well as specific accusations against individuals. One instance involved a head of the Spetsotdel accusing an engineer of wrecking and being part of an enemy faction. Despite his coworker, the interviewee, publicly defending the engineer and his director staying silent, he still stated that he “had a very good director.”¹⁴⁸ The engineer being interviewed vehemently disagreed with the charges against his fellow engineer; nonetheless, he appeared to understand that their director was powerless to fight against accusations from the Spetsotdel.

Changing Regulations

One of the most impactful laws on labour discipline under Stalin was the law on tardiness and absenteeism enacted on 15 November 1932. Despite the strict nature of the law which mandated workers be fired and lose their housing for arriving over 20 minutes late the enforcement was not always as ruthless. In some factories, enforcement only impacted a few people despite having control booths run by a timekeeper who oversaw when workers would show up.¹⁴⁹ Workers greatly feared the punishment from this law, some even claiming they had trouble sleeping, fearing that they would not wake up on time. In cases where workers did sleep in, they could rush to the doctor to get a note claiming

¹⁴⁸ HPSSS, Schedule A, Vol. 3, Case 29, 16.

¹⁴⁹ HPSSS, Schedule A, Vol. 9, Case 114, 10.

they had some illness.¹⁵⁰ In many cases, punishment would be doled out for being late a single time, such as when a paymaster showed up 90 minutes late, lost his vacation and worked for half pay for a month.¹⁵¹ Victor Kravchenko, who was running a factory in the Urals when the new laws on absenteeism came into effect, stated that he felt he had no choice but to follow the draconian new laws; if a factory official did not report workers for arriving late or being absent, punishment would be mandatory for the official who did not report it.¹⁵² One elderly worker came to Kravchenko after appearing 30 minutes late, begging for help, to which he obliged. Workers would come to him for help, and Kravchenko claimed that workers never blamed him for having to enforce the measures.¹⁵³

The introduction of a law in October 1930 that prevented workers from freely moving between jobs also created a situation in which directors and workers had to choose between confrontation and collaboration. Often, directors would use this legislation to their advantage to prevent the rampant turnover of workers, with one interviewee stating that:

In the case of the illness of a worker's wife, he would be told by the director: "Would you sacrifice communism and the good of your country for the health of your wife?" He would be told to send his wife away, but that he would have to remain on his job. If the worker is acquainted with a "Slavchil" or "Lovkach",¹⁵⁴ who are, for all practical purposes, professional "blatniks", then he would be able to get a transfer, by paying a bribe, naturally.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁰ HPSSS, Schedule A, Vol. 2, Case 18, 20.

¹⁵¹ HPSSS, Schedule A, Vol. 35, Case 97/(NY)1528, 13.

¹⁵² Kravchenko, *I Chose Freedom*, 313.

¹⁵³ Kravchenko, *I Chose Freedom*, 314.

¹⁵⁴ The proper transliteration of these words are "Slovchil" and "Lovkach".

¹⁵⁵ HPSSS, Schedule A, Vol. 34, Case 147/(NY)1467, 12-13.

Blatnik is a slang word denoting someone with the right connections and/or receiving unfair advantage. A Lovkach is someone with contacts with higher Soviet officials or skilled in exploiting the loopholes and generally street-wise. Slovcil is the past tense of lovchit (to cheat).

This respondent believed that the director would never grant such requests unless there was a reason they could not legally deny or unless they received a bribe. However, others were more successful at changing jobs by working with their director. An electrical engineer stated that:

prior to [1940], one was able to work where one wished. The director had the right to refuse to give you permission to leave the job, but it was easy to get around this simply by not appearing for work for a day. One was then termed a Progulschchik (“gold brick”) and had to be released. I never had to use this trick, but rather used my leg as an excuse— it was difficult for me to come to work from so far away, etc... I would give my director two weeks notice. Had he then refused, I would have used [the method] concerning “Progulschchiks”.

This employee found success by just putting in two weeks’ notice, and while that did not always work, he was never forced into remaining in a role that he did not desire. He does not explain how others avoided arrest for failing to show up to work. Another engineer writing about how people would attempt to change jobs essentially said it was up to the director’s whims and stated that the director would respond by saying, “I am sick too, and my wife too and look I’m staying and working here.”¹⁵⁶ Directors would use these laws to prevent turnover, at the expense of their workers. Workers were not allowed to bring up requests for higher pay, and the directors were, of course, aware of the reasons workers actually wanted to leave and knew sickness was often just an excuse. Moving jobs, even with a good relationship with the director, could be impossible in essential or highly specialized enterprises, such as aviation. Officials would deny

¹⁵⁶ HPSSS, Schedule A, Vol. 27, Case 526, 13.

their request because there may be no other plants that would be appropriate for their skill set, and their job is considered essential.¹⁵⁷

Directors could also use labour laws as an excuse to rid themselves of workers or management that they did not want to work with. In one such case, a worker claimed that a new director accused him of wrecking so that he could hire people with whom he was familiar.¹⁵⁸ Their influence also allowed them to hire people who would otherwise be rejected. A worker who had to leave his job due to medical issues was cleared to return to work, but the trade union chairman told him they had no jobs available. The director fought against the trade union chairman until the man was allowed to work at his factory.¹⁵⁹ This worker demonstrated that he was comfortable going to the director when he had a problem, even when the director was not supposed to be seeing workers, and seemed confident that he could receive help from him. The worker had this attitude despite him thinking that “everyone below [the director] acted in a disgusting manner.”¹⁶⁰

The Changing Role of the Factory Director

The term “red director” is often used by those being interviewed as a loaded term, and it is often followed by scornful remarks about the director in question. Workers saw the red directors as loyal servants of the Soviet system, unlike the technical directors, who many felt were just as compelled to serve as

¹⁵⁷ HPSSS, Schedule A, Vol. 9, Case 115, 20.

¹⁵⁸ HPSSS, Schedule A, Vol. 7, Case 99, 4.

¹⁵⁹ HPSSS, Schedule B, Vol. 19, Case 121, 4-5.

¹⁶⁰ HPSSS, Schedule B, Vol. 19, Case 121, 5.

tools as the workers themselves. One interviewee disdainfully explained their view on how someone would become a red director:

After you finish the course you are made assistant to the chief engineer, who is not a Party member. For several years you work directly with him, getting your practical experience. Finally you are qualified. The director wants to get the chief engineer out of the job someday. You isolate him and you surround him with Party people. Someday the chief engineer will make a mistake, and will say something wrong in a discussion, or he will make an enemy of somebody, or slip up in some way. Then something will go wrong somewhere in the plant, say there has been some material damaged. They will say, where was the chief engineer when this happened? They will call him an enemy of the people, and he will be removed from his job, through no fault of his own.¹⁶¹

The interviewee showed a clear sense of hatred towards the Soviet system and those who served in it, stating that directors would fight for the continuation of the Soviet power structure, and called them bootlickers and backstabbers.¹⁶² The technical director in a dairy factory stated that the red director would overrule basic requirements to prevent cheese spoilage to save money, despite it costing significantly more in spoilage than would be saved in material usage.¹⁶³ Workers consistently noted the red director's lack of technical expertise, and some interviewees would be sure to point out the differences between a red director and other bosses in the factory who had technical knowledge. One interviewee praised their chief engineer, by contrasting them with the red director, stating that the chief engineer "did not give absurd orders."¹⁶⁴

¹⁶¹ HPSSS, Schedule A, Vol. 12, Case 147, 63.

¹⁶² HPSSS, Schedule A, Vol. 12, Case 147 109.

¹⁶³ HPSSS, Schedule A, Vol. 8, Case 102, 7-8.

¹⁶⁴ HPSSS, Schedule A, Vol. 8, Case 102, 7.

While the use of the term “red director” was not altogether common in the HPSSS interviews, pointing out the loyalty and party membership of directors was. An engineer at a sugar factory proclaimed, “[m]y director was a communist, who controlled me, checked on me, and exploited me in every way.”¹⁶⁵ He continued that he and his director had no friendship because he was not a communist, and his director was, and therefore there could never be mutual trust between them.¹⁶⁶ The mere act of becoming a communist director was damning to some, who saw anyone who wanted these roles as people who would be willing to betray even their friends. A worker described communist directors as:

[P]eople with a low education, with little development in terms of general culture, but they were people with experience in Party affairs and in administration... As special traits they were vulgar by nature and harsh. They had no sense of pity for the difficulty of the men or for the hard work of a worker.¹⁶⁷

The ruthlessness of the red directors was often emphasized, like in the aforementioned quote. This person saw the director as part of a separate group in Soviet society, privileged and pitiless towards the plight of the workers, especially in the period when the directors lacked the technical experience that the workers felt was necessary for them to perform their duties properly. The vulgarness of some directors led to disdainful relationships. As one mechanic explained, he met his director after World War II, and when the director offered him a job, he “told him all he did in the past was yell at me and all he would do from now on would be to yell again.”¹⁶⁸ While he acknowledged that there were

¹⁶⁵ HPSSS, Schedule A, Vol. 34, Case 90, 6.

¹⁶⁶ HPSSS, Schedule A, Vol. 34, Case 90, 7.

¹⁶⁷ HPSSS, Schedule B, Vol. 3, Case 70, 5.

¹⁶⁸ HPSSS, Schedule A, Vol. 18, Case 342, 12.

directors who were much worse, it was clear that the constant cursing was so off-putting that when given the choice, workers would refuse to work with such directors again.

The cruelty of directors was endorsed by Soviet officials, such as Mikhail Kaganovich, the brother of Lazar Kaganovich and a deputy to Sergo Ordzhonikidze, who proclaimed, “the ground must shake when the director goes into the factory... a director who has become a liberal isn’t worth half a kopeck. Workers do not like such a director. They like a powerful leader.”¹⁶⁹ While many directors continued to try to foster good relationships with their workers, it was officially discouraged, as evidenced by the introduction of laws and regulations, which further distanced the workers from their director.

It was source of frustration among workers when the directors had a purely political background and had no idea how to run a factory. By 1929, not even 10% of directors had a higher-education degree. While this was a substantial increase from the early days of the NEP, it still meant that the vast majority of directors were undereducated.¹⁷⁰ A chief engineer stated that people could only advance “if you are a party man—no other way. I know of one who was a director at the tractor factory. He could hardly write his name. What a fool.”¹⁷¹ Workers mocked and disrespected directors without technical knowledge, albeit not to their faces.

The people looked at the managers critically because they (the managers) were illiterate and ignorant. These ignorant managers were “saved” by the Party, but the people did not admire them. The

¹⁶⁹ Siegelbaum, *Stakhanovism*, 34 citing *Soveshchanie khoziaistvennikov* 1934 g., 212-213.

¹⁷⁰ Siegelbaum, *Stakhanovism*, 27.

¹⁷¹ HPSSS, Schedule A, Vol. 34, Case 149/(NY)1486, 12.

Party has a doctrine that the one Lenin plan (sic) must be effected at all plants and branches. And who can run this plan? Only communists. But if the person is a good person, people admire him as a person. Directors had to be outstanding, honored party members. Not just any Communist could be a director. Many communists were pawns who had to be first in everything, had to do all the dirty work, and had no mind of their own.¹⁷²

While this person had clearly shown disdain against directors due to his personal experiences, he still acknowledged that they could be good people. The attitude also differs significantly from when a director placed in charge due to their Party membership would at least have some technical acumen, especially those who would take advice from the engineers, as they would not be seen as a political tool that was only disrupting the workplace. When directors had proper technical training, as many did in the earlier and later periods covered in this paper, the workers had a much more charitable view towards them.

The previously mentioned technical director of a dairy factory provided his view on his relationship with his subordinates and documented his interactions with his factory's red director. As someone with extensive technical expertise who had to work with someone who knew nothing, he explained that he had no respect for the red director. He would have to, as was typical, document that he disagreed with the decisions of his superior so that he would have evidence to protect himself against an inevitable investigation for wrecking.¹⁷³ The technical director would allow his workers to eat food from the factory, but only if they ate away from the machinery to prevent damaging the goods and machines. He explained that his relationship with the people below him was very positive, and

¹⁷² HPSSS, Schedule A, Vol. 34, Case 149/(NY)1486, 15-16.

¹⁷³ HPSSS, Schedule A, Vol. 8, Case 102, 8.

he would like to be still working with them. However, he felt very differently about the red director, who “as a Party man... had to stick his nose into everything, whether he understood it or not.”¹⁷⁴ He also explained that another one of his red directors abused his position by granting favours to female workers in the factory whom he would sleep with, which eventually got him fired after his bosses determined that he had impregnated three of them.¹⁷⁵

One worker did empathize with the Soviet Union only allowing Party members to be directors, despite not believing this practice to be just, explaining that this was due to substantial amounts of wrecking committed by the first wave of directors.¹⁷⁶ Spoilage and damaged final products were common enough that one engineer complained about his director, asserting that his director had no interest in producing a good product, instead only meeting the norms, which put him in a difficult position as he constantly argued with the director about how poor the final product was.¹⁷⁷

In the mid-1930s, the role of the director underwent significant changes as the period of purges commenced and directors began to lose their influence. The next chapter will discuss how these changes affected workplace relationships between workers and directors.

¹⁷⁴ HPSSS, Schedule A, Vol. 8, Case 102, 12.

¹⁷⁵ HPSSS, Schedule A, Vol. 8, Case 102, 13.

¹⁷⁶ HPSSS, Schedule A, Vol. 4, Case 34, 94.

¹⁷⁷ HPSSS, Schedule A, Vol. 27, Case 524, 11.

Chapter Three: Workplace Relations, Stakhanovism, and the Evolution of Factory Authority

Despite the Soviet Union's attempts to divide workers and directors, most directors continued to formally and informally help their workers. Directors knew that they needed a content workforce to reduce turnover and reach their norms. To accomplish this, the directors often contravened Soviet law to keep the factory running efficiently.

Workplace Interactions and Fulfilling the Plan

Most factory workers had few interactions with their director, especially in larger enterprises. The engineers, technical staff, and other management had the most to say about their directors, as they had to work directly with them or with someone who worked directly for them. An engineer who designed machinery was given a job by Shurygin, the director of the kombinat Altai-Polymetal, to oversee production and determine what needed fixing at the factory. He provided numerous complaints about how poorly the factory was being run, and in exchange, was treated well and given “complete carte blanche.”¹⁷⁸ He noted how well this director treated his workers and named many other directors who did the same. The most powerful directors, according to him, were the ones who had the best relationships with their subordinates.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁸ HPSSS, Schedule B, Vol. 5, Case 403, 5.

¹⁷⁹ HPSSS, Schedule B, Vol. 5, Case 403, 5.

Workers' negative attitudes towards directors generally had two distinct reasons. The most common reason is that they perceived the director as incompetent, having little professional expertise, and despite their lack of technical knowledge, still meddling in production. The workers might think the director was a decent person, but they are not the right person for the job. This attitude became less prevalent in the later years of the period I researched, outside of the years of purges in the mid-1930s, as undertrained directors became less common. Workers with technical expertise would have much better relationships with experienced directors, as conflicts over technical issues would become rarer.¹⁸⁰ The other reason for disliking directors was that they were cruel. This disdain could be because they mistreated workers, refused to move them, or had workers imprisoned for minor offences. The attitudes generally differed from the labourers in the factory to the lower management with technical expertise, as their relationships with the directors were vastly different. The labourers rarely had direct interactions with the director. Thus they had fewer opinions of them at a personal level, while the higher-ranked engineers formed their opinions based on the level of professionalism and technical acumen that the directors demonstrated.

A significant share of interactions between directors and workers came from the necessity of using informal relationships to fulfill their factory's plan. The system of *blat*, which translates literally to "favours," was a pervasive and illegal means to use a special connection or bribery to gain goods, services, or favours

¹⁸⁰ Bailes, *Technology and Society*, 304.

in return. While blat is different from other illegal procurement methods, workers in the HPSSS interviews used the term blat to describe a wider variety of illegal actions, such as using the black market. Blat was so common throughout the workplace due to its necessity, as the workers could not sustain themselves off their wages alone, and directors could not fulfil their plans without it. The pervasiveness of blat created many situations where workers and directors would have to interact in order to defend themselves when investigations took place to determine how the material was going missing. The supply agent of a factory could be someone who helps distribute the goods obtained by using blat amongst workers while also being a scapegoat for investigations, as otherwise directors could be blamed for missing materials and be arrested.¹⁸¹ Directors could take spoiled products and sell them to employees at a discount by giving them to the supply agent, which helped workers obtain products that they would have no chance of otherwise affording.¹⁸² More commonly, blat worked between the higher-ups in factories, as barter was necessary to reach anywhere near their given norms due to severe supply issues. Despite its illegality, the director would likely be fired and arrested for not meeting norms if blat was not used to procure supplies.¹⁸³

One well-liked director with significant local influence was able to have a shop chief nearly instantly released from custody after his unexpected arrest. When this happened a second time, the director was not in, and the shop chief

¹⁸¹ HPSSS, Schedule A, Vol. 17, Case 338, 42.

¹⁸² HPSSS, Schedule A, Vol. 17, Case 338, 39.

¹⁸³ HPSSS, Schedule A, Vol. 17, Case 338, 38-39.

called upon a less influential chief engineer who could do nothing. A worker with a good relationship with the right director could get them out of trouble with the NKVD. The shop chief described how, between the two directors he worked with, the one with influence saved him considerable time through these means, including saving him three days by calling a railroad station director to have him release a ticket so that the shop chief could go to Moscow much more quickly.¹⁸⁴

In an interview, a supply agent explained how he used blat for his director so the factory would keep running, providing an example of their procurement of tire tubes:

Ours used to wear out very quickly. But a city factory in Leningrad would wear out less frequently. Say he gets 50 tubes per quarter but he uses only 40 because the roads in the city are better. He wants to sell them for his personal benefit. I can buy them by the money I got from the director's fund... I was able to make out well on paper, glue, and tubes. These were all the things I could buy privately in the market. These sales were made with no record. I always indicated that I paid more than I actually had. This was the blackmarket. Everybody knew of it, but there was no other way out. The director does not care how I got the stuff as long as I got it. What did he care if I earned an extra 100 rubles a month, he used to get 1,200 a month.¹⁸⁵

He also explained how supply agents earned the least money, the chief supply agent was able to earn more, and the commercial director earned the most through blat.¹⁸⁶

The more powerful directors could wield enough power to rule over an entire town in which their factory was based. One of these influential directors used blat to manoeuvre his way around complaints. He was on friendly terms

¹⁸⁴ HPSSS, Schedule B, Vol. 3, Case 16, 32.

¹⁸⁵ HPSSS, Schedule B, Vol. 5, Case 481, 6.

¹⁸⁶ HPSSS, Schedule B, Vol. 5, Case 481, 7.

with the local prosecutor; thus, the prosecutor automatically dismissed any complaint against him. However, when a younger and more eager prosecutor replaced him, the director used his influence differently, as they had no relationship.

There was one case with a relative of mine. The director called me and said: "Tell your relative to stop the case. Because there is conflict between me and the prosecutor, and he will fly, not I." Indeed, two weeks later the prosecutor was removed by order of the Republic prosecutor. Every worker who has contact with such a director, i.e. a high official of such a plant, is in a precarious position. If he quarrels with the director, he will fly. But if he is on good terms with him and the director flies, he will also fly.¹⁸⁷

The prosecutor's dismissal demonstrated the unbalanced nature of the relationship between a director and their subordinates at the time, as the director could ignore all complaints, even when the local prosecutor was working against him. Most important to the directors was preventing work stoppages. Workers and directors alike wanted to avoid this so that workers would receive proper pay and directors could fulfil their quotas. While directors may have supplies promised to them by the central authority, inefficiencies in other factories, shipping, or planning created situations where necessary materials would arrive late, in lower quantities, or not at all. These situations made blat so important, as it would create severe issues if the factory had to cease production, perhaps even causing workers to seek alternative employment. When directors tried and failed to go through the many proper channels to make up for the shortfall of supplies, they would turn to blat. For the enterprises producing less critical goods, blat could be even more prevalent, as they would only receive supplies

¹⁸⁷ HPSSS, Schedule B, Vol. 5, Case 403, 3-4.

when the more essential industries first received their allocations.¹⁸⁸ According to a technical director in an Elektrougol factory, any work stoppage would lead to the director's immediate dismissal. They needed a minor part in small quantities and explained that they might have half of the requested materials provided, making them responsible for preventing work from stopping when the parts inevitably wore out.¹⁸⁹ However, due to the large size of his factory, they carried three months of surplus supplies on hand, thus making that unnecessary.¹⁹⁰

A director's influence depended on how important his enterprise was. A director of a large all-union factory held significantly more sway than a small locally important factory director. An engineer in an all-union factory had been promised an apartment as part of his contract, but when his director did not grant him one, he complained to the city's procurator. Because the procurator accepted the complaint, the factory's director had the procurator fired.¹⁹¹

On one occasion, a technical director explained how his factory's red director stayed in his position despite having no technical expertise and receiving complaints from workers:

Because he was a Party man. His advantage was that if anybody sued him, the procurator had to send the papers to the secretary of the Party organization to which he belonged. The secretary used to get things from the director, such as a box of butter and cheese and other things. Therefore the secretary would destroy all complaints against him and would tell the director which worker it was that complained and the director would kick him out of the factory.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁸ Berliner, *Factory and Manager*, 185-186.

¹⁸⁹ HPSSS, Schedule B, Vol. 5, Case 609, 5.

¹⁹⁰ HPSSS, Schedule B, Vol. 5, Case 609, 10-11.

¹⁹¹ HPSSS, Schedule B, Vol. 20, Case 403, 12.

¹⁹² HPSSS, Schedule A, Vol. 8, Case 102, 51.

People used blat not only to procure workplace supplies and essential goods for workers or to supplement one's income but also to curry personal favour. The aforementioned director had a negative relationship with his workers due to his poor ability to handle the job but he avoided losing his job or being persecuted because he was able to use blat to bribe his superiors in the Party.¹⁹³

Another mutually beneficial form of blat came during workers' allotted vacation time. In the Soviet Union workers were generally granted a month's vacation every year. However, through negotiations with a director, not necessarily at their usual factory, they could arrange to work during their paid vacation, doubling their monthly salary. As directors were always looking to increase productivity and workers were looking to earn more money, this was one of the more accessible arrangements for workers.¹⁹⁴

For the lowest tier of workers, arranging blat was much more difficult and, in most cases, completely out of reach. Their primary method would be to have good relationships with higher-ups in the factory, including the director, or even connections with other factories. An example of this would be when, after a worker applies for a role, the directors have a range of salaries that they can legally assign, and with connections, the workers could obtain the higher end of the range. A man was given a higher position in his factory despite not having the best qualifications. He explained how he received it through nepotism:

I was made head of the Supply Section. But it was not because I knew anything about procurement; it happened accidentally, with the commercial director being from Leningrad, and I being from Leningrad, he simply said "why don't you take the job"? And I did.

¹⁹³ HPSSS, Schedule A, Vol. 8, Case 102, 7-12.

¹⁹⁴ HPSSS, Schedule A, Vol. 31, Case 307/(NY)1069, 48.

You see it was not because I was a specialist in the field - procurement, or because my work had been especially outstanding, it was simply blat.¹⁹⁵

This ability to use blat still mainly applied to specialists and deputies. One worker said that if someone does not have connections, blat is only available for those in the highest positions in the factory, while another stated that only party members could use blat.¹⁹⁶ A bookkeeper contradicts this by explaining his views on blat:

Blat was everywhere. Say for instance that you and I are bookkeepers. You in a meat packaging house and I in my place. I get meat from you and you can get a piece of furniture through me. We help each other and if it weren't for blat you couldn't live. Blat exists everywhere and includes everyone from the janitor, and chairwoman to the director.¹⁹⁷

He implied a mutual understanding existed where everyone in the factory would use blat to ensure that they could provide for themselves, which he stated later in the interview, "Bez Blata Vy Nichovo ne zdelate"¹⁹⁸ meaning, "without blat, you cannot do anything." Even those who felt like they could not use blat would still feel like they could receive goods through other means, such as stealing. One low-paid worker stated that while blat was too risky, stealing is always permissible if there is no policeman present.¹⁹⁹ An engineer stated that:

[h]ardly anyone in the Soviet Union can live without theft or deception-- after all, blat is a form of deception. When the newspapers say that all the plans have been fulfilled or overfulfilled, you may be sure that a great deal of deception has gone into this. Even if a plant does not fulfill its plan, the director will always make it look as if it has. In such conditions I approve of illegal activities

¹⁹⁵ HPSSS, Schedule A, Vol. 24, Case 481, 12.

¹⁹⁶ HPSSS, Schedule A, Vol. 17, Case 337, 9-10.

¹⁹⁷ HPSSS, Schedule A, Vol. 7, Case 91, 14.

¹⁹⁸ HPSSS, Schedule A, Vol. 9, Case 114, 37.

The interviewer provides their own transliteration here, the phrase in Russian is "без блата вы ничего не делаете."

¹⁹⁹ HPSSS, Schedule A, Vol. 21, Case 419, 38.

because otherwise life is impossible. If you are honest in the Soviet Union you cannot live.²⁰⁰

In this quote, he displayed his empathy for the director's position. He understands that directors must constantly lie and cheat so that plans can be fulfilled and they can remain in the good graces of the Soviet apparatus. He recognized that every person in Soviet society was in the same position, and being in a relative position of power meant little.

For the more personal aspects, people used blat to exchange products or materials from their factory for everyday goods, such as food. While directors would trade for the more lavish goods, they could also help to arrange trades for others in the factory. In a dairy factory, the director would provide butter to local grocery stores in exchange for food for himself, the technical director, the bookkeeper, and the mechanic, allowing these people to avoid the Soviet rationing of food.²⁰¹ This director's actions corroborate what the other workers stated, that blat was primarily used to benefit those in the top positions in the factory. The tone throughout the interviews is consistently neutral or supportive of the use of blat, as although it was illegal and considered theft, very few people appeared to be against it. Thus, most workers considered it morally acceptable.

Blat was of smaller importance in the more critical factories, especially those producing key military goods. These factories would get priority access to supplies and be under increased scrutiny. Of course, it would be much less practical to informally trade military goods with other factories and carry much

²⁰⁰ HPSSS, Schedule A, Vol. 15, Case 305, 86.

²⁰¹ HPSSS, Schedule A, Vol. 8, Case 102, 91.

greater risks. Thus, workers in these factories had less opportunity to employ blat and would not have the same access to trading that workers in consumer goods factories had.²⁰² One of the few interviewees in the HPSSS who admitted to being an ardent Communist worked as an engineer and proclaimed that he viewed stealing as morally wrong as it was criminal in nature. In his opinion, those who could not afford food should have gone on strike instead.²⁰³ Based on the other comments recorded in the HPSSS archive and the general attitude displayed across the Soviet Union, this was a minority opinion but perhaps more common amongst Communist Party members.

The introduction of more formal standards of conduct between workers and directors in 1937 created a larger distance between them. Any rank of worker used to be able to try to see the director in their office, but after 1937, workers had to see a secretary first, who would generally turn the less important workers away. While some people viewed these as positive changes to increase workplace productivity, others saw these changes as going against the proclaimed directives of the Soviet Union. Workers and directors were stratified, and while this made some of the higher-ups in the factory happy, the workers generally were not pleased with these changes.²⁰⁴ The workers saw this as a betrayal of Soviet ideals—even those with Party membership were now included into a hierarchical structure.

²⁰² HPSSS, Schedule A, Vol. 27, Case 524, 12.

²⁰³ HPSSS, Schedule A, Vol. 23, Case 470, 93.

²⁰⁴ HPSSS, Schedule B, Vol. 3, Case 70, 16.

Creating a divisive wedge between the workers and directors was intentional and was reflected in other policies. An engineer explained, “I don’t know if the director of an enterprise or a big director of a plant who worked more than one or two years, usually they get changed, they discouraged a person remaining on one duty too long as it might bring familiarity.”²⁰⁵ The formal workplace standards were just the next step in creating a more extensive division between labourers and management and further placing the Soviet Union away from being a classless society. Not all directors adhered to these rules; for example, Ivan Likhachev, a red director in the auto industry who had run factories from 1926 into the 1950s, “knew the first names and patronymic names of practically all of his personnel workers and top engineers in the factory, and helped whoever got into trouble.”²⁰⁶

Stakhanovites and Workplace Relations

As restrictions continued to increase, the reality of factory work became significantly different by the late 1930s. The laws became stricter, job mobility became nearly nonexistent, and the Stakhanovite movement ushered in an era of increasingly unrealistic production norms.

The concept of socialist competition by the mid-1930s was firmly rooted after a period of promoting the shock-workers, or “udarniks.” These shock workers formed brigades that would push to increase productivity, save costs, or

²⁰⁵ HPSSS, Schedule A, Vol. 23, Case 470, 93.

²⁰⁶ Igor Morzharetto, “Khoziain svoego zavoda Ivan Likhachev: Kak sozdavalas avtomobilnaia promyshlennost SSSR,” TASS, 15 June 2021, <https://tass.ru/opinions/11627827>. My translation

promote state-sponsored social causes.²⁰⁷ Shock workers were increasingly common, with over 40% claiming the title in the early 1930s.²⁰⁸ The Second FYP brought on a new form of socialist competition called Stakhanovism, in which workers would compete individually to overfulfil their norms. Stakhanovism received its name from Aleksei Stakhanov, who the Soviets reported to have broken a record for coal mining in a day.

Stakhanovism became a heavily promoted official policy start in the mid-1935, and about a third of trade-union members were designated as Stakhanovites by August 1936. The designation of being a Stakhanovite was often arbitrary, influenced by personal relationships and biases.²⁰⁹ The introduction of Stakhanovism in the factory created significant tensions, as it imposed immense pressure on workers. A bookkeeper demonstrated these tensions, claiming, “Stakhanovites were the most evil elements and were universally hated,”²¹⁰ as well as accusing their production records of being fraudulent, attributing them to ideal conditions and materials. This sentiment was frequently echoed throughout the interviews in the HPSSS. The relationship between a regular worker and a director vastly differed from that between a Stakhanovite and a director. An engineer observed that:

By far the greater majority of “Stakhanovism” were chosen by officials at drinking parties. In my factory a day shift was chosen to break the record. The director’s wife was put in charge of it. Sure, they broke the record, but I know that the following shift spent several hours cleaning up the mess after them.²¹¹

²⁰⁷ Siegelbaum, *Stakhanovism*, 40.

²⁰⁸ Siegelbaum, *Stakhanovism*, 50.

²⁰⁹ Siegelbaum, *Stakhanovism*, 171-174.

²¹⁰ HPSSS, Schedule A, Vol. 9, Case 114, 12.

²¹¹ HPSSS, Schedule A, Vol. 31, Case 102/(NY), 55.

The whole factory would have to help Stakhanovites set their records, which would slow down the overall production in the factory. While the fellow workers of the Stakhanovites could feel malevolence and envy towards them due to the upward influence the Stakhanovites had on norms, the relationship was more complicated between the Stakhanovites and their bosses.²¹² In the view of one worker, the directors benefitted from the Stakhanovites, as they would help raise the factory's profile in the eyes of their bosses. While the worker was unsure what exactly the director truly thought of Stakhanovites, the directors would demonstrate their dissatisfaction towards the Stakhanovites to the other workers, but not towards the Stakhanovites themselves nor their bosses, as that could destroy their career. The director could be beholden to the Stakhanovites, as they were chosen or confirmed by the Party apparatus and could exert their influence, which could affect the director's career.²¹³

Generally, the factory's management, from the foremen up to the director, was against the implementation of Stakhanovism. While they may have supported Stakhanovites once the state forced them to implement the new policy, they did not support their arrival. The management knew that the new norms created by the Stakhanovites were fraudulent, as they helped set up their ideal conditions, and thus knew that the overall raised norms of the factory would prove incredibly hard to meet and lead to more issues with quality control.

²¹² HPSSS, Schedule B, Vol. 20, Case 409, 19.

²¹³ HPSSS, Schedule B, Vol. 20, Case 409, 20.

When discussing Stakhanovism, a non-Stakhanovite worker said the Stakhanovites did not cause them harm by raising norms, nor did the director. Instead, the worker placed all of the blame on the Politburo. The workers often seemed aware of who was really forcing norms and rules on the factory and did not usually misplace their blame on people who had little control over their roles.²¹⁴ This attitude was never universal, and other workers would “curse the damned Stakhanovites” for raising the norms,²¹⁵ while another stated, “[a] man had to eat, and this was a way to earn more for his family.”²¹⁶ The frustration came from norms in various engineering industries rising 28.5% to 55%, with norms in light industry being raised much higher than even the Commissariat of Light Industry had recommended.²¹⁷ Management used creative accounting to raise wages for workers who could not keep up with the new norms and thus did not make enough money to live off. The director would overlook this, as they knew it was necessary, or the workers would try to leave for a job with higher wages.²¹⁸ The number of people not reaching their norms could be as high as 70% in some factories, making this a pervasive issue.²¹⁹

The Soviets introduced a progressive piece-rate pay system, and in the latter half of the 1930s, 40% of piece-rate workers used this system. Once workers reached their norms, the pay per piece would increase, greatly encouraging the Stakhanovite movement to flourish and helping to create a

²¹⁴ HPSSS, Schedule B, Vol. 20, Case 470, 14.

²¹⁵ HPSSS, Schedule A, Vol. 20, Case 387, 56.

²¹⁶ HPSSS, Schedule A, Vol. 34, Case 149/(NY)1486, 13.

²¹⁷ Filtzer, *Soviet Workers and Stalinist Industrialization*, 184.

²¹⁸ Lampert, *The Technical Intelligentsia*, 322.

²¹⁹ Filtzer, *Soviet Workers and Stalinist Industrialization*, 191.

separate elite class of Soviet workers while leaving those who could not keep up with the new norms in a significantly disadvantaged position.²²⁰

In the early period of Stakhanovism, some Stakhanovites became directors, and according to a textile worker, they were ineffective directors due to often lacking technical and management knowledge.²²¹ The presence of Stakhanovites in a factory not only challenged the authority of a director but could also threaten their position. A prominent Stakhanovite in a ball-bearing factory attended a Komsomol committee meeting and complained about the management of their factory, which was not even close to meeting the new massively raised norms. Shortly thereafter, *Pravda* announced the firing of the director, and although this was likely not significantly influenced by the actions of the Stakhanovite, it still demonstrates that they were willing to exert their influence as a Stakhanovite to undermine their director's authority.²²²

The Great Purge gradually decreased the prominence of Stakhanovism, as the terror provided workers with a new means of motivation and leverage against the management. While directors had previously received orders to rule the factory with an iron fist and avoid friendly relationships with workers, while many directors were on trial in 1937 for charges of spying or wrecking, they were now condemned for their ruthlessness.²²³

²²⁰ Siegelbaum, *Stakhanovism*, 5.

²²¹ HPSSS, Friedrich-Fainsod preliminary interviews. Fainsod #47. Male, 50, 2.

²²² Siegelbaum, *Stakhanovism*, 115.

²²³ Siegelbaum, *Stakhanovism*, 252.

The Purges of the Late 1930s

The purges of directors in the late 1930s swept out a class of Communist directors perceived as potentially disloyal to Stalin. An official in the factory who worked directly under the director discussed this purge, saying the director the state purged in his factory was a loyal party man who was well-liked, and purging him caused discontent amongst his former subordinates. He had excellent relations with the non-party workers in the factory despite his loyalty to the regime, and this was explained as a “loyalty based on force.”²²⁴ The former director was understood to have done the best he could despite the severe limitations placed on his ability to act while remaining a loyal Party member.

In a metalworking factory during the purges, the NKVD arrested and shot a well-liked director. One of the director’s subordinates stated that the director would hire engineers who had been arrested under Article 58, as he considered them the best workers.²²⁵ Of course, this would have put him under great suspicion of being a counter-revolutionary and made him vulnerable to attacks in the mid-1930s, despite being a Party member from 1917.²²⁶

A dairy specialist who had many issues with the directors in the latter part of his career stated that his director in 1935 explained to him that in a Party meeting, they had discussed a future purge of dairy workers, and someone mentioned the specialist’s undesirable social origin. The director lied, claiming

²²⁴ HPSSS, Schedule A, Vol. 32, Case 433/(NY)1240, 18.

²²⁵ Article 58 was the law covering counter-revolutionary activity. This was an incredibly broad law that could cover many forms of wrecking, or even such acts as “any conscious attempt to undermine [Stakhanovism].” Siegelbaum, *Stakhanovism*, 202.

²²⁶ HPSSS, Schedule B, Vol. 5, Case 403, 5.

that the worker did not come from a wealthy background and thus saved the specialist from being purged.²²⁷ Directors at this time were frequently purged, so defending a worker with an undesirable past could easily have caused the director to come under suspicion by authorities, as in other cases where directors were purged for hiring people with potential anti-Soviet beliefs. Defending this worker would have come at great personal risk, and it exemplifies how some directors would defend their valuable workers even when it was dangerous.

The purges also empowered workers, as directors were now in a weak position where workers could condemn them and thus had to tread lightly or risk being a victim of a purge. Sometimes, workers would utilize this, such as in a factory where workers who were tired of an uneven work schedule publicly complained about the management of the factory, including the director.²²⁸ They complained because the mismanagement of the factory caused all the workers to have to perform most of the month's work in the latter half of the month due to a lack of supplies in the first half. Directors could also be accused of wrecking for not maintaining equipment properly or for the occurrence of workplace accidents. It was commonplace for Stakhanovites to use their influence to denounce directors, accusing them of being wreckers. In a meeting, a factory director was accused of having a poor attitude towards Stakhanovites and not giving them proper support.²²⁹ Directors were now in a dangerous position where denunciations could ruin their careers or get them into significant legal trouble,

²²⁷ HPSSS, Schedule A, Vol. 8, Case 102, 56-57.

²²⁸ Siegelbaum, *Stakhanovism*, 253.

²²⁹ Siegelbaum, *Stakhanovism*, 252.

significantly undermining their position. The directors who lost their jobs at this time found it difficult to find new work, unlike the factories' other technical staff.²³⁰

During this period, it became more common for workers to become directors, but only for a brief time.²³¹ A shop chief described how his new director in 1937 came to power after he denounced his current director and had him purged. Due to his long and untarnished past as a Party member, he received the director role despite not completing his studies at the Promakademiia.²³² While this new director shared many traits with the red directors, he was still respected by the shop chief because he respected the opinions of his technical staff and did not interfere. He had to maintain these good relationships because of his lack of technical knowledge; otherwise, the technical staff could have easily sabotaged him, so he gave them benefits at the expense of the rest of his workers. The shop chief contrasted him with a second technically trained director, who would bypass his technical staff and in exchange, used his discretionary fund on his workers and was well-liked by them due to this. Despite this, on a personal level, the first director who relied on his technical staff was respected as a peer by his workers, as the workers viewed the director as a worker who was in an elevated position. Despite the director favouring the technical staff, the technical staff did not respect him as a director but liked him as a person.

²³⁰ Siegelbaum, *Stakhanovism*, 258.

²³¹ HPSSS, Schedule B, Vol. 20, Case 470, 10.

²³² HPSSS, Schedule B, Vol. 3, Case 16, 26.

Meanwhile, the second director, who favoured the workers, did not necessarily have better relationships with them, as the workers regarded him as an outsider who looked down on them. Instead, the technical staff, whom he tended to bypass and neglect, respected him for his technical acumen.²³³ The contrast between how the different strata of the factory viewed these two directors demonstrated how workers did not just base their opinions on how the director treated them but rather on how much they could relate to the director on a personal level. The fact that the workers felt they could approach the first director with their personal issues was a more significant factor in how they viewed him than the benefits they did not receive.²³⁴ These new directors usually commanded less respect and had less influence, as they did not have the same connections and experience that the purged directors exerted.²³⁵

The End of Purges and World War II

The purges, including in the industry, slowed down by the summer of 1938, and directors began to receive official praise again and have their authority restored. The authority of management in the factory was extended to the point where the lowest management positions, including brigade leaders, were given more authority in an increasingly hierarchical workplace.²³⁶ The increased authority of management corresponded with a decrease in the power of the Stakhanovites and other workers, whom management now expected to respect

²³³ HPSSS, Schedule B, Vol. 3, Case 16, 28-30.

²³⁴ HPSSS, Schedule B, Vol. 3, Case 16, 30.

²³⁵ HPSSS, Schedule B, Vol. 5, Case 403, 6.

²³⁶ Siegelbaum, *Stakhanovism*, 264-265.

their factory's chain of command. Stakhanovites previously could work their way up in the factory and become directors. However, after 1938, this became exceedingly rare, as the authorities began requiring them to be Party members with higher technical training and education.²³⁷ This change coincided with the years just before the start of World War II when labour laws had become so strict that leaving factories generally became impossible without proper permission from the local party organization, who were very difficult to influence through bribery or blat.²³⁸ As workers became tied to one enterprise, they were forced to work under the same director for longer periods, and the director now had more power in the relationship. Increased enforcement led to blat becoming more restricted, and blat was now mainly used for larger-scale deals between enterprises, while individuals had fewer chances to use blat or bribery.²³⁹

The landscape had changed so much by the time the Soviet Union entered World War II in 1941 that even allowing damaged goods to be shipped could be punished by death. These punishments could create more conflict between those responsible for overseeing the production of goods and the director, as the director would argue for reaching the norms, while the technical staff was afraid that if they pushed too hard, the goods would be deficient, and they would risk execution.²⁴⁰ Directors ruled factories with even more fear, and discipline became stricter while shifts became longer, with each worker putting in twelve hours daily. The most important new rule that altered workplace relations

²³⁷ HPSSS, Schedule B, Vol. 20, Case 470, 4.

²³⁸ HPSSS, Schedule A, Vol. 34, Case 148/(NY)1398, 14.

²³⁹ HPSSS, Schedule A, Vol. 12, Case 149, 32.

²⁴⁰ HPSSS, Schedule A, Vol. 27, Case 524, 14.

was that now every worker in an essential industry was exempt from military service unless they were fired. This rule meant that if a worker got on the wrong side of their director, the military could ship them to the front lines against Germany. This threat, of course, significantly reduced the workers' power in their relationship with the director. Multiple interviewees also pointed out that theft increased during and after World War II, and while arrests were common, this created little deterrence.²⁴¹ Workers after World War II felt that the state should lessen restrictions, as there was no longer a need to maintain such high production levels. Of course, Stalin had no interest in lessening the burden on Soviet workers. After the war, the norms were not reduced, but instead increased; workers were given no respite, and discipline remained just as high.²⁴² A mechanic stated that "[a]fter the war everything was destroyed and therefore it was harder to work and harder to fulfil the norms set by the government."²⁴³ Eventually, some of the most draconian laws would be repealed, but not until after the death of Stalin.

²⁴¹ HPSSS, Schedule A, Vol. 26, Case 517, 13.

²⁴² HPSSS, Schedule A, Vol. 27, Case 524, 13-16.

²⁴³ HPSSS, Schedule A, Vol. 18, Case 342, 12.

Conclusion

The Soviet system claimed to create a new form of governance that would transform the old tsarist regime into a workers' state. While workers initially were granted more influence in their workplaces, their rights were continuously eroded, and their responsibilities accumulated. The culture from the tsarist times of collective action against directors was ended. As such, actions were unfeasible in the new political climate. The Soviet Union may have preached collectivism, but this did not extend to collective action or identity in the workplace, except when it benefited the state. Instead, placed in a culture of fear, workers would take individual actions and have to navigate a system that required personal connections to get anywhere. Thus, relationships between workers and directors became more individually based, and the constant turnover of directors and workers prevented many genuine relationships from forming. The first wave of Red directors was despised by their employees, especially those in management with technical knowledge. Once they were replaced with technically trained communists, the relationships shifted, and while they could rarely be described as friendly, the workers and directors had a relationship best described as 'understanding' of each other and their actual place in this new Soviet society.

Stalin's taking control of the Soviet Union ushered in a new era of Soviet industrialization, as the NEP instituted under Lenin was abandoned in favour of the FYPs, which attempted to rapidly increase the industries of the Soviet Union, especially heavy industry. Norms were increasingly raised in an attempt to move the Soviet Union from an agrarian to an industrial society, but at great expense to

the workers. This attempt at modernization brought a significant share of peasantry into the urban industrial workforce, greatly altering the dynamics at the factory, as these new workers were viewed as backward. The rapid pace of dictating high norms created some leverage for the workers, as directors were desperate to maintain their workforce when turnover could exceed 100%. To combat this, a series of laws were put into place that discouraged and eventually banned workers from voluntarily changing their place of work. These laws that tied workers to their factory are almost analogous to the serfdom that the Russian Empire had gotten rid of less than a century ago, and a Soviet worker frustrated with a lack of softening the laws after World War II echoed these sentiments, calling their labour laws “Soviet serfdom.”²⁴⁴

The workers were forced into working in such poor conditions, under the control of directors of varying degrees of ruthlessness, and with little hope of receiving help as the trade union and newspapers answered only to the state’s wants. Despite this, workers generally maintained a neutral to favourable view of their director as long as they did not interfere with the actual production of goods. Many of the higher technical or procurement staff in a factory could benefit from maintaining a good relationship with their director, as they gained favours through blat, helping them to obtain essential and luxury goods that were otherwise incredibly difficult to obtain. Blat played a role in the lives of everyone in the Soviet workplace, with some exceptions for certain key industries, and was

²⁴⁴ Andrei Sokolov, “Forced Labor in Soviet Industry: The End of the 1930s to the Mid-1950s: An Overview,” in *The Economics of Forced Labor: The Soviet Gulag*, ed. Paul R. Gregory and V. V. Lazarev (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 2003), 36.

the main way that both workers and directors displayed their ability to work together to navigate their way around the Soviet system that would have otherwise left the workers insufficiently provided for.

Directors could certainly be cruel, especially as this became an officially endorsed state policy, and their workers hated these directors on a personal level. While some understood that the directors were forced to act this way, others saw through experience at many places that the cruelty of directors was far from a rule. Many did their best to foster positive relationships with their labourers and technical staff, even those considered red directors.

Stalin's vision of a strictly hierarchical Soviet factory would never be realized, as despite his desire to have factory directors in complete control, he enacted policies that forced directors into collaboration with their workers. The Great Terror, which encouraged workers to denounce their directors, meant that the directors' ability to rule using fear was curbed by the risk of being denounced by a worker. The increasingly high norms combined with severe supply chain shortcomings and Stalin's inability to properly reduce turnover during this period granted workers some negotiating power, circumventing the state's policy of single-person management.

The Soviet's goal of creating a classless social system was thoroughly abandoned by the start of World War II, official rules of conduct between workers and management were enacted, and friendly relationships were discouraged. Management and workers ate in separate dining areas, had access to different goods, and received drastically different pay. Against its stated aims, the Soviet

state accomplished the goal of creating a gulf between different segments of Soviet society. Despite this, it did not prevent the workers from understanding the position of management. Workers often recognized that directors were forced through material needs and fear to perform their jobs as the state demanded. If this meant enforcing unreasonably strict laws and unreachable norms, the blame was still placed on the Soviet state for creating these requirements.

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