12 Was collectivisation a success?

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Stalin forced through collectivisation at an incredibly rapid pace. This caused chaos in agriculture as well as suffering and misery on a huge scale. At the end of the first wave of collectivisation, he appeared to relent and called a halt. But the next year he restarted the programme with increased vigour. Peasant attempts to resist the process proved futile. By 1932, collectivisation had resulted in an enormous drop in agricultural production and created a famine in which millions died. However, Stalin secured the surplus food he needed to feed the industrial workforce and, to some extent, to pay for industrialisation.

A Why collectivise? (pp. 204–206)

B Why was collectivisation carried out so rapidly? (p. 206–208)

C How was collectivisation carried out? (pp. 209–210)

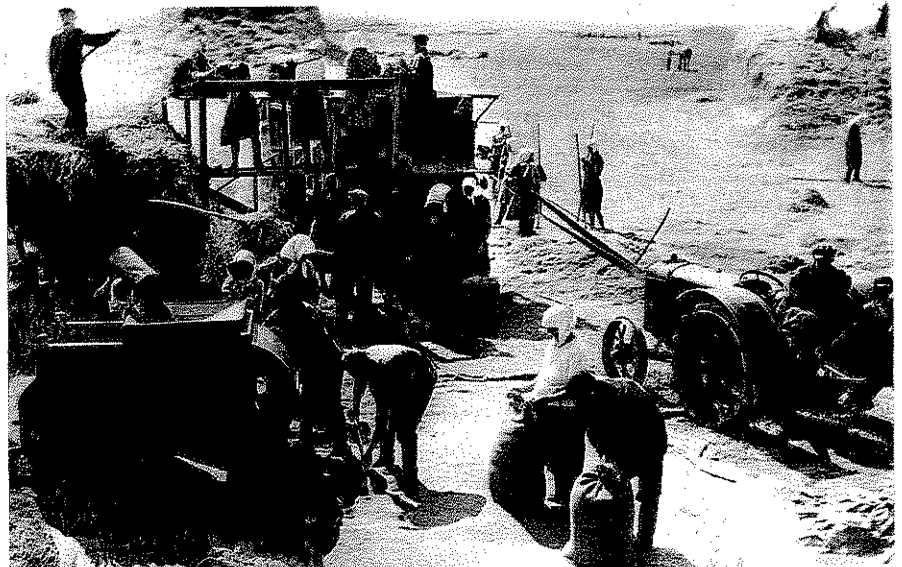
D What impact did collectivisation have on the peasants? (pp. 210–216)

E Was collectivisation a success? (pp. 217–218)

A Why collectivise?

In mid-1929, less than five per cent of peasants were on collective or state farms. In January 1930, Stalin announced that around 25 per cent of the grain-producing areas were to be collectivised by the end of the year. This announcement took even his own officials by surprise. Most party members had assumed that collectivisation would be carried out on a voluntary basis and had not anticipated the speed at which it was going to take place. Some were horrified.

SOURCE 12.1 A mechanised harvester at work. The government promised that collective farms would bring modern agricultural machinery and methods to the peasants



SOURCE 12.2 Babies are settled into an outdoor nursery as their mothers march off to work in the fields of the collective farm

SOURCE 12.3 A literacy class on a collective farm

SOURCE 12.4 The slogan on this poster reads 'Come and join our kolkhoz, comrade!'

ACTIVITY

Examine Sources 12.1–12.4. They are examples of propaganda published to persuade peasants of the advantages of collectivisation. What messages do they contain about why the Communists thought collectivisation was a good thing?

FOCUS ROUTE

Make notes explaining:

a) why the Communists saw collectivisation as the solution to the problems facing Soviet agriculture
b) how a kolkhoz worked and its relationship with the towns and with machine and tractor stations (MTS).

What was a collective farm?

There were three main types of collective farm:

- the toz, where peasants owned their own land but shared machinery and co-operated in activities like sowing and harvesting. This type was more common before 1930
- the sovkhoz, which was owned and run by the state. The peasants who worked on this state farm were paid a regular wage, very much like factory workers
- the kolkhoz, where all the land was held in common and run by an elected committee. To form a kolkhoz, between 50 and 100 households were put together. All land, tools and livestock had to be pooled. Under the direction of the committee, the peasants farmed the land as one unit. However, each household was allowed to keep its own private plot of up to one acre. They could use this to grow vegetables and keep a cow, a pig and fowl.

The original aim of collectivisation was to create more sovkhozes, but the kolkhoz with private plots became the type most favoured by the Communists in the collectivisation process of the 1930s.

Why did the Communists think collectivisation was the solution to the USSR's agricultural problems?

1 Larger units of land could be farmed more efficiently through the use of mechanisation. Tractors and other machinery would be supplied by the state through huge machine and tractor stations (MTS). Experts could help peasants to farm in more modern ways using metal ploughs and fertilisers. The net result would be much higher food production.
2 Mechanised agriculture would require fewer peasants to work the land. This would release labour for the new industries.
3 It would be much easier for the state to procure the grain it needed for the cities and for export. There would be fewer collection points and each farm would have Communist supporters who would know how much had been produced.
4 Collectivisation was the socialist solution for agriculture. You could not build a socialist state when the majority of the population were private landholders who sold their products on the market. Collectivisation would socialise the peasantry. They would live in 'socialist agrotowns': living in apartment blocks instead of wooden huts, leaving their children in crèches, eating in restaurants, and visiting libraries and gymnasiums. They would be bussed out to the fields to work. They would learn to work together co-operatively and to live communally.

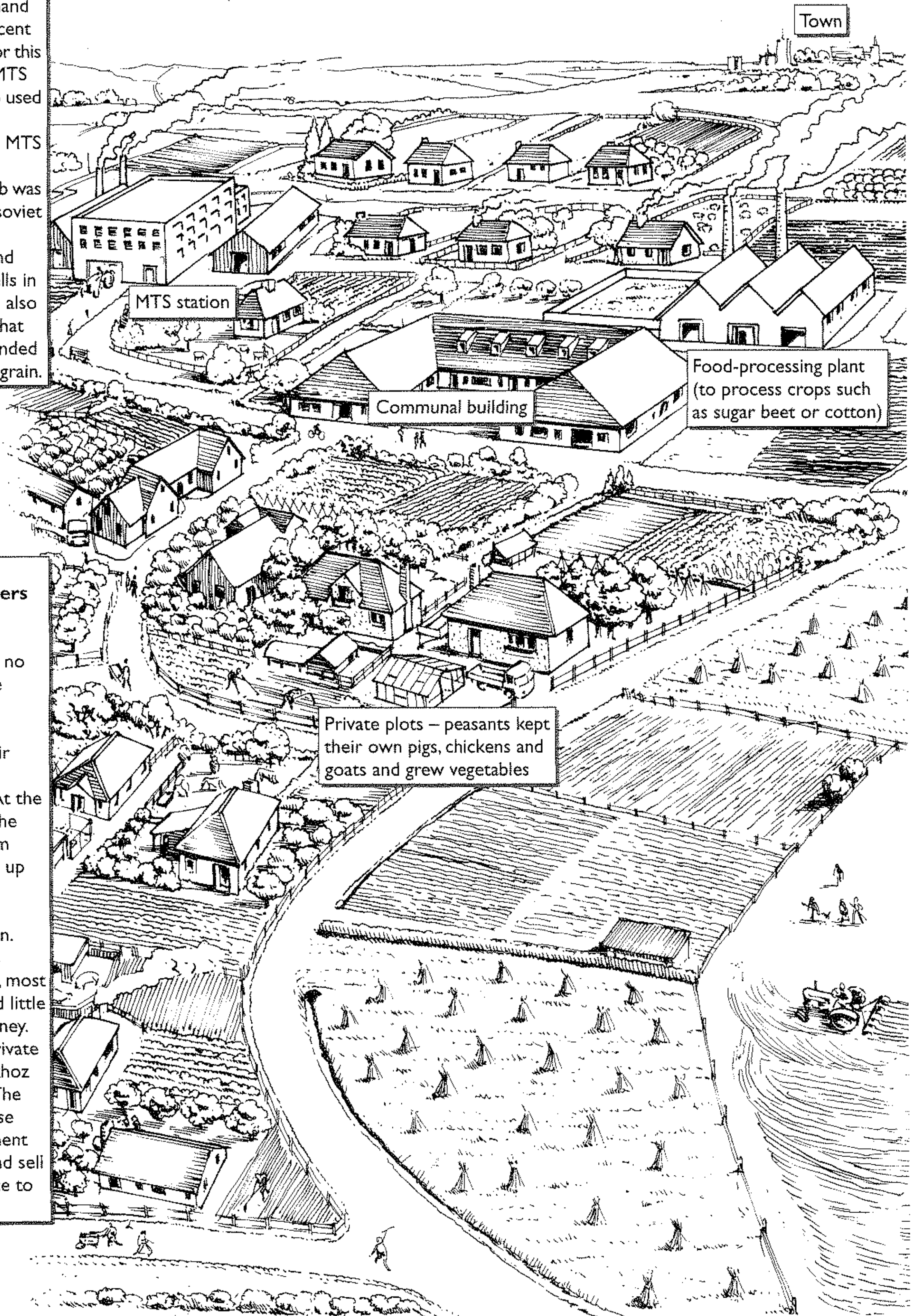
B Why was collectivisation carried out so rapidly?

The answer to this question lies in the grain procurement crisis of 1928–29. We saw on page 200 that Stalin had visited the Urals and sent officials into the countryside to seize grain in 1928. In 1929, even though the harvest was much better, the state was still finding it difficult to get grain out of the peasants. The peasants were resisting the government's policies and were not marketing their food. Matters were so bad that meat as well as bread had to be rationed in the cities. The cities were hungry. Stalin blamed kulaks (rich peasants) for hoarding grain (see Source 12.5). Large numbers were arrested and deported to Siberia.

■ 12A A plan of a collective farm

MTS stations
There were 2500 machine and tractor stations (MTS). Established to support collective farms, they maintained and hired out machinery. Typically, peasants had to hand over twenty per cent of their produce for this service. But the MTS stations were also used to control the countryside. Each MTS had a political department. Its job was to root out anti-soviet elements and troublemakers, and establish party cells in local areas. It was also there to ensure that every kolkhoz handed over its quota of grain.

Relationship of the collective farm to the towns
The first priority of the collective farm was to deliver quotas of grain and other food products to the state. The state paid very low prices, then sold the produce to the towns at slightly higher prices. Once the state quota had been met, peasants could sell any surplus at the local market. This came mostly from the peasants' private plots and was the main source of milk, butter, eggs, etc., for the urban population.



How were collective farmers paid?
Workers on the kolkhoz received no wages. They were credited with 'workdays' in exchange for their labour on the collective fields. At the end of the year, the profits of the farm would be divided up according to the workdays each peasant had put in. Since most farms made little profit, most peasants received little in the way of money. This made the private plots on the kolkhoz very important. The peasants could use these to supplement their own diet and sell any extra produce to the towns.

FOCUS ROUTE

1. How can you explain why Stalin decided to collectivise so rapidly?
2. Why was his policy so actively resisted by Bukharin and the right wing of the party?
3. What other pressures was Stalin under at the time when the decision to collectivise rapidly was taken?
4. Why is it difficult to explain the reasons for Stalin's decision?

SOURCE 12.5 J. V. Stalin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 11, 1955. Visiting Siberia in January 1928, Stalin is reported to have said the following to administrators

You have had a bumper harvest ... Your grain surpluses this year are bigger than ever before. Yet the plan for grain procurement is not being fulfilled. Why? ... Look at the kulak farms: their barns and sheds are crammed with grain ... You say that the kulaks are unwilling to deliver grain, that they are waiting for prices to rise, and prefer to engage in unbridled speculation. That is true. But the kulaks ... are demanding an increase in prices to three times those fixed by the government ...

But there is no guarantee that the kulaks will not again sabotage the grain procurements next year. More, it may be said with certainty that so long as there are kulaks, so long will there be sabotage of grain procurements.

Bukharin and the right wing of the party were worried that Stalin's methods would lead to the return of War Communism – a cycle of violence and rural unrest, shortages of bread and other foods, and rationing. Under pressure from the right, Stalin agreed to stop grain seizures in 1928 and to try raising the price of grain to encourage peasants to put more on the market. But with continuing food shortages in 1929, the party swung behind Stalin, and Bukharin and the rightists were removed from key posts. Shortly afterwards, Stalin announced a policy of forced mass collectivisation. He had decided to break the peasants' stranglehold on the economy.

It seems likely therefore that the decision to collectivise rapidly was an emergency decision taken to solve the procurement crisis of 1928–29 and to crack down on the resistance of the peasants. This conclusion is supported by the lack of preparation and planning for a revolution in Soviet agriculture. There were simply not enough tractors, combine harvesters, agricultural experts or supplies of fertiliser to carry out a high-speed collectivisation programme.

However, this decision should be seen in the context of the other factors mentioned at the end of Chapter 11. Stalin, the party and many others wanted to move forward. There was a genuine sense of crisis in urban Russia at the end of the 1920s. The 1927 war scare had made the perceived need for industrialisation all the more urgent and that meant getting more grain out of the peasants. The party broadly supported Stalin and wanted to force the pace of industrialisation and solve the peasant problem.

Historians have also shown that there was a lot of support for collectivisation among the urban working class. It was not only that they were hungry and angry at what they saw as the deliberate actions of peasants in holding back food. Many saw the socialisation of the land as a key part of the revolution and the way out of poverty towards the great society. Whether they, or indeed Stalin, had any idea of what this would entail is a different matter.

■ Learning trouble spot

Complicated explanations

It is sometimes difficult to explain the actions of politicians because they have to cope with a range of interrelated issues at any given time and under different political and economic pressures. When Stalin was deciding whether or not to opt for rapid forced collectivisation, he was also:

- trying to push forward rapid industrialisation plans upon which his credibility as a leader was staked
- dealing with the problem of feeding the workers, his natural supporters
- engaged in a power struggle to become leader of the party
- fighting a political battle with Bukharin and the right about the pace of industrialisation and how they should handle the peasants
- looking at the results of the Urals–Siberian method in 1929, which appeared to have been a successful way of getting grain from the peasants
- thinking about a long-term solution to allow the development of agriculture, which for Communists had always been collectivisation and agrotowns.

So when Stalin made his decision, he was playing with a range of factors. And it might also be the case that he decided he had had enough of the peasants and was going to break their resistance. His personality also has a role to play here and he had a history of taking revenge on people who thwarted him.

How was collectivisation carried out?

FOCUS ROUTE

1 Explain the process by which collectivisation was carried out.
2 Describe how the peasants resisted this process.

WHO WERE THE KULAKS?

Soviet writers divided the peasants into three classes:

- **kulaks, or better-off peasants**
- **middle peasants (those on moderate incomes)**
- **poor peasants and landless labourers.**

An examination of Soviet data shows that the so-called kulak might own one or two horses, hire labour at times during the year and produce a small surplus for the market. There was no separate rich peasant stratum. Indeed, once the attack on kulaks began, many got rid of some of their animals and other resources so that they would be classed as middle peasants.

In practice, a kulak was anyone officials decided was one. Often the people they identified were the most enterprising peasants in a village, the better farmers, the ones who had a little machinery and a few animals. So, in getting rid of them, they were destroying the best chance for more successful agriculture.

Force, terror and propaganda were the main methods employed in carrying through collectivisation. Stalin returned to the familiar ideological weapon of the 'class enemy' as the mechanism to achieve his ends. It was not difficult to find a class enemy in the countryside – the kulak! In December 1929, he announced the 'liquidation of the kulaks as a class'. Molotov, one of Stalin's leading supporters, said that they would hit the kulaks so hard that the so-called 'middle peasants' would 'snap to attention before us'.

The aim of identifying the kulak as a class enemy was to frighten the middle and poor peasants into joining the kolkhozes. But villagers were often unwilling to identify kulaks, many of whom were relatives or friends, people who might have helped them out in difficult times or lent them animals to plough their land. Even if the kulaks were not liked, they were part of a village community in which the ties to fellow peasants were much stronger than those to the Communist state. In some villages, poor peasants wrote letters in support of their richer neighbours. Meanwhile, richer peasants quickly sold their animals and stopped hiring labourers so that they could slip into the ranks of the middle peasants.

Many local party officials opposed the policy of forced collectivisation, knowing that it was unworkable. They were unwilling to identify as kulaks good farmers who were valuable to the community. They also knew that collectivisation would tear the countryside apart. So Stalin enlisted an army of 25,000 urban party activists to help to revolutionise the countryside. After a two-week course, they were sent out in brigades to oversee the collectivisation process, backed by the local police, the OGPU (secret police) and the military. Their task was to root out the kulaks and persuade the middle and poor peasants to sign a register demanding to be collectivised. The land, animals, tools, equipment and buildings would be taken from the kulaks and used as the basis for the new collective farm, the creation of which the activists would then oversee.

The so-called 'Twenty-five Thousanders' had no real knowledge of how to organise or run a collective farm, but they did know how to wage class warfare. 'Dekulakisation' went ahead at full speed. Each region was given a number of kulaks to find and they found them whether they existed or not. The kulaks were divided into three categories: counter-revolutionaries who were to be shot or sent to forced-labour settlements; active opponents of collectivisation who were to be deported to other areas of the Soviet Union, often to Siberia; and those who were expelled from their farms and settled on poor land.

A decree of 1 February 1930 gave local party organisations the power to use 'necessary measures' against the kulaks. Whole families and sometimes whole villages were rounded up and deported. The head of the household might be shot and his family put on a train for Siberia or some distant part of Russia. Others would be sent off to the Gulag labour camps or to work in punishment brigades building canals, roads or the new industrial centres. Up to ten million people had been deported to Siberia or labour camps by the end of the collectivisation process.

The Communists also mounted a huge propaganda campaign to extol the advantages of collective farms and to inflame class hatred. In some areas this was effective. Many poorer peasants did denounce their neighbours as kulaks. Sometimes this was an act of revenge for past grievances but, of course, it was to the advantage of the poor peasants to get their hands on their neighbours' animals and equipment for the new collective. Children were encouraged to inform on their neighbours and even on their parents. One thirteen-year-old girl denounced her mother for stealing grain.

Peasant resistance

The peasants resisted collectivisation bitterly despite the mass deportations. There were riots and armed resistance. One riot lasted for five days and armoured cars had to be brought in to restore order. In many instances troops had to be brought in. Peasants burned crops, tools and houses rather than hand them over to the state. Raids were mounted to recapture animals that had already been taken into the collectives. Action by women often proved the most effective form of opposition. Women's revolts were reported in the press. Kaganovich, a member of the Politburo, recognised that 'women had played the most advanced role in the reaction against the collective farm'. The women's protests were carefully organised, with specific goals such as stopping grain requisitioning or retrieving collectivised horses. They reckoned, sometimes correctly, that it would be more difficult for troops to take action against all-women protests. The government found their tactics difficult to deal with.

One of the main forms of resistance was to slaughter animals and eat or sell the meat rather than hand over the beasts to the kolkhoz. Mikhail Sholokhov described this graphically in his novel *Virgin Soil Upturned* (1935):

> 'Kill, it's not ours any more . . . Kill, they'll take it for meat anyway . . . Kill, you won't get meat on the collective farm . . . And they killed. They ate until they could eat no more. Young and old suffered from stomach ache. At dinner-time tables groaned under boiled and roasted meat. At dinner-time every one had a greasy mouth . . . everyone blinked like an owl, as if drunk from eating.'

ACTIVITY

Imagine you are a party activist. Use Sources 12.1–12.4 on pages 204–205 to write a speech explaining to peasants the advantages of joining a collective farm and encouraging them to take part in the great experiment of 'socialist construction'.

D What impact did collectivisation have on the peasants?

FOCUS ROUTE

Make notes on:

a) why Stalin halted and then restarted the collectivisation process in 1930–31
b) the consequences of collectivisation
c) what happened in agriculture after 1934.

By the end of February 1930, the party claimed that half of all peasant households had been collectivised – a stunning success. In reality, it was an agricultural disaster on a huge scale. The most enterprising peasants had been shot or deported, agricultural production disrupted, and a huge number of animals slaughtered – around 25–30 per cent of all the cattle, pigs and sheep in the USSR (mostly eaten by the peasants). Peasants who had been forced into collectives were in no mood to begin the sowing season and the level of resistance was high. This was fed by rumours in some areas that women were about to be 'socialised' and that there were special machines to burn up old people.

Knowing that further peasant resistance could lead to the collapse of grain production, Stalin backtracked. He wrote an article for *Pravda* in March 1930 saying that his officials had moved too far too fast. They had, he said, become 'dizzy with success'. This was probably not far from the truth. Young, ferocious and militant urban activists had got carried away, competing with each other to see who could get the most households into collectives. Central government seemed to have little direct control over what was happening in the provinces. Stalin called for a return to the voluntary principle and an end to coercion. Given the choice, a huge number of peasants abandoned the new collective farms and went back to farming for themselves.

But once the harvest had been gathered in, Stalin restarted the campaign and it was just as vicious as before. Throughout 1931 peasants were forced back into the collectives they had left, so that by the end of the year large areas of the USSR had been collectivised, taking in over 50 per cent of peasant households. The peasants had already paid a terrible price for their resistance and lack of co-operation. But worse was to come.

SOURCE 12.6 V. Kravchenko, *I Chose Freedom: The Personal and Political Life of a Soviet Official*, 1947, p. 104. Kravchenko was a Communist who later fled the Soviet Union. Here he is an eyewitness to a round-up of kulaks

'What's happening?' I asked the constable.

'Another round-up of kulaks,' he replied. 'Seems the dirty business will never end. The OGPU and District Committee came this morning.'

A large crowd was gathered outside the building. . . . A number of women were weeping hysterically and calling the names of husbands and fathers. It was like a scene out of a nightmare . . . In the background, guarded by the OGPU soldiers with drawn revolvers, stood about twenty peasants, young and old, with bundles on their backs. A few were weeping. The others stood there sullen, resigned, hopeless. So this was 'Liquidation of the kulaks as a class!' A lot of simple peasants being torn from their native soil, stripped of their worldly goods and shipped to some distant labour camps. Their outcries filled the air . . . As I stood there, distressed, ashamed, helpless, I heard a woman shouting in an unearthly voice . . . The woman, her hair streaming, held a flaming sheaf of grain in her hands. Before anyone could reach her, she had tossed the burning sheaf into the thatched roof of the house, which burst into flames instantaneously.

'Infidels! murderers!' the distraught woman was shrieking. 'We worked all our lives for our house. You won't have it. The flames will have it!' Her cries turned suddenly into bitter laughter. For some reason, on this occasion, most of the families were being left behind.

SOURCE 12.7 Peasants protesting against the kulaks. The Soviet version of the collectivisation process was that the poorer peasants themselves demanded that the kulaks be forced out and asked to be collectivised

SOURCE 12.8 V. Serge, *Memoirs of a Revolutionary 1901–1941*, translated and edited by P. Sedwick, 1967, p. 247

In a Kuban market town whose entire population was deported, the women undressed in their houses, thinking that no one would dare make them go out naked; they were driven out as they were to the cattle trucks, beaten with rifle butts . . . Trainloads of deported peasants left for the icy north, the forests, the steppes, the deserts. These were whole populations, denuded of everything; the old folk starved to death in mid-journey, newborn babes were buried on the banks of the roadside, and each wilderness had its crop of little crosses.

ACTIVITY

Use Sources 12.6–12.14 on pages 212–214 to answer these questions.

1 What impression do you get of the dekulakisation and collectivisation process from Sources 12.6–12.11?
2 Given Sholokhov's background (Source 12.12), how valuable do you think his novel is as historical evidence?
3 Look at Sources 12.13 and 12.14. Do they change your answer?
4 What justification or explanation of the process is provided by Communists in Sources 12.12–12.14?
5 What value, if any, does a novel like Sholokhov's have for historians looking at collectivisation?

SOURCE 12.9 Peasants signing up to join a collective farm. Typically, party activists would call a village meeting and invite the villagers to set up and join a collective farm. They would offer inducements such as machinery, or make threats of increased taxes or forced exile

SOURCE 12.10 A famine victim, 1932

SOURCE 12.11 An OGPU colonel speaking to the historian I. Deutscher as they travelled to Kharkov, quoted in *Stalin*, rev. edn 1966, pp. 324–25

'I am an old Bolshevik,' he said almost sobbing, 'I worked in the underground against the Tsar and I fought in the civil war. Did I do all that in order that I should now surround villages with machine-guns and order my men to fire indiscriminately into crowds of peasants? Oh, no, no!'

SOURCE 12.12 M. Sholokhov, *Virgin Soil Upturned*, 1935, pp. 71–73. Sholokhov was an active Communist who wrote this pro-collectivisation novel. But he was horrified by what he saw of dekulakisation and wrote a letter to Stalin condemning the 'disgusting methods' that officials used. In his reply Stalin acknowledged that officials were guilty of crimes but claimed that Sholokhov did not appreciate the other side of the picture, that the peasants were engaged in sabotage and 'waging what was in essence a "quiet war" against the Soviet power – a war of starvation, Comrade Sholokhov'. In this extract from Sholokhov's novel, one of the main activists of the local soviet, Razmiotnov, at a meeting with other activists where they are adding up the totals of grain they have confiscated from kulaks, is making a surprise announcement

'I'm not going on.'

'What do you mean? "Not going on." ' Nagulnov pushed the abacus to one side....

'I've not been trained! I've not been trained to fight against children! At the front was another matter. There you could cut down who you liked with your sword or what you liked ... And you can all go to the devil! I'm not going on! ... Do you call it right? What am I? An executioner? Or is my heart made of stone? I had enough at the war ... Gayev's [a kulak] got eleven children. How they howled when we arrived! You'd have clutched your head. It made my hair stand on end. We began to drive them out of the kitchen ... I screwed up my eyes, stopped my ears and ran into the yard. The women were all in a dead fright ... the children ... Oh, by God, you ...'

... 'Snake!' [Nagulnov] gasped out in a penetrating whisper, clenching his fist. 'How are you serving the revolution? Having pity on them? Yes ... You could line up thousands of old men, women and children, and tell me they'd got to be crushed into the dust for the sake of the revolution, and I'd shoot them all down with a machine gun.' Suddenly he screamed savagely, a frenzy glittered in his great, dilated pupils, and the foam seethed at the corners of his lips.

SOURCE 12.13 V. Kravchenko, *I Chose Freedom: The Personal and Political Life of a Soviet Official*, 1947, p. 130. Kravchenko, a party activist in the Ukraine, quotes the secretary of the Ukrainian Central Committee

A ruthless struggle is going on between the peasantry and our regime. It's a struggle to the death. This year was a test of our strength and their endurance. It took a famine to show them who is master here. It has cost millions of lives, but the collective farm system is here to stay. We've won the war.

SOURCE 12.14 L. Kopelev, an activist who later went into exile, quoted in R. Conquest, *The Harvest of Sorrow*, 1986, p. 233

With the rest of my generation, I firmly believed that the ends justified the means. Our great goal was the universal triumph of Communism ...

I saw what 'total collectivisation' meant – how they mercilessly stripped the peasants in the winter of 1932–33. I took part in it myself, scouring the countryside ... testing the earth with an iron rod for loose spots that might lead to buried grain. With the others, I emptied out the old folks' storage chests, stopping my ears to the children's crying and the women's wails. For I was convinced that I was accomplishing the great and necessary transformation of the countryside; that in the days to come the people who lived there would be better off ...

In the terrible spring of 1933 I saw people dying of hunger. I saw women and children with distended bellies, turning blue, still breathing but with vacant lifeless eyes. And corpses – corpses in ragged sheepskin coats and cheap felt boots; corpses in the peasant huts ... I saw all this and did not go out of my mind or commit suicide ... Nor did I lose my faith. As before, I believed because I wanted to believe.

Collectivisation after 1934

At the end of 1934, it was announced that 70 per cent of peasant households were in collectives, rising to 90 per cent in 1936. Individual peasant landholdings were gradually squeezed out. Grain production began to recover slowly but did not exceed pre-collectivisation levels until 1935 (1930 being an exceptional year). Meat production did not pass pre-collectivisation levels until after 1953. Grain procurement continued at a high level throughout the 1930s, whatever the harvest.

The problem was lack of incentive – the peasants had nothing to work for. They were supposed to get a share in the profits of the farm at the end of the year but there never were any profits. They practised a form of passive resistance shown in apathy, neglect and petty insubordination on the newly created kolkhozes. The state could do little about it. On many farms the chairman (usually a Communist) was changed regularly because he could not get the peasants to perform.

This made the private plots on collectives very important. It was the only way peasants could earn something for themselves. Peasants could sell their products on the local market. The state did not hinder them because the economy desperately needed food. It has been estimated that these private plots provided 52 per cent of vegetables, 57 per cent of fruit, 70 per cent of meat and 71 per cent of milk as well as butter, honey and wool to Soviet consumers.

The peasants referred to collectivisation as the 'second serfdom'. They were tied to land they did not own. They could not leave the farms without the permission of the authorities. Draconian laws would punish them if they stepped out of line. However, Sheila Fitzpatrick in her book *Stalin's Peasants* (1994) maintains that the peasants developed all sorts of ways of subverting the farms and turning matters to their advantage. The peasants had been broken by collectivisation but they had not been totally crushed.

SOURCE 12.15 Extracts from peasants' letters to *Our Village*, a peasant newspaper, concerning the first collectivisation drive, 1929–30. These letters were not actually published in the newspaper

Ivan Trofimovitch

I am a poor peasant. I have one hut, one barn, one horse, three dessyatins of land ... Isn't it true that all the poor peasants and middle peasants do not want to go into the kolkhoz at all, but you drive them in by force? ... [In my village] poor peasants came out against it ... they did not want serfdom.

Pyotr Gorky

Every day they send us lecturers asking us to sign up for such-and-such a kolkhoz for eternal slavery, but we don't want to leave our good homes. It may be a poor little hut, but it's mine, a poor horse, but it's mine. Among us, he who works more has something to eat ... Let the peasant own property. Then we assure you that everyone will be able to put more surpluses on the market.

Unnamed peasant

Comrades, you write that all the middle peasants and poor peasants join the kolkhoz voluntarily, but it is not true. For example, in our village of Podbuzhye, all do not enter the kolkhoz willingly. When the register made the rounds, only 25 per cent signed it, while 75 per cent did not ... If anyone spoke out against it, he was threatened with arrest and forced labour ... Collective life can be created when the entire mass of the peasants goes voluntarily, and not by force ... I beg you not to divulge my name, because the Party people will be angry.

COLLECTIVISATION CASE STUDY: SMOLENSK

The Smolensk Archive was seized from the Nazis by US troops in 1945, having been abandoned by Soviet forces in 1941. It contains a lot of information about changes in agriculture in the province of Smolensk. It tells the story of how collectivisation was carried out and how the peasants responded to it. The following account is a summary of the findings from the Smolensk Archive. Source 12.15 contains extracts from the archive.

Before collectivisation, 90 per cent of the population lived on the land. In 1927, five per cent of households were classified as kulaks, 70 per cent middle peasants and 25 per cent as poor peasants. During 1927–28, increasing pressure was applied to the kulaks. They were made to pay heavier taxes and higher wages for hired labourers; they were prosecuted for grain speculation and concealment.

After September 1929, activists were sent to the area to intensify the campaign against the kulaks and to speed up grain deliveries. But they found it difficult to get local support. Often the 'kulaks' were respected village leaders linked by blood ties to poor and middle peasants. The villagers maintained their solidarity against the Soviet authorities. Even more problematically, the activists found that local soviet members and party workers sided with the peasants.

As the activists could get little co-operation, they took harsher measures. All peasant households were required to deliver fixed quotas of grain, with penalties or even prison sentences for failure to do so. If households failed to deliver their quota, 'workers' brigades' would descend and seize their grain. The peasants responded by hiding grain and attacking activists. In October 1929, ten chairmen and eight party secretaries of village soviets were murdered. The OGPU were called in to support the activists and a 'pall of terror' enveloped the villages. In court cases it was found that almost half of the offenders were middle and poor peasants; they were condemned as ideological kulaks.

Shortly after this, Smolensk was hit by the first collectivisation drive (1929–30) characterised by 'storm' tactics. The local soviets and party workers could not be trusted to carry out effective dekulakisation or organise the kolkhozes, so brigades of urban workers, the 'Twenty-five Thousanders' (see page 209), were used.

OGPU reports reveal a picture of chaos and confusion. There was a wave of panic in the villages. Kulaks were dekulakising themselves – selling all they owned, leaving their property to relatives and friends, even just abandoning their fields and homes. Growing numbers were fleeing east to Moscow and the Urals. There was a reported wave of suicides amongst richer households with well-to-do peasants killing their wives and children as well as themselves. While some poor peasants were pleased to see the attacks on the kulaks, other poor and middle peasants colluded with kulak friends to protect their lives and property. Petitions were collected testifying to the good character of kulaks who were on the lists.

There was also a lot of antagonism towards the kolkhozes, as the extracts from the letters in Source 12.15 show. In one incident in September 1929, 200 peasants attacked a kolkhoz, destroying equipment and clothes. The majority of the attackers were women armed with pitchforks, spades and axes. There were numerous instances of burned barns, haystacks and houses. The OGPU noted the heavy involvement of women in these outbursts against the collectives.

Generally, the halt to collectivisation in March 1930, after Stalin's 'dizzy with success' article in *Pravda* (see page 210), was well received. The archives show how the local officials and activists were really out of control, arresting whomever they pleased, including many middle peasants, often on the basis of vicious rumour. There were cases of activists blackmailing kulaks to take their names off the confiscation and deportation lists.

But by March 1931, Smolensk was again the subject of intense dekulakisation. Lists of kulaks were collected by village soviets. Activists set about liquidating kulak households and deporting whole families. The OGPU reported that there was much sympathy in the villages for the deported. Nevertheless, the process of collectivisation went ahead with over 90 per cent of peasant households in kolkhozes by the end of the 1930s.

Although there are gaps in the Smolensk Archive about how the collective farms operated, it is full of complaints about inefficiency, poor chairmen, lax working practices, drunkenness, thievery and worse abuses. The picture is one of apathy from the ordinary kolkhoz members and lack of enthusiasm for life on a collective farm.

ACTIVITY

1 Compare the material from the Smolensk Archive with what you have already read about collectivisation. List the points where the specific detail here agrees with the general picture and the points where it disagrees.
2 What does the archive tell us about the kulak response to the pre-collectivisation grain seizures?
3 What does the archive show us about the behaviour and actions of the activists and their relations with the kulaks?
4 Think about the value of the archive to historians. Remember, it was collected by the Soviet authorities.
   a) Do you think we can trust the general picture it presents of collectivisation?
   b) What view of the peasant response is clear from the unpublished letters?
   c) Do you think these letters are useful and reliable evidence for historians?

E Was collectivisation a success?

FOCUS ROUTE

Assessing collectivisation

Draw up a table to make notes on your assessment of collectivisation. You can use the table shown here or make notes under your own headings. You might also like to design a more interesting way of setting out your notes, for example, in a flow diagram or spider diagram.

Use the sources and information which follow to complete your table or diagram. At the end of this section you are going to use these notes in an essay which considers the overall successes and failures of Stalin's economic policies in the 1930s.

Ways in which collectivisation was economically successful for the government	Ways in which collectivisation was politically successful for the government
Ways in which collectivisation was an economic failure	**The human cost of collectivisation**

ACTIVITY

Study the figures in Source 12.16 and answer the following questions.

1. How can you explain the figures for grain harvests from 1928 to 1935?
2. What is the significance of the state procurement of grain in relation to the overall grain harvest over the same period?
3. Why are the grain export figures significant?
4. Analyse and explain the figures for animals over this period.

SOURCE 12.16 Agricultural output and state procurement of grain, 1928–35, from A. Nove, *An Economic History of the USSR, 1917–91*, 1992, pp. 180, 186

	1928	1929	1930	1931	1932	1933	1934	1935
Grain harvest (million tons)	73.3	71.7	83.5	69.5	69.6	68.4	67.6	75.0
State procurement of grain (million tons)	10.8	16.1	22.1	22.8	18.5	22.6		
Grain exports (million tons)	0.03	0.18	4.76	5.06	1.73	1.69		
Cattle (million head)	70.5	67.1	52.3	47.9	40.1	38.4	42.4	49.3
Pigs (million head)	26.0	20.4	13.6	14.4	11.6	12.1	17.4	22.6
Sheep and goats (million head)	146.7	147.0	108.8	77.7	52.1	50.2	51.9	61.1

Any assessment of collectivisation reveals a very mixed picture. Economically, it appears to have been a disaster. The fact that grain harvests dropped dramatically in the early 1930s when grain was most needed and did not recover to their 1928 level (apart from 1930 which was an exceptional year) until the latter half of the 1930s is a damning indictment. This is an even worse performance when you compare the figures with the last harvest of tsarist Russia in 1913 (see Source 8.18 on page 158). The Soviet Union also lost a huge proportion of the animal population, a loss from which it did not really recover until after the Second World War.

However, although the overall grain harvest declined in the early 1930s, state procurements did not. The state collected the grain it needed to feed the rapidly growing workforce and to sell abroad to pay for industrial equipment. What is more, dispossessed peasants from the overpopulated countryside fled to the towns, so providing labour for the new factories. Collectivisation had succeeded in its main purpose – to provide the resources for industrialisation.

This view, however, has been challenged by several historians. They believe that valuable resources had to be diverted to agriculture: because of the need to build large numbers of tractors, for example, and to send out agronomists and large numbers of activists and secret police. Furthermore, the USSR did not get as much foreign money for its grain as it had hoped because the GREAT DEPRESSION had forced down world grain prices.

GREAT DEPRESSION
A world economic slump that began in 1929 with the Wall Street Crash and lasted until the beginning of the Second World War.

On top of this, the human costs were horrendous. The suffering cannot be quantified, particularly for those who not only lost their homes but ended up in the Gulag prison camps. Roy Medvedev estimates that some ten million peasants were dispossessed between 1929 and 1932, of whom around two or three million lost their lives. Then we must add the cost of the famine. Robert Conquest estimates around seven million died, five million of them in the Ukraine alone. Whatever the actual figure, it represents an inexcusable episode in Soviet history.

For the party, collectivisation was an essential part of its modernisation drive. The party did not want a sizeable sector of the economy to be dominated by the private market or to be at the mercy of the peasants who hoarded grain. In this sense, collectivisation was a political success. The party gained control of the villages and did not have to bargain with the peasants any more. It had established a system, using local soviets and MTS, of controlling the countryside and making agriculture serve the towns and workers.

SOURCE 12.17 C. Ward, *Stalin's Russia*, 1993, p. 47

What happened between November 1929 and December 1931 cannot be grasped merely by reciting statistics ... a socio-economic system in existence for five hundred years vanished for ever. But the whirlwind which swept across the countryside destroyed the way of life of the vast majority of the Soviet people, not just the Russians ... Early in 1930, countless individuals and families in entire regions and republics – the Russian, Ukrainian and Caucasian grain districts – were stigmatized as kulaks, driven from their land, forced into collectives, exiled or shot. Central Asian cotton growers and sugar beet farmers in the Central Black Earth region suffered the same fate in 1931.

SOURCE 12.18 R. Service, *A History of Twentieth-Century Russia*, 1997, pp. 181–82

With the exception of 1930, mass collectivisation meant that not until the mid-1950s did agriculture regain the level of output achieved in the last years before the Great War. Conditions in the countryside were so dire that the state had to pump additional resources into the country in order to maintain the new agrarian order ... to agronomists, surveyors, and farm chairmen but also to soldiers, policemen and informers. Moreover, 'machine-tractor stations' had to be built from 1929 to provide equipment for the introduction of technology.

Yet Stalin could draw up a balance sheet that, from his standpoint, was favourable. From collectivisation he acquired a reservoir of terrified peasants who would supply him with cheap industrial labour. To some extent, too, he secured his ability to export Soviet raw materials in order to pay for imports of industrial machinery ... Above all, he put an end to the recurrent crises faced by the state in relation to urban food supplies as the state's grain collections rose from 10.8 million tons in 1928–9 to 22.8 million tons in 1931–2. After collectivisation it was the countryside, not the towns, which went hungry if the harvest was bad.

Use the information and sources on pages 217–218 to discuss the statement: 'Collectivisation was a political success but an economic failure and a human disaster.'

KEY POINTS FOR CHAPTER 12

Was collectivisation a success?

1. Collective farms were the socialist solution for agriculture, changing individualistic peasants with capitalist tendencies into agroworkers.
2. Stalin also wanted to bring the peasants under control and ensure the food supply needed for his plans to industrialise the Soviet Union.
3. There was a lot of support for his programme amongst the urban working classes but a high level of resistance from the peasantry.
4. Stalin used force, terror and propaganda to collectivise Soviet agriculture at high speed. Brutal methods were used, including mass arrests, mass murder and the deportation of hundreds of thousands of peasants.
5. Peasants resisted by slaughtering and eating their animals and fighting the activists who carried out collectivisation.
6. The impact on agriculture was disastrous. Grain production fell and there was a tremendous drop in the number of animals.
7. In 1932–34 a famine, largely the result of government policies, killed millions of peasants.
8. Vast numbers of peasants fled the countryside to become industrial workers in the new booming industrial centres.

13 How well planned were the Five-Year Plans?

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

The Five-Year Plans for industry were ambitious and far-reaching. They envisaged nothing less than the transformation of the Soviet Union into a great industrial power. Central planning would replace the capitalist market as the main device for managing the economy.

The plans soon hit problems as the central planning system found it could not cope with the demands it had imposed on itself. The First Five-Year Plan was marked by its outrageous targets for INDUSTRIAL ENTERPRISES. The workers suffered as their needs were pushed to the bottom of the scale of priorities. Yet, despite all the problems, the plans were successful in many respects.

A How were the Five-Year Plans organised? (pp. 222–224)

B What did the Five-Year Plans achieve? (pp. 225–229)

C How did the workers fare under the plans? (pp. 230–239)

D Did urban living standards improve during the plans? (pp. 240–241)

E How successful were the Five-Year Plans for industry? (pp. 242–244)

INDUSTRIAL ENTERPRISE
Large factory, mine, etc. or collection of factories, mines, etc. run as one unit.

ACTIVITY

What do Sources 13.1–13.7 suggest about:
a) the attitudes of certain groups towards the big push for industrialisation
b) the scale and vision of the venture
c) the idea of socialism in comparison to capitalism in the 1930s?

SOURCE 13.1 S. Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilisation*, 1995, p. 35

The transformation of the old Russia into the USSR was viewed as tantamount to the discovery of a new continent by one contemporary geographer… To the majority of people who participated in building it, socialism in the USSR afforded the means to acquire a niche, as well as a sense of pride, in a society that did seem to be qualitatively different – in comparison with capitalism, which was then synonymous not with wealth and freedom but poverty and exploitation, as well as imperialism and war.

SOURCE 13.2 A. Bullock, *Hitler and Stalin: Parallel Lives*, 1991, p. 298

A young Komsomol [Young Communist League] member leaped at the opportunity to organise a shock brigade [see page 227] in 1929. 'When we went to work in the factories, we lamented that nothing would be left for us to do, because the revolution was over, because the severe [but] romantic years of civil war would not come back, and because the older generation had left to our lot a boring, prosaic life that was devoid of struggle and excitement.'

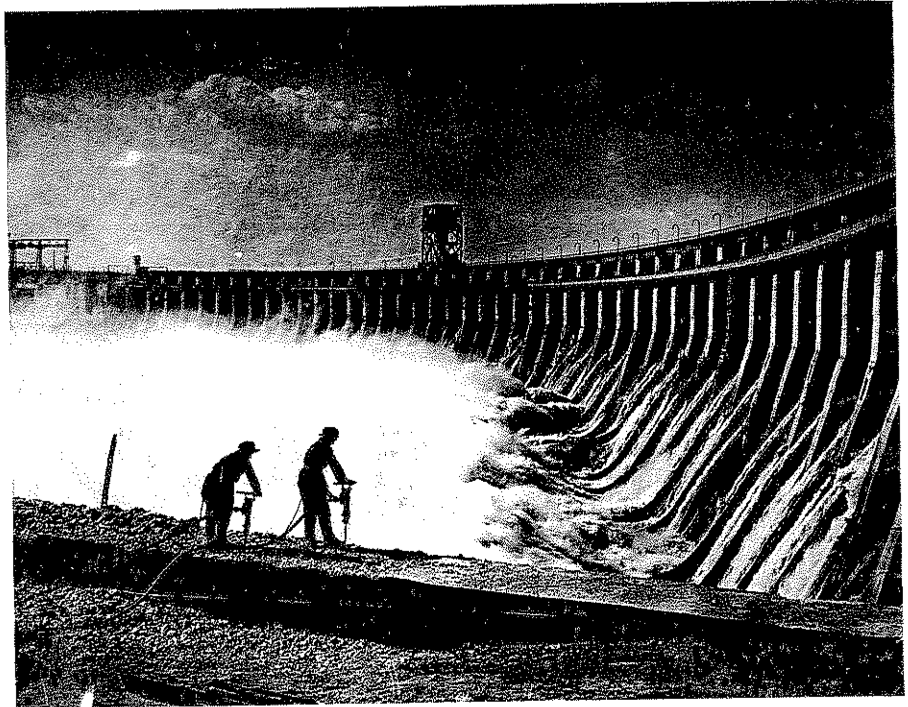
SOURCE 13.3 A. Nove, *An Economic History of the USSR, 1917–91*, 1992, p. 193

There were, in the later years, all too many examples of phoney official superlatives, which gave rise to widespread cynicism. So it is all the more necessary to stress that thousands (of young people in particular) participated in the 'great construction projects of socialism' with a will to self-sacrifice, accepting hardship with a real sense of comradeship. Statistics will also be cited to show that others had very different attitudes to their work, not only prisoners and deportees but also peasants fleeing collectives.

SOURCE 13.4 S. Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilisation*, 1995, p. 93

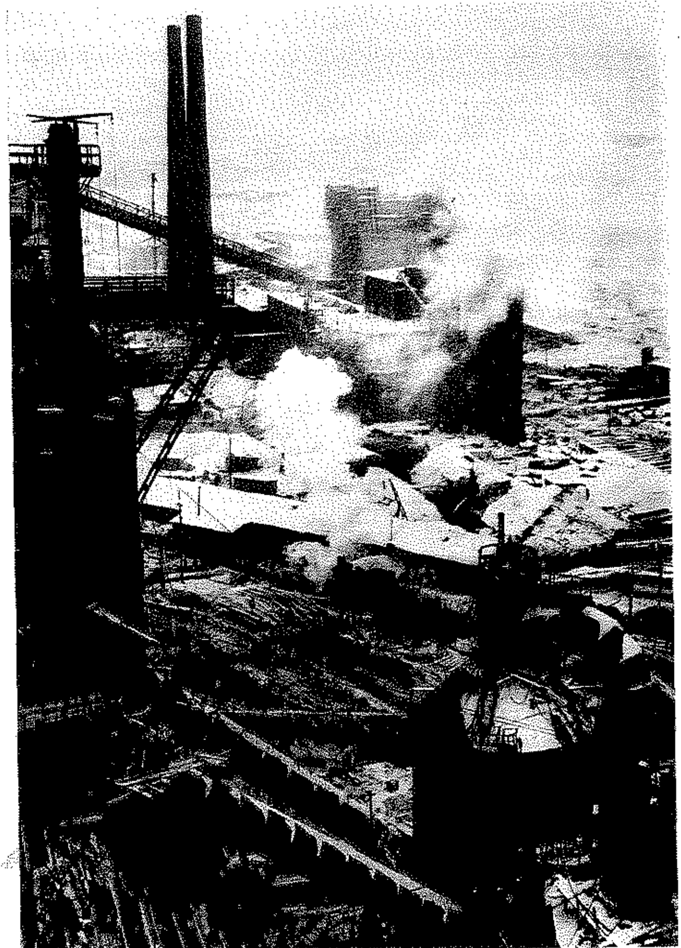
A group of young enthusiasts, working double shifts, whole days without rest and with little food, met to discuss the work on blast furnace no. 2, 'their' furnace, the Komolska. One of them opened the meeting by asking, 'Does anybody have any suggestions?' Someone else was quoted as saying, 'What kind of suggestions could there be – everybody straight to the site for a subbotnik [any time extra time was performed without compensation].' If we are to believe the credible account from which this conversation is taken, the youths 'worked till dawn'. Such pathos was genuine and it was widespread. 'Everyone, even the labourers, felt that Magnitogorsk [steel works] was making history, and that he, personally, had a considerable part in it,' wrote John Scott [see case study, page 221], himself deeply affected by the enthusiasm of the crusade. 'This feeling was shared to some extent even by the exiled kulaks.'

SOURCE 13.5 The Dnieprostroi Dam, built in the 1930s, increased Soviet electric power output fivefold when it began operating

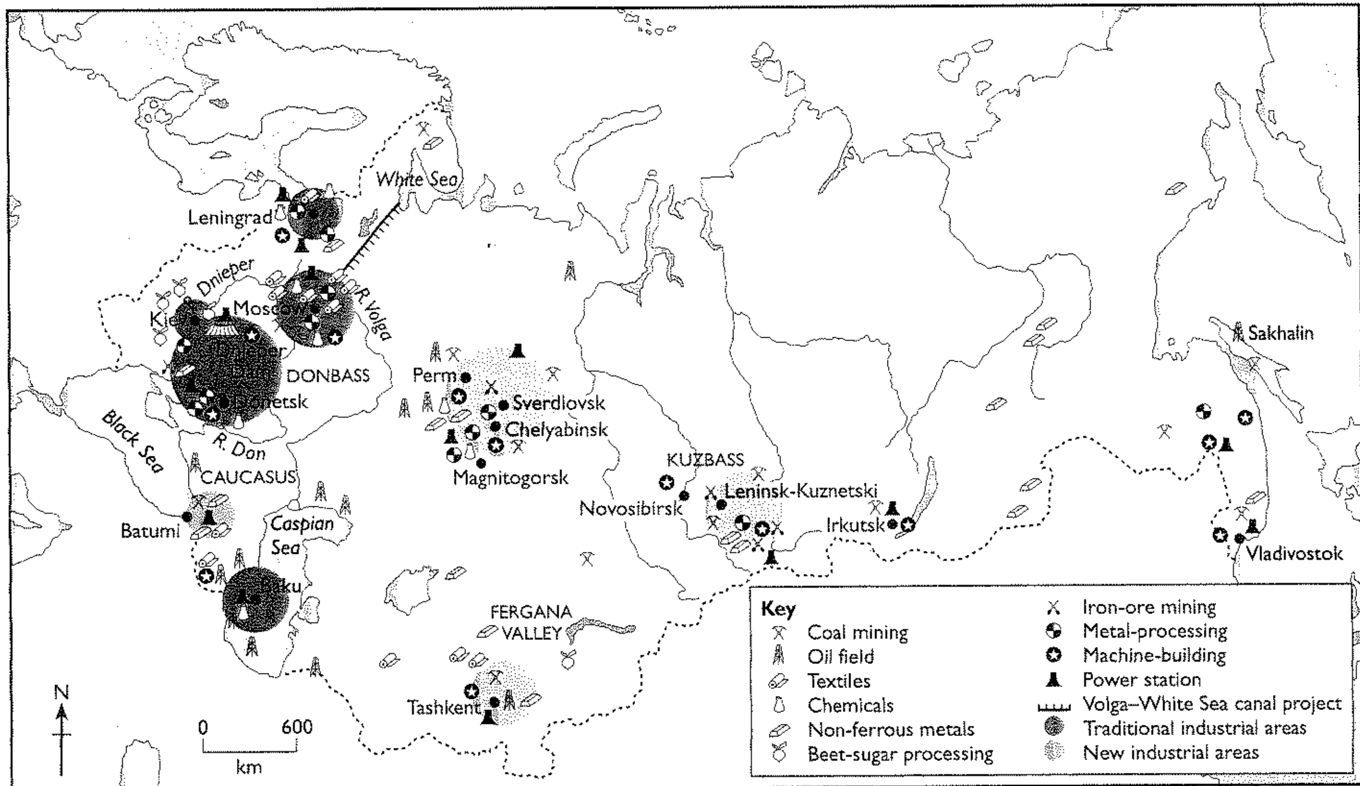


SOURCE 13.6 The Moscow metro, built in the 1930s, was a showpiece of Soviet construction

SOURCE 13.7 The Magnitogorsk steel works, 1932. Magnitogorsk rapidly developed into a major industrial centre in the early 1930s



13A Major industrial centres in the 1930s



MAGNITOGORSK CASE STUDY

Throughout this chapter the development of the industrial centre at Magnitogorsk in the Urals, 'the most celebrated of the new, superior industrial age' (S. Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilisation*, 1995, pages 34–35), is used as a case study to show what general policies involved when translated into practice. Magnitogorsk was designed to be the socialist city of the future, inhabited by Soviet Socialist Man (*Homo Sovieticus*). Two main sources are used for the case study:

- **Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilisation*, 1995. This outstanding study is an example of the recent trend among some Western historians of focusing on the experiences of the Russian people. Kotkin looks at the relationship between the authorities and the inhabitants of Magnitogorsk. The latter were not mere passive clay in the hands of the authorities; they knew how to make the best of their situation and which rules could be bent. So the people and the authorities influenced each other in the creation of the new city and the attempt to create new socialist citizens. He gives a vivid picture of the life of the newly urbanised Soviet workers of the 1930s that emphasises chaos and population movement. Thus the reintroduction of the tsarist internal passport system appears not as the culmination of a premeditated policy designed to establish total control over the populace, but rather as a typically heavy-handed Communist improvisation to combat a problem their policies had done so much to create.**
- **John Scott, *Behind the Urals*, 1942. Scott was an American college student who left the Depression-hit USA in 1932 to take part in the great experiment. He became a member of the Communist Party and spent several years as a volunteer worker at Magnitogorsk. Sympathetic to the aims of the socialist authorities, he nevertheless reveals the problems and hardships of life in the front-line of the industrial expansion. His book is regarded as the best eyewitness account by a Westerner.**

The idea that the Soviet Union was at last on the road to socialism, via industrialisation, inspired party members and urban workers alike. There was a feeling that they were creating a new type of society that would be far superior to that of their capitalist neighbours. After the compromises of the NEP, there was a return to the war imagery of the Civil War and War Communism. There was talk of a 'socialist offensive', and of 'mobilising forces on all fronts'. There were 'campaigns' and 'breakthroughs', 'ambushes' by 'class enemies'. People who opposed or criticised the regime's policies thus became guilty of treachery.

The creation of this state of psychological warfare, with appeals to patriotism, was a useful device to push through policies, particularly since mistakes and failures could be blamed on the enemy. But many Communists did see the struggle as a war against backwardness and enemies inside and outside the Soviet Union. Industrialisation was the way to break through to socialism and to protect themselves from the hostile forces that appeared to be surrounding them.

A How were the Five-Year Plans organised?

FOCUS ROUTE

1 Make notes to explain:
   a) what you understand by central planning or the 'planned economy'
   b) how this differs from a market-led economy.
2 Draw diagrams and charts to help you to remember how the Five-Year Plans operated.
3 Make notes to explain Gosplan's role.

The plans put central planning at the forefront of the Soviet economy. The state decided what was produced, where it was produced and when it was produced. The key feature of the plans was the setting of production and output targets which industrial enterprises had to achieve. Five-Year Plans set down broad directions and could be changed as they went along. There were also shorter one-year or even quarterly plans which set more specific targets for individual enterprises. The targets were backed by law, so failure to meet targets could be treated as a criminal offence. Bonuses were paid to enterprises that exceeded their plan target.

The party, acting through the government, set the priorities for the plans and the targets for key industries. The People's Commissariats (ministries or government departments) were responsible for working out more detailed plans for different regions and the enterprises under their control. Although there were varying numbers of industrial commissariats during the 1930s, four major ones had developed by 1934: heavy industry, light industry, timber and food. The most important of these was the Commissariat of Heavy Industry, which headed the industrialisation drive. By 1939, there were twenty commissariats.

In theory, industrial enterprises could have a say in formulating the plan but, in practice, instructions would be passed down through various bureaucratic layers to the managers of the enterprises. Chart 13B shows a simplified diagram of how the system worked using heavy industry as an example. However, this system emerged only as the plans developed and was not in place at the beginning. The planning of the First Five-Year Plan was much more chaotic.

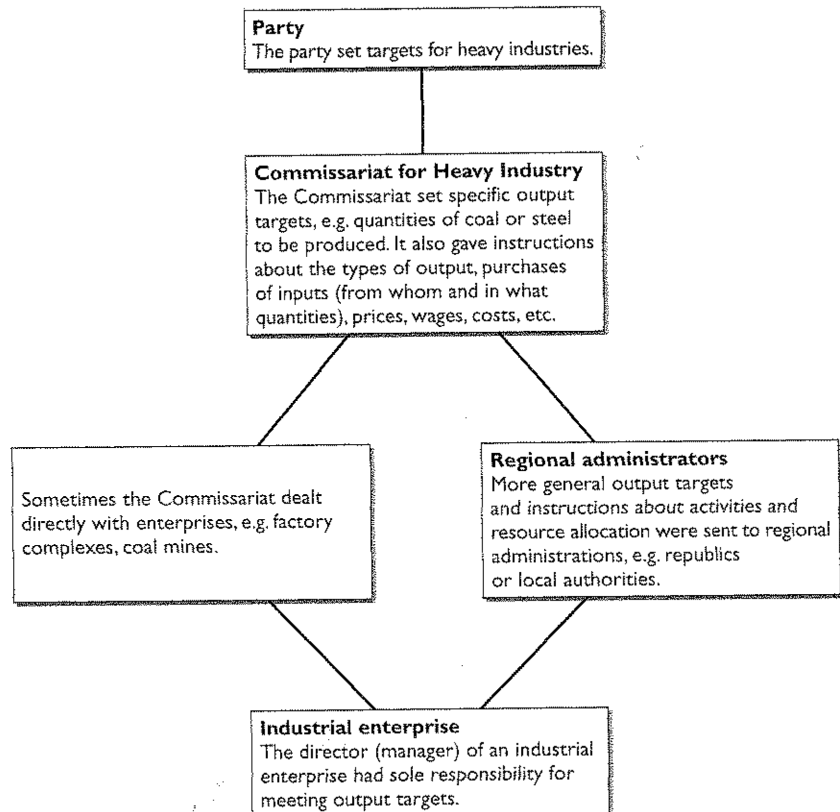
■ Learning trouble spot

What is the difference between central planning and capitalism?

In a capitalist market economy, the production of goods and the allocation of resources and investment in industry are largely determined by supply and demand working through prices, that is, by the operation of the market. The demand for a product pushes up the price of that product. This encourages producers to enter the market to supply the product and make a profit. They bring the necessary investment in industrial plant and make decisions about the methods and techniques used to produce and distribute the goods. In this way, resources – raw materials, land and labour – flow to this particular industrial activity.

In a centrally planned system, state agencies co-ordinate the activities of the different branches of production. They make the decisions about the allocation of resources, where investment should be targeted, what methods of production should be used and what economic strategies should be followed.

■ 13B How the Five-Year Plans were administered using changes to heavy industry as an example



WHAT HAPPENED TO PRIVATE INDUSTRY?

The state already had control of large-scale industry (run by trusts) under the NEP, so these were brought into the new system. But there were quite a lot of small-scale private industries supplying consumer goods such as shoes and textiles. These were starved of supplies and resources and most collapsed during the First Five-Year Plan. This was a disaster for the Russian consumer who found it very hard to get clothing, shoes and other products. The situation was compounded by the collapse of cottage industries in the countryside due to collectivisation. Peasants had traditionally made clothes, tools and other products for a domestic market and these were swept away in the collectivisation upheaval. Most industrial enterprises of any size were under state control by the end of the 1930s.

Sergei Ordzhonikidze

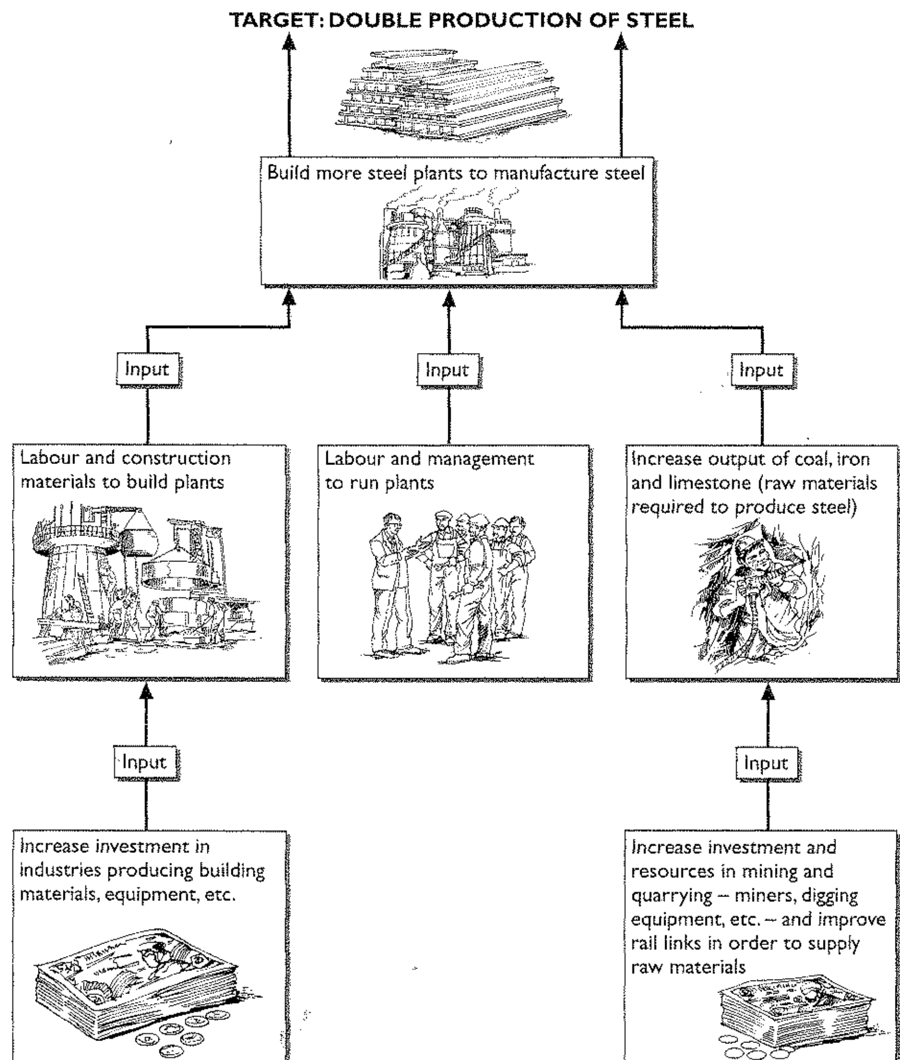
'Sergo' had joined the Bolshevik Party in 1903 and became active in the underground political scene where he became friends with Stalin. Elected to the Central Committee, he played a prominent role in the revolution and the Civil War. He worked with Stalin in Georgia and it was he who struck the Bolshevik official in the incident which upset Lenin so much (see page 172). He was one of Stalin's staunchest supporters in the Politburo during the First Five-Year Plan. His key position as head of the Commissariat of Heavy Industry put him in the driving seat of the push for rapid industrialisation. He was reasonably popular in the party and was a moderating influence in the Politburo.

It was a top-down method of management which applied in the workplace as well. The principle of one-person management was established right at the beginning. The director of an industrial enterprise (for example, a large factory or several units of production) was in sole charge and responsible for seeing that the targets were achieved. The trade unions were told not to interfere and to focus on increasing worker productivity. Workers' control and influence over the factory floor, such as it had ever existed, receded as the plans progressed.

All this begs the question: who co-ordinated the activities of the different branches of industry to balance the system and make it work? For instance, if you decide to expand the railway, then you need to plan for enough steel to make the rails. Gosplan (the State Planning Commission), which had originally been set up in 1921 as a forecasting agency, was given the job of working out the figures – the inputs each industry would need and the output each had to produce – to meet overall targets for the plan (see the example in Chart 13C).

The party not only laid down basic priorities but interfered in the day-to-day running of enterprises. It had a grip on the economy at all levels. Senior party officials appointed and dismissed planners and senior managers, often for political rather than economic reasons. From 1930 to 1937, the Commissariat for Heavy Industry was led by Sergei Ordzhonikidze, who had a direct line to different factories and moved around people and resources as he wished. At the local level, the party got involved in checking whether enterprises were fulfilling the plans; party secretaries were held responsible if industrial enterprises in their area did badly.

■ 13C Planning required to achieve targets



Features of the plans

The plans in the 1930s were dominated by an emphasis on the development of heavy industry. Stalin and the Supreme Economic Council (Vesenkha) agreed that the lion's share of investment should go into coal, iron, steel and other heavy industries. These would provide the power, capital equipment and machine tools that could be used to manufacture other products. The Soviet Union would then be less dependent on the West for these goods and could move towards self-sufficiency or 'autarky'. This decision meant that consumer industries producing clothes, shoes and similar products would be downgraded. Soviet citizens were asked to sacrifice their standard of living for longer-term objectives. There were two main reasons behind this:

1. It seemed to the Stalinists that Western industrial revolutions had been underpinned by the initial development in coal, iron and steel.
2. They were driven by the need to develop the sort of industries that could protect the Soviet Union should it be attacked from the West.

Three other features of the plans are worthy of note:

- The plans were always declared complete a year ahead of schedule. This denoted the superiority of Soviet planning over the Western capitalist economies which were, at this time, going through the worst throes of the Great Depression. It was also a psychological device to encourage the already hard-pressed workforce to even greater achievements.
- Huge new industrial centres were constructed virtually from nothing, for example at Magnitogorsk in the Urals and Kuznetz in western Siberia. Most of these were located east of the Ural mountains, a strategic decision to make them less vulnerable to attack from the West.
- Spectacular projects were conceived to demonstrate the might of the new Soviet industrial machine. This has been called 'gigantomania'. The Dnieprostroi Dam in eastern Russia (Source 13.5 on page 220) was, for two years, the world's largest construction site and it increased Soviet electric power output fivefold when it came on stream. Other projects included the Moscow–Volga canal and the prestigious Moscow metro with its elaborate stations and high vaulted ceilings (see Source 13.6 on page 220).

Foreign participation

A significant aspect of the industrial development of the USSR in the early 1930s was the involvement of foreign companies and individuals. A large number of companies sent specialists, engineers and skilled workers to help to erect new factories or exploit new resources. Henry Ford helped the Russians to develop a car industry. Russian engineers were trained by Ford in the USA and it was Ford-designed cars that were produced at the car plant in Gorky. Colonel Hugh Cooper, the engineer in charge of the Dnieprostroi Dam project, was an American. So was A. Ruckseyer, the man behind the huge growth in the asbestos industry at a remote place in the Urals called Asbest. Thousands of skilled workers – British, American and many other nationalities – came for a variety of reasons, some ideological and some because of unemployment in the West. The Great Depression convinced many people that capitalism was in its death throes and that the dynamic Soviet Union offered hope for the future of working people.

AT MAGNITOGORSK

Iron and steel were at the heart of Soviet industrialisation so the development of Magnitogorsk, with its huge reserves of iron ore, was at the forefront of the labour offensive. One contemporary Soviet pamphlet stated: 'Near Magnetic Mountain the steppe has been turned into a battlefield, the steppe is retreating.' The object of the battle was to build a gigantic steel plant capable of challenging the best in the capitalist world. In March 1929, 25 settlers arrived on horseback at the snow-covered site. By June 1930, the first train arrived with the banners 'The Steel Horse Breathes Life into the Magnitogorsk Giant. Long Live the Bolshevik Party!'

B What did the Five-Year Plans achieve?

■ 13D The achievements and weaknesses of the Five-Year Plans in the 1930s

FIRST FIVE-YEAR PLAN
October 1928 to December 1932

The emphasis was on heavy industries – coal, oil, iron and steel, electricity, cement, metals, timber. This accounted for 80 per cent of total investment; 1500 enterprises were opened.

Successful sectors
- Electricity – production trebled.
- Coal and iron – output doubled.
- Steel production – increased by one-third.
- Engineering industry developed and increased output of machine-tools, turbines, etc.
- Huge new industrial complexes were built or were in the process of being built.
- Huge new tractor works were built in Stalingrad, Kharkov and other places to meet the needs of mechanised agriculture.

Weaknesses
- There was very little growth, and even a decline, in consumer industries such as house-building, fertilisers, food processing and woollen textiles.
- Small workshops were squeezed out, partly because of the drive against Nepmen and partly because of shortages of materials and fuel.
- Chemicals targets were not fulfilled.
- The lack of skilled workers created major problems. Workers were constantly changing jobs, which created instability.

Comment

In reality, many targets were not met. The Great Depression had driven down the price of grain and raw materials, so the USSR could not earn enough from exports to pay for all the machinery it needed. Also, a good deal of investment had to go into agriculture because of the forced collectivisation programme. However, the Soviet economy was kick-started: there was impressive growth in certain sectors of the economy and there were substantial achievements.

SECOND FIVE-YEAR PLAN
January 1933 to December 1937

Heavy industries still featured strongly but new industries opened up and there was greater emphasis on communications, especially railways to link cities and industrial centres. Four and a half thousand enterprises opened. The plan benefited from some big projects, such as the Dnieprostroi Dam, coming into use.

Successful sectors
- Heavy industries benefited from plants which had been set up during the first plan and now came on stream. Electricity production expanded rapidly.
- By 1937, the USSR was virtually self-sufficient in machine-making and metal-working.
- Transport and communications grew rapidly.
- Chemical industries, such as fertiliser production, were growing.
- Metallurgy developed – minerals such as copper, zinc and tin were mined for the first time.

Weaknesses
- Consumer goods industries were still lagging, although they were showing signs of recovery. There was growth in footwear and food processing – modern bakeries, ice-cream production and meat-packing plants – but not enough.
- Oil production did not make the expected advances.

Comment

There was a feeling in the party that Stalin had overreached himself in the First Five-Year Plan, that targets had been too high. The second plan was more one of consolidation. The years 1934–36 were known as the 'three good years' since the pressure was not so intense, food rationing was ended and families had more disposable income.

THIRD FIVE-YEAR PLAN
January 1938 to June 1941

The third plan ran for only three and a half years because of the USSR's entry into the Second World War. Once again, heavy industry was emphasised as the need for armaments became increasingly urgent.

Successful sectors
- Heavy industry continued to grow, for example, machinery and engineering, but the picture was uneven and some areas did poorly.
- Defence and armaments grew rapidly as resources were diverted to them.

Weaknesses
- Steel output grew insignificantly.
- Oil production failed to meet targets and led to a fuel crisis.
- Consumer industries once again took a back seat.
- Many factories ran short of materials.

Comment

The third plan ran into difficulties at the beginning of 1938 due to an exceptionally hard winter and the diversion of materials to the military. Gosplan was thrown into chaos when the purges (see Chapter 14) created shortages of qualified personnel, such as important managers, engineers and officials, who linked industries and government.

FOCUS ROUTE

1 As you work through pages 225–229, collect evidence about the planning system and its effectiveness and record it in a table like the one shown here.

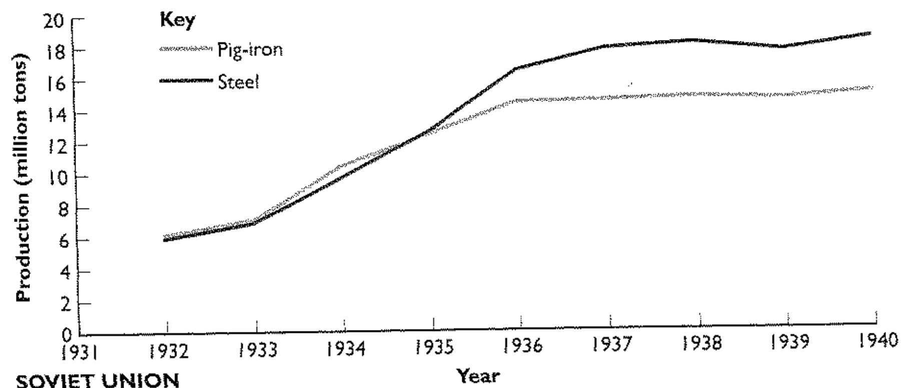
Evidence of success and achievements	Evidence of failures and weaknesses	Evidence that the Five-Year Plans were not well planned

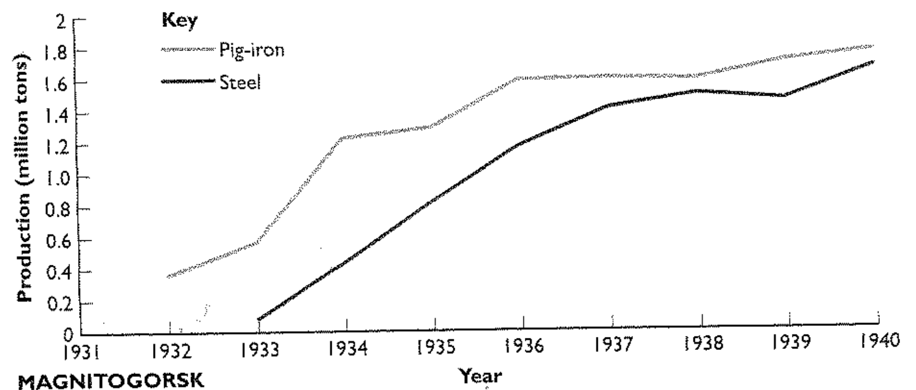
2 Who were the 'bourgeois specialists' and why were they attacked by the party?
3 Why were officials and managers reluctant to admit to problems in the plans?

SOURCE 13.8 Industrial output 1913–40, from R. W. Davies, M. Harrison and S. G. Wheatcroft (eds), *The Economic Transformation of the Soviet Union, 1913–1945*, 1994

	1913	1928	1932	1933	1936	1937	1940
Electric power (billion kWh)	1.9	5.0	13.5	16.4	32.8	36.2	48.3
Crude oil (million tons)	9.2	11.6	21.4	21.5	27.4	28.5	31.1
Coal (million tons)	29.1	35.5	64.4	76.3	126.8	128.0	165.9
Pig-iron (million tons)	4.2	3.3	6.2	7.1	14.4	14.5	14.9
Rolled steel (million tons)	3.5	3.4	4.4	5.1	12.5	13.0	13.1
Quality steel (million tons)	0.04	0.09	0.68	0.89	2.06	2.39	2.79
Copper (thousand tons)	31.1	30.0	45.0	44.3	100.8	97.5	160.9
Cement (million tons)	1.52	1.85	3.48	2.71	5.87	5.45	5.68
Mineral fertilisers (million tons)	0.07	0.14	0.92	1.03	2.84	3.24	3.24
Sulphuric acid (million tons)	0.12	0.21	0.55	0.63	1.20	1.37	1.59
Metal-cutting machine tools (thousands)	1.5	2.0	19.7	21.0	44.4	48.5	58.4
Locomotives (standard units)	265	478	828	941	1566	1582	1220
Generators (thousand kW)	–	75	1085	587	–	561	468
Electric motors (thousand kW)	–	259	1658	1385	1653	1833	1848
Tractors (thousand 15 hp units)	–	1.8	50.8	79.9	173.2	66.5	66.2
Lorries (thousands)	–	0.7	23.7	39.1	131.5	180.3	136.0
Raw sugar (million tons)	1.35	1.28	0.83	1.00	2.00	2.42	2.17
Cigarettes (billions)	22.1	49.5	57.9	62.7	85.9	89.2	100.4
Vodka (million decalitres)	118.9	55.5	72.0	–	89.7	92.5	44.3
Cotton fabrics (million linear metres)	2582	2678	2694	2732	3270	3448	3954
Woollen fabrics (million linear metres)	105	101	89	86	102	108	120

SOURCE 13.9 A comparison of pig-iron and steel production in the USSR and in Magnitogorsk





ACTIVITY

Compare the two graphs in Source 13.9. The similarities in their pattern are striking. Study Source 13.8 also, and consider why there was a slowdown in production between 1936 and 1938.

The First Five-Year Plan

As the First Five-Year Plan got underway, there was a wave of planning fervour or 'target mania'. There was a sort of competition between Gosplan and Vesenkha (the Supreme Economic Council), who were bidding each other up with higher targets. The original targets set in the first plan were optimistic, but almost before it was begun targets were revised upwards. In April 1929, two versions of the plan were produced – a 'basic' and a much higher 'optimum' version. The latter was chosen. This envisaged targets being increased by astonishing amounts, for instance, coal up from 35 to 75 million tons and iron ore from six to nineteen million tons. To many, these seemed hopelessly unachievable.

Some historians have suggested that planning was more in the realms of socialist fantasy than rational calculation. In *The Russian Revolution 1917–1932* (1994, pages 129–34), Sheila Fitzpatrick talks of this period as one in which the 'spirit of a Cultural Revolution' swept people along. Party leaders and members had a millennial vision of a country that would be transformed. They believed that in two or three years they would have a socialist rather than a market economy and money would be abandoned as the main means of rewarding workers. In this sense, the First Five-Year Plan can be seen more as a propaganda device to drive Soviet citizens forward and create a sense of urgency.

Setting targets is one thing; detailed planning, which involves the complex co-ordination of different branches of industry over a huge area, is something else. And this sort of detailed planning seemed to be notably absent from the First Five-Year Plan. The party handed out broad directives and priorities and it was left to officials and managers at regional and local levels to work out ways to achieve the production targets they had been set. This was bound to lead to problems.

AT MAGNITOGORSK

SOURCE 13.10 Changing production targets for pig-iron during the First Five-Year Plan

	Tons per year
1928	656,000
Summer 1929	850,000
Late 1929	1,100,000
Early 1930	2,500,000

Raw materials Firms routinely requested far more than they required because they were never sure what they would be allocated. Interruptions in deliveries were so regular that firms hoarded what they could, while at the same time bombarding the centre with requests for more of everything. Coal supplies were often found to be short on arrival, having been pilfered on the way. The plant therefore had to request more coal than it needed and probably ended up buying the 'lost coal' on the black market.

Quality Significant amounts of pig-iron and steel were found to be unusable when the time came to count up output. But even if it was declared defective, it was still sent to metal-starved firms that had little choice but to use it.

SOURCE 13.11 Output targets for the First Five-Year Plan, from A. Nove, *An Economic History of the USSR, 1917–91*, 1992, p. 145

	Actual output in 1927–28	1932–33 targets in first version of plan	1932–33 targets in 'optimum' version of plan
Coal (million tons)	35	68	75
Iron ore (million tons)	6	15	19
Steel (million tons)	4	8	10

SOURCE 13.12 A. Nove, *An Economic History of the USSR, 1917–91*, 1992, p. 191. Nove recounts a story told by Isaac Babel

'One old oil expert, given what he regarded as an absurd order to increase production, is said to have written to the Central Committee as follows: "I cease to be responsible for the planning department. The [plan] figure of 40 million tons I consider to be purely arbitrary. Over a third of the oil must come from unexplored areas ... Furthermore the three cracking plants which now exist are to be turned into 120 plants by the end of the five-year plan. This despite the huge shortage of metal ... and so on." ' ...

Needless to say the new targets were far beyond practical possibility. The rush, strain, shortages, pressures became intolerable, and caused great disorganization. Naturally, supplies of materials, fuels, goods wagons, fell short of requirements.

The high targets placed enormous strain on the economy. Materials of all sorts were in short supply and there was intense competition to get hold of them. At higher levels, powerful people in industrial commissariats pulled strings to make sure that their pet projects got the resources they needed for completion. Materials and workers – shock brigades – were rushed into key industries to do certain jobs, often on the order of a senior party official, despite the fact that this left other areas short and waiting for supplies. At the regional and local levels, factories competed with each other for scarce resources. Bribery and corruption were rife. Managers made illegal deals in their desperation to get the parts or supplies they needed to fulfil their targets. Some were known to hijack lorries and ambush trains to get supplies intended for other plants. Bottlenecks appeared everywhere due to shortages of materials and the inadequacy of the transport system. The railways could not cope with what they were expected to transport: it soon became clear that the planners had not invested enough in track or rolling stock.

The net result of this was twofold:

1 In some parts of the economy there was underproduction because factories were held up by shortages of materials. In other parts there was overproduction as factories rushed to exceed their targets.
2 There was a great deal of wastage because:
   a) overproduction created thousands of parts that other industries did not want
   b) much of the output was sub-standard, such as lorry tyres that lasted for only a few weeks.

What made matters worse was that few managers or officials were prepared to admit anything was wrong. They did not want to be accused of sabotaging the plans or criticising the party. So mistakes were covered up and problems were left unresolved. It was all buried in the colossal amount of paperwork that flowed around the USSR. All that mattered to managers and officials at different levels was that they could show they had achieved their targets, whether this was real or invented. In fact, there were extravagant claims of over-fulfilment in many areas. This seemed to confirm that the system was working and discouraged others from speaking out about problems.

Of course, not all the mistakes could be covered up and somebody had to be blamed. Class enemies were ready to hand and Stalin was not slow to use this political tool in the same way as he had in the collectivisation drive. The industrial equivalent of the kulak was the 'bourgeois specialist'. These were the old pre-1917 managers, engineers and technical staff who had survived the NEP in important jobs because of their skills and abilities. Now they were identified as saboteurs who were deliberately causing hold-ups, breakdowns and general problems in the supply industries. They were uncovered and imprisoned. Show trials were held to hammer home the point to other managers.

The attack on the bourgeois specialists was not just a cynical tool to frighten others and find a convenient scapegoat for errors and miscalculations. Many party members believed that this group did harbour bourgeois, anti-socialist attitudes that would scupper their revolution: they wanted proletarians in key technical positions. Unfortunately, the loss of valuable personnel so quickly caused so many problems that by 1931 the offensive against them was quietly dropped.

In the First Five-Year Plan, consumer goods industries, such as textiles, were sacrificed to the needs of heavy industry. Other areas suffered from the closure of small-scale enterprises and workshops. These were squeezed out for two main reasons:

- they had been largely run by Nepmen
- they could not get supplies of raw materials.

These small-scale operations might have been able to respond to consumer demand but there was no room for them in a centrally organised system.

WHY WERE OFFICIALS AND MANAGERS TOO FRIGHTENED TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE PROBLEMS OF THE PLANNING SYSTEM?

In March 1928, managerial and technical staff were accused of counter-revolutionary activities at the Shakhty coal mine in the Don Basin. Stalin was closely involved in the proceedings. The staff were forced to confess to subversive activities in a 'show trial' for all of the public to see. Five were executed and the rest were given long prison sentences.

The aim of this was clear – to intimidate managers and party officials who did not go along with the pace of industrialisation. The Shakhty trial created shock waves throughout the planning system. Gosplan was purged of pessimists and non-party members at the end of the 1920s. Statisticians who presented low targets were replaced by those who could paint a more optimistic picture.

In the early 1930s, trials of professionals and specialists were held in cities throughout the Soviet Union. In November 1930, the 'Industrial Party' show trial was held. This was a party of professionals who were supposedly organising the sabotage and wrecking of the Five-Year Plan. But this party was invented by Stalin. The accused were mainly industrialists, Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries who worked for the government. In 1933, in the Metro-Vickers trial, British specialists were found guilty of sabotage.

It is therefore not surprising that managers were unwilling to admit to mistakes when it could lead to investigation and criminal charges.

The Second and Third Five-Year Plans

By the beginning of the Second Five-Year Plan, party leaders were prepared to acknowledge the problems that had resulted from the breakneck speed of industrialisation from 1929 to 1932. The severe shortages, disruptions in transport, lack of skilled workers and slower growth rates for certain industries were sufficient evidence of this. In 1932, the great leap forward seemed to be on the verge of collapse.

The second plan was revised and targets were scaled back. The emphasis was more on consolidation. The plan was worked out in greater detail for each industry and region. The People's Commissariats, which were more organised and clearly defined by 1934, gave specific targets for the enterprises under their control as well as estimates of costs, labour, prices, and so on. Investment was ploughed into the railway system, thus increasing enormously the amount of freight it was able to carry. There were new training schemes that encouraged workers to learn skills and master techniques to tackle the problem of skills shortages. There were still plenty of rough edges to the planning system – shortages, waste, and under/over-production continued – but not on the scale of the first plan.

Many of the schemes started in the first plan now came on stream, boosting industrial growth enormously. For instance, the USSR was almost self-sufficient in the production of machine tools and far less dependent on foreign imports of machinery. The Soviet Union enjoyed the 'three good years' of 1934–36 and the achievements by 1937 were impressive. The Second Five-Year Plan envisaged more resources going into consumer industries, since leaders had realised how badly the workers had suffered during the early 1930s through lack of goods and basic commodities. There were improvements in some areas, like footwear production and food processing, but as the plan progressed, resources were again diverted into other areas.

After 1937, the USSR witnessed an economic slowdown. Although there was a general increase in industrial output during the Third Five-Year Plan, some areas like iron and steel virtually stopped growing. There was a fuel crisis when the oil industry failed to meet its modest targets. As Europe moved towards war, resources were channelled into the armaments industry and this created shortages elsewhere. Alec Nove (Source 13.13) places much of the blame for this slowdown on the purges that were in full swing in 1936 and 1937 (see Chapter 14). Nove claims the purges deprived the economy of valuable personnel and paralysed the ability of administrators and party officials to take the initiative and solve problems. Also, many planners were purged with the result that the planning system was thrown into confusion.

The picture at the end of the Third Five-Year Plan shows planning once more in a confused and even chaotic state, with shortages, waste and bottlenecks as growing features of the economy. Indeed, looking back over the plans it is sometimes difficult to see where the word 'planned' fits into the 'planned economy' of the 1930s. Yet this rough-and-ready system worked and, by 1941, the USSR had succeeded in creating the industrial base for a powerful arms industry.

SOURCE 13.13 A. Nove, *An Economic History of the USSR, 1917–1991*, 1992, p. 239

[The purge] swept away . . . managers, technicians, statisticians, planners, even foremen. Everywhere there were said to be spies, wreckers, diversionists. There was a grave shortage of qualified personnel, so the deportation of many thousands of engineers and technologists to distant concentration camps represented a severe loss. But perhaps equally serious was the psychological effect of this terror on the survivors. With any error or accident likely to be attributable to treasonable activities, the simplest thing to do was to avoid responsibility, to seek approval from one's superiors for any act, to obey mechanically any order received, regardless of local conditions.

C How did the workers fare under the plans?

FOCUS ROUTE

As you work through pages 230–239, use a table like the one below to collect information about the impact of the industrialisation plans on the workers.

Ways in which the plans benefited the workers (identify which types of worker benefited)	Ways in which the workers suffered under the plans or did not do well

Did the workers support the plans?

The urban working classes and young people in general were enthusiastic at the beginning of the plans. They were carried forward by the spirit of cultural revolution and wanted to move forward to a better society. Evidence of this enthusiasm can be found in the actions of the thousands of young people who volunteered to go and work on distant projects, often labouring in the most primitive of conditions. They were prepared to make sacrifices to build a new world which would probably bring real benefits only for their children. They were participating in the great construction projects of socialism (see Sources 13.5–13.7 on page 220).

On a more practical note, workers believed they would be better off. Their real wages had risen only slowly under the NEP and unemployment had been high in the late 1920s. Social historians have found evidence suggesting that shop-floor workers in the main supported the party hierarchy in its industrialisation push. They also approved of the attack on the bourgeois specialists. Young workers were tired of their 'old' managers still strutting around giving orders and engineers enjoying privileges while they slaved away.

The party had envisaged the creation of a proletarian intelligentsia with highly developed technical skills ('red specialists') who would fill the role of the old specialists and become loyal to the regime. To some extent this succeeded. The cohort of industrial workers of the late 1920s, possessing highly valued skills, quickly advanced to supervisory posts or became managers or party officials. There were great strides in higher technical education for more able and intelligent proletarians. This group did well on the whole when wage differentials were introduced and their standard of living was significantly higher than that of the broad mass of workers.

Workers who stayed in their jobs and observed labour discipline could do well in the 1930s. Training courses meant they could improve their qualifications and position, pay and prospects. Those who exceeded their targets were rewarded with higher pay, better working conditions and, with luck, better housing. They were celebrated in newspapers and on notice boards where they worked.

■ **Learning trouble spot**

Proletarianisation

Some students have difficulty understanding why the Communist Party was so anxious to 'proletarianise' the mass of the Russian people, that is, turn them into industrial workers. The Communists believed that the vast majority of the population had to be proletarians with the right attitudes before you could create a socialist state and then move on to establish Communism – the ultimate Marxist goal. This meant that you had to get rid of the old bourgeois capitalist attitudes connected to the selfishness of the free market economy – the notion of working for one's own self-interest with profit as the main incentive for economic activities. The people who held these attitudes were class enemies. Only when you got rid of these people could you proceed to the co-operation and sharing envisaged in the higher form of socialism.

To push forward proletarianisation, the party believed it had to:

- get rid of bourgeois specialists who made up the majority of the managers and engineers in industry and replace them with proletarians (red specialists)
- turn peasants flooding into the towns into good proletarians
- turn peasants remaining in the countryside into agricultural proletarians, hence the vision of factory farms and agrotowns.

Women in the labour force

One of the most important sources of new labour was women. Some ten million women entered the workforce. Women dominated some professions, particularly medicine and school teaching. The less well educated, especially tough ex-peasant women, became labourers or factory workers. Generally, women were paid less and found it more difficult to gain advancement than men. However women were working in jobs that they had not done before, as Source 13.14 on page 231 shows.

Sarah Davies' survey of women workers in Leningrad in 1935 (*Popular Opinion in Stalin's Russia: Terror, Propaganda and Dissent 1934–41*, 1997) showed that women workers in the city made up 44 per cent of the workforce but were likely to be less well paid, less literate and less involved in political and

technical education than their male counterparts. The issues that were most important to them were their children's needs, queues and fluctuating prices, not surprising as women had to look after the home as well as work. Their chances of reaching the top were limited. Of 328 factory directors, only twenty were women and seventeen of these were in textile and sewing factories where well over three-quarters of the workforce were women. There were only four women head doctors in hospitals, even though 50–60 per cent of all doctors were women.

SOURCE 13.14 Soviet women pilots in the 1930s

AT MAGNITOGORSK

Almost half of the workers in January 1932 were under 24 and typically ex-peasant, male, unskilled and illiterate. In 1933, about one-fifth (40,000) of the population were exiled peasants. John Scott (*Behind the Urals*, 1942) estimates that between 1928 and 1932 about three-quarters of new arrivals came of their own free will seeking work and the rest came under compulsion. Few of the engineers had real engineering experience. A colony of several hundred foreign engineers and specialists arrived to advise and direct the work.

SOURCE 13.15 S. Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilisation*, 1995, p. 95, writing about the fluidity of labour

By early 1934 almost ten times as many workers had passed through the site than were at hand. Indeed, who had not been to Magnitogorsk! You tell someone you're going to Magnitogorsk and everywhere you hear: 'Magnita, I'm going there,' or 'I just came from there.' Somebody says he has a brother there, somebody else is waiting for a letter from his son. You get the impression that the whole country either was there or is going there. Many people in fact came and left several times in the course of one year. In 1931 the average length of stay for a worker was 82 calendar days. Magnitogorsk became a revolving door.

The quicksand society

The First Five-Year Plan required an enormous expansion of the labour force. The majority of the new workers were peasants who had been forced off the land by collectivisation. Around half the labour force by the end of the First Five-Year Plan was made up of peasants. They wandered in from the countryside, bemused and bewildered, looking for work, lodgings and adequate food. If they could find a better deal elsewhere, they moved on. There was a phenomenal turnover of labour. In the coal industry in 1930, the average worker moved jobs three times a year. These ex-peasants lacked the most elementary disciplines of time-keeping and punctuality. Their normal working pattern was entirely different from that required in a factory and they found it difficult to adapt to the monotonous hours of machine-based work. Many were resentful about being forced into industrial work anyway. This led to a high rate of absenteeism.

This turnover was not restricted to the peasants. Skilled and semi-skilled workers soon found that skills were at a premium and that managers, desperate to fulfil their targets, were anxious to attract them. They began to compete for skilled workers by offering higher wages or additional perks, such as extra food rations. These workers were able to move easily between jobs and this contributed to the destabilising effect of high labour turnover on industrial enterprises. One Communist leader talked of Russia being like a huge 'nomadic gypsy camp' and Moshe Lewin likened it to a 'quicksand society' (see Source 13.20 on page 234).

The skills shortage was one of the biggest problems the planners faced. In 1931, it was estimated that less than seven per cent of the workforce were skilled. A survey in 1933 showed that only seventeen per cent of those recruited to industry had any skills. In Elektrozavod, a $25,000 lathe from the USA lay unused for want of a minor repair which workers were unable to perform. Untrained, clumsy workers were doing an astonishing amount of damage to expensive imported machinery and were turning out poor-quality goods. Machines were not properly oiled and maintained. There were stories of whole production runs being ruined by ill-educated and untrained ex-peasants.

ACTIVITY

1 Use the information in Sources 13.16 and 13.17 and a graph-drawing program to produce bar graphs illustrating the following:
   a) net gains or losses in the Magnitogorsk labour force for each month in 1931
   b) the overall pattern of gains and losses between 1930 and 1933.
2 Using ICT, produce a bar graph which shows:
   a) total number of workers on 1 January 1931
   b) total arrivals for 1931
   c) total departures for 1931
   d) total number of workers on 31 December 1931.
3 What do these graphs reveal about the turnover of labour in Magnitogorsk in 1931?

SOURCE 13.16 Labour turnover at Magnitogorsk, 1931

1st of month	Total workers	Arrived during the month	Left during the month
January	18,865	3,597	3,853
February	18,609	4,398	3,402
March	19,605	8,570	5,934
April	22,241	9,391	7,166
May	24,446	17,640	9,826
June	32,280	17,292	10,825
July	38,747	10,983	12,694
August	37,006	8,693	11,447
September	34,252	10,381	9,421
October	35,162	8,003	10,072
November	33,093	10,350	10,797
December	32,666	7,440	7,835

SOURCE 13.17 Workers arriving at and departing from Magnitogorsk, 1930–33

	Arrived	Left
1930	67,000*	45,000
1931	111,000	97,000
1932	62,000	70,000
1933	53,000	53,000
Total	**293,000**	**265,000**

* It is possible that the figure of 67,000 for 1930 is a typographical error and should have read 57,000

SOURCE 13.18 A. Nove, *An Economic History of the USSR, 1917–91*, 1992, p. 192. Nove quotes a future minister, talking about the birth of the Stalingrad tractor works

a) *A worker ... came to the Volga from a Moscow factory. Even he was full of wonder at the American lathes without belt transmission, with their own motors. He could not handle them. What is one to say of peasants fresh from the fields? They were sometimes illiterate.*

b) *The first director of the factory, Ivanov, wrote as follows: 'In the assembly shop I talked to a young man who was grinding sockets. I asked him how he measured, and he showed me how he used his fingers. We had no measuring instruments!'*

ACTIVITY

You are advisers to the Politburo. Working in groups of three, suggest at least one solution for each of the problems identified below. Then compare your solutions with those of other groups.

Are you going to:

- use methods of intimidation to force the most out of the workers?
- find ways to encourage them to perform more satisfactorily?

Problems

1 Continuing shortage of labour – where can you get more workers for the ever-expanding factories?
2 Skills shortage – what can you do about the lack of technical skills?
3 Poor work habits amongst the ex-peasants – poor discipline and clumsiness.
4 Keeping the workforce stable – it is very hard to establish good practices if your workforce is constantly changing and moving to other places.
5 Absenteeism.
6 Motivating the workers to increase their productivity.
7 Keeping the existing skilled working class happy.

How did the party respond to its labour problems?

FOCUS ROUTE

1 Draw a diagram to record the main ways in which the Soviet government tried to deal with the problems it faced).
2 Compare these with the solutions you suggested in the second Activity on page 232.
3 What surprises you about some of the methods adopted by the Communists?

Wage differentials and incentives

To stop workers 'flitting' from job to job, wage differentials (i.e. paying some people more than others) were introduced to reward those who stayed put and acquired skills. Managers were allowed to pay bonuses. Other incentives were also used, such as awarding honours to outstanding workers; these were not just moral rewards but could bring perks and privileges such as access to closed shops, better housing and better clothes. Egalitarianism in wages was abandoned as early as 1931.

Piece work

Payment according to the pieces of work completed became common across industry, to try to drive up productivity.

Training

A massive training programme was brought into being. But many of the training programmes were poor and trainees were rushed through by poor instructors. The situation improved in the Second Five-Year Plan with fewer but better training schemes made available.

Tough measures

A series of measures were brought in between 1930 and 1933 to deal with absentees. These included dismissal, eviction from factory-owned homes or loss of various benefits. Causing damage or leaving a job without permission could lead to a prison sentence. The intimidation and terror applied to the bourgeois specialists were also applied to the workers.

The degree of control increased during the Second and Third Five-Year Plans. In 1938, labour books were issued, along with internal passports. The labour book gave details of a worker's labour history, qualifications and any misdemeanours. It was very difficult to survive without one of these. In 1940, absenteeism became a crime, with two offences bringing a prison sentence.

Forced labour

Some labour shortages were solved by using forced labour, especially for the worst jobs in the worst conditions. Around 300,000 prisoners worked on the Baltic–White Sea Canal, many of them kulaks arrested during the collectivisation drive. After April 1930 all criminals sentenced to more than three years were sent to labour camps to provide cheap labour. The government decreed that these camps should be self-supporting. Lumber camps were set up in the forests of the frozen north and the timber produced was exported to help earn money for industrial investment. The number of forced labourers increased when the Great Purges got into full swing in the mid-1930s.

Propaganda and encouragement

A huge propaganda campaign was mounted to encourage workers to raise their productivity, which was outstandingly low during the First Five-Year Plan (see Sources 13.19 and 13.21). Shock-brigade campaigns (mounting intensive efforts to build structures such as dams) and 'socialist competition' were tried to raise work norms but they enjoyed only limited success. Probably the most significant propaganda initiative was the Stakhanovite movement (see pages 236–238). Although this caused some problems in the economy, productivity rates did improve.

AT MAGNITOGORSK

SOURCE 13.19 S. Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilisation*, 1995, pp. 90–92

In 1930 work began on a dam on the Ural River to supply the steel factory with water. Shock work began: 'Everyone to the dam! Everything for the dam!' There was socialist competition between left and right banks. The target date moved forward but the dam was built in a record 74 days, well ahead of schedule. One contemporary writer wrote: 'The Magnitogorsk dam was the school at which people began to respect Bolshevik miracles.' But it was not deep enough and the water froze, there was a chronic shortage of water, and a new dam five times as big was started almost immediately. When it was completed the first dam was submerged.

SOURCE 13.20 M. Lewin, 'Society, State and Ideology during the First Five-Year Plan', 1976, in C. Ward (ed.), *The Stalinist Dictatorship*, 1998, pp. 178–79. Lewin has an interesting background. Born in Poland in 1921, he became active in left-wing politics, escaping from the Nazis to work in the Soviet Union on a kolkhoz and in a mill. He was an officer in the Red Army for a brief time. After the Second World War he spent ten years in a kibbutz in Israel before holding academic positions in France, Britain and the USA

One of the results of this [mass influx of peasants to the cities] was the breakdown of labour discipline, which saddled the state with an enormous problem of education and disciplining the mass of the crude labour force. The battle against absenteeism, shirking, drinking in factories during working hours, and breaking tools was long, and the Soviet government played no 'humanistic' games in this fight. Very soon, methods such as denial of ration cards, eviction from lodgings, and even penal sentences for undisciplined workers were introduced.

Factories and mines in these years were transformed into railway stations – or as Ordzhonikidze [see page 223] exclaimed in despair – into one huge 'nomadic gypsy camp'. The cost of the turnover was incredible. Before they had managed to learn their job, people had already given their notice or done something in order to get fired. But the same process, and on a large scale, was going on among managers and administrators, specialists and officials. At all levels of the local administration and party apparat, people adopted the habit of leaving in good time, before they were penalized, recalled, brought in for questioning, downgraded, fired or arrested.

Thus workers, administrators, specialists, officials, party apparatus men, and, in great masses, peasants were all moving around and changing jobs, creating unwanted surpluses in some places and dearths in others, losing skills or failing to acquire them, creating streams and floods in which families were destroyed, children lost, and morality dissolved. Social, administrative, industrial and political structures were all in flux. The mighty dictatorial government found itself, as a result of its impetuous activity during those early years of accelerated industrialisation, presiding over a 'quicksand' society.

SOURCE 13.21 A Soviet propaganda poster, *In the Struggle for Fuel and Metal*, produced in 1933 with the aim of spurring on the workers to fulfil the Five-Year Plan. Gustav Klutsis, the creator of this poster, was a master of photo-montage techniques, and his posters were reproduced thousands of times. A party member since 1920, he was a loyal Stalinist, but neither this nor his work for the party could save him when he was denounced by a jealous rival during the purges; he was shot in 1938

SOURCE 13.22 J. Scott, *Behind the Urals*, 1942, p. 49. Scott describes aspects of the attempts to motivate workers in Magnitogorsk

In 1933 wage differentials were approximately as follows: the average monthly wage for an unskilled worker in Magnitogorsk was something in the neighbourhood of 100 roubles; a skilled workers' apprentice 200, a skilled worker, 300; an engineer with experience 600 to 800; administrators, directors etc., anywhere from 800 to 3000. The heavy differentiation plus the absence of unemployment and the consequent assurance of being able without difficulty to get any job in any profession learned, supplemented and stimulated the intellectual curiosity of the people. The two together were so potent that they created a student body in the Magnitogorsk night schools of 1933 willing to work eight, ten or even twelve hours on the job under the severest conditions, and then come back to night school, sometimes on an empty stomach and, sitting on a backless wooden bench, in a room so cold that you could see your breath a yard in front of you, study mathematics four hours straight....

... Competition between individuals, brigades and whole departments was encouraged ... The Stakhanov movement [see pages 190–192] hit Magnitogorsk in the autumn of 1935. Brigade and shop competition was intensified. Banners were awarded to the brigades who worked best, and monetary remuneration accompanied banners ... Wages rose. Production rose ...

SOURCE 13.23 Extracts from a letter preserved in the Magnitogorsk archives, from Anna Kovaleva to Marfa Gidzia, and quoted in S. Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilisation*, 1995, pp. 218–19

Dear Marfa!

We are both wives of locomotive drivers of the rail transport of Magnitka. You probably know that the rail transport workers of the MMK (Magnitogorsk Metallurgical Complex) are not fulfilling the plan, that they are disrupting the supply of the blast furnaces, open hearths and rolling shops ... All the workers of Magnita accuse our husbands ... Every day there are stoppages and breakdowns in rail transport ... [To fulfil the plan] it is necessary to work like the best workers of our country work. Among such shock workers is my husband, Aleksandr Panteleevich Kovalev. He always works like a shock worker, exceeding his norms, while economising on oil and lubricants ... My husband receives prizes every month ... My husband's locomotive is always clean and well taken care of....

Your husband, Iakov Stepanovich, does not fulfil the plan. He has frequent breakdowns on his locomotive, his locomotive is dirty, and he always overconsumes fuel ... all the rail workers of Magnita know him, for the wrong reasons, as the worst driver. By contrast, my husband is known as a shock worker. He is written up and praised in the newspapers ... He and I are honoured everywhere as shock workers. At the store we get everything without having to wait in queues. We moved to the building for shock workers. We get an apartment with rugs, a gramophone, a radio and other comforts ...

Therefore, I ask you, Marfa, to talk to your husband ... Persuade him that he must work honourably, conscientiously, like a shock worker. Teach him to understand the words of comrade Stalin, that work is a matter of honour, glory, valour and heroism....

ACTIVITY

Use the information in Sources 13.19–13.23 on pages 234–235 to answer the following questions.

1 Which of the measures the Soviet government brought in do not fit well with socialism and would be more at home in a capitalist system?

2 **a)** What does Moshe Lewin (Source 13.20) reveal about the problems facing the Soviet authorities and the actions they took?
  b) How reliable do you think Moshe Lewin's account is as a historical source?

3 What do Sources 13.19–13.22 tell you about the methods used to motivate workers?

4 **a)** Does John Scott's account (Source 13.22) suggest these were successful?
  b) How reliable do you think his account is?

5 **a)** Do you think the 'Dear Marfa' letter (Source 13.23) is solely the work of the author?
  b) Why did she write this letter or allow her name to be attached to it?
  c) What arguments does Anna use to persuade Marfa to reform her husband?
  d) Marfa was illiterate but the letter could have been read to her. How effective do you think it was?

The Stakhanov record

SOURCE 13.24 Alexei Stakhanov, the coal miner whose astonishing output inspired countless other workers to copy his example

At ten o'clock on 30 August 1935, Alexei Stakhanov, a pneumatic-pick operator, began his special shift. After five hours of uninterrupted work he had cut 102 tons of coal, almost sixteen times the norm of 6.5 tons per shift. How was this done?

The idea came from Konstantin Petrov, party organiser at Central Ormino in the Don Basin. Central Ormino lagged behind its plan quota and Petrov wanted to do something about it. He knew Stakhanov usually produced above the norm results on his shift. Ideal conditions were set up: an uninterrupted supply of compressed air, a good pick, two carefully selected proppers (to prop up the roof as Stakhanov cut away the coal) and ample supplies of timber. Hauliers were on hand to take the coal away. Petrov was there, holding a lamp on the coal face. Normally, the miners working on the face that Stakhanov cut produced around 52 tons in total per shift, but they did their own propping. Stakhanov with his support team cut twice the amount that the eight miners would have produced.

Barely two hours after Stakhanov had finished, Petrov assembled a party committee at which Stakhanov was acclaimed for his world record for productivity – the correct path to 'guarantee the fulfilment of the annual plan ahead of schedule'. Stakhanov received 200 roubles (instead of the normal 30 roubles), a bonus equal to a month's wages, an apartment reserved for technical personnel with a telephone and comfortable furniture, passes to the cinema and live performances at the local workers' club, and places at a holiday resort. He also had his name prominently displayed on the mine's honour board.

A special meeting of coal hewers was called, with compulsory attendance of local party, union and managerial leaders. Sectional competitions were set up for miners to emulate Stakhanov's achievements. The party got the response it wanted. Several miners demanded the chance to beat the record, and by 5 September two had done so. Others were warned: 'All those who try to slander Stakhanov and his record will be considered by the party committee as the most vile enemies of the people.'

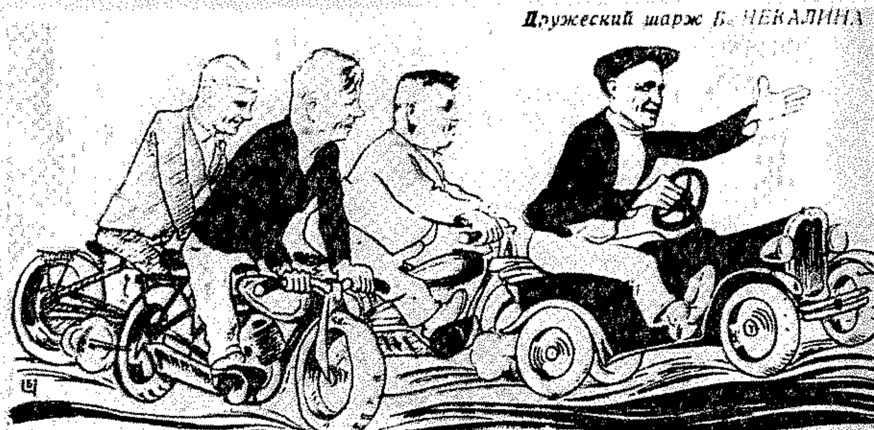
Ordzhonikidze, the Commissar for Heavy Industry, had Stakhanov, the 'Soviet Hercules', put on the front page of *Pravda*. He said, 'In our country, under socialism, heroes of labour must become the most famous.' On 11 September, *Pravda* used the term 'Stakhanovite movement' for the first time and in November Stalin called for Stakhanovism to spread 'widely and deeply' across the entire Soviet Union. Recordmania swept the country: by December 1935, the records achieved in heavy industry alone filled two volumes.

The Stakhanovite movement was seen as a way of compelling management to adopt new production methods and increase rates of production. Those reluctant to do so were branded as saboteurs, with the warning 'Such pseudo leaders must be removed immediately'. With pressure from above to meet increased targets and from below from workers wanting to be Stakhanovites, who would have wanted to be a manager in Soviet Russia at that time?

A MAGNITOGORSK STAKHANOVITE

V. P. Ogorodnikov was the son of a peasant from Smolensk. His name features four times in a list of eight record-breaking shifts in a Magnitogorsk steel mill between September 1935 and January 1936. The second-highest-earning worker in Magnitogorsk, he was rewarded with a brand-new motor cycle and an individual house with its own garden, 70 per cent paid for by the factory. Before the revolution perhaps only a factory owner could have afforded such a house. He became a household name.

SOURCE 13.25 A cartoon showing the leading 'Stakhanovite' blooming mill operators, featured in the Magnitogorsk newspaper. Left to right: Ogorodnikov, Chernysh, Bogatyrenko and Tishchenko



SOURCE 13.26 The output of the leading 'Stakhanovite' blooming mill operators in Magnitogorsk, 1935–36 *(In a blooming mill, melted metal is formed into steel ingots or bars.)*

Date/shift	Name	Steel ingots produced per shift
12 September 1935	Ogorodnikov	211
22 September	Tishchenko	214
25 September	Bogatyrenko	219
9 October	Ogorodnikov	230
? October	Bogatyrenko	239
29 October	Ogorodnikov	243
11 January 1936	Ogordnikov	251
11 January (next shift)	Chernysh	264

PARTY SECRETARIES

Party Secretaries were charged with overseeing the implementation of Moscow's orders. They were judged by the output of major industrial enterprises in their areas – over fulfilment of plan targets was demanded at any cost, and health and safety issues came a poor second. They would use their influence to help managers secure scarce supplies in competition with factories from other areas. Failure to meet a target might have serious consequences.

The Stakhanovite campaign gave them the chance to overcome inertia in industry and put pressure on managers to improve productivity and raise output.

WORKERS

Workers were anxious to improve their position. But they could not strike; the NKVD saw to that. They wanted to take advantage of any wage differentials in order to secure a better standard of living. Also, they tried to avoid harsh punishments for absenteeism or poor quality work – they did not want to be accused of wrecking. One way to get higher wages and to avoid accumulating a poor record was to move from one job to another so that the authorities could not keep track of them.

When Stakhanovism started, workers resented the increased norms (these went up by around 30 per cent in some enterprises) and there was increased tension between managers and workers. Some workers demanded to become Stakhanovites in order to gain increased pay and privileges. For example, they demanded good tools, but other workers resented that the would-be Stakhanovites got the best equipment.

MANAGERS

Managers had to fulfil their targets and would do anything, including bribery and corruption, to do it. They could only fulfil their targets with the co-operation of the workers. Managers were especially desperate to keep skilled workers: some managers registered non-existent workers on the payroll and distributed their ration cards to favoured workers. Harsh laws on absenteeism were not enforced, payments were made for work that had never been done and bonuses were paid wherever possible. Moscow attacked the overpayment of wages but managers were more worried about failing to meet production targets. They made up success stories to keep Moscow happy. Soviet managers had a saying: 'It's necessary not to work well but to account well.'

Stakhanovism presented managers with problems. Workers put them under a lot of pressure to be classified as Stakhanovites and wanted good tools to do the job more efficiently, but there were not enough of these to go around. Such shortages frustrated workers and could lead to them charging managers with wrecking by 'hindering us from working in a Stakhanovite fashion'. Managers also had to deal with other problems arising from Stakhanovism, such as:

- resentment from workers who did not want production norms to increase
- distortions in the production process caused by resources being focused on Stakhanovite workers. Managers were judged on total output, not output from specific areas within the enterprise.

13E Pressures on a manager in 1936

PRESSURES FROM ABOVE

Targets
There was increasing pressure from party officials to fulfil targets. Failure could lead to savage attacks on managers.

Increased labour norms
These were increased on average by ten per cent in early 1936, and by up to 50 per cent in some areas. If managers applied the norms, workers often left. Some workers could not make the norms, which caused tension between workers and management. Managers who tried to lower norms could be accused of wrecking and arrested by the NKVD.

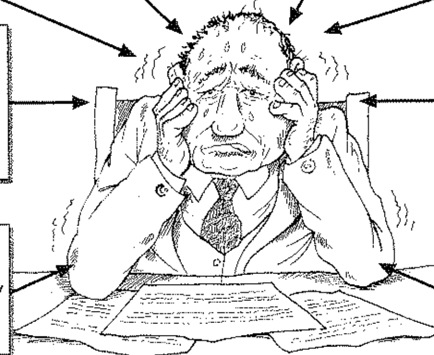
Books must balance
State subsidies to industry were cut substantially from 1936 onwards and enterprises were expected to pay for the fuel, raw materials and labour they needed from their own income. Managers who found themselves with a shortfall faced charges of wrecking.

Wage incentives
In 1936, rationing ended and there were more consumer goods to buy. Food became more expensive. Workers wanted better wages, especially when they had to work harder. But enterprises could not afford these because of cuts in subsidies and the need to balance the books (see left). However, at the same time the gap between ordinary workers' wages and that of managers and professionals increased.

ECONOMIC PRESSURES

Labour shortage
By 1936, the number of new workers coming into industry had declined by two-thirds because of better living conditions on collective farms and the drafting of young men into the armed forces. Mining and lumbering were hit hard.

Shortage of vital raw materials
There were shortages of oil, coal and timber (partly as a result of the lack of labourers to supply them) at a time when domestic consumption was expanding rapidly.



ECONOMIC PRESSURES

Competition from military spending
From 1936 onwards there was an unplanned increase in spending on the armed forces (from 3.4 per cent of the budget in 1931 to 16.1 per cent in 1936 and 32.5 per cent in 1940) and the military was given priority in the allocation of materials.

Fall in foreign trade
The worldwide slump in trade during the 1930s meant it was no longer possible to import technology such as new industrial machines.

D Did urban living standards improve during the plans?

Throughout the 1930s, the central planning system never managed to improve the standard of living of the very citizens for whom the plans were ostensibly designed. During the First Five-Year Plan, in particular, the workers suffered very badly. There was a profound lack of consumer goods, and food was rationed. It is estimated that in Leningrad and Moscow between 1928 and 1933 meat, milk and fruit consumption declined by two-thirds.

The pressures created by the expanding urban population were phenomenal. It is estimated that cities and towns were growing at a rate of 200,000 every month and there was very little provision for this wave of humanity pouring in from the countryside. The newcomers were mainly peasants who had suffered from the psychological upheaval of being uprooted from their rural lifestyle. Some of the towns in more remote areas were akin to frontier towns, with no paved roads and inadequate sanitary arrangements. They had been turned into huge construction sites, surrounded by a sea of mud. Workers lived in barracks in appalling conditions. Overcrowding was intense, and with it came its usual bedfellows – dirt and squalor. There was very little control and life was brutish, violent and crime-ridden.

In 1935, Stalin announced that 'Life has become better, comrades, life has become more joyous.' Just how joyous is open to question. The planners were not able to meet the needs of urban dwellers. Housing, in particular, remained abysmal; there was intense overcrowding in sub-standard accommodation as building materials were diverted to factory building. Town transport, mainly trams, was also invariably packed. There was a shortage of water, shops and catering facilities. Most workers ate in their factory canteens. There was some expansion of shops during the Second Five-Year Plan but the centralised distribution system was poor and the shops often lacked basic commodities. Long queues, seemingly a permanent feature of Russian life, had as much to do with the scarcity of shops as with lack of products. However, some industrial enterprises set up their own shops, bringing in food from farms, and the peasants supplied towns with milk, eggs, vegetables and meat from their private plots. It is difficult to generalise for all sections of society and some workers certainly became better off during this period.

AT MAGNITOGORSK

Only 15 per cent of Magnitogorsk's population lived in permanent brick apartment buildings, taking up 33 per cent of the city's space. Twenty-five per cent lived in mud huts they had built for themselves. Virtually everybody had at some time lived in the huge barrack-like workers' housing. By 1939, there were enough public bath-houses to allow every inhabitant to have seven baths a year. In *Behind the Urals* (1942, pages 184–88), John Scott records that there were different levels of housing: directors and top managers had houses with several rooms and gardens; skilled workers had small houses or apartments with basic facilities; unskilled workers had poor-quality housing or mud huts.

SOURCE 13.27 M. Lewin, 'Society, State and Ideology during the First Five-Year Plan', 1976, in C. Ward (ed.), *The Stalinist Dictatorship*, 1998, p. 177

In the cities, the inordinate and unanticipated growth transformed a strained housing situation into an appalling one, creating the specifically Soviet [or Stalinist] reality of chronically overcrowded lodgings, with consequent attrition of human relations, strained family life, destruction of privacy and personal life, and various forms of psychological strain. All this provided a propitious hunting ground for the ruthless, the primitive, the blackmailer, the hooligan, and the informer. The courts dealt with an incredible mass of cases testifying to the human destruction caused by this congestion of dwellings. The falling standards of living, the lines outside stores, and the proliferation of speculators suggest the depths of the tensions and hardships.

SOURCE 13.28 M. Fainsod, *Smolensk under Soviet Rule*, 1958, p. 322, describing living conditions for unskilled workers in 1937

The workers' barracks were described as overcrowded and in a state of extreme disrepair with water streaming from the ceiling 'straight on to workers' beds'. Heat was rarely provided in the barracks; bedding went unchanged; and sanitary work was almost non-existent. There were no kitchens and eating halls on the construction sites; hot food could not be obtained until the evening when workers had to walk a long distance to reach the dining hall. 'Many of the women', one female Party member reported, 'live practically on the street. No one pays any attention to them; some of those defenceless creatures threaten to commit suicide.' In addition, cases where wages were not paid on time were on the increase. All this 'neglect of the elementary needs of workers' as well as 'lack of care for them as human beings' resulted in 'fully justified dissatisfaction' and bitterness on the part of the workers.

SOURCE 13.29 H. Eekman, a Belgian diplomat, saw ordinary families in Moscow in the late 1930s cramped into small, shared living accommodation

They made pathetic efforts to isolate from their neighbours the few square feet of floor space allotted to their use. Every piece of furniture, every stick they owned, every ragged remnant saved from old curtains, was pressed into service to build some sort of fence or stockade around their cramped refuge.

URBAN HOUSING STATISTICS IN THE FIRST FIVE YEAR PLAN

Housing
- Plan 33% increase
- Actual 16% increase
- Result 50% shortfall

Urban population
- Plan 32.5 million
- Actual 38.7 million
- Result 20% higher than expected

Moscow population
- 1929 2.2 million
- 1932 3.7 million

By the end of the 1930s, 40% of the Soviet urban population were former peasants who had moved within the decade.

SOURCE 13.30 N. Mandelstam, *Hope Against Hope*, 1971. Nadezhda Mandelstam was the wife of one of Russia's greatest poets of the twentieth century, Osip Mandelstam, and a victim of Stalin's repression. She survived and wrote two volumes of memoirs: *Hope Against Hope* and *Hope Abandoned*

At the end of the twenties and in the thirties our authorities, making no concessions to 'egalitarianism', started to raise the living standard of those who had proved their usefulness. The resulting differentiation was very noticeable, and everybody was concerned to keep the material benefits he had worked so hard to earn – particularly now that the wretched poverty of the first post-revolutionary years was a thing of the past. Nobody wanted to go through that again, and a thin layer of privileged people gradually came into being – with 'packets', country villas, and cars. They realized only later how precarious it all was: in the period of the great purges they found they could be stripped of everything in a flash, and without any explanation. But in the meantime those who had been granted a share of the cake eagerly did everything demanded of them.

SOURCE 13.31 J. Scott, *Behind the Urals*, 1942, pp. 122–23. John Scott was an American volunteer working in Magnitogorsk (see page 221). Here, he writes about Masha the daughter of illiterate, poor peasants. Masha did not receive her first pair of shoes until she was fourteen years old. Her parents were very supportive and Masha studied at school, in a higher education institute in Moscow and at Magnitogorsk Teachers' College. She then taught adults in a party higher education college

From the incredible poverty and suffering of the civil-war period, the Russian people were working their way up to a higher standard. All Masha's family were enthusiastic. Several of the children joined the Komsomol, and after years of argument, the mother succumbed to the pressures of her children and took down the icons from the walls of the hut. Then she too decided to study. Masha's mother learned to read and write at the age of fifty-five. She was taught by her youngest daughter.

Masha went to the capital in 1929. At that time the industrialization of the country was just beginning. Russia's rapidly expanding economy was crying for every kind of professional skill, for engineers, chemists, teachers, economists, and doctors. The higher schools paid stipends to their students, and aided them in every way to get through their courses and out to factory and laboratory. Masha finished up her preparatory work, and then entered the Mendelyeyev Institute, where she worked part time as laboratory assistant to make a few roubles for bread.

Masha was very happy in Magnitogorsk. She felt that the world was at her feet. She slept on the divan of her sister and brother-in-law's tiny hotel room, she had two or three dresses, two pairs of shoes and one coat. In two more years, she would graduate from the teachers' college. Then she would teach, or perhaps take graduate work. Not only this, she was living in a town which had grown up from nothing just as she herself had. Living conditions were improving as the pig-iron production of the mill increased. She felt herself a part of a going concern. Hence her spontaneous pity for me, whom she first saw as a cast-off from a bankrupt and degenerating society.

ACTIVITY

How do Sources 13.27–13.31 confirm Stalin's claim of 1935 that 'Life has become better, comrades, life has become more joyous'?

Note: This activity requires you to interpret, evaluate and use source material in relation to its historical context.

1. Carefully analyse both the content and the provenance of the sources. Notice the differences in content and what this says about the experience of different sections of Soviet society and how experiences change in different parts of the country.
2. Examine the origins and purpose of the sources so you can judge their reliability and value.
3. Think about the different perspectives of the writers, for example, Lewin is a professional historian (see Source 13.20, page 234), and N. Mandelstam was a victim of Stalin's repression.

How successful were the Five-Year Plans for industry?

> ■ **Learning trouble spot**
>
> **Examining the statistics**
>
> The production figures for the Five-Year Plans can be seen in Source 13.8 on page 226. All of the figures are based on Soviet estimates. There are several ways in which the figures could be inaccurate:
>
> - Managers of enterprises and factories had plenty of opportunity to manipulate the paperwork in order to inflate their successes and cover up their failures. It was not only their jobs that were on the line if they could not show that they had fulfilled their targets.
> - Officials at regional levels also did not want to be seen to be failing to meet the targets set by the central administration. So they were likely to cover up failures and to accept good figures given to them by enterprises.
> - Top officials did not want to be seen to be failing to achieve the key targets set for their industry. They wanted to show Stalin that they had been successful.
>
> Western analysts, such as R. W. Davies, Alec Nove and Eugene Zaleski, have looked carefully at the Soviet figures and used different ways of calculating growth. Others have concluded that the Soviet statistics are often so contradictory that it is impossible to give an accurate picture of the achievements of the plans in the 1930s.

Conclusions

Despite the problems with the statistics, all commentators agree that there was substantial growth in heavy industry during this period, that there were impressive achievements, and that the Soviet Union was transformed on the industrial front. The command economy clearly had major weaknesses – unrealistic targets; the use of bribery, corruption and crooked deals to achieve targets; major shortages; and products of dubious quality. At best, the economy was ill-organised and badly co-ordinated, at worst it was chaotic. There were imbalances in the economy, with heavy industry taking priority over chemicals and transport and consumer goods being neglected throughout. The Russian people still spent an enormous amount of their time queuing and went short of essential commodities. Living conditions remained abysmal.

However, this has to be set against the state of Soviet Russia in 1928 and the massive steps forward that industry took in the 1930s. In a sense, the plans were trying to do the impossible in conditions of appalling backwardness. The targets were always unrealisable but they were designed to drive people forward to achieve the impossible. Resources were directed towards the areas of key priority and in a rough and crude way progress was made. Given the results, some historians have concluded that the type of command economy that emerged, with clearly set priorities, seemed reasonably well suited to the circumstances of the USSR in the 1930s. It got the Soviet industrial juggernaut rolling and that was no mean achievement.

SOURCE 13.32 C. Ward, *Stalin's Russia*, 1993, p. 81

When the first piateletka (Five-Year Plan) was declared complete in December 1932 no major targets had been reached, but there were some dramatic advances. In these four or five years the Soviet economy was fundamentally transformed. In the Urals, the Kuzbass, the Volga district and the Ukraine hundreds of mining, engineering and metallurgical enterprises were in the making. New factories materialised in the empty lands of the non-Russian republics scarcely touched by the modern world. More than half the machine tools on stream in the USSR by 1932 were fabricated or installed after 1928. Gigantic schemes like the Magnitogorsk combine (part of the Ural–Kuznetsk iron and steel complex) were built from scratch, the Truksib railway line opened in 1930 and the first of the Dnieprostroi's new turbines began to turn in 1932.

SOURCE 13.33 A. Bullock, *Hitler and Stalin: Parallel Lives*, 1991, pp. 295–96

After the grey compromises of the NEP, the Plan revived the flagging faith of the party. Here at last was the chance to pour their enthusiasm into building the New Jerusalem they had been promised. The boldness of the targets, the sacrifices demanded and the vision of what 'backward' Russia might achieve provided an inspiring contrast with an 'advanced' West with millions unemployed and resources left to waste because of the Slump. None of Stalin's targets might be achieved, but in every case output was raised: 6 million tons of steel was little more than half the 10 million allowed for, but 50 per cent up on the starting figure.

How well planned do you think the plans for industry were?

Would the Soviet Union have done better if it had continued with the NEP?

One question remains: would the Soviet Union have done better if it had continued with the NEP as Bukharin and the right wing of the party had wanted it to?

Some historians believe that the Soviet government could have avoided the human suffering and done just as well, probably better, by sticking with the NEP. Roy Medvedev (*Let History Judge*, 1972) and Stephen Cohen (*Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution*, 1974) were among the first historians to put forward this case. They contend that the modernisation of Russia could have been achieved by the continuation of the limited market economy of the 1920s. They accept that the pace would have been slower but maintain that the waste of resources would have been far less.

R. W. Davies, a leading British expert on the Russian economy, has a mixed view (*Soviet Economic Development From Lenin to Khrushchev*, 1998, pages 36–37). According to him, the NEP had delivered rapid recovery after the Civil War and the economy probably could have continued to expand at a moderate rate. But he acknowledges that the NEP had limitations for the Communists: serious unemployment and an unfavourable effect on other sectors of the economy, such as education and the railways. Also, Soviet officials were worried about the defence and armaments industries. He accepts that there were powerful arguments in favour of rapid industrialisation. He believes that in the end it is a political judgement of how essential it was for the USSR to establish a powerful heavy industry sector and an armaments industry in the space of a few years and whether the NEP was capable of doing that.

Alec Nove, in *Was Stalin Really Necessary?* (1964, page 23), argues that the party had reached an impasse at the end of the 1920s: the economy was stagnant and they needed to find a way forward. This was heightened by the sense of crisis caused by war threats. The policy of Bukharin – sometimes called 'riding towards socialism on a peasant nag' – was ideologically and politically unacceptable to the party. They could not base their industrialisation plans on the development of a prosperous peasantry who would voluntarily supply food. Rapid industrialisation and collectivisation were the way out of the impasse.

In his *An Economic History of the USSR, 1917–91* (1992), Alec Nove admits that there were colossal mistakes and disasters, but asserts that these should be seen in the context of the 1930s, when capitalism was in crisis in the rest of the world (this was the period of the Great Depression) and there were no models to follow. The command economy was inefficient but it concentrated resources in key areas and got the job done. Nove accepts there was a high price to pay for this, particularly the human suffering involved in collectivisation, and accepts that there might have been other ways of doing it. But he thinks that for Stalin and the Communist Party there was no real alternative. Without this 'leap forward', however crudely it took place, Nove doubts that the Russians would have created the sort of industrial base that helped them to win the Second World War.

Historians call the 'what if . . .?' approach counterfactual history. What do you think are the advantages and problems of asking 'what if . . .?' about the past. Can you suggest other topics where a counterfactual approach would be useful?

FOCUS ROUTE

In your Focus Route activities (pages 225 and 230), you should have collected information about the plans under these headings:

Evidence of success and achievements
Evidence of failures and weaknesses
Evidence that the Five-Year Plans were not well planned
Ways in which the plans benefited the workers
Ways in which the workers suffered or did not do well

1 Look back over the chapter and add any further information that you think should go in these categories.
2 Read pages 242–243, assessing the plans, then:
   a) add any more details
   b) note down any final comments.

KEY POINTS FROM CHAPTER 13

How well planned were the Five-Year Plans?

1 The party was convinced that the route to socialism was through industrialisation and the proletarianisation of the Russian people.
2 Although this was a 'revolution from above', there was a great deal of active support for the plans and for socialist construction from young urban workers.
3 The changes were administered through a 'command economy' which relied on centralised planning and control by government commissariats overseen by the Communist Party.
4 The mechanism chosen to deliver industrialisation was the Five-Year Plans, which set broad targets for all branches of industry. Most operational targets were contained in plans covering shorter periods such as one year.
5 Extremely ambitious targets were set to drive people to huge efforts. These had little to do with rational planning and more to do with propaganda.
6 Fulfilment and over-fulfilment of the plan targets became the overriding force driving the managers of industrial enterprises and officials.
7 Intimidation and fear permeated the system as managers strove to fulfil their targets. They, together with party officials, were evaluated on their target performance. This led to the falsification of figures and corruption.
8 The First Five-Year Plan was chaotic. There was an enormous amount of waste and many products were unusable. At the same time, remarkable progress was made in key heavy industries and huge-scale projects were undertaken.
9 Some workers did well out of the plans, particularly skilled urban workers. Other workers, particularly ex-peasants forced into cities by collectivisation, found themselves part of a 'quicksand society' trying to make a better living and avoiding harsh punishments by constantly moving from place to place and job to job.
10 The Second Five-Year Plan saw more developed planning and more reasonable targets. Workers enjoyed 'three good years' with more food and consumer goods but these were ended by the purges. The third plan saw a return to shortages and chaotic planning as resources were diverted to the military.
11 Generally, the standard of living for most workers during the plans was poor and improved marginally; housing standards remained abysmal.