

Building Socialism: The Idea of Progress and the Construction of Industrial Cities in the Soviet Union, 1927-1938

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Abstract

This study examines how Soviet and Western institutions, governmental agencies, presses, and publishing companies often created an image that the Soviet Union was progressing towards an industrialized nation through the inauguration of the First Five-Year Plan, 1928-1932. This study also examines how individuals themselves viewed this industrialization. The study revolves around two industrial cities constructed during the First Five-Year Plan and its immediate aftermath in the Soviet Union: Magnitogorsk and Nizhnii Novgorod. Government city planners constructed whole new industrial and housing facilities from the ground up in locations practically barren just a few years earlier. To the Soviet government these cities were symbols of socialism's ability to build planned 'socialist' cities, and by extension their ability to build a new society. The history, importance, and portrayal of these two cities are a microcosm of the Soviet industrialization process in general. Through this study, it becomes apparent the constructed image is one of *progress*, either progress achieved or in some cases progress unachieved. Soviet as well as Western presses and publications often created an image that the Soviet Union, through its industrialization, was building a new modern society. Furthermore, many of those involved in the construction of these cities, both Westerners and Soviet citizens, seemingly agreed with the images being constructed by the press.

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Introduction

Through much of its history, Western intellectuals and politicians viewed Russia as a technologically backward nation; this changed when Joseph Stalin took charge of the country in the years following Vladimir Lenin's death in 1924. Under Stalin, the Soviet Union underwent a stunning transformation, from a predominantly agricultural society to one of the leading industrial centers of the world in just a few short years. Stalin was convinced the Soviet Union faced invasion by the capitalist countries within ten years. If socialism were to survive and show its superiority to capitalism, it would show it through the Soviet Union's military might. To prepare the country for this eventuality, he initiated a course of rapid industrialization. This industrialization materialized through the First Five-Year Plan, which was initiated in 1928 and was declared a success in 1932, a full half-year ahead of its projected end date.

Along with industrial buildup, the First Five-Year Plan initiated a course of forced collectivization of agriculture. This transformed Soviet farms from predominantly individual estates into a system of large, state owned collective farms. The Soviet government believed collectivization would improve agricultural productivity and would produce grain to feed the growing urban labor force.¹

In both Russia and Western nations, the industrialization of Russia has been a topic of great interest. Many historians have focused on the economics of industrialization; others have looked at the environmental ramifications; and still others have investigated the cost in human life of breakneck modernization. All of these points

¹ "Revelations from the Russian Archives: Collectivization and Industrialization," Library of Congress: Exhibits, Archives, <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/archives/coll.html> (accessed July 1, 2012).

of view have prompted a historiographical debate over the process of industrialization in Russia, which actually started during the Tsarist era. While some historians believe that the effort of Tsarist policies to modernize their economy might have been more productive and less costly in human lives than Soviet modernization, others believe the Russian Empire needed the Soviets' planned economy to shake it from the economic restrictions of Tsarism.²

Since the fall of the Soviet Union, and the opening of many once-closed archives, scholarship has often focused on specific cities and placed them within the history of the Soviet Union's industrialization as a whole. An example of this is *Tashkent: Forging a Soviet City, 1930-1966* by Paul Stronski.³ This work examines the Uzbek city of Tashkent and how the Soviet government attempted to remake the city around a new industrial facility. Alec Nove investigated industrialization through the medium of economics and statistical analysis. His main work, *An Economic History of the USSR, 1917-1991*, examines governmental policies including the New Economic Policy (1921-28) and the First Five-Year Plan (1928-32), interpreting their results in light of their impact on the Russian economy.⁴ A different interpretation comes from Vladimir Andrie in *Workers in Stalin's Russia: Industrialization and Social Change in a Planned Economy*.⁵ This monograph examines Soviet factory workers and the social organizations they were a part of in the 1930s. It examines the circumstances in which a new working

² An overview of this debate is found in Harry Schwartz, *An Introduction to the Soviet Economy* (Columbus, OH: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Company, 1968). In this work, Schwartz argued that the Soviet system worked by quickly industrializing the country, but only because of the foundation Tsarist government had put into place.

³ Paul Stronski, *Tashkent: Forging a Soviet City, 1930-1966* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010).

⁴ Alec Nove, *An Economic History of the USSR, 1917-1991*, 3rd ed. (New York: Penguin, 1993).

⁵ Vladimir Andrie, *Workers in Stalin's Russia: Industrialization and Social Change in a Planned Economy* (Sussex: Palgrave Macmillan, 1988).

class formed, and is one of a number of recent works that investigates what life was like in Stalin's Russia by focusing on the lives of the workers themselves. One of the main chapters entitled "Workers in a changing society" examines the individuals who were entering industrial cities, the living conditions in those cities, and the daily life of factory workers outside the factory gates.

The present study also examines industrialization. It will focus on two cities, Nizhnii Novgorod and Magnitogorsk with a particular focus on their imagery and public perception, both within the Soviet Union and abroad. These two cities already have a number of works completed on them but rather differently focused. Regarding Nizhnii Novgorod, the main English language work is *Building Utopia: Erecting Russia's First Modern City, 1930*.⁶ This work centered on a number of letters sent home from an American engineer working in the city during its construction. The author, Richard Austin, used these letters to construct a general history of the city, while giving the reader a first-hand account of life in the burgeoning Soviet Union. Another work that examines the city is Lewis Siegelbaum's *Cars for Comrades: The Life of the Soviet Automobile*.⁷ This also gives a history of the city, and Siegelbaum focused on how the city contributed to the emerging car industry in the Soviet Union.

Magnitogorsk is mentioned in most studies as a keystone project during the First Five-Year Plan and has a monograph done specifically on it. Steven Kotkin's *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* is unquestionably the main work on the subject. Kotkin's work is an all-encompassing history of the city and argued that Magnitogorsk

⁶ Richard Cartwright Austin, *Building Utopia: Erecting Russia's First Modern City, 1930* (Kent: Kent State University Press, 2004).

⁷ Lewis H. Siegelbaum, *Cars for Comrades: The Life of the Soviet Automobile* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011).

was a representation of the transformation Russia was undertaking via Stalin's policies.⁸ Kotkin spent countless pages giving insight into the emerging Soviet system, often giving detailed insight into workers' experience in the new city. John Scott, an American worker who travelled to the Soviet Union in the early 1930s, wrote *Behind the Urals: An American Worker in Russia's City of Steel*.⁹ While working in Magnitogorsk, Scott wrote a detailed history of the city, as well as an account of the current construction project. Scott was able to write a detailed, first person account of life during the First Five-Year Plan in Magnitogorsk. Although an American, Scott lived and witnessed the hardships of the daily lives Soviet citizens experienced. Throughout his experience Scott often seems sympathetic to the cause of building the Soviet Union and accepted short term hardships in the hope the Soviet Union would eventually provide a better place to live than the depression era America he left behind.

Within the existing scholarship, there is room for a study examining how institutions, governmental agencies, press, and publishing companies presented an image of industrialization, and how individuals themselves viewed industrialization. This thesis will look at these two industrial cities during the First Five-Year Plan and its immediate aftermath in the Soviet Union. Magnitogorsk and Nizhnii Novgorod were constructed from the ground up during the Soviet era.¹⁰ To the Soviet government they were symbols of the Soviet Union's ability to build planned 'socialist' cities, and by extension their

⁸ Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

⁹ John Scott, *Behind the Urals: An American Worker in Russia's City of Steel* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973).

¹⁰ Nizhnii Novgorod is actually an ancient city. When Soviet planners decided to build their industrial center there, it was constructed outside of the old city; therefore, a whole new city was built from the ground up outside the existing city.

ability to build a new society. The history, importance, and portrayal of these two cities are a microcosm of the Soviet industrialization process in general.

This study will examine views of industrialization from the bottom, primarily the accounts of both Russians and Westerners involved in building the cities, and from the top, especially portrayals by Soviet and Western governments and their media. It will compare how these cities were portrayed in the world's media versus how individuals felt about the cities and about the process of industrialization in general. When put together, this study will examine the production and consumption of the image of the Soviet industrial cities from a variety of perspectives.

This thesis is arranged into three sections, each looking at the topic from a separate angle and perspective. The first chapter entitled "Envisioning Socialism in the Soviet Union" investigates the First Five-Year Plan to see how industrialization was changing Soviet society. This gives context for the examination of Magnitogorsk and Nizhnii Novgorod, putting their significance in perspective. The focus of the chapter will be on the processes and techniques the Soviet government, media, and Soviet literature utilized to construct an image of industrialization. In the second chapter, "Image Construction in the West," Western media is examined to explore how the image of Soviet industrialization was created for Western audiences and often by Western writers. In chapter three, "Living Socialism," the focus shifts to those involved in the construction projects themselves. This enables a study of how workers and witnesses of industrialization created, interpreted, and consumed their own ideas on these cities and the industrialization drive in general. Focusing on these first person accounts will enable

the workers themselves to construct a story of how individuals helped produce and also consumed the image of the burgeoning society.

Through this study it becomes apparent the constructed image is one of *progress*, either progress achieved or in some cases progress unachieved. The Soviet Press created an image of progress; stories of new planned cities emerging, industrial sites producing new products, and socialism progressing forward. Included in this theme of progress were a number of subthemes, Socialist Competition, which is a form of competition between state enterprises and between individuals that the state used to entice workers to be more efficient in production. An ideological battle with the West was also created to show the Soviet Union catching the West in industrial output. Even the acknowledgment that some cities had not progressed as planned was a common theme in Soviet newspapers. If industrialization was not going as proposed, there had to be reason, someone else other than the Party was always to blame. This created the image that the Communist Party knew best how to progress the country, when workers, or organizations chose not to follow their lead, production lagged.

Beyond Soviet newspapers, the Communist Party used a number of platforms to create an image of progress. The main outlet being the creation of a completely new form of literature: Socialist Realism. Socialist Realism used many of the same propaganda tools newspapers utilized creating an image of workers striving to achieve production records, factories constructed in record time, and Soviet citizens happily living their lives. Socialist Realism was not restricted to just literature, the Soviet government printed countless 'histories' of the Soviet Union which proclaimed the great progresses that had been achieved in building a society free from the ills of capitalism.

Surprisingly, America newspapers helped create a similar image of progress. Many articles printed in the United States viewed the Soviet Union quite uncritically, or at least with a positive spin. With the Stock Market Crash of 1929 Western economies began to retract, resulting in high levels of unemployment and increased suffering. Many of these newspaper articles seem to reflect the idea that the Soviet Union may indeed be creating a alternative society free from these ills. Countless articles about the Soviet Union were written with inquisitiveness that a new society might be emerging. However, obviously not all articles were sympathetic, and many focused on the numerous hardships Soviet citizens faced. The sheer number of positive accounts is telling though; many Americans were exposed to articles claiming the Soviet Union was progressing towards a socialist, industrialized society.

In British newspapers this sympathy was in relatively short supply. The most widely circulated British newspaper *The Times* rarely wrote about progress occurring in the Soviet Union. Instead, articles consistently focused on the numerous hardships with no sympathetic bend. These articles created an image that the Soviet Union was a mess, and lacking consumer goods that were readily available in the West. Just as importantly, these articles created an image industrialization and socialism were failing to take shape. Although these articles are important, they do not overshadow the positive images created in the United States, instead they highlight the great divergence in thought present during a period of great uncertainty.

While the Soviet and Western newspapers were creating an image of Soviet industrialization, the final chapter will examine how many ordinary Soviet citizens and foreign visitors to the country believed that the Soviet Union was progressing towards

industrializing and building socialism. Many of these individuals spoke about the hardships they endured in the country, but accepted these difficulties in the hope their work was building a new society. Many inhabitants joyfully retold stories of a time when the country was transforming and excitement abounded. A number of personal letters add to the tale and help bring to life the mood of a changing society.

Unsurprisingly, a number of first person accounts did not share the idea the Soviet Union was progressing to an industrialized utopian society. These accounts come from both Russian and Americans working in Nizhnii Novgorod and Magnitogorsk and show that not all people were consuming the image that the Soviet Union was progressing. Although these accounts are important to evaluate, the sheer amount of positive accounts shows that many people were happily working towards building socialism.

The differentiation between the production and consumption of an image is often difficult to judge. An author who witnessed industrialization firsthand, then published accounts in the newspaper, in a way fills both roles. Through their work, they are helping to produce an image and distributing it for others to consume. At the same time, these same individuals are consumers of their surroundings. As an attempt to resolve this, each author's work is broken up, when necessary, between published work (newspaper, literature, advertisements) and personal accounts (letters, diaries, interviews) with the former considered examples of image construction and the latter being treated more as instances of consumption.

Chapter I.

Envisioning Socialism in the Soviet Union.

In the Soviet Union, the fundamental goal of the First Five-Year Plan was to convert the U.S.S.R. from an agrarian and weak economy, dependent upon goods from capitalist countries, into an industrial and powerful economy, fully self-reliant on its own production to supply its people.¹ Eighty-six percent of all industrial investments during the First Five-Year plan went into heavy industry. In just a few years the Soviets constructed entire new forms of industry, such as chemicals, automobiles, agricultural machinery, aviation, machine tools, and electrical equipment from primitive beginnings or simply from scratch. During this rapid industrialization, they built over fifteen hundred new factories. Entire cities unknown before the 1917 Revolution such as Novokuznetsk and Karaganda began to appear. Many in the Soviet government proclaimed industrialization a great success. Joseph Stalin proclaimed at the Joint Plenum of the Central Committee on 7 January 1933, “We did not have an iron and steel industry, the basis for the industrialization of the country. Now we have one. We did not have a tractor industry. Now we have one. We did not have an automobile industry. Now we have one... We did not have a real and big industry for the production of modern agricultural machinery. Now we have one... And as a result of all this our country converted from an agrarian into an industrial country....”² Although these factories were completed, they came at a heavy cost – the Soviet regime spent over 170,000,000 rubles on Magnitogorsk alone in 1931. Industrialization robbed the nation of the hard currency necessary to

¹ J. V. Stalin, *Problems of Leninism* (Moscow: Peking, Foreign Languages Press, 1976), 590.

² *Ibid.*, 594-95.

purchase much needed consumer goods. It also demanded a major emotional and physical commitment from the people. The success of the First Five-Year Plan depended on the work and sacrifice of all Soviet citizens. The Soviet government implemented plans and goals for the long run; in return for the workers' short-term suffering, the First Five-Year Plan would build industries that would create goods Soviet citizens needed – eventually.³

To the detriment of consumer goods, Stalin allocated capital for these 'long haul' projects such as power plants, iron foundries and other heavy industrial centers. These projects monopolized such quantities of capital that textile mills and other units producing consumer goods went neglected. This resulted in great shortages of goods.⁴ The short-term hardships of living and working conditions were expected to open the door for future prosperity, but life for Soviet citizens was hard to endure. For instance, butter and eggs, which people badly needed for home consumption, were exported to secure foreign currency. This was done to such an extreme that Russian butter could not be obtained in Moscow, but was readily available in London.⁵

Among Soviet historians there exists a debate as to what extent living standards were affected by the Five-Year Plan. Nonetheless, due to increased shortages of food and housing, there is little doubt life became more difficult for Soviet citizens. Sheila Fitzpatrick's *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s* argued that living standards in general dropped sharply in both cities and in the

³John Scott, *Behind the Urals*, 71. For a rounded discussion on the economics of industrialization see Marshall Goldman, *The Soviet Economy* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1968), or Robert C. Allen, *Farm to Factory: A Reinterpretation of the Soviet Industrial Revolution* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).

⁴Bruce C. Hopper, "The Soviet Touchstone: Industrialization," *Foreign Affairs* 8, no. 3 (April 1930), 284.

⁵Ibid.

countryside.⁶ Fitzpatrick argued that by 1933 (a year after the First Five-Year Plan was declared a ‘success’) the average worker in Moscow consumed less than half the amount of bread and flour a worker had consumed in St. Petersburg at the beginning of the twentieth century. The workers’ diets included virtually no fats, very little milk and fruit, and a mere fifth of the meat and fish consumed at the turn of the century.⁷ Alec Nove, an economic historian, is more direct: “The fact still seems to be clear: 1933 was the culmination of the most precipitous peacetime decline in living standards known in recorded history.”⁸

One of the main priorities of the First Five-Year Plan was the creation of a heavy industrial base in Siberia to supply the country with arms and machines in immense quantities if war broke out.⁹ This was ever more important due to Stalin’s fear that the capitalist countries would invade the Soviet Union. Stalin wanted an industrial site out of reach from an aerial bombardment, which would allow the Soviet Red Army to continue its war effort even if much of the country was conquered.

Stalin’s fear of invasion was justified and rooted in experience as well as ideology. In the early twentieth century, Russia had experienced a war with Japan (1904-05), the First World War, and a Civil War in which Western nations backed the ‘White Army’ against the Bolshevik ‘Red Army.’ In the minds of Bolshevik revolutionaries, capitalism and revolutionary socialism represented opposing principles and could not coexist. Soviet leaders feared that capitalists would again attack the Soviet Union

⁶ Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

⁷ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁸ Alec Nove, *An Economic History of the USSR: 1917-1991*, 3d ed. (New York: Penguin Books, 1992), 210.

⁹ John Scott, *Behind the Urals*, 63.

militarily once the opportunity presented itself, thus achieving what they failed to accomplish during the Civil War intervention. To Soviet leaders, especially Stalin, this war was inevitable and would be the ultimate test of Soviet society. If the Soviet Union was to survive this ‘last decisive battle’ it would have to show to what degree socialism had evolved. The country needed to construct enough blast furnaces, tractor and tank factories, hydroelectric dams, and kilometers of railroad track to show Soviet and socialist supremacy.¹⁰

In the early twentieth century, the largest and most technologically advanced iron and steel plant in the world was the U.S. Steel plant in Gary, Indiana. Stalin ordered that a similar factory be built in the Soviet Union.¹¹ Stalin wanted his factory to be capable of producing as much steel as any capitalist country. This was based partly on the fear of being invaded, but also his determination to not allow a capitalist nation to have larger, more advanced industrial centers. The Soviet Union’s population was to embrace large-scale technologies with enthusiasm directed at eliminating their economic backwardness. Soviet leaders argued that the state planning by GOSPLAN, the State Planning Committee, would ensure rational decisions with lower costs and higher efficiencies than in the West. They also claimed industrialization in the Soviet Union would serve the worker, not the capitalist ‘master.’¹² Thus between 1928 and 1935, more than twenty large enterprises were built in the Urals. Factories, combines, and trusts came into

¹⁰ Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, 10.

¹¹ Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997) 42.

¹² Paul Josephson, “Deserts: Industry, Science and the Destruction of Nature in the Soviet Union,” *Modern Humanities Research Association and University College London, School of Slavonic and East European Studies* 85, no. 2 (2007), 297.

existence, seemingly overnight. In typical Bolshevik understatement, the regime called the overly ambitious industrialization program the 'Big Ural' program.¹³

The Ural region was chosen due to its location, far away from Western powers, and for its abundance of natural resources - the iron deposits at Magnitogorsk had been known for years as some of the richest in the world. The ore was right on the surface and tested up to sixty per cent pure iron. The availability of coal deposits in the Kuzbas region also influenced the decision to exploit the Urals. In many places, the coal seams were easily accessible and three hundred feet thick. This made the resources easy to mine with minimal effort. In addition, due to the lack of existing machinery, easily accessible resources were a necessity. By connecting these two untouched sources of raw material into one immense metallurgical combine, the country secured an iron and steel supply of great quantity.¹⁴

In Magnitogorsk it was necessary to start from scratch. An American who worked in the city explained: "There were no supply bases, no railroads, no other mills in or near Magnitogorsk."¹⁵ It all needed to be constructed from scratch. Upon completion; the Magnitogorsk Metallurgical complex was to produce nearly as much steel as the entire Russian empire had in 1913. Magnitogorsk was distinguished not only by its huge scale but also by its integrated design, which was to be as automated as possible. The linear flow from raw material to finished product would even incorporate by-products

¹³ Josephson, "Deserts," 301.

¹⁴ Scott, *Behind the Urals*, 63.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 64.

somehow. Magnitogorsk was not simply to be a steel plant, but a huge mining, energy, chemical, metallurgical complex.¹⁶

The first settlements in Magnitogorsk began to appear in 1929. Primitive barracks, tents, and mud huts housed the early laborers. These workers were required to build not only the steel plant, but also housing for themselves. To make matters worse, a massive influx of workers entered the city as soon as a railroad line opened in June 1929. Though the encampment was overcrowded it became a blur of activity as workers began building the city.¹⁷

In Magnitogorsk and other emerging cities of this period, everything was planned with the intention and design to create the first ‘socialist’ cities in the world. Magnitogorsk was to be a city in which all the problems of cities known to that time — congestion, poor sanitation, disease, poverty, and crime — would all be eliminated. The Socialist city was a dream for a better way of life, for literacy, health, justice, abundance, happiness.¹⁸

Another relevant city during the First Five-Year Plan was Nizhnii Novgorod, located 265 miles southeast of Moscow on the Volga River.¹⁹ The industrialization of Nizhnii Novgorod actually took place fourteen miles outside the ancient city which already had a population of 150,000.²⁰ This new industrial city was to be centered around a vehicle manufacturing plant with an accompanying planned ‘socialist’ city, similar to the one at Magnitogorsk.

¹⁶ Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*, 47.

¹⁷ Scott, *Behind the Urals*, 64.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, xx.

¹⁹ The city went through a name change in 1932. In honor of the Soviet writer Maxim Gorki, who was born in Nizhnii Novgorod, the city changed its name to Gorki. Throughout this thesis though, I will refer to the city as Nizhnii Novgorod to spare confusion.

²⁰ “Monkey Wrench Hits Machines in Soviet Shop,” *Huntington West Virginia Herald*, April 4, 1932.

During the planning stages of the Five-Year Plan, 1926-1927, Nikolai Osinskii was one of the main proponents for domestic manufacturing. Osinskii was a former head of the State Bank and assistant Commissar of Agriculture, director of the Central Statistical Administration, and a leading member of the State Planning Commission (Gosplan). Between 1925 and 1926 he spent months travelling around the United States, often on the back roads of the American south, examining America's automotive capacity. From this experience, Osinskii was convinced that the Soviet Union needed its own automobile industry.²¹

Once back in the U.S.S.R., Osinskii published a series of articles in *Pravda* arguing for a strong automobile manufacturing system. Osinskii complained of the "catastrophically backward" state of the Soviet automotive transportation system. He argued for construction of an automobile plant capable of producing at least 100,000 vehicles annually. Critics responded by claiming the existing roadways, repair facilities, and mechanical expertise could not support such a large volume of production. Osinskii countered by pointing to the developments in the United States, where the technical infrastructure expanded along with production of vehicles.²²

Most critical for Osinskii's argument were the military benefits of building a car industry. He argued that added military power would far outweigh the cost or infrastructure concerns. An underdeveloped automobile industry would restrict the effectiveness of the Soviet military, which would have to utilize a large supply of motorized fighting machines in the future. Massive plants would be needed to supply the

²¹ Lewis H. Siegelbaum, *Cars for Comrades: The Life of the Soviet Automobile* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011), 37.

²² Kurt S. Schultz, "Building the 'Soviet Detroit': The Construction of the Nizhnii-Novgorod Automobile Factory, 1927-1932," *Slavic Review* 49, no. 2 (summer, 1990), 211-12.

entire nation with sufficient numbers of vehicles so the Soviet Union would not have to rely on imported vehicles from the West – imports that might be cut off should the Soviets go to war with the capitalist countries. Such a war would leave the Red Army having to use "the Russian peasant cart against the American or European automobile," for which, Osinskii warned, Russia would be "threatened with the heaviest losses, not to say defeats."²³

Osinskii's experience is one example of how separate government factions disagreed on how to industrialize, or even where to assign financing. It also illuminated a larger problem. So little of the country had preexisting infrastructure that even when construction was agreed upon, barriers stood in the way of completion. Many of the roads throughout the Soviet Union were difficult to navigate. Lack of paving made mud and ruts the norm, making these roads impassible and useless to motorized vehicles. It was a gamble to construct vehicles for nonexistent roadways.

Once Osinskii won agreement that an automotive plant would be constructed, Soviet leaders looked to the West for technical assistance. One of the central companies assigned with the task of constructing Nizhnii Novgorod was the Austin Company of Cleveland, Ohio. By the 1920s, the Austin Company was one of America's best-known construction companies. In 1927, the company constructed the world's largest automobile factory in Michigan to manufacture the "Pontiac Six" for General Motors Corporation. Due to the Austin Company's diligent work, which became known as the 'Austin

²³ Schultz, "Building the 'Soviet Detroit,'" 201.

Method,' the project took only seven months to complete. Russian specialists took note, and the Austin Company was chosen partly because of their construction efficiency.²⁴

The Austin Company was hired to plan and supervise construction of the socialist city as well as the automobile plant. The plan envisioned schools, clubhouses, hospitals, bread factories, kitchen factories, bath-houses, laundries, and municipal service buildings. The housing quarters were designed to accommodate groups of 200 people in community and apartment houses. Each group of community buildings was interconnected by means of an enclosed overhead bridge, with a club house on one side and a nursery and kindergarten on the opposite side. This layout was designed to keep inhabitants' services close, with all services provided by the state. The workers' city originally planned to house 60,000 people, but quickly became overpopulated.

Soviet Newspapers

The media reported on these construction projects on a regular basis as well as the progress made in the new industrial plants at Magnitogorsk and Nizhnii Novgorod. Articles ranged from detailing the cities' construction to personal notes from Joseph Stalin congratulating workers on their achievements, to blaming deficiencies on one group or another. Soviet newspapers, writers, and governmental publications were attempting to portray these cities and industrialization overall in a positive light, always sustaining the image of progress, always promoting the idea that the Soviet Union was building a new society – a socialist society. State run newspapers like *Pravda* published

²⁴ Richard Cartwright Austin, *Building Utopia: Erecting Russia's First Modern City, 1930* (Kent: Kent State University Press, 2004), 6.

negative articles on occasion, and Stalin himself complained about some aspects of industrialization. Even these negative accounts were used to build the image of progress that the Central Communist Party wanted to project, though – if problems existed, it was because factions were straying from the dictates of the Five-Year Plan, not because the Plan itself was failing.

The typical Soviet citizen had access to *Pravda*, which gave a daily dose of the party line to the reader. The only handicap to the continuous flow of propaganda from the Kremlin was a shortage of paper – *Pravda* was often limited to only four pages in length and there were not always enough papers to meet demand. Even then, citizens who lacked the ability to read were exposed to the paper through group readings, or public readings at their place of work. *Pravda* was overseen by the Party Central Committee, and often regurgitated party resolutions and agendas.²⁵ It was easy for Party officials to argue a particular point of view as the regime had eliminated all other newspapers, parties, and intellectuals that might have presented opposing arguments or facts tending to undermine the state's case.²⁶

Chris Ward argues that Soviet Newspapers were not newspapers at all, but propaganda outlets which reported party campaigns as news.

They paid scant attention to failures or shortcomings – except as an aspect of another campaign. Sometimes, however, there were Aesopian references to ‘real’ events. In 1932-33 for instance, the press carried stories of famines in Europe and Asia. Since there were no serious famines outside the USSR at that time these could only have been intended as allusions to matters closer to home, perhaps to convince the Soviet people that life was no better elsewhere.²⁷

²⁵ Chris Ward, *Stalin's Russia*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 2.

²⁶ Peter Kenez, *The Birth of the Propaganda State: Soviet Methods of Mass Mobilization 1917-1929* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 4.

²⁷ Ward, *Stalin's Russia*, 2.

Overall, Ward's conclusions are correct, but the surprising number of negative accounts found in the papers cannot be overlooked. These negative articles were used to create an image just like positive accounts. The Communist Party led by Stalin needed to create an image the Soviet Union was progressing, when difficulties were too large to ignore, someone had to be blamed. Critical articles in *Pravda* were a way for the Party to deflect accountability. Negative accounts of industrialization were just as much propaganda as positive accounts, and just because the accounts were negative did not mean that they were necessarily true.

Peter Kenez argues that the Soviet regime was the first state to not merely set itself propaganda goals, but also attempt, through political education, to create a new type of humanity. Kenez further argues that propaganda is nothing more than the attempt to transmit social and political values in the hope of affecting people's thinking, emotions, and behavior.²⁸

Party leaders pressured Soviet writers to construct a narrative that manipulated the way society viewed industrialization, centering the narrative entirely on Soviet progress. Stories began to appear in newspapers presenting everyday labor as an epic battle to modernize the USSR.²⁹ Readers of *Pravda* were accustomed to articles and cartoons espousing the evils of the West, capitalism, and articles proclaiming the superiority of Soviet communism and Marxist ideology. This was symbolized in the recurring section in *Pravda* entitled "With Us" and "With Them." Under "With Us" the reader was exposed to news about the opening of new factories, the numbers of students now being

²⁸ Kenez, *The Birth of the Propaganda State*, 4.

²⁹ Matthew Lenoe, *Closer to the Masses: Stalinist Culture, Social Revolution, and Soviet Newspapers* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 1-3.

educated, and new scientific discoveries across the Soviet Union. Under "With Them" the reader would receive a dreary narrative of the hardships in the West. These accounts gave the story of chronicle unemployment, currency disasters, closed factories, and essential commodities like wheat, milk, and coffee deliberately being destroyed in an attempt to raise prices.³⁰

By the height of the Great Depression scenes of misery spread across American cities. Diets deteriorated and weakened people, causing diseases to spread quickly. Epidemic diseases like tuberculosis spread throughout tightly packed apartment buildings as multiple families were forced to live together just to pay rent. Those less fortunate were forced to build shantytowns on vacant lots or in forests on the edge of cities. Bread lines and soup kitchens were required just to keep people alive.³¹ Soviet propagandists had plenty to work with and easily found examples they used to show capitalism disintegrating. Socialism in the Soviet Union was the epitome of progress while capitalism in the West was collapsing.

Although the Soviet press regularly vilified the West's economic and political systems, the Party was still interested in using Western technology and knowhow in building their industrial base. Gregorii Ordzhonikidze, a close associate of Stalin who later became Heavy Industry commissar, was a proponent of the rapid industrialization drive, and he often argued in favor of using foreign assistance to speed up industrialization. While addressing a group of students in 1928 Ordzhonikidze explained how the Soviet Union must open its doors to foreign expertise as never before. He

³⁰ William Henry Chamberlin, *Russia's Iron Age* (Boston: Little, Brown, And Company, 1934), 94.

³¹ George Donelson Moss, *America in the Twentieth Century* (Upper Saddle River: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2004), 159.

claimed “there is no place to boast here of our communism. If we compare an American ‘arch-bourgeois’ machine with our ‘socialist’ one, the first will be better. There is no doubt about this... We must invite foreign technical experts, conclude technical-assistance agreements with them, and first and foremost, send hundreds and thousands of our young engineers to America so that they can learn for themselves what to do and how to work.”³² Ordzhonikidze believed the industrial output of the Soviet Union would eventually be greater than the West’s. The country just needed help building its plants and could not achieve its goals in isolation.

Ordzhonikidze wanted American firms to come, and come they did. Throughout the Soviet industrialization period, foreign companies had a tremendous impact by selling their technological knowhow and supervising projects for the Soviet government. American companies helped construct industrial centers, dams, and even housing communities. Du Pont built two nitric acid plants at Kalinin and Shostka. The Arthur G. Mckee Company contributed to the construction of Magnitogorsk and Colonel Hugh Cooper supervised the construction of the Dnieper Dam in the Ukraine. The A.J. Brandt Company of Detroit helped construct an auto plant in Moscow while the Hercules Motor Corporation of Canton, Ohio helped in the construction of an automotive plant in Yaroslavl. General Electric built and installed the massive generators at the Dnieper dam and designed the Kharkov turbine works. And of course, the Austin Company of Cleveland assisted in the construction of Nizhnii Novgorod.³³

³² Alan M. Ball, *Imagining America: Influence and Images in Twentieth-Century Russia* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2003), 119-120.

³³ Carl Gershman, “Selling Them the Rope: Business,” *Commentary* 67, no. 4 (April, 1979), 37.

In 1944, Stalin acknowledged much of the country's industrial strength could be attributed to the help of Western powers. He told Eric Johnston, the president of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, "two-thirds of the large industrial projects in the Soviet Union had been built with American assistance."³⁴ Outside of this conversation, Stalin gave little acknowledgment to American firms for their contributions in building the Soviet Union.

Instead, Soviet leaders such as Ordzhonikidze and Stalin focused on Soviet workers and *Pravda* published articles directed toward the workers of industrial cities. These articles were used to either congratulate the workers and management, or belittle those involved and express the importance of completing projects on time. For example, in a 19 May 1931 article, Stalin wrote, "I congratulate the Magnitogorsk workers and executive staff on their first important victory. Forward, comrades, to new victories!"³⁵ This was in response to a 14 May 1931 telegram in which the builders of the Magnitogorsk Iron and Steel Works informed Stalin that the Magnitnaia Mountain mine had been put into operation.³⁶ Although the average citizen would not know what the "important victory" was, or what Stalin was congratulating these workers for, the message was clear: complete production quotas and be rewarded publically for the achievement. In theory, other workers, from other cities, would see the recognition from Stalin and attempt to emulate Magnitogorsk's success so they themselves could receive praise.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ J. *Stalin Works* (Moscow: Foreign Language House, 1955), 13:49.

³⁶ "Magnitogorsk Iron and Steel Works Project, Magnitogorsk," *Marxists Internet Archive*, <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1931/05/x01.htm> (accessed March 4, 2012).

Pravda published a similar article on 30 March 1932. Once again, Stalin was full of praise for those working at Magnitogorsk. He boasted: “I congratulate the workers and the administrative and technical personal staff at Magnitostroi for their successful fulfillment of the first part of the program at the factory.” He continued by greeting the shock workers, men *and* women who accepted and overcame harsh winters in order to continue construction. Stalin also ‘suggested’ what he expected from workers moving forward; he claimed he had no doubt the workers of Magnitogorsk would successfully fulfill their part of the program for 1932, which included building three more blast furnaces and other useful projects, and would “fulfill their duties with honor before their country.”³⁷

These articles created an image that that workers at Magnitogorsk were making progress towards goals set by Central Planners, and showing enthusiasm for the process. Affairs were supposedly running so smoothly that Stalin himself came out and congratulated workers.

It was not incidental that Soviet citizens wanted acknowledgment from Stalin. After Stalin’s fiftieth birthday celebration in December 1929, which had unprecedented extravagance, even in comparison to Lenin, a ‘worship’ of Stalin began. By the early 1930s portraits of Stalin began to appear almost everywhere. References to Stalin now included words such as “remarkable,” “outstanding,” “great” and even “genius.” The State Publishing House even issued a special anthology, entitled *Stalin*, in which great exaggerations and distortions about Stalin’s importance and role in building the Soviet

³⁷ Joseph Stalin, "Magnitogorsk," *Pravda*, March 30, 1932. *Pravda* articles throughout this paper have been translated by this author using the accepted Library of Congress transliteration method.

Union were plentiful.³⁸ What was forming was a society that looked up to and wanted acceptance from its leader.

The cult of personality surrounding Stalin was best exemplified in a speech made by the writer A.O. Avdienko. Avdienko, speaking in February 1935 before the Seventh Congress of Soviets, gave deep praise to Stalin and wrote as if Stalin was not a man but instead a deity.

Thank you, Stalin. Thank you because I am joyful. Thank you because I am well. No matter how old I become, I shall never forget how we received Stalin two days ago. Centuries will pass, and the generations still to come will regard us as the happiest of mortals, as the most fortunate of men, because we lived in the century of centuries, because we were privileged to see Stalin, our inspired leader. Yes, and we regard ourselves as the happiest of mortals because we are the contemporaries of a man who never had an equal in world history.

The men of all ages will call on thy name, which is strong, beautiful, wise and marvelous. Thy name is engraven on every factory, every machine, every place on the earth, and in the hearts of all men.

Every time I have found myself in his presence I have been subjugated by his strength, his charm, his grandeur. I have experienced a great desire to sing, to cry out, to shout with joy and happiness. And now see me--me!--on the same platform where the Great Stalin stood a year ago. In what country, in what part of the world could such a thing happen....³⁹

One major orchestrator behind Stalin's cult of personality and growing power was Vyacheslav Molotov. As Stalin accumulated power, Molotov rose in the party, holding positions of increasing responsibility until he became chairman of the Council of People's Commissars (similar to the position of prime minister) in 1930. He held this

³⁸ Roy Medvedev, *Let History Judge: the Origins and Consequences of Stalinism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 314.

³⁹ A.O. Avdienko, "A.O. Avdienko Praises Stalin," *Pravda* (1 February 1935, 28 August 1936), quoted in Brian Bonhomme, *Landmarks of Modern World History* (Dubuque: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, 2003), 176.

post until 1941. Stalin and Molotov together wrote a 4 November 1931 *Pravda* article congratulating the industrial workers of Magnitogorsk.

Ardent greetings to the workers and the administrative and technical personnel of the construction project on the occasion of the successful completion of the building work for the factory.
Congratulations on your victory, comrades!
We wish you further success in your work of assembling, setting in working order and inaugurating this giant plant. We do not doubt that you will be able to surmount all difficulties and will fulfil with honour your duty to the country.⁴⁰

Stalin continued his unabashed praise of workers in a 2 January 1932 *Pravda* article, this time directed at the Chief of the Automobile Works Project and the Director of Nizhnii Novgorod. Stalin made sure to thank all those involved, including workers, administrative personal and surprisingly, even foreign workers.

Greetings to the working men and working women, and to the administrative, political and technical chiefs of the works on the occasion of the completion of the building and inauguration of the Giant Automobile Works!
Hearty congratulations to the men and women shock brigaders [sic] of the Automobile Works Project, who bore the brunt of the construction work!
Our thanks to the foreign workers, technicians and engineers who rendered assistance to the working class of the Soviet Union in building, assembling and inaugurating the works!
Forward to new victories!
Congratulations on your victory, comrades!⁴¹

These articles were strictly positive and created an image that construction was progressing as planned. In these accounts, Stalin never acknowledged the poor working or living conditions. Instead, he focused on the results, that plans had been fulfilled. Stalin's priorities were to industrialize the country at any cost. There would have been plenty for Stalin to acknowledge, but instead he chose to create an entirely positive image. An American working in Magnitogorsk expressed the sacrifices being made by all

⁴⁰ Stalin, *Works*, 13:105.

⁴¹ Stalin, *Works*, 13:125.

involved, "Ever since 1931 or thereabouts the Soviet Union has been at war, and the people have been sweating, shedding blood and tears. People were wounded and killed, women and children froze to death, millions starved, thousands were court-martialed and shot in campaigns of collectivization and industrialization."⁴² Although there were hardships, they were acceptable to Stalin as long as the results were achieved, and thus there was little need to include anything else in reports.

Magnitogorsk and Nizhnii Novgorod were representative of emerging industrial cities, and similar positive imagery was produced on cities throughout the Soviet Union. In two separate articles, 16 June and 17 June 1930, Stalin personally congratulated workers at two separate factories. On 16 June Stalin congratulated the workers of the Agricultural Machinery Works in Rostov for their 'victory.' Stalin boasted "Your victory is a great one, if only because the Agricultural Machinery Works alone is to produce, in accordance with its full programme, farm machinery to the value of 115,000,000 rubles annually, whereas all the 900 agricultural machinery works that existed before the war together produced farm machinery to the value of only 70,000,000 rubles annually."⁴³

The next day, Stalin congratulated the workers at the Stalingrad tractor works. Stalin was once again boastful towards the achievements workers made. "The 50,000 tractors which you are to produce for our country every year will be 50,000 projectiles shattering the old bourgeois world and clearing the way for the new, socialist order in the countryside."⁴⁴

⁴² Scott, *Behind the Urals*, 5.

⁴³ Stalin, *Works*, 12:240.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 241.

While these success stories were printed in Soviet newspapers, Soviet party officials were espousing similar sentiments at Party meetings. At the Sixth All-Union Soviet Congress held in the Grand Opera House in Moscow, Vyacheslav Molotov gave a glowing speech about the progress industrialization had achieved by 1931. Molotov's presentation went in step with the positive accounts printed in newspapers. As he listed the achievements of the First Five-Year Plan, Molotov claimed "The first and most fundamental achievement... during the past two years... [the] building up of Socialism has not only been carried out according to plan, but that, when all the decisive economic factors are taken into consideration, the achievements can be seen to exceed the level fixed by the plan." Molotov continued his glowing appraisal by claiming "[we] have achieved our greatest successes in industry, 110 per cent in heavy industries, and 99 per cent in light industries. With certain exceptions, for instance, the production of pig-iron (99 per cent)...and in particular the industries producing the means of production, has considerably exceeded the plan confirmed by the last Soviet Congress."⁴⁵

This was an interesting and far-fetched tale of how successful industrialization had become. Molotov promoted the idea that the Soviet Union had made great progress in modernizing the country and was hitting targets for production. To Molotov and other party officials, these accomplishments could be achieved only if workers and Party officials followed the dictates of the Central Planners. Articles in *Pravda* often revealed situations where workers did not follow these plans – thus production regressed. An example of this is a 31 July 1929 *Pravda* article entitled "Planned Misery." This article centered on an author's complaint about the large quantity of regions and districts around

⁴⁵ V. M., Molotov, *The Success of the Five Year Plan* (New York: International Publishers, Inc, 1932), 48.

the Soviet Union not following the plans put forward by the Central Planning Commission. Because of this, the economics and finances of the country were in disorder and even agriculture lagged behind. This was causing emerging industrial cities to lack required raw materials and industrialization thus did not proceed as scheduled.⁴⁶

This *Pravda* article, although contradicting the glowing account Molotov gave at the Sixth All-Union Soviet Congress, still fits the image the Soviet regime promoted. Molotov was proclaiming success had been achieved. The *Pravda* article was claiming those achievements would be possible if Soviet citizens and local governments would just listen to the central government's plan. Similar articles appeared in Soviet newspapers often and were critical of what was happening around the country, but did not criticize the Bolshevik Party or its economic plans. The reader read instead about the idea of rebellious workers wrecking factories, or anti communist factions in opposition to the Five-Year Plan. But neither the Central Plan nor Party itself was responsible for shortcomings of any sort.

The idea that reactionaries inhibited construction progress is also found in a 24 August 1931 article entitled "Crooks have entrenched themselves in the Magnitogorsk ORS." The author focused on a report by Gregorii Ordzhonikidze in which he complained about Magnitogorsk being a mess, even complaining that the cafeterias were too dirty! More importantly, Ordzhonikidze spoke about "thieves, crooks, embezzlers and robbers" who had penetrated local Party ranks and were stealing goods destined for workers. According to Ordzhonikidze, the situation was so bad that whole trainloads of bread and fish had been stolen. A number of local officials in Magnitogorsk had

⁴⁶ "Planovye Nevzgody," *Pravda*, 31 July 1929.

supposedly allowed individuals to steal these consumer goods. The officials would then tell the Central Party the items had been stolen, thus attempting to receive twice the allotted quantity of goods. This corruption led to great shortages of goods for the workers, and depleted the finances of the Magnitogorsk factory trust.⁴⁷

Undoubtedly, there were corrupt party officials throughout the Soviet Union, and Magnitogorsk would have been no exception. At the same time though, it was much easier to blame ‘corrupt’ officials for the shortage of supplies in Magnitogorsk than to consider the idea that Gosplan might have diagrammed production poorly. Admitting that a lack of supplies was due to shortages and poor coordination around the country would create the image that the system itself was the problem. That was unacceptable.

While the Soviet press sold the idea that the Bolshevik party knew best on economic matters, it also challenged social beliefs on gender equality. New industrial cities needed as many workers as they could find, regardless of gender. To change the historic idea that women were second-class citizens to men, newspaper articles put forward positive accounts of women, suggesting they were at least equal to, if not better workers, than men. When new production records were achieved and introduced to the readers, women were often given credit for the achievement. On one hand, the articles showed the readership that women were just as capable workers as men. On the other hand, it also had a sexist element to it – the idea in part was to embarrass male workers to be more productive. For example when women were portrayed in the media as the successful embodiment of shock workers, men would theoretically want to strive to be the better worker.

⁴⁷ "V ORS Magnitogorskogo zavoda zaseli zhuliki," *Pravda*, 24 August 1931.

This was evident in a 2 June 1931 *Pravda* article entitled “Stalingrad must master the Bolshevik pace of the Red Putilov.” The article rebuked the Stalingrad tractor factory for not meeting its tractor production quota. A Putilov factory was fulfilling its planned quotas, and “in competition of the two tractor giants Putilov wins and Stalingrad lags behind.”⁴⁸ Although the article gives interesting insight into Socialist competition, what was telling was an image and caption that accompanied the article. The image was of a woman, looking stern and serious, with the caption “Female shock worker.” Her image was located alongside a short segment celebrating her success working with large mechanical conveyors at the Stalingrad Tractor Factory.

Articles like this are telling of a number of topics. For one, the article is pitting one factory against the other, telling the Stalingrad workers that they need to increase their pace, that their work is lagging behind what the country needs. On the other hand, it placed the few successes the Stalingrad plant had achieved on the shoulders of a woman. Although the Stalingrad tractor factory was struggling to reach its production levels, this worker, a woman, was achieving her goals. This would have been just as useful to Soviet officials who were determined to industrialize at any cost, regardless of who was doing the work.

These articles were also representative of a trend in Soviet media stressing socialist competition. By addressing one factory and proclaiming its success relative to another, the state attempted to put pressure and trepidation into the workers at opposing factories. This was obvious in an 18 August 1931 *Pravda* article entitled “Magnitogorsk and Kuznetsk.” This article, supposedly authored by “the shock workers of

⁴⁸ "Stalingradtsy obiazany ovladet' bol'shevistskimi tempami krasnoputilovtsev," *Pravda*, 2 June 1931.

Magnitogorsk,” complained of the difficulties these workers experienced in building their factory due to shortages from the Debaltsevo factory. The article pointed to a wide range of items the Debaltsevo factory was supposed to be producing and shipping to Magnitogorsk. The authors continued with harsh criticism, claiming factories from around the Soviet Union had sent skilled workers to Debaltsevo, but their work still did not get finished on time. Debaltsevo needed to step up production because, as the Magnitogorsk workers claimed, the Magnitogorsk plant was “building the entire Soviet Union.”⁴⁹

Although the article appears to be blatant propaganda orchestrated to shift the blame of Magnitogorsk’s shortcomings onto someone else, an alternative meaning seems apparent. Striving to build a socialist society through industrialization, the leaders of the Soviet Union often had to entice workers to work harder, and try to achieve their goals. Since paying productive workers a higher salary was a bourgeois, capitalist idea, Soviet leaders had to find alternative motivation. In 1931 Magnitogorsk was lacking in supplies, but an article like this would only appear in *Pravda* if there was a reason for it, and that reason was related to socialist competition, or as Stalin called it, “Socialist Emulation.”

Socialist competition was an extension of ‘shock work,’ which was an idea that first appeared during the Russian Civil War period. Shock workers were workers acknowledged for their performance of particularly important or urgent tasks. These tasks ranged from helping cut down on work absences, to abstaining from alcohol, to the highly valued over-fulfilling of output norms and reducing per unit cost of production. Socialist competition built on this in the form of open letters, resolutions, and challenges

⁴⁹ Ibid.

for workers to emulate or outdo the examples of other shock workers.⁵⁰ Stalin summarized this phenomenon best.

Socialist emulation is sometimes confused with competition. That is a great mistake. Socialist emulation and competition exhibit two entirely different principles. The principle of competition is: defeat and death for some and victory and domination for others. The principle of socialist emulation is: comradely assistance by the foremost to the laggards, so as to achieve an advance of all. Competition says: Destroy the laggards so as to establish your own domination. Socialist emulation says: Some work badly, others work well, yet others best of all—catch up with the best and secure the advance of all.⁵¹

Socialist competition allegedly led to industrial progress. A 29 June 1931 *Pravda* article entitled “First [industrial scale] Iron Smelting Plant” (Pervyi sovetskii zavod ferrosplavov) began by proclaiming the successful completion of three blast furnaces at the Chelyabinsk factory. The author included tales of heroic shock workers laboring beyond their means to achieve results, and socialist competition between various factions of workers which helped speed the process along. The author explained that these blast furnaces were great accomplishments not only because they would help the Soviet Union increase its steel production capabilities, but also because with the start of new plants, the country was on its way to being independent from the West.⁵² Thanks to socialist competition, *Pravda* said, the Soviet Union was progressing towards its goals.

Similar to other articles, the author of this article wrote about the superiority of Bolshevik central planning. The author used an example about a German firm, as well as some Russian engineers, who had been advising, and telling workers to only produce limited outputs. This was being done as these engineers felt machinery was only capable

⁵⁰ Lewis H. Siegelbaum, *Stakhanovism and the Politics of Productivity in the USSR, 1935-1941* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 40.

⁵¹ Stalin, *Works*, 12:116.

⁵² "Pervyi sovetskii zavod ferrosplavov," *Pravda*, 29 June 1931.

of producing so much without being overly exhausted. However, once everyone accepted the Bolshevik tempo, and Bolshevik planning, construction finished in record time. The article went even further claiming that the party had developed new techniques in concrete composition, and that once workers accepted the Party's recommendations, construction would become quicker and more effective.⁵³

Socialist Realism

Although Soviet newspapers were an effective, accessible way for the Soviet government to spread their image of industrial and socialist progress, it was not the only way. A completely new form of literature appeared which espoused the party ideology too. Socialist realism was a style of realistic art that glorified the poor and the working classes for the purpose of furthering the goals of socialism and communism. The promulgation of socialist realism became state policy in 1932 when Joseph Stalin published the decree "On the Reconstruction of Literary and Art Organizations."⁵⁴ Even before it became State policy in 1932, it was popular among the Bolsheviks and those sympathetic to their cause. Because of this, well-known authors such as Maxim Gorky made a career out of writing in this style. Socialist realism served the same purpose as Soviet newspapers: to create an image that the Soviet Union was progressing, not only in building new factories, but in the quest to build socialism.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Sergey Ivanov, *Unknown Socialist Realism. The Leningrad School*, ed. Marina Kesler (Saint Petersburg: NP-Print, 2007), 28-29.

The overriding purpose of Soviet realism was to elevate the common worker, whether they labored in a factory or agriculture, by presenting their life, work, and recreation as admirable and worthy of emulation. The ultimate aim was to create what Lenin called "an entirely new type of human being": New Soviet Man.⁵⁵ Joseph Stalin called these people "Engineers of Human Souls."⁵⁶

Andrei Zhdanov helped develop Stalin's cultural policy and was behind the establishment of the Union of Soviet Writers and the doctrine of Socialist Realism. When Zhdanov delivered a speech at the Soviet writers' congress in 1934 he explained further what it meant to be an Engineer of Human Souls, "the truthfulness and historical concreteness of the artistic portrayal should be combined with the ideological remolding and education of the toiling people in the spirit of socialism." Zhdanov continued by claiming, "Soviet literature should be able to portray our heroes; it should be able to glimpse our tomorrow. This will be no utopian dream, for our tomorrow is already being prepared for today by dint of conscious planned work."⁵⁷

One of the most relevant novels in the socialist realism style is *Time, Forward!* by Valentine Kataev.⁵⁸ *Time, Forward!* is one of many Soviet "industrial" novels which describes the building of the metallurgical plant at Magnitogorsk. Throughout the novel, Kataev tells of the hardships the workers sustained, the pressure they were under, but also their will to succeed at any cost. The book successfully conveys the atmosphere of

⁵⁵ R. J. Overy, *The Dictators: Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Russia* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2004), 254.

⁵⁶ Gorky, Radek, Bukharin, Zhdanov et al., *Soviet Writers' Congress 1934* (New York: Lawrence & Wishart, 1977), 21.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 17-18.

⁵⁸ Valentine Kataev, *Time, Forward!* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1995).

workers' feverish hurry, and of the need to 'alter time' to finish their project on schedule.⁵⁹

The central event of the story is a successful attempt by a brigade of shock workers at Magnitogorsk to break the world record for the quickest pouring of concrete in a shift. According to Edward Brown, a literature critic, "the vivid action reveals the mechanisms developed in the USSR during the First Five-Year Plan in an effort to motivate workers to outdo themselves: shock brigades, socialist competition, Stakhanovism, slogans, public acclaim of 'heroes of labor' and opprobrium for 'shirkers.'" ⁶⁰ The dominant image is the speeding up of time in the Soviet Union, where a century's work must be done in a meager ten years.

The reader is exposed to the excitement and energy involved in building the city. The characters are realistic, one person having a child and another struggling with coworkers. The reader is also exposed to the idea that the drive to industrialize the country was being completed on all fronts. At the end of the book, shortly after the construction crew succeeded in breaking the world record, they received news their work was in vain. The story closes with this short exchange between two workers finding out their recent record had already been broken:

Falling asleep, Margulies noticed the fresh newspaper sticking out of the pocket of the special correspondent's leather coat:
'Well.... Where?'
'At the Chelyaba tractor plant!' Vinich cried.
'How many?'
'Five hundred four....'⁶¹

⁵⁹ Ibid., Foreword.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid., 345.

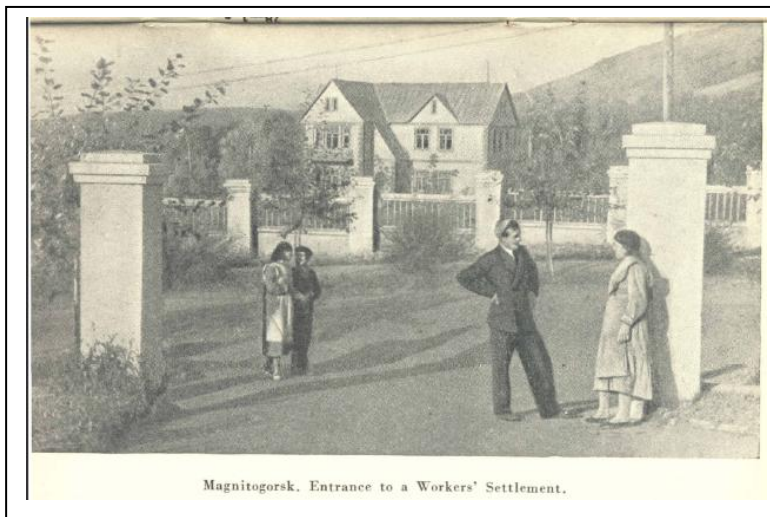
An ending like this was created for more than just suspenseful literature. It stressed how the country was continuously changing, continuously improving and moving forward. It also expressed the idea that workers needed to try harder, work harder, find new techniques, so they themselves could eventually hold the pivotal position of being ranked first in the building of the Soviet Union. When hearing the news that their record had been broken, Kataev was implying these workers would then strive to achieve greater successes.

Although the theme of the book was to glorify Soviet industrialization, Kataev did include sections in the book that were not overly positive. An example on this is with a character named Georgi Vasilyevich, who played a famous novelist. Vasilyevich stayed in one of Magnitogorsk's few hotels in the 1930s. As a person of prestige, he was given better sleeping quarters than the majority of workers, but even in his "better" living quarters he ran into problems. As he stayed on the fourth floor of the hotel, he quickly realized that the building's heating unit constantly malfunctioned, thus heating his room to uninhabitable temperatures. Although this is just one quirky example, Kataev gives reference to how bad living and working conditions were for inhabitants in general.

Through these harsh conditions, the majority of the workers strove to achieve higher and higher outputs of industrial goods in the name of building socialism. They did not necessarily care about their well-being; instead, they strove to help the state progress. As one of the characters in *Time Forward!* put it, "A year and a half ago this was an utter desert – a wild parched steppe. Unpopulated. Dead mountains. Vultures. Eagles. Blizzards. One hundred and fifty kilometers from the nearest railroad. Fifty Kilometers

from the nearest town... But now? Miracles....”⁶² In theory, consumers of Soviet literature would want to replicate the achievements and glory they read about.

Another good representation of socialist realism is A. Baikov’s *Magnitogorsk*, a depiction of the glories of the city in words and pictures. In *Magnitogorsk* Baikov boasted about the luxuries Magnitogorsk offered workers and inhabitants. These included reading rooms, gyms, and places of rest. Also included in the book are a number of images that portray the city in a positive light. One of the main images is an artist’s rendition of what workers’ housing looked like. The picture, entitled “Magnitogorsk Entrance to a Workers’ Settlement” shows a large central house surrounded by a nice-looking fence with trees all around. The yard is well manicured, and everything appears clean. There are people casually standing about, undoubtedly workers, conversing with each other. These individuals are well dressed, and in general look relaxed. The overall



impression that the painting gives is that Magnitogorsk is a nice, clean, livable place. There are no indications of the massive steel plant these workers were building, no sign of pollution, and only one house was visible. It

gave the impression that inhabitants had spacious lawns with ample room to move around and converse with their friends.

⁶² Ibid., 92.

This was greatly exaggerated as housing was still drastically primitive and cramped. By 1938, 17.5 percent of living space was still mud huts (!) with only 46.9 percent of living space even being of the quality of 'barracks.'⁶³ There may have been a few of these well-manicured homes, but they were reserved for party bosses or foreign executives. They were foreign to Soviet citizens.

Along with these images, Baikov included an in-depth description of the city. He claimed that it was full of tall, well-appointed houses catering to a population of 250,000. It had an electric power plant, waterworks, scores of wide streets, boulevards, parks, streetcars, and a good autobus system.⁶⁴ Magnitogorsk had a mining and metallurgical institute and a pedagogical institute, forty secondary schools with 25,000 pupils and a medical training college. He further claimed the city boasted a fine theater with a seating capacity of 1,000, eighteen moving-picture houses, a circus, and a large number of clubs, including the splendid iron and steel workers' club.⁶⁵

As Baikov's book was published by the Moscow Foreign Languages Publishing House, it can be assumed his book was for a Western audience. In fact, a stamp on the front cover identified the book as being sold at the 1939 New York World's Fair, the Soviets' literary display of the fair's theme, "Building the World of Tomorrow." It would not be surprising a work like this would be available at such an exhibit.⁶⁶ Baikov was attempting to convince the West that the Soviet Union succeeded in creating their utopian city.

⁶³ Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*, 162.

⁶⁴ A. Baikov, *Magnitogorsk* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1939), 29.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Andrew F. Wood, *New York's 1939–1940 World's Fair (Postcard History Series)*, (Chicago: Arcadia Publishing, 2004).

There are numerous examples of the Soviet government publishing pamphlets and books directed towards a specific audience, with the specific purpose of influencing readers' opinions on industrialization. A 1930s children's book titled *Story of the Great Plan* is a good example. *Story of the Great Plan* was created to teach children about the Soviet Union's industrialization effort. Whereas the majority of books were directed at adults, this particular one was designed to target children from twelve to fourteen years of age. The main purpose of the book was to acquaint boys and girls with the Five-Year Plan and to explain to them the nature of a planned economy and society.⁶⁷ Readers were introduced to important construction projects like Nizhnii Novgorod, Magnitogorsk, the Dnieper dam project, and the tractor factory in Stalingrad.⁶⁸ The story summarized the hope that the Soviet government wanted to impart in its citizens:

In just one factory in Nizhniy Novgorod we expect to build 200,000 automobiles a year. Into Siberian taiga, the Kirgiz steppe, everywhere, the automobile will penetrate... By 1932 we shall have 138 airlines.... It will then be possible to fly from Moscow to Vladivostok and Tashkent, from Novosibirsk to Berlin. Tens of airlines will go over the forest of Siberia over the Caucasus... Every future city will be a workers' village near a factory. And factories and unions of factories will not be brought together in one center as at present: they will be distributed throughout the entire country according to a rational plan... But to accomplish this we must have new cities and new houses, our life down to the last kitchen pot must be changed. Down with the Kitchen! We shall destroy this little penitentiary! We shall free millions of women from housekeeping... Socialism is no longer a myth, a fantasy of the mind. We ourselves are building it.⁶⁹

Whether it was the Soviet press, a Soviet publishing company, or Soviet literature, the image created by the Communist Party was one of progress. The consumer

⁶⁷ George S. Counts and Nucia Perlmutter Lodge, trans., *New Russia's Primer: The Story of the Five-Year Plan* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1931), Introduction.

⁶⁸ Ball, *Imagining America*, 123.

⁶⁹ M. Ilyn, *The Story of the Five Year Plan* (Moscow: Cooperative Publishing Society of Foreign Workers in the USSR, 1932), 137-56 Quoted in William Craft Brumfield and Blair A. Ruble, eds., *Russian Housing in the Modern Age: Design and Social History* (New York: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 193), 136.

of these sources was led to believe society was moving in the right direction, the Soviet Union was industrializing successfully and would no longer be a backward nation. Anytime something contradictory to this idea was acknowledged, an excuse was close behind. Wreckers, saboteurs, rogue Party members were always easy targets for blame. If these excuses were not convenient, problems of industrialization were simply ignored or were just accepted as part of the process. Nothing was more important than moving industrialization forward, and it was especially important to sell the notion that the Communist Party knew best how to achieve industrialization. The idea and image of progress was foremost.

Chapter Two

Image Construction in the West

It is unsurprising to read positive accounts in the Soviet press. More unusual, however, were the number of accounts in the West that created a similar image. Many of the articles that appeared in American newspapers either agreed with the Soviet accounts, or were less critical than one would expect. Since the end of the First World War communism had been vilified in the United States. The Stock Market Crash of 1929 did much to spark interest in the reports coming out of the Soviet Union, especially since they emphasized the newness and productivity behind the Five Year Plan. Numerous articles, however, did criticize the Soviet government and the First Five-Year plan in general. Although economic hardship devastated the lives of many in the West, many journalists never bought into the idea socialism would create a better society. Yet the number of newspaper reporters, literary figures, intellectuals, businessmen and politicians who wrote of their sympathies with the Soviet project was significant.

In the late 1920s and early 30s the majority of American citizens and those in Western Europe knew little about Russia, much less had a deep understanding of the industrialization process taking place. However, one of their main sources of information came from newspaper coverage. These available accounts were often written by persons fresh from the Soviet Union, or still stationed in Moscow. One such group was a team of engineers from the Austin Company of Cleveland, Ohio, which was hired with the task of designing and constructing many buildings in Nizhnii Novgorod. After nearly a year of planning in the United States, George A. Bryant, the executive vice president of the

Austin Company, began his first of many trips to Russia. Bryant spent the summer of 1929 traveling throughout Russia studying the economic and business conditions with which his company would have to contend. During and after these trips, Bryant often published articles in American newspapers explaining the situations he confronted. In numerous articles, Bryant gave his interpretation of the Russian citizens' mindset, and detailed his interactions with the Soviet government. His publications are an insightful source of image construction that appeared in the United States.

George Bryant often wrote articles friendly to the Soviet government and people. He expressed his admiration of the progress he witnessed. In a 1929 *Cleveland Plain Dealer* article he explained how "The Russian people are anxious to emulate our [American] mass production and wide distribution of prosperity" and "Their purchasing power is much greater than before the war. The working class is much better off while the former nobility and white collar classes are in general worse off. However, the government does not discriminate against skill and brains. All government workers from Stalin down, get the same pay, \$112 a month."¹

In the same article, Bryant continued, "in factories wages vary, with mechanics earning \$150 a month more than the head of the government."² Similar to Soviet newspaper articles, Bryant created an image of progress and prosperity. The typical reader in the United States would not realize the shortcomings of Soviet industrialization. Instead, workers appeared to be better off financially than those in charge of the Soviet state. If an American knew the economic hardships citizens faced under the Tsar, this would certainly appear as progress.

¹ George A. Bryant, "Praises Progress in Soviet Russia," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 5 October 1929.

² Ibid.

In an article published in the Cincinnati, Ohio *Inquirer*, an associate with the Austin Company, Harry F. Milter gave an account of his experiences in bringing the project at Nizhnii Novgorod to completion. Milter wrote about how labor was willing and plentiful, but was lacking skill. He explained “Russia is not nice, it’s not orderly, it is very much unlike our country, but the tremendous nerve of the people in undertaking big projects and doing things on a big scale naturally won my favor.”³ His idea was that the Soviet Union was "not nice", but that Russians were willing to work hard. The Soviet people were doing their best to construct their country for a better future.⁴

In an editorial page from 1 October 1929, Bryant continued the positive appraisal of the Russian people. “During all this long trip we have seen nothing but peaceful, ambitious people. Their economic progress is almost beyond belief; yet their plans are far beyond their accomplishments” Bryant continued with what he witnessed in the city. “The cities all show wonderful spirit for economic progress, and almost on every side we found the old things being discarded and the new being built. This includes stores, apartments, homes and factories of all kinds. The people seem almost universally happy and contented.”⁵

Possibly the most telling section of the article came when Bryant claimed “I was impressed by the eagerness of the workers in the plant, the lack of the need for supervision, and the workers’ aptness and anxiety to take up new methods of

³ “Business Men,” Cincinnati, Ohio *Inquirer*, 17 March 1932.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ George A. Bryant, Jr., “How Soviet Russia Looks to an American Business Man,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 1 October 1929.

accomplishing good results. Apparently the workmen are sold on the advantage of doing their best for themselves as well as for others.”⁶

Americans reading these articles were sure to take note of the positive imagery the authors were putting forward. Another 4 April 1932 article claimed “The Russian system is state capitalism rather than Communism... the Russians deserve credit for conceiving the plan for industrial... expansion of the nation, and for their courage in carrying it out. The people are co-operating whole-heartedly in the plan and... they are more content than under the old regime, probably because they have more hope of advancement.”⁷ These articles all lacked any critical evaluation of the Soviet State, and never touched on the many privations that Russian citizens had to accept. It is interesting they chose not to acknowledge these shortcomings.

Although many articles that appeared in American newspapers centered on the progress of the Soviet citizens, just as many focused on the progress of the Soviet economy as a whole. A 2 January 1932 *Cleveland Plain Dealer* article entitled “Soviet Ford Plant Built by Clevelanders Opens” is one example. The majority of this article explained the progress made in Nizhnii Novgorod, including general details about the opening of the factory. However, the article also referenced Soviet officials who claimed, “by the end of 1932 the U.S.S.R. will have jumped from fortieth to eighth place among the countries of the world in auto production.”⁸ Any American reader was sure to take note of this stunning transformation. These articles, although not flashy or exciting, provided statistics to show that the successful building of industrial centers was the key to

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ “Says Religion Is Still in Russia,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 4 April 1932.

⁸ “Soviet Ford Plant Built by Clevelanders Opens,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 2 January 1932.

the advancement of the Soviet Union. All of a sudden, a backward nation was supposedly catching up to the West.

George Bryant and Harry F. Milter authored many of these positive articles and were both experienced businessmen. With capitalist economies suffering from the Stock Market Crash of 1929, American industrial profits slowed to a near standstill. American enterprises like the Austin Company found revenue in the Soviet Union to keep their companies going. This would have had an effect on how these men interpreted what was happening around them. Due to the economic hardships in America, it did not matter to American enterprises what country they were working in; they were relieved to be working.

For example, a *Cincinnati Times-Star* newspaper article from 16 March 1932 recapped a meeting between Harry F. Milter and George Bryant. These two told a gathering of the Cincinnati Club about their successful business experience in Soviet Russia. The two explained, “America can learn much from Soviet Russia. That country is where we were in 1860. Think what a market for our products that affords. There is consuming power there not only for Cincinnati machine tools, but for the manufactured goods of all America.”⁹ The two continued by proclaiming, “I went to Russia for my company with the object of getting a job, getting paid for doing it, and making a profit for the company by doing it.”¹⁰

A separate 16 March 1932 *Inquirer* article covered the get-together with Bryant and Milter further. In this article, the two men told about how they “made the mistake of comparing Russia with New York, Chicago, and Cincinnati... [we] went there with a

⁹ “Huge Russian Market Cited,” *Cincinnati Times-Star*, 16 March 1932.

¹⁰ “Business Men: Blind to Opportunity,” *Cincinnati, Ohio Inquirer*, 17 March 1932.

complete outfit of what [we] needed and knew no particular discomforts any more than I would if I went to Arkansas or Georgia rural sections to buy a toothbrush.”¹¹ The article continued by boasting that the Russian people were all employed, had no Lindbergh kidnapping, and no Al Capone. The Soviet Union was not only going through rapid industrialization, it was not experiencing the ills of American society. Americans reading these articles absorbed the idea that working in the Soviet Union was no worse than living in rural Georgia or Arkansas and lacked the problems associated with organized crime.

Another 1930 article in the *Steubenville, Ohio Herald-Star* examined American companies’ involvement in construction. The article, speaking of the Austin Company, explained, “American business men consider the opportunities offered them in the land of the Soviet more important than the political phases of the Russian experiment with Communism.”¹² In the same article, the author expressed Austin’s appreciation for the Soviet business: “Each month Russia pays the Austin Company in gold. Austin declared that he has NEVER [emphasis in original] heard of anyone who had cause to be dissatisfied with Russian credit or Russian payments since the inauguration of the five year plan.”¹³

The Austin Company’s involvement in the Soviet Union went smoothly. The government supplied them to their fullest capabilities. Because of this, those involved, especially Bryant, seemed to hold a positive view of the Soviet Union. Bryant then shared his positive opinions to a wider public through the platform of newspapers.

¹¹ “Huge Russian Market Cited,” *Cincinnati Times-Star*, 16 March 1932.

¹² “Ohio Engineers Plan Industrial Centers for far off Russia,” *Steubenville, (Ohio), Herald-Star*, 25 July 1930.

¹³ *Ibid.*

Philip Davis was another engineer who worked for the Austin Company. Upon returning to the United States from Nizhnii Novgorod, Davis published an article in the *Journal of the Worcester Polytechnic Institute* entitled “The Building of Molotov: Where Russian Fords Will be Produced.” Davis spoke about various aspects of the city, always seeming impressed by his surroundings. When writing about the living conditions in Nizhnii Novgorod, Davis claimed “It has been called the first socialistic city of the world and contains all of the latest facilities for the development of an ideal communistic community, including apartment and community houses, clubs, kitchens... and stores.” Davis went further by stating “Due to the location of the job, it was necessary to provide temporary facilities for the workers on the site... in general, the barracks are as well equipped as any in our own country.”¹⁴ Davis also touched on the issue of gender equality: “In Russia, women now have equal rights with men,” and “women have equal social status as men, and can engage in all of the construction activities that men take part in without discrimination.”¹⁵ He acknowledged that the Soviet Union was breaking with the entrenched idea that women were second-class citizens. Davis claimed men and women were working diligently for the cause of building the city and country. Workers were content with their situation in part because “the peasant has never had many luxuries and is easily satisfied.”¹⁶

Davis finished his article by explaining the magnitude of the Five-Year Plan through the sheer strain on natural resources it required. Such shortages were an acceptable byproduct of a modernizing society: “There was never an adequate supply of

¹⁴ Philip K. Davis, “The Building of Molotov: Where Russian Fords Will Be Produced,” *The Journal of the Worcester Polytechnic Institute* (April 1932): 85.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid., 85-86.

materials to meet the requirements of the plan and many projects were greatly delayed. In no other particular was the magnitude of the Five-Year Plan more apparent.”¹⁷ These views are similar to the ones found in *Pravda*, the scale of industrialization consumed natural resources in tremendous quantities.

Correspondents from national news circulations often created a similar image, but at times less flattering. A 26 August 1931 *New York Times* piece claimed “It may be the workers are badly housed and fed. It may be the [q]uality in some of their work is faulty. It may be critics think Magnitogorsk too big to chew. But there are hundreds of thousands of men working like beavers... I admit there is waste, muddle, hardship and decay. Yet they get things done, and gradually, little by little, order begins to appear from chaos.”¹⁸

With depression spreading through Western economies it is unsurprising that many newspaper accounts looked at the Soviet Union inquisitively. American newspaper writers who seemed sympathetic to communism were happy to paint a picture of a country free from the problems that appeared rooted in the American economy. To these journalists, the Soviet Union was making progress on all fronts. No newspaper studied Soviet industrial advances more than *The New York Times*, whose correspondent, Walter Duranty, won the Pulitzer Prize in 1932 for his coverage of the Soviet Union. Today, Duranty’s work is often considered apologetic and distorted, especially in light of facts in his reporting that historians know that he knew were wrong. In fact, he may best be known for his denial of the Holodomor, the Ukrainian and Kazakh mass starvation of 1932–33, which later prompted a call to revoke his Pulitzer Prize. Regardless of how we

¹⁷ Ibid., 88.

¹⁸ Walter Duranty, “American Experts Win Soviet Victory,” *New York Times*, 26 August 1931.

view Duranty now, or even to what extent his articles were accurate, there is little doubt Duranty shaped readers' opinions of the Soviet Union.

In a 20 March 1932 article, Duranty claimed that: "there is little doubt that on the whole the prime necessities of food, clothing and shelter are adequately provided... There are no beggars of unemployment in Soviet streets – no rent evictions, no ragged despair, no luxury and not much comfort, unless sardines are comfortable. No one, of course is satisfied."¹⁹ Although Duranty spoke about the elimination of unemployment (a large problem the Soviet Union faced before the First Five-Year Plan), his evaluation was obviously not all positive. However, even while explaining the shortcomings of the industrialization drive, Duranty was sure to emphasize the positive features of workers working to achieve their goals. In the same article he explained that "there is a universal feeling here now which is shared apparently by a large proportion of the non-communist population, that despite hardships the U.S.S.R is working out its own destiny for the benefit of the whole nation, that despite difficulties the Kremlin policy is correct and that taking it by and large this country is lucky as compared with the rest of the world with its shocks, uncertainties and planless, drifting course."²⁰

Even when Duranty published critical reports of Soviet industrialization, he often included direct or indirect comparisons to the struggling American economy. A 2 March 1933 article entitled "Millions 'Removed' to Exile by Soviet" investigated the forced removal of 'class enemies' from their land to exile camps – obviously a terrible occurrence. Duranty claimed "If questioned on the subject, the Bolsheviki reply... And what about your economic system, which suddenly and mercilessly cuts jobs and savings

¹⁹ Walter Duranty, "Soviet Bewildered by World Events," *New York Times*, 20 March 1932.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

from under millions of families and throws them literally into the street or at the mercy of charity? Don't you know there have been more American homes thus disrupted in the past four years than in all of our removals of kulaks and other enemies? And, remember, we uproot enemies; you break the hearts of your own supporters."²¹ Although the general sentiment of the article was negative, examining the forced relocation of *Kulaks*, so called "wealthy peasants," the inclusion of the Soviet response was a strike at American economics. At the time the article was published in 1933, many Americans had lost their home, their savings, and their livelihood from the Great Depression. By adding the Soviet governments' view, Duranty posited the notion that the Soviet system might prove to be the superior economic system.

Other articles appearing in the *New York Times* not authored by Walter Duranty tended to be harsher on the Soviet State. An 18 August 1931 article claimed that the Soviet experiment was bound to fail because there was no successful organization and Stalin was spending money 'like an inebriated sailor.' The article revolved around criticizing the Soviet government and its industrialization drive for its massive waste of time and resources. The author claimed: "I saw nothing to presage their miraculous delivery from the dilemma with which the Marxian fallacy besets them."²² Although the article reads like an editorial with little to substantiate any of the negative claims against the Soviet government, it also states plainly that the Soviet Union was a disaster. At times, Duranty also felt the need to acknowledge the shortcomings of Soviet industrialization. This was evident in a 2 June 1931 article that focused on an American engineer's contribution to Soviet industrialization. According to Duranty: "Despite

²¹ Walter Duranty, "Million 'removed' to Exile by Soviet," *New York Times*, 2 March 1933.

²² "Sees Soviet's Doom in Stalin's Waste," *New York Times*, 18 August 1931.

marked success in certain phases of the construction of Magnitogorsk and strenuous efforts by the workers under difficult conditions, there is a grave lack of coordination and rational utilization of labor and materials which has caused anxiety lest the plant fail to achieve its estimated production.”²³

On a regular basis the British newspaper, *The Times* carried articles detailing the latest events in the Soviet Union. Many of these articles were apolitical on the surface and simply discussed what was happening: major events that took place, or the party line coming out of Moscow. While the authors of these articles usually did not explicitly criticize the Soviet Union, or the industrialization drive, the newspaper often chose stories highlighting the shortcomings of Soviet industrialization.

For instance, a 14 February 1929 article covered the Congress of the Russian Trade Unions that had been held the previous December. The congress discussed the issue of undemocratic work practices and the dire situation in housing and food supplies. While covering the meeting, *The Times* made sure to point out the poor working and housing conditions. The newspaper read “Housing conditions continue [to be] very bad ... The textile workers, the miners...complained of intolerable housing conditions. It was not uncommon for two working-class families to be compelled to live in a single room, or for one bed to serve by turns for three workers... The lack of hygiene, the dilapidation of houses, the defective quality of the new buildings, were all pointed out by members of the congress.”²⁴ *The Times* gave no apologetic interpretation of these shortcomings, but instead just used the opportunity to show readers the hardships in the Soviet Union.

²³ Walter Duranty, “American to Build 90 Soviet Steel Plants; Blame for Accidents Is Waived For Him,” *New York Times*, 2 June 1931.

²⁴ “Labour Conditions in Russia,” *The Times*, 14 February 1929.

A separate article entitled “Failure of Five-Year Plan,” examined a conference held by the Soviet People’s Commissars of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic. The point of this conference was to discuss the progress of the Five-Year plan by mid 1929. Quoting the Chairman Syrtsov, the *Times* article explained how there were already differences between the Plan and reality. Similar to articles that appeared in Soviet newspapers, *The Times* placed the blame on widespread “lack of faith in the Government’s plan.” As rogue groups were not following the central planning commission’s plan, “The financial difficulties would inevitably continue at least until the end of the present Budget year.”²⁵ In style with other articles in *The Times*, the article did not come out and say how poor conditions were in the Soviet Union, but instead had a Soviet official say it for them.

In fact, *The Times* often published its critiques straight from the mouths of Party officials. A 4 December 1930 article examined a report from Moscow claiming that the Ogpu (secret police) was preparing three new trials of technical specialists in Nizhnii Novgorod. The article examined the engineers held responsible for purposefully crippling the power station in Nizhnii Novgorod. The same article examined other trials occurring around the Soviet Union and told of other “plots” (quotation in original) in which eight engineers and professors were on trial.²⁶

A 2 November 1932 article spoke grimly of the First Five-Year Plan specifically. The article claimed, “No important section of the civilian community, not even the privileged ‘shockmen’ and members of the Communist Party, is receiving sufficient food, clothing, or fuel; the harvest of grain and potatoes has failed in part; general distress

²⁵ “Failure of Five-Year Plan,” *The Times*, 9 July 1929.

²⁶ “More Anti-Soviet ‘Plots’: Further Trials Ordered,” *The Times*, 4 December 1930.

throughout the Soviet Union and famine in some regions are inevitable during the winter and next spring.”²⁷ The article listed the disastrous results of the Five-Year Plan and claimed “The breakdown of transport is largely responsible for the failure of supplies to factories and towns. The government has attempted this year to abandon the centralized ration system of distributing food among the masses and to replace it by a ‘self-supply’ system. Every factory was ordered in the early summer to breed rabbits, poultry, and pigs on a large scale and to organize the systematic fishing of streams and ponds in its neighborhood in order to augment the waning supplies of food.”²⁸ Whereas many American newspapers expressed optimism, *The Times* focused on the struggles that seemed to represent the realities of the Soviet program.

Even in articles where there was a sliver of sympathy for the Soviet state, *The Times* made sure to embrace the negative side of industrialization. A 21 January 1932 article entitled “Moscow after a Year” summarized the improvements made to the capital. “The visitor of November 7, 1930 who returned for the same fete in 1931, was first struck by the new paving in Moscow. In 1930, save inside the Kremlin and on the Red Square, cobblestones altered with deep mud and wide pools all over town; now there are miles of smooth asphalt, achieved, one is told, in a great burst of enthusiasm and record-breaking time by workers vying with one another in day and night shifts according to ‘shock brigade’ methods.”²⁹ The author of the article also added sections on the failings of the Five-Year Plan. “I found the question of lodging and transportation more acute than a

²⁷ “Setbacks to Five Years Plan,” *The Times*, 2 November 1932.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ “Moscow After a Year: I. Changes in the Fantasy,” *The Times*, 21 January 1932.

year before. Rooms which held four people now hold eight; families which had three rooms now have one.”³⁰

These *Times* articles created a negative image of the Soviet Union. British readers consistently read about the idea of housing shortages, show trials, and disorganization. Whereas the Soviet press acknowledged shortcomings in industrialization, there was always the overriding theme that progress was being made, and the hardships would prove worthwhile in the long run.

The Western media and the images it constructed were known to the Soviet leadership, in particular Joseph Stalin. At a meeting of the Joint Plenum of the Central Committee and Central Control Commission of the C.P.S.U. on January 1933, Stalin examined how the West was writing about the Soviet Union and industrialization. In it, Stalin summarized the various schools of Western thought on the Five-Year Plan. Some Western reporters and newspapers published articles that focused only on the negative aspects of industrialization. Others acknowledged the achievements of the Soviet people and gave credit to the successes of the Five-Year Plan. According to Stalin, though, whether reports were positive or negative, they all signaled the impending end of capitalist economics.

At first the bourgeoisie and its press greeted the Five-Year Plan with ridicule. “Fantasy,” “delirium,” “utopia” – that is how they dubbed our Five-Year Plan at that time. Later on, when it began to be evident that the fulfilment of the Five-Year Plan was producing real results, they began to sound the alarm, asserting that the Five-Year Plan was threatening the existence of the capitalistic countries, that its fulfilment would lead to the flooding of European markets... and to the increase of unemployment.³¹

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ J. V. Stalin, *Problems of Leninism* (Foreign Languages Press, Peking, 1976), 580.

Stalin's assessment had a basis in reality. One example was a 19 October 1932 piece in *The Times* in which Canadian officials complained about Russian cereals and timber being imported in the UK instead of Canadian goods. According to the article, Russian goods were so cheap that Western companies could not compete and asked the government to place tariffs on Russian goods to protect them from Russian dumping.³²

Stalin also spoke about individual newspaper articles in the West that stuck out as being critical of the Soviet Union. According to Stalin "here is the opinion of a British bourgeois newspaper, *The Daily Telegraph*, expressed at the end of November 1932: 'As a practical test of 'planned economics' the scheme has quite clearly failed.'" Stalin continued "The opinion of a British bourgeois newspaper, *The Financial Times*, in November 1932: Stalin and his party, as the outcome of their policy, find themselves faced with the breakdown of the Five-Year Plan system and frustration of the aims it was expected to achieve.'" ³³

As always, Stalin had an answer to this negativity: "Such are the opinions of one section of the bourgeois press. It is hardly worth while criticizing those who gave utterance to these opinions... It is not worth while because these 'die-hards' belong to the species of mediaeval fossils to whom facts mean nothing, and who will persist in their opinion no matter how our Five-Year Plan is fulfilled." ³⁴

Stalin was then proud to point out the numerous newspapers that wrote positive reviews of the Soviet industrialization project. *Le Temps*, a French publication, stated "The U.S.S.R. has won the first round, having industrialized herself without the aid of

³² "Russian Dumping: Security for Dominion Producers," *The Times*, 19 October 1932.

³³ Stalin, *Problems of Leninism*, 581.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 582-83.

foreign capital.” Stalin also quoted a section of the American journal *The Nation*, which expressed in 1932: “The four years of the Five-Year plan have witnessed truly remarkable developments... Russia is becoming ‘machine-minded,’ Russia is passing quickly from the age of wood into an age of iron, steel, concrete and motors.”³⁵ Stalin continued by quoting a British magazine *The Round Table*:

The Development achieved under the Five-Year plan is astounding. The tractor plants of Kharkov and Stalingrad, the AMO automobile factory in Moscow, the automobile plant in Nizhni-Novgorod, the Dnieprostroi hydro-electric project, the mammoth steel plants at Magnitogorsk and Kuznetsk, the network of machine shops and chemical plants in the Urals- which bid fair to become Russia’s Ruhr- these and other industrial achievements all over the country show that, whatever the shortcomings and difficulties, Russian industry, like a well-watered plant, keeps on gaining colour, size and strength... She had laid the foundations for the future developments...³⁶

Stalin found interest in a wide variety of Western publications; these publications show the vast spectrum of image construction that was going on in the West. Many articles looked at the Soviet Union with skepticism, but believed the Soviet State was making progress towards industrialization, modernization, and possibly building a better society. Other newspapers thought the Soviet state was a mess, cruel to its inhabitants, and was nothing but a totalitarian regime.

³⁵ Ibid., 583.

³⁶ Ibid., 582.

Chapter Three

Living Socialism

The Soviet press, American press, and British press all presented the industrialization of the Soviet Union in their own way. This included a mixture of success stories, hardships, suffering and production accomplishments. The individuals who worked in the industrial cities of Magnitogorsk or Nizhnii Novgorod give insight into the feelings among inhabitants in emerging industrial cities. Workers appeared to present two basic versions of the development of industrialization in the model cities. Some held a positive outlook on industrialization. Many of these individuals tolerated hard working and living conditions in the hope of building a better society for themselves and their family. Others were more critical and more pessimistic. Living conditions in the Soviet Union were awful; everyday consumer goods were near nonexistent. These individuals had no ideological love for the Soviet Union or communism. No amount of Soviet or American propaganda was going to change the minds of these individuals. This chapter gives voice to individuals so they themselves can tell the story of industrialization.

With the inauguration of the First Five-Year Plan Magnitogorsk and Nizhnii Novgorod both experienced a rapid influx of workers. Whereas Gosplan might have established housing and consumer services before inhabitants arrived, attention and resources were directed towards the manufacturing base, while workers often had to make do with what they could gather. A later *Pravda* correspondent described the Soviet government's thoughts when it came to city planning while discussing the development of a new Siberian oil town in 1969.

“The main thing is production. Everything else is a subsidiary. Normal living conditions can be created while oil is being drilled. In time, the contrast between production and the quality of life will be eliminated and everything will be put right.”¹ The parallels with the construction of Magnitogorsk, Nizhnii Novgorod, and other emerging Soviet cities in the 1930s were obvious.

In the early days of construction at Magnitogorsk, the housing settlements grew close to the factory, rather than in the linear city model that Soviet planners had envisioned. The linear city model focused on a short commute from home to work, but led to the problem of workers being engulfed by pollutants. To counter this, planners developed a plan in which a central strip of housing would be aligned parallel to a strip of factories. The two would be separated by a greenbelt that would keep the noise and pollution of the factory separate from the housing. Quickly though, the city became overpopulated, and the planned city ran into problems. Funding for housing was never adequate either as the Soviet government poured the needed resources and funding into the steel plant before establishing living quarters.²

Early in the industrialization process, housing consisted of poorly constructed huts, tents and low quality buildings. Because of this, it is of little surprise that workers' discontent ran high. The linear city disappeared. A personal letter by a young Leningrad worker who arrived in Magnitogorsk in June 1931 told of the struggles of arriving in the city.

¹ Peter Wilsher and Rosemary Righter, *The Exploding Cities* (New York: Quadrangle/New York Times Book Co., 1975) 199-200.

² Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997) 114.

Hello, Uncle Fedia. Greetings from Magnitogorsk... They did a poor job of meeting us at Magnitogorsk. We sat and waited a very long time for the bus to take us to the place we were going... [they] Brought us to open country and left us. They showed us a tent in which there was nothing except the tent itself. The first night we slept on the bare ground, for the second they made sawhorses and paneling for us. We slept on the bare boards. The third day they sort of knocked together a floor in the tent for us out of boards. They handed us blankets and empty mattress cases, gave us straw, and we stuffed the mattresses. So began our camp life.³

With such a negative introduction to the city, it is little wonder he wanted to leave Magnitogorsk and return to his home city of Leningrad.

We're waiting until 15 June, and no matter what I'm coming back to Leningrad. So we've fallen into a trap. No matter how hard you try, you can't find a way out. Right now we're building temporary housing. But, you can understand yourself what sort of carpenters we are. But otherwise there's no work. A large number of workers leave to go back to where they came from every day, but it's very hard to get out of here. They won't let you out for anything, but no matter what I'm coming back since life here is impossible: first of all, there's no work by trade, they don't give you overalls, the chow is awful, we're living in tents, and the weather is cold and rainy all the time. The tents always leak and after a rain everything is soggy. Strong cold winds come down from the mountains so it's very cold to live in the tents, we're freezing, and the bosses don't give a damn.⁴

The letter's author also sarcastically commented on how the Soviet Government was creating an image of workers completing heroic, revolutionary work. This worker did not seem to believe the hype:

Now when we were being sent off, we heard pretty, sweet words. You're going, they said, to a shock construction project. They're waiting for you. The project (installation of machinery) can't proceed without you, they said. But in fact this is what is actually the case: we are not needed at all since there are many workers here and we're putting up temporary housing.⁵

This worker expressed no love for the Soviet Union's industrial drive and certainly did not feel that the Soviet Union was progressing to a better society. All he

³ Lewis Siegelbaum and Andrei Sokolov, *Stalinism as a Way of Life*. Abridged ed. (New Haven, CT.: Yale University Press, 2004) 33.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

wanted to do was go home, whether the government officials would give him permission to go or not. This was more common a problem than Soviet leaders would have liked to acknowledge, and certainly not coincident to the image of the enthusiastic young builder of a socialist society promulgated by *Pravda* or George Bryant.

A Soviet worker who toiled at the Samoilov factory gave a similar critical account suggesting that the Soviet worker was in a state of despair. “What is there to say about the successes of Soviet power. It's lies. The newspapers cover up the real state of things. I am a worker, wear torn clothes, my four children go to school half-starving, in rage. I, an honest worker, am a visible example of what Soviet power has given the workers in the last twenty years.”⁶ This Soviet worker certainly had no devotion to the furthering of communism.

Along with rapid industrialization, mass urbanization occurred. In Magnitogorsk and Nizhnii Novgorod, the population exploded in just a few short years. Chauncy Harris, an early historian of the Soviet Union, studied the urbanization of Russian cities in the mid twentieth century. Harris was shocked at the rapid population increase. In just a few short years, by 1939, Nizhnii Novgorod had accumulated a population of 644,116 people up from 150,000 some eleven years earlier.⁷ Although this figure accounted for both old Nizhnii Novgorod and the new industrial city practically down the road, it was a huge increase in population. Harris, using the same 1939 census data, was equally shocked when Magnitogorsk, which had practically no population to speak of at the turn of the

⁶ Sarah Davies, *Popular Opinion in Stalin's Russia: Terror, Propaganda, and Dissent, 1934-1941* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 135.

⁷ Chauncy D. Harris, “The Cities of the Soviet Union,” *Geographical Review* 35, no. 1 (January, 1945): 119.

nineteenth century, had a population of 145,870 by 1939.⁸ With such a rapid concentration of people, it is unsurprising residents would be distraught over the poor sanitary and housing conditions.

An American who travelled to the Soviet Union in 1928 to help build Nizhnii Novgorod was no more impressed than the worker who just wanted to head back to Leningrad. David Kempler, an engineer for the Austin Company, was not shy about his displeasure with the Soviet Union. In giving an interview several years after his trip, Kempler spoke critically of his experiences and complained about pretty much his entire experience. Whereas private letters allow spontaneous private communication between one person and another, an interview is a much more orchestrated endeavor. As Kempler's interview was conducted years after his work in the Soviet Union, he had ample opportunity to mold and create a narrative of his experience. This does not take away from Kempler's insight, but the time between the event and telling of the story should be taken into consideration. As with any oral history, Kempler's story was possibly molded by the events of his life since returning from the Soviet Union. Nonetheless, his story is an interesting and telling one into life in the Soviet Union.

When interviewed Kempler gave insight into many aspects of the city, ranging from the working conditions, living conditions, and his perception of the Soviet citizens' vision of industrialization. Kempler described arriving at Nizhnii Novgorod in 1928 by train: "it was an overnight trip, their facilities – that's not the proper word to use but I'll use it – on these trains, it was very primitive, we were in the soft car, which is the wagon with the cook car... then you go from that to the hard car, which is where you have the

⁸ Ibid.

four occupants to a room. Then you go from there to the cattle car...which has benches along both walls and of the floor. That's it. The smell is awful! You've got one toilet to each car and you couldn't stand the odor"⁹ The start of his voyage was not one of pleasure, and his dissatisfaction grew.

Kempler seemed discontent with anything Soviet. He claimed "one more thing I think that's important to me and would be interesting to you, is the minute you get one foot into Russia, the air changes. It is typically Russian, and I don't care what anybody says... there is definitely an odor of change in the atmosphere caused by unwashed bodies, excrement. There's no sanitation whatsoever. It smelled like nothing that you ever smelled before."¹⁰

As a Western engineer, Kempler and his co-workers from the Allan Company had a higher standard of living than average Soviet citizens. For instance, shortly after arriving in Nizhnii Novgorod, the group indulged in fine food that was unfathomable to the average Soviet citizen. On arrival they were treated to duck and goose, "which was brought to them on a great big platter with the head and neck and everything."¹¹ In a country where the typical diet consisted of black bread, this was a feast. Regardless, Kemper was dissatisfied and never bought the idea of Soviet progress.

Even with enhanced luxuries, Kempler explained he came across many individuals from other Western companies that "just could not take" being in the Soviet Union any longer. He told how Westerners really "lived like kings" but yet, whole divisions of companies were trying to leave the country. Even though they had agreed to

⁹ David Kempler, interview by Martin Greif, tape recording 8 November 1976, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, Oh.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

a contract that stipulated they would stay in the country for one year, they “waived it to get the hell out.”¹² Even with their ‘privileges,’ life was difficult in the emerging industrial cities. It is interesting that others involved with the Austin Company – George Bryant, Harry Miter, Allan Austin – all returned from the Soviet Union with positive tales of their experience. It appears these individuals bought into the image the Soviet government created, while Kempler never did.

David Kempler’s interview also provided perspective on how the Russian people viewed the industrialization process. Kempler gave insight into this when the interviewer asked “Didn’t they have any interest in the time?” Kempler’s response was telling. “In a way, yes... the top echelon would probably be interested in time. But the people on the job – no. All they had to do was get up in the morning, work, try to find enough to eat and a place to sleep – that’s it. That was all they were interested in. They didn’t care about the time.”¹³ Kempler did give a strange reasoning for this: “They were the most exasperating people in the world. They had no experience. After all, they were Communists and they had been fighting the terrible system for all these years.”¹⁴

Kempler did speak of one group he witnessed that clearly bought into the need for rapid industrialization. This was a group of Americans who, upon reaching Leningrad, threw their passports overboard and went to Nizhnii Novgorod as a group. “They were given an apartment house for their group, and they improved on it. They marched to work and they marched back from work – typical Russian style, typical Communist.”¹⁵ He continued by telling a story about when this group of workers invented, designed, and

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

constructed a crane-like contraption that enabled quicker unloading of gravel from cargo ships, thus cutting labor time down significantly. Even if these people did not exist, visitors to the Soviet Union had the impression certain people felt strongly about progressing socialism.

Although these negative accounts were expected and understandable, there are many stories and firsthand accounts of inhabitants diligently building the Soviet Union. These accounts came from both Westerners working in the country, as well as from Soviet citizens. These accounts give insight into the mood many people shared: that the Soviet Union was progressing in its drive to build an industrial socialist society.

A Russian firsthand account of Magnitogorsk comes from Valentin Kataev, the Soviet novelist who first traveled to Magnitogorsk during the early stages of the Five-Year Plan. Although he wrote his account in 1966, he recalled his first visit to Magnitogorsk in 1931. Kataev told about how he had never forgotten the visit. As Kataev put it “To people of my generation this city is as unforgettable as one’s first love.”¹⁶ It was not only because it was the most majestic project he had ever seen, but “what impressed me was the plan, bold to the point of daring, to build a giant metallurgical complex deep in the wild and barren Ural steppe lands.”¹⁷ To Kataev this was the period of construction records, when workers worked with inspiration to turn their backward agrarian country into an industrial power.

Kataev enjoyed retelling a story of a friend whom he met on his trip in 1931. This friend, Yakov Frolov, had visited Magnitogorsk, enjoyed it, and stayed there ever since.

¹⁶ Thomas Riha, ed., *Readings in Russian Civilization: Vol. III, Soviet Russia, 1917-1963*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1969), 585.

¹⁷ Ibid.

Frolov lived with his wife and child in a barrack hostel. In their hostel there were forty narrow iron cots divided by half a meter of space. In the center stood an unpolished wooden table, a bench and several stools, and in the corner a wooden water barrel. Frolov claimed all the inhabitants of Magnitogorsk lived in such barracks and conditions. While thinking back on those early days, Frolov told how he missed those years when construction had just started. “It was a grand feeling to be building a city with your own hands....”¹⁸ Even though the workers faced great hardships, and had little space of their own, workers like Frolov thought they were working for a greater good.

Another positive Russian account comes from Masha Scott, the wife of John Scott, who authored *Behind the Urals*. Masha Scott had moved to Magnitogorsk to “take part in our new industry.”¹⁹ While being interviewed by Pearl Buck in 1945, Scott began to cry with joy at the remembrance of her first time in Magnitogorsk.²⁰ She explained “I cannot tell you how beautiful was Magnitogorsk to me” and continued “It was new... The air on the steppe is wonderful, it makes you strong and ready to laugh. You eat so well, and you are glad to be living.”²¹ Scott explained that when she first moved to Magnitogorsk she lived with her sister and her sister’s husband in one-small room. All they had was one closet for their clothes, a sofa, one bed, and two windows, but Scott thought it was great. She praised Magnitogorsk as there was always food, healthcare and paid vacations from work.²²

¹⁸ Riha, ed., *Readings in Russian Civilization*, 586-587.

¹⁹ Pearl S. Buck, *Talk about Russia with Masha Scott* (New York: The John Day Co, 1945), 87.

²⁰ Unfortunately Masha does not include at what age she first went to Magnitogorsk. She says "I saw shapes of great buildings, houses, factories, and even the flame of the blast furnace." The first blast furnace was 'blown in' on 7 June, 1932.

²¹ Buck, *Talk about Russia with Masha Scott*, 92.

²² *Ibid.*

Scott did not dwell on the hardships of Magnitogorsk found in newspaper accounts from the period. In fact, her account and admiration for the city was often more positive than any account *Pravda* or *The New York Times* had to offer. There seem to have been reasons to explain this. Mainly, she felt she was contributing to building a new socialist city that would be better than anything Tsarist Russia ever had to offer. Scott claimed, “A planned city... colleges, schools, factories, theaters, apartment houses – all were planned together. The streets were wide. There were no trees at first, but when I got there, small trees were already planted and the big city park was planned. I remember how under my own eyes the big park grew up and became beautiful, with green trees on both sides of the roadways, and benches to sit upon and enjoy.” She continued “Oh, everything was planned in this new city – nurseries where the children of workers could stay, and trees everywhere, and the houses all to face the sun, and not too near together.”²³ Even though she had to live in a single room with her sister's husband, Scott seemed content working towards the larger goal of building a new country.

Although it is easy to question why workers like Scott were content working and living in such primitive conditions, many Soviet citizens seemed content being part of building a new country. Scott admitted that at an early age, there were problems while growing up in her village. When asked “Were you often hungry...?” she answered “Often I was. So were we all in our village. There was usually not enough bread by the time before harvest, but we were still better than most.”²⁴ Later, when Masha Scott was older, the Bolsheviks took power through the Revolution. During that period, her family built a new house, which had eight rooms, a big kitchen, two large living rooms, and five

²³ Buck, *Talk about Russia with Masha Scott*, 95.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 15.

bedrooms.²⁵ This is relevant because it shows that the Russian Revolution had made Scott's life comfortable. She did not move to Magnitogorsk to escape a hopeless life, but instead was drawn to the excitement of furthering industrialization.

Another Soviet citizen shared similar sentiment to Masha Scott. This unnamed citizen lived in Moscow and sent a letter to *Pravda* detailing his experience in Magnitogorsk in 1931. "What is Magnitostroi? It is a grandiose factory for remaking people. Yesterday's peasant... becomes a genuine proletarian ... fighting for the quickest possible completion of the laying of socialism's foundation. You are an unfortunate person, my dear reader, if you have not been to Magnitostroi. I feel sorry for you."²⁶

As this account appeared before the end of 1931, it is interesting that he viewed the city in such a positive light, as the city was just in its infancy.²⁷ To the author Magnitogorsk was more than a city designed to build steel. It was the location where socialism was being built. Unfortunately, as we do not know who the author was, their enthusiasm could be explained in a dismissive manner. The author simply may have been trying to convince people to travel to Magnitogorsk to work by telling them that it was something special – and they should be a part of it. This was not unheard of in the early 1930s.

Another positive account from a Soviet citizen comes from Gubaiduli, an electrician at the Magnitogorsk blast furnace. In 1936 Gubaiduli sent a letter to the *Magnitogorskii rabochii*, Magnitogorsk's main newspaper, in celebration of the new

²⁵ Ibid., 65.

²⁶ R. Roman, *Krokodil V Magnitostroe* (Moscow, 1931), Quoted in William G Rosenberg and Lewis H Siegelbaum, eds., *Social Dimensions of Soviet Industrialization* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 63.

²⁷ The author does not give a date of when they were in Magnitogorsk. However, the article was published in 1931.

constitution Stalin had put in place. This worker expressed his gratitude for the Soviet Union and the opportunities it had given him from the First Five-Year Plan. Gudaiduli believed passionately that the Soviet Union was progressing towards a better society.

I am a Tatar. Before October, in old Tsarist Russia, we weren't even considered people. We couldn't even dream about education, or getting a job in a state enterprise. And now I'm a citizen of the USSR. Like all citizens, I have the right to a job, to education... In 1931 I came to Magnitogorsk. From a common laborer I have turned into a skilled worker... I live in a country where one feels like living and learning....²⁸

To this worker the industrialization of the Soviet Union had achieved a new society, a society better than the one it overthrew. This is assuming this worker was actually a worker and that this was not a fabricated story. According to Stephen Kotkin, who examined Magnitogorsk in detail, "even if such a clear... expression of the official viewpoint was not written entirely by Gubaiduli himself...what is important is that Gubaiduli 'played the game,' whether out of self-interest, or fear, or both."²⁹

In *Magnetic Mountain*, Kotkin argued that letters like this were not written haphazardly. He believed that "every worker soon learned, just as it was necessary for party members to show vigilance and 'activism' in party affairs, it was necessary for workers, whether party members or not, to show activism in politics and production."³⁰ This seems to be an accurate assessment of why some workers felt the way they did. But this explanation cannot hold true for all workers, and certainly not for accounts given later in life, such as Masha Scott or Valentine Kataev.

²⁸ *Magnitogorskii rabochii* (28 July 1936), quoted in Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 221-222.

²⁹ Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*, 222.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

Beyond these accounts from Soviet citizens, there are many positive accounts from Westerners who travelled to the Soviet Union. Whereas Russian citizens had been exposed to daily propaganda and the general patriotism that went along with being a Soviet citizen, Western workers theoretically based their views on the Soviet Union from their experiences.

One of the main firsthand accounts of Magnitogorsk comes from John Scott. In 1931 Scott decided to travel to the Soviet Union. America was in the Great Depression, and Scott was hopeful he would find something better in the Soviet Union. In America, plants were closing; millions of people were out of work. By contrast, in the Soviet Union hundreds of new plants were under construction, unemployment had disappeared, and there was even an acute labor shortage. Many people felt that something was deeply wrong with the United States, and that something important was taking place in the USSR; Scott wanted to see it for himself.³¹

Scott gave testimony not only about how he felt about industrialization, but also an account of everyday happenings. On the issue of housing, Scott was no better off than the average Soviet citizen, meaning he lived in discomfort. He described his living quarters as a "low wooden structure whose double walls were lined with straw. The tarpaper roof leaked in spring."³² In his section of the barracks, there were thirty rooms, which were each about the same size and quality. The inhabitants each had made a little brick or iron stove so the rooms could be kept warm. Scott described his room as being about six feet by ten feet and having one small window, which had to be plastered over

³¹ Steven Kotkin, introduction to *Behind the Urals: American worker in Russia's City of Steel*, by John Scott (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), XII

³² Scott, *Behind the Urals.*, 39.

with newspaper to keep the cold out. There was a small table, a little brick stove, and one three-legged stool. There were two iron bedsteads that were rickety and narrow and had no springs, just thin planks put across an iron frame.³³ This is hardly the living quarters one would expect in a socialist city, but Scott seemed content.

Even though Scott wrote about the hardships of Magnitogorsk, he still held a positive image of the time period. He wrote how workers were given “vacations and maternity vacations with pay, old age pensions” and “they were studying, and had opportunities to apply what they learned to the benefit for both themselves and of society as soon as they graduated, or before.”³⁴ Although there were hardships in Magnitogorsk, and he went into great detail listing them, Scott believed people were working towards a larger goal, that of building socialism.³⁵ Scott witnessed hardships around him, but justified these as a part of the massive undertaking by the Soviet people to construct a better future.

Sidney and Beatrice Webb, founders of the Fabian Society in Britain, visited numerous cities including Magnitogorsk and wrote about their travels in *Soviet Communism: A New Civilization*.³⁶ Similar to Walter Duranty, these authors were known for their less than realistic accounts from the Soviet Union. The Webbs were both ardent Labour politicians in Britain, and believed the Soviet Union would offer workers a better life than in the West. The two of them were sympathetic to the communist government, and ignored many of the hardships in the Soviet Union.

³³ Scott, *Behind the Urals.*, 40.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 206.

³⁵ Throughout much of Scott’s book he talked about the poor living, the shortage of food, the shortage of adequate housing, the purges, and the corruption.

³⁶ Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *Soviet Communism: A New Civilization? Volume II* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1936).

The Webbs visited the Soviet Union in 1932 as they were interested in the new emerging society. They were impressed with the direction of Soviet city planning. They said "it is hard to believe that deliberate planning is not better than leaving everything to haphazard individual decision when the moment arrives"³⁷ Although they were enthusiastic about Magnitogorsk, and its central planning, they did acknowledge the city had problems. The authors' biggest concerns were with building conditions that were far behind Europe's in regard to quality. However, they justified this by saying it was going to take time for the USSR to catch up. In addition, the problems the cities had were minimal because they could be fixed at a later date. An unplanned city would have to demolish much of the city if it wanted to fix itself; the new planned city would only have to fix small sections, say, a leaky roof, or poor plumbing. In the Webbs' opinion, the Soviet Union was creating a new and wonderful society through industrialization.

The American journalist William Henry Chamberlin covered affairs in the Soviet Union throughout the industrialization period. Chamberlin quickly become acquainted with many of the Soviets' achievements and failures, and witnessed the hardships citizens faced in the Ural region. While exploring the Urals, Chamberlin was awed by the pace of construction. He claimed "within the boundaries of the Ural region one can find, in various stages of construction, Russia's largest steel plant, its largest chemical factory, its largest machine-building works, its largest copper smelter, and its largest heavy-tractor plant."³⁸ Chamberlin was amazed at the rapid pace at which whole cities, unmarked on maps published just a few years before, had grown into industrial giants.

³⁷ Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *Soviet Communism*, 933.

³⁸ William Henry Chamberlin, *Russia's Iron Age* (Boston: Little, Brown, And Company, 1934), 47.

One of the most informative and expansive insights into life in Nizhnii Novgorod came from Allan Austin. Austin was the youngest of the twenty American engineers from the Austin Company who were involved in the construction of Nizhnii Novgorod. While working in the city, Austin and his wife wrote an extensive collection of letters which they sent home to Austin's father, Wilbert J. Austin. Wilbert Austin kept these letters, and after his death they became available for public consumption. These letters give insight into life in the Soviet Union in the 1930s. According to Richard Cartwright Austin, who used these letters in his own monograph, "The letters from a young engineer to his father tell the personal side of the story and offer striking insights into a revolutionary society. They bring this page of history to life."³⁹

Throughout the investigation of individual accounts, the reader must always take into consideration the interior motives of those writing the articles or giving their firsthand accounts. It is difficult to judge why one person reacted to the Soviet Union one way while someone in a similar position reacted another. After arriving in Berlin, Germany, while waiting to move to Nizhnii Novgorod, Allan Austin shared his feelings. "The entire group is in good spirits. We are 'going in' feeling well and confident and with a strong sense of Austin spirit and ability. This opportunity to serve the Russian people is a privilege of which we hope to take full advantage."⁴⁰

While in Nizhnii Novgorod, Austin often discussed everyday life, giving insight into the harsh realities of industrialization. In a May 18, 1930 letter, Austin explained

³⁹ Richard Cartwright Austin, *Building Utopia: Erecting Russia's First Modern City, 1930* (Kent: Kent State University Press, 2004), IX. For an extensive examination of these letters, the reader should consult *Building Utopia: Erecting Russia's First Modern City* by Austin Cartwright.

⁴⁰ Allan Austin, unpublished letter, 16 April 1930, quoted in Richard Cartwright Austin, *Building Utopia: Erecting Russia's First Modern City, 1930* (Kent, Oh: Kent State University Press, 2004), 31.

“One of our most difficult problems here is getting the kind of variety of food we need. For us there is no actual shortage of food, but the choice is quite limited and the prices are high. Few fresh vegetables yet, for the spring is so late. Poor meat: I got a live chicken yesterday; they are hard to buy... peasants do not raise chickens for eating... The bread is rather poor, even the best, and the black bread is uneatable...” Austin continued, “It is really too early to try to pass any kind of judgment of the Russians and their new social structure. It is quite apparent, as I presumed before I came, that in many places there are wide discrepancies between theory and practice. These discrepancies are not always apparent on the surface, but as we get better acquainted, especially with non-official people, we are able to hear more of the actual conditions and workings of the Soviets.”⁴¹

Although Austin was not overly critical of the Soviet state, he seemed content doing his job and going home. When Austin recalled his experience years after his time in the Soviet Union, he explained how working in Russia had helped his family survive. Allan claimed “When I came home from the job, we found that we were really in a very deep depression. So, it carried some of us through the better part of a year... spared us the first year or so of the depression.”⁴² Shortly after returning to the United States, Austin wrote a series of short newspaper articles that he proudly proclaimed paid him a hundred dollars each, a significant sum in depression era America.

Allan Austin gave further insight on his feelings in an unpublished pamphlet titled *Socialism's Model City*, authored early in his stay at Nizhnii Novgorod. In this pamphlet,

⁴¹ Allan Austin, unpublished letter, 18 May 1930, quoted in Richard Cartwright Austin, *Building Utopia: Erecting Russia's First Modern City, 1930* (Kent: Kent State University Press, 2004), 41.

⁴² Allan S. Austin, interview by Martin Greif, tape recording 8 November 1976, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, Oh.

Austin listed the amenities the city was to have, the general design, and most significantly, the city's significance to the Soviet Union. Austin spoke about the configuration of the city, which was designed to reduce congestion, and how ample green space was dedicated for citizens and especially for kids. Austin proudly claimed "no longer the rush to the country on Sunday, nor children growing up in ignorance of flowers, and tadpoles and grasshoppers."⁴³

Austin believed that what was occurring in the Soviet Union was something new, something daring, to build a planned society that was to be for the betterment of all. Throughout his article, he included small reflections on his feelings towards Nizhnii Novgorod. From new construction material that was being invented and installed, to sport clubs throughout the city, Austin was generally impressed with the direction of the country.

Austin concluded with a small paragraph that best exemplified what Nizhnii Novgorod and the Soviet industrialization as a whole meant for socialism, and to the Soviet Union: "Is the game worth the candle? Will their experiment succeed? No prudent person is answering these questions at the present time. But the Socialistic city at Nijni Novgorod is giving to the Soviet government a proving ground for their theories. Here they will fail or succeed. They have not had this chance before."⁴⁴

In retrospect, we now know the planned cities of Nizhnii Novgorod and Magnitogorsk did not form as planned. Factories and housing were indeed built, but at great cost, and nowhere near how the original plan directed. However, this does not take

⁴³ *Socialism's Model City*, unpublished article, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland Oh, Austin Files, "Americans and the industrialization," 4.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

away from the feeling that in the early 1930s, many people truly believed something good was going to come of the Soviet Union; industrialization accompanied by socialist cities were viewed by many as leading to a better future.

Conclusion

When the Russian Revolutions overthrew the Russian Tsar in 1917, Russians witnessed a chain of traumatic events. Over the next ten years, Russia underwent the breaking of the Romanov dynasty, struggles of War Communism, a civil war, and pseudo capitalism in the form of The New Economic Policy. What appeared in 1928 was a country burdened by high unemployment, miserable living conditions and industrial capacity a fraction of what it was prior to World War I. With the inauguration of the First Five-Year Plan in 1928, the Soviet Union underwent even greater turbulent changes. What had been known as a technologically backward nation became one of the leading industrial producers in just a few short years. However, during those few short years the entire population underwent great hardships. Cities arose out of the wilderness, but as workers arrived in these unheard of places, they found poor working and even inferior living conditions.

With the overthrow of the Tsar, Soviet communists found a country ripe for implementing their ideology. Coinciding with the inauguration of the First Five-Year Plan, the Communist Party accelerated its campaign to create an image that industrialization was progressing the country into a modern, self-reliant, socialist world power. The majority of Soviet newspaper articles painted a bright picture. The newspaper exposed the reader to the idea of workers achieving production records in pursuit of modernizing the country, even letters from Soviet leaders congratulating workers for their achievements were a common occurrence. There may have been hardships in the country, but to Soviet leaders it was a small price to pay to industrialize, thus scant attention was

given to the numerous shortcomings citizens endured. When there were articles discussing shortcomings, there was a caveat, someone else was at fault; wreckers, saboteurs, party crooks. Whoever it was, neither the Plan nor the Party was to be blame. The Central Bolshevik Party (predominantly Stalin and whoever he was closest with that year) supposedly knew best how to modernize the country.

The Soviet newspaper *Pravda* was the mouthpiece for the Central Committee of the Communist Party which spread the party's agenda throughout the Soviet Union. While a positive narrative of Soviet progression was often apparent, the newspaper constructed an image using a number of subthemes. These subthemes created the convenient image the Bolshevik Party needed. The idea of Socialist Competition was one such theme. Daily *Pravda* articles exposed its readers to stories of one factory attempting to out-produce a neighboring factory. As the ideology of the Soviet Union theoretically prevented the government from paying skilled workers more, the government needed a way to incentivize workers to achieve enhanced results. Socialist competition grew out of this necessity and pressured one group of workers or even a whole factory to work against another to increase production. The idea of competition was also apparent when it came to gender equality. With the inauguration of the First Five-Year Plan, gender inequality was to be eliminated. The Communist Party needed workers in great abundance, it matter little if these workers were male or female, Soviet leaders expected everyone to contribute. *Pravda* produced stories of female workers achieving heroic production outputs, at times even out performing their male counterparts.

Beyond the Soviet newspaper, the Communist Party used a variety of literary outlets to create an image that the Soviet Union was progressing and achieving its goals.

These outlets included a new form of literature, Socialist Realism, which glorified the workings of common laborers. Stories of workers laboring beyond their anticipated capabilities quickly became common. The Soviet government also published countless works proclaiming the successes of the industrialization effort. Within these printings were stories and images of modern cities offering their residents luxuries unknown before the Bolshevik party came to power. These publications were positive and created an image for the reader that the Soviet Union was well on its way to achieving industrialization and socialism.

In America, many articles appeared with similar positive enthusiasm boasting that the Soviet Union was progressing towards its goals. Of course, there were articles which focused on the hardships of the country; life was difficult in industrial cities, it would have been hard to ignore. Numerous articles pointed to the crude living and working conditions citizens endured. Nonetheless, the Soviet industrialization process was often viewed with positive skepticism. American businessmen upon returning to the United States from the Soviet Union often produced articles in local or national papers. These articles gave insight into life in the Soviet Union and the authors' impressions of the evolving country. Interestingly, these businessmen were often impressed by what they witnessed. Not always impressed by the Soviet government or their economic beliefs, but often impressed by the enthusiastic workers striving to modernize their country. Widely circulated newspapers like the *New York Times* often ran stories from their correspondents stationed in Moscow that created a similar, glowing appraisal of the successes of the First Five-Year Plan. The main author of these articles was Walter Duranty. Duranty often seemed sympathetic to the Soviet regime and often whitewashed

or chose not to cover less positive topics. Many of the articles authored by Duranty created the image the Soviet Union, through its centralized economic system, was quickly and successfully modernizing the country.

The most widely circulated British newspaper, *The Times*, often portrayed the industrialization process critically. Instead of editorial style articles, *The Times* often covered Party meetings held in Moscow which focused on the struggles of Soviet citizens. *The Times* chose to print these stories which painted a bleak picture, focusing on poor living conditions, and the ineffectiveness of the Party to organize construction. Little recognition was ever given to the completed factories or the workers diligently constructing the emerging industrial cities.

When firsthand accounts are evaluated, this study has demonstrated that through the hardships of industrialization many citizens, Americans and Soviets, believed the Soviet Union was progressing towards a better future. This better future was constructed around industrial centers with socialist cities which had the capability of turning a once backward nation into a modern self-reliant world power. This idea is personified in John Scott's own words "Socialism as it functioned in Magnitogorsk displayed numerous shortcomings, as did capitalism as operated in Gastonia, Dunkirk, or Coventry. But Socialism in Magnitogorsk did well enough so that I am convinced that many valuable lessons can be learned from a study of it."¹ Whether it was John Scott, his wife Masha Scott, the Webbs, engineers from the Austin Company or Henry Chamberlin, in the early 1930s, many people felt that the Soviet Union was creating something new, something that would eliminate the ills that appeared rooted in depression era capitalist societies.

¹ John Scott, *Behind the Urals: An American Worker in Russia's City of Steel* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973) 249.

The image of progress that had been constructed in American and Soviet newspapers was often found in workers' firsthand accounts. Many of those who toiled in the construction of the Soviet Union's industrial cities truly felt they were building something new, something better. Obviously, there were many who did not subscribe to the idea that the Soviets were building a socialist society, but their views should not overshadow the quantity of people who during the First Five-Year Plan truly believed that the Soviet Union was progressing towards an industrialized and socialist society.

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