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## Industrialization and Collectivization

*Christopher Read, ed.*

### THE DRIVE TO INDUSTRIALIZE

For his many admirers and supporters over the decades industrialization was Stalin's greatest achievement. Without it the Soviet Union would have been powerless before the Hitlerite onslaught and not only Soviet but European civilization would have been at risk. The negative features of the process – its inefficiency and waste but above all the cruelties associated with it in the form of collectivization, famine and the Gulag – were dismissed as 'mistakes' or, more significantly, unavoidable costs justified by the ultimate victory. We will return to aspects of this debate in later chapters, pausing only, for the moment, to comment that the argument presupposes that the 'collateral damage' of mass death somehow contributed to rather than endangered final success.

The fact that the Soviet leadership decided to embark on an industrialization programme is no surprise. In the first place, it rose out of the logic of productionism. If Soviet Russia had to become an advanced, wealthy country in order to create a basis for socialism, only industry could lift it up. The process would strengthen the crucial proletariat (working class) and weaken the private-property-loving peasantry who would also be attracted to socialism by the advantages of large-scale collective farming and the availability of the modern technique and equipment that modernization would bring. There were other practical imperatives, too. In the forefront of these was the fundamental administrative issue facing any Russian government, tsarist, Soviet or capitalist – defence of a sprawling territory with no natural borders. The urgency of the question was heightened, in Bolshevik minds, by the history of foreign intervention in the revolutionary wars of 1918-20. Germany, France, Britain, Austria-Hungary, Turkey, Finland, Poland, Japan and the United States had all sent in significant armed forces and controlled or helped themselves to slices of territory of the former Russian Empire. Around the tenth anniversary of the revolution in 1927 the fear began to grow in Moscow that the capitalist world might awake from its post-world-war hangover and make a renewed attempt to overthrow its upstart communist competitor. From the mid-1920s military chiefs were warning the leadership of possible weakness and, with rising threats from an unstable Germany to its west and a collapsing China, eyed hungrily by a resurgent Japan, in the east, urgent action appeared to be needed.

The question, then, was not 'should the USSR industrialize?' since all the ideological, political, economic and strategic indicators pointed in the same direction, rather it was one of 'how should the USSR industrialize?' and that was a very different one. In the 1920s Soviet Russia was the site of a vast and intriguing debate about just

how one might go about such a challenging process. Strange as it may seem, the economic sphere in Soviet Russia in the 1920s was rent by arguments comparable to those we have just encountered in the realm of religious policy. As Peris mentioned in his conclusion, the debate between what he terms 'culturalists' and 'interventionists' (in other words, moderates and militants) 'nearly parallels' that of the 'geneticists' and 'ideologists' in the economic sphere. Geneticists stood for gradual, step-by-step transformation of the economy, teleologists for one big heave into socialism. Underneath these divisions lay the left/right split in the party which persisted despite the expulsion of Trotsky and his exile in 1929. It was also significant that, not least because of the shortage of qualified Bolsheviks, many of the leading voices in this debate came from former Mensheviks, Socialist Revolutionaries and non-committed experts like the Orthodox priest Pavel Florensky, a mathematical and scientific genius who worked in the economic apparatus. Tragically, despite their honest and conscientious contribution to the process, Stalin's cultural revolution, aimed at tightening up ideological orthodoxy, and the search for scapegoats to blame for problems made such people immensely vulnerable and by the late 1920s and early 1930s many of them found themselves in the camps.

Nonetheless, in the mid 1920s the debate raged. On the one hand there was Bukharin and his supporters. For them, the mixture of state domination of 'the commanding heights' of the economy – large-scale industry, finance, taxation, transport, foreign trade – with limited restoration of the market, especially for small-scale crafts and services and for peasant agriculture, was the route chosen by Lenin for dynamic transformation to socialism. Though slow – Bukharin, ill-advisedly, comparing the speed of transition to that of a peasant pony – it was sure. For the impatient party militants, particularly veterans of the initial revolutionary struggles when they appeared to have conquered the whole of the old Russian world, the pace was too slow. They pointed out that NEP encouraged the growth of anti-socialist elements. In the forefront were petty traders, known as Nepmen (though many were women), and supposedly wealthier peasants, known as kulaks about whom we shall say more later. The critics of NEP had plenty of ammunition to throw at Bukharin. The maintenance of the relationship was not easy and at times seemed to be diverting resources – the wrong way in that state prices for grain had to be raised from time to time to stimulate peasants to market more agricultural products. This drained resources the left wanted to gamble on a rush for industrialization. Bukharin, also armed with the last injunction of Lenin, that the working class should not attack the peasantry again as it had done through war, communism and the requisitioning of grain, stood firm for his line.

However, encouraging peasants to 'enrich themselves' as Bukharin exhorted in 1925 did not excite the militants. They were also discontented with the apparent lack of ambition of the leaders in reconciling themselves to the fate of building 'socialism in one country' rather than the more intoxicating goal of world revolution. Bukharin scoffed at such critics pointing, quite rightly, to the decline of revolutionary potential

around the globe as the instability of the post-war period receded, for a while at least. The left, however, pressed for a more energetic policy. Obviously, a key issue for industrialization was investment. Even socialism could not develop industry without primary accumulation of resources. In Russia's case, historically, there had been no spare capital to use. Where centuries of foreign trade had prepared Britain and France for industrialization Russia had always had a major shortage of capital. The tsarist regime had resorted to foreign loans but substantial foreign involvement in the Soviet economy was precluded by Soviet ideological fear of dependence on capitalism and capitalist reluctance to invest in its potential rival. In the event, there was significant foreign involvement in the Soviet economy at various times. Lenin himself had encouraged it saying that Soviet contracts would support capitalism in the way that a rope supports a hanged man. Nonetheless, no one believed it to be desirable even if it might be unavoidable. Looking for internal sources of capital the eyes of the left-wing economists, with Preobrazhensky in the forefront, fell on the perceived enemy – the peasants. The NEP system envisaged relatively gentle pressure on peasants both through taxation and through turning them into a market for industrial products such as fertilizers and tractors. The left, however, took a narrower view. In a much-quoted and much-misunderstood phrase, Preobrazhensky described peasants as 'internal colonies'. What he meant was that, where imperialists accumulated from their overseas possessions, Soviet Russia had to accumulate from its internal sources. While he was not advocating a full-scale colonial war against the peasants he, and the left in general (whose political leader was Trotsky) called for more energetic pressure to be applied to the peasantry so that great industrial projects could proceed.

Curiously, the political defeat of the left as a party faction, in 1927, and the ensuing expulsion of its leaders, Kamenev and Zinoviev as well as Trotsky, did not take the heat out of the debate. Advocates of rapid industrialization were just as vociferous in 1928, perhaps more so, than in 1926.

Alongside this debate was a parallel discussion of planning. It was assumed that some form of state planning would be needed to encourage the growth of industry. The logic was that socialism was supposed to be an economic system based on reason rather than the arbitrariness of the market and that planning was the instrument whereby reason would direct the economy. At the time, state planning was coming into vogue not only in Soviet Russia but also in western Europe under the influence of the experience of war economies, reconstruction and, later, financial instability. However, it was in Russia that the debate was pursued most energetically. As Peris mentioned, there were two schools here, 'geneticists' who believed in the gradual evolution of planning on an initially modest scale, and 'ideologists' who wanted a short, sharp shock, to break through the initial barriers of backwardness.

How did this complex of debates result in the process of industrialization as it unfolded? In the first place, Stalin, though he had frequently shown signs of

impatience with non-party specialists, nepmen and kulaks, had not joined the left in denouncing NEP. In fact, 'socialism in one country' is a slogan inextricably associated with Stalin. Trotsky roundly denounced him for timidity. By 1929, however, industrialization was advancing at an even greater pace than that envisaged by Preobrazhensky. The transformation had come about through several factors interacting with one another. The 'war scare' of 1927 focused attention on the potential strategic weakness of the country and thereby raised the stakes for industrialization. Second, NEP itself appeared to be in trouble. Grain marketings in 1928 were insufficient and rationing had to be applied. The Bukharinite solution of yet another substantial rise in grain prices was a step too far for an increasing number of party members. Instead, experiments in forcing the pace of establishing collective farms were tried out in the Urals and western Siberia. The Politburo, riven by division between the Bukharinite right and the industrializing left, adopted the First Five-Year Plan in 1928, but it was only in 1929 that planning turned decisively in the direction of teleologists rather than geneticists. At the April 1929 Central Committee Plenum Bukharin was defeated and a new wave of rapid industrialization, collectivization and enforced cultural revolution began.

Ironically, however, the onslaught the country suffered from this triple whammy owed nothing to planning in any real sense. Instead, it had the format of an effort to raise oneself out of a bog by pulling on one's own bootstraps. In Bukharin's despairing words, the leadership were trying to 'build today's factories with tomorrow's bricks'. Kurt Schultz's article could not provide a better example of this plus the already-mentioned Bolshevik determination that 'there was no fortress the Bolsheviks could not storm'. Far from being a carefully-planned and thought-through process the First – Five-Year Plan years represented nothing so much as a military campaign, conducted by raising and exhorting cadres to carry through policies in an endlessly improvised fashion. Unrealizable targets were actually raised, making them even more remote, as the plan went on. Eventually, as with its sister policies in the cultural and agricultural spheres, the result was such chaos that the squads had to be reined in and a more modest regime of advance instituted.

However, a decisive breakthrough had taken place. While calculations today show the falsity of the claims made at the time there can be no doubt that there were substantial advances. For example, the labour force more than doubled. Production in key areas did make an upward surge. Large-scale, often military-related, industries grew fastest. The overall urban population more or less doubled from 16 per cent of the total population in the 1926 census to 33 per cent in the 1939 census. Argument continues about the precise measurement of the advances but there is no doubt heavy industry grew at a rapid pace. Schultz's article shows how these processes appeared on the ground in the key project of constructing a major car factory in Nizhnii-Novgorod (later called Gorky). In particular it provides a vivid illustration of the chaos surrounding the effort and the extreme, far-from-planned methods characteristic of Stalinist policies in operation.

### **Kurt S. Schultz: 'Building the "Soviet Detroit": the Construction of the Nizhnii-Novgorod Automobile Factory, 1927-32'**

Recent literature on interwar Soviet society is changing the way we view the 'Revolution from Above'. Instead of focusing on high politics, the authors of this literature have cast their analytical nets more widely and have revealed a remarkably dynamic society that was anything but clay in the hands of Kremlin potters.<sup>1</sup> The history of the massive automotive complex at Nizhnii-Novgorod adds weight to the conclusions growing out of this scholarship and sheds light on the origins and implementation of the larger plan to industrialize the Soviet economy; it shows in microcosm the many problems that often bedeviled and sometimes defeated the grand designs dreamed up in Moscow.

Like the First Five-Year Plan, the decision to build the Nizhnii-Novgorod automobile plant was forged in the ideologically charged debates over economic development policy that sundered the Communist party in the late 1920s." These debates had barely been resolved when a relentless campaign for faster tempos and greater results led to persistent bottlenecks at Nizhnii-Novgorod and internecine strife between hard-pressed officials who were scrambling for scarce resources. To overcome these problems, Moscow had to intervene in everyday decisions, assign priority to critical projects, and reallocate materials in short supply. This intervention encountered resistance in both the capital and the provinces, with results that often slowed progress, led to further intrusions from the top, and dislocated other branches of the economy that were essential to the smooth operation of high-priority projects. The history of Soviet 'automobilization' illustrates the spiraling cycle of local improvisation, central intervention, and All-Union bureaucratic warfare that characterized the First Five-Year Plan as a whole.

Central planners constantly modified plans for developing a domestic Soviet automotive industry before finally approving the Nizhnii-Novgorod project in April 1929. Although the changes reflected the fluid political situation in Moscow, they also resulted from the fractured Planning Commission (Gosplan) and a more ambitious group of individuals in the Supreme Council of the National Economy (Vesenkha) offered competing visions of industrial development.<sup>3</sup> Initial drafts of the five-year plan, drawn up by Gosplan in 1926-7, made no provision for substantially augmenting the country's automotive capacity. Instead, existing facilities would be upgraded slightly to increase their combined capacity to 10,000 vehicles during the entire quinquennium, and a modest number of imports would supplement domestic production.

These projections brought a variety of complaints, but none as strenuous as N. Osinskii's. Head of the Central Statistical Administration in mid-1927, Osinskii was an old leftist who had opposed the New Economic Policy and was now advocating a much more concerted industrialization effort. In a series of articles he decried the 'catastrophically backward' state of Soviet automotive transport,

ridiculed Gosplan's targets as 'mere handicraft', and demanded the construction of an automobile plant capable of producing at least 100,000 vehicles annually. When critics claimed that existing roadways, repair facilities, and mechanical expertise could not support such a large volume of production, Osinskii countered by pointing to developments in the United States, where the technical infrastructure had expanded along with production. He also reminded his critics of the military implications of the automotive revolution. An underdeveloped automobile industry could not meet the needs of Soviet military doctrine, he said, which envisioned massive mechanized and motorized armies. Nor could sufficient vehicles be imported in the face of an economic blockade. Should the Red Army have to use 'the Russian peasant cart against the American or European automobile,' Osinskii warned, it would be 'threatened with the heaviest losses, not to say defeats'.

Osinskii's dissatisfaction with the modest plan for the Soviet automobile industry reflected deeper disagreements in high party circles – over strategies of industrial development, differences that also penetrated the state's economic planning and administrative agencies. In 1927, S. G. Strumilin, S. D. Shein, I. A. Kalinnikov, and others on the right wing of the party tended to dominate Gosplan's subordinate committees and bureaus. They opposed overly optimistic industrial plans, and their opposition squared with decisions that had been reached at the recent Fifteenth Party Congress.<sup>4</sup> In other agencies, however, a more aggressive industrialization drive drew support from key officials, including Valerian V. Kuibyshev, who had assumed the chairmanship of Vesenkha on 5 August 1926. A protégé of Stalin, Kuibyshev promptly set his staff to work on a more ambitious plan than the one Gosplan envisioned, and even this plan seemed inadequate by mid-1928, when the Soviet Union's economic difficulties pushed Stalin and his allies toward a more intensive industrialization policy. As a result of this shift to the left, automobilization finally assumed its place among the priorities of economic development.

As early as 1926, Soviet representatives in the United States had tried to interest automobile manufacturers in building a plant on Soviet territory. These overtures did not interest the Americans, who worried about Moscow's ability to guarantee long-term, profitable operations. By early 1928, however, Soviet economic policymakers had shifted their sights toward an agreement under which a firm from the United States would provide technical assistance in constructing a plant to be owned and operated by the Soviet government. With this goal in mind, officials of Amtorg, the Soviet trading agency in New York, approached several automotive companies with a project for building a Soviet factory capable of producing between 12,000 and 50,000 vehicles annually. Later that year, when Osinskii travelled to the United States for talks with the Ford Motor Company, the target had been raised to 100,000 vehicles. Henry Ford had his own reasons for being interested in the Soviet offer and he soon countered with a proposal that came close to the

contract that Amtorg would sign with Ford in late May 1929. At this point, however, the Soviet agency hesitated.

The delay apparently stemmed from a lack of unity in the top economic policymaking agencies in Moscow, particularly in Vesenkha and the Council of Labour and Defence (STO). In early March 1929, on the eve of the Sixteenth Party Conference that formally approved the 'optimal' variant of the First Five-Year Plan, Vesenkha and the STO announced the government's decision to build an automobile plant that would turn out 100,000 vehicles a year. The announcement did not delight everyone. Despite their support for a rapid industrialization drive, some left-wing elements in Vesenkha worried that the automobile plant would divert resources from more important projects.

Opponents on the right went further, as became clear once the STO and Vesenkha created a new agency, Avtostroi, to oversee the plant's construction and organize production. These opponents somehow managed to dominate the committee of experts that Avtostroi established to draft a plan for the new enterprise. Within a week of the committee's appointment Osinskii was warning that its members, who were recruited from two of Vesenkha's industrial design bureaus, neither believed in the project nor wished for its success. His foreboding was confirmed at the end of the month, when the committee presented a draft that fell far short of its instructions. The new plant got short shrift in the draft, which called instead for expansion of the factories in Moscow and Iaroslavl', for the construction of a new plant to produce a limited number of heavy trucks, and for total production by 1933 of not more than 39,000 vehicles.

The very appearance of the draft project, which amounted to the same kind of 'handicraft' approach Osinskii had deplored two years earlier, points up the byzantine complexity of administrative politics in 1928-9. By April 1929 both the STO and Vesenkha had opted for 'mass-production' over 'handicraft', while the party and state's highest bodies were about to sanction an industrial development plan that the right considered impossibly optimistic. Despite the leftward swing in party politics and Kuibyshev's position at the head of Vesenkha, advocates of a modest automobilization effort had managed to secure a draft project reflecting their position. Clearly the opponents of all-out industrialization, if not numerous, still occupied key positions in the planning apparatus.<sup>7</sup>

By the time Vesenkha's presidium met on 2 April to discuss the draft, however, Kuibyshev, Osinskii and their allies had outmanoeuvred and defeated their opponents. Some members of the presidium still supported a modest production effort in the belief that the Soviet economy could not produce or absorb a large number of vehicles. The Commissariat of Internal Affairs, for example, estimated the total transport needs of all cooperative economic organizations at roughly 4000 cars and trucks. But more powerful authorities scoffed at this estimate. *Ekonomicheskaiia zhizn'* (*Economic Life*) denounced the committee's report as 'utterly worthless'. Osinskii, who by now sat on the presidia of both Gosplan and Vesenkha,

condemned the 'extraordinary caution' of the experts. Kuibyshev and I. A. Khalepskii, chief of the Military-Technical Administration, felt the same way. Led by Osinskii, they persuaded the presidium to reject the draft.

The presidium also briefly discussed the type of vehicle to produce and where to locate the new factory. A few members favoured Chevrolet designs, whereas Kuibyshev, Osinskii, and Khalepskii argued that Ford's models were less expensive and better suited to Soviet road conditions. Since a Soviet delegation had reopened talks with Ford in February, – a decision probably had been reached on this matter before the presidium gave its formal approval. Much the same can be said of Vesenkha's decision to build the plant on the outskirts of Nizhnii-Novgorod, a city of 258,000 and the administrative centre of the overwhelmingly agricultural Nizhegorodskii krai. Although the presidium considered Moscow, among other Soviet cities, it voted to go ahead with a plant at Nizhnii-Novgorod, stating merely that labour was cheaper there and more readily available. Vesenkha's design bureaus were given one month to draft a new plan for a plant that would produce 100,000 vehicles based on the Ford Model A car and Model AA truck.

The presidium's meeting of 2 April 1929 was yet another step toward the triumph of such men as Kuibyshev, Osinskii, and other allies of Stalin, all of whom pushed their designs for rapid industrialization with single-minded determination. By mid-1929 the advocates of an all-out effort were in control of at least the top economic policymaking positions, while such right-wing figures as Nikolai Bukharin and Mikhail Tomskii were losing their formal positions of power and influence. This shift almost certainly explains Vesenkha's actions of early 1929. It had reopened discussions with Ford in February, well before any formal decision had been made, and had decided in April to build the automobile factory and to use Ford designs, even though no agreement with the company had been reached. Whether Kuibyshev was confident of the outcome or already had reached a decision cannot be determined; in any event, he was vindicated on 29 May 1929, when his protégé, Vesenkha Deputy Chairman Valerii I. Mezhlauk, signed a contract with Ford that closely followed the lines of the company's 1928 proposal.

Although the details of this contract have been discussed elsewhere, certain provisions merit our attention. At a cost of \$30,000,000, Avtostroi would purchase the components of 74,000 automobiles and trucks, which over four years would be shipped to the USSR for assembly in a reconditioned factory. It would also acquire the designs for both the Model A and Model AA, as well as those for all equipment used in their production, and would send fifty workers a year to study production methods in Ford plants. These arrangements would 'speed the automobilization of the country', Osinskii concluded, but ultimate success also depended on overcoming a host of obstacles. Avtostroi had to mobilize the labour, equipment and raw materials needed to construct the plant, which was scheduled to begin operations on 1 January 1932. It also had to train supervisory, technical and production personnel who would keep the plant running smoothly. Even then, the

success of its operations at Nizhnii-Novgorod depended to a large extent on the creation or expansion of a host of related industries that would support the automotive complex.

Party officials in Nizhnii-Novgorod did not need such tutelage from the centre to set construction in motion. Once Vesenkha named Nizhnii-Novgorod as the site of the automobile factory, the local organizational committee established a subcommittee and technical bureau to assist the construction effort. It also instructed local planning bureaus, economic councils and construction, supply, and production enterprises to cooperate fully with Avtostroi's officials. If necessary, they were to 're-examine their five-year plans – particularly the current year's plan' – to ensure that Avtostroi received the necessary raw materials and manufactured goods.

At the national level, meanwhile, Gosplan and Vesenkha tried to coordinate the activities of plants and the administrative agencies whose participation was essential for constructing the new factory. In early June 1929, Gosplan convened an interagency committee to determine construction and production schedules. The first order of business was to reequip the factory near Nizhnii-Novgorod where Ford components would be assembled. This work was to be completed by 1 April 1930, so that the supply of cars and trucks could begin well before the main production plant was brought on line. The final specifications for the main plant were to be ready for approval no later than 1 October of the current year. In the meantime, constituent organizations of the inter-agency committee were to devise plans for supplying the automobile factory with the products for which they were responsible, be they raw materials, semifinished goods or cadres of engineers, technicians and workers.

The June interagency meeting was the first of what would become an expanding series of conferences, all issuing a flood of directives all designed to rectify the disorganization and delay that rapidly overtook the project. Vesenkha did manage to secure factory blueprints in short order, but only because it parcelled out that task to Austin and Company, an engineering firm from Cleveland, Ohio. Confusion surrounded every other aspect of construction. Vesenkha contributed to this situation in mid-June, when the presidium approved Osinskii's proposal to increase the plant's annual production target to 130,000. Of more immediate concern, however, were the transportation bottlenecks that impeded the flow of supplies to the construction site and the wilful obstructionism of officials in agencies and factories that were supposed to be cooperating with Avtostroi. In the months ahead, Vesenkha, the STO and even the Central Committee in Moscow would issue decree after decree in the hope of bringing order to the chaotic situation, only to find their efforts thwarted at every turn by administrative agencies in Moscow and industrial enterprises in the provinces, all of which had their own interests to protect.

By early 1930 these agencies, which supposedly were 'subordinate' to Vesenkha, were actually fighting each other for control of operations at the plant and the resources being funnelled into it. The first sign of trouble came at a meeting convened in mid-January 1930 by the Ail-Union Automobile and Tractor Association (VATO), the agency responsible for production in this branch of the economy. Summoned by VATO to report on progress at Nizhnii-Novgorod, spokesmen for Avtostroi and Metallostoi, the trust chosen by Vesenkha to build the factory, engaged instead in an 'animal fight', trading insults and 'petty accusations'. Having previously received rosy reports of progress, VATO now discovered that 'bureaucratic foul-ups' had nearly brought construction to a standstill. Although the supply schedule called for two hundred railway cars to arrive at the site each day, wrangling between Avtostroi, Metallostoi and other national and local agencies had cut the flow to an average of twenty cars.

VATO laid the blame for these problems squarely on Metallostoi, which had refused to comply with a 'categorical order' to provide Avtostroi with a variety of construction materials. Avtostroi had calculated the costs of its supplies and was unwilling to pay more. Metallostoi had other ideas and demanded that Avtostroi buy a larger amount of goods at prices that would help Metallostoi meet its production and distribution targets. Without intervention from Moscow, Metallostoi would have been in an impregnable position because, like other supply and production entities, it was barraged with more orders than it could possibly fulfil. The abolition of capitalist market relations notwithstanding, Metallostoi enjoyed a seller's market, which under 'socialism' allowed it to act 'like a feudal prince'; as long as its own plan was fulfilled it could 'treat the needs of its consumers with the arrogance of a baron'.

The alarming situation prompted VATO to dispatch a delegation to Nizhnii-Novgorod to correct the situation. Soon thereafter, construction materials and other equipment began to flow a bit more evenly, although problems ahead would still force officials to improvise solutions to keep construction on schedule. In late March, for example, when a shortage of bricks threatened to halt all activity at the site, the party's local executive committee simply requisitioned 48 million bricks from a nearby silicate plant. This hand-to-mouth supply system attended every aspect of construction at the 'Soviet Detroit'. Lumber, gravel, cement, and steel beams often went straight from railroad boxcars into the plant's assembly shops, foundries, coke ovens and blast furnaces. Quite frequently, however, they languished in the rail yard because Avtostroi never received more than half of the locomotives and trucks needed for internal transport. As a result, Avtostroi had to rely on the most primitive means of transport, and even this was 'catastrophically reduced by the low supply norms of oats for horses'.

Throughout the summer of 1930, Vesenkha and the STO complained ceaselessly about the haphazard work at Nizhnii-Novgorod, and these complaints, combined with occasional direct intervention from Moscow, finally resulted in an

increased work tempo and new reports of progress. Vesenkha maintained the pressure, however, attributing most of the progress to 'happy circumstance' and accusing both Avtostroi and Metallostroi of showing more interest in 'taking vengeance' upon each other than in fulfilling their obligations. Formal affidavits [*akty*] became 'the most popular form of communication between the two organizations'. Avtostroi even assigned its contingent of American advisers to work on them. According to Boris Agapov, a correspondent for *Za industrializatsiinu* (*For Industrialization*), Avtostroi wanted to eliminate Metallostroi from any role at the construction site and therefore launched a campaign 'to discredit the enemy'. To be sure, Agapov noted, Metallostroi had 'broken all records with regard to total disorder', but Avtostroi was also guilty of contributing to the chaos. He demanded an 'immediate resolution' of bureaucratic 'squabbling', lest the situation be reduced to the point where 'one will build a wall, and the other will tear it down'.

In late August the presidium of Vesenkha intervened once again, relieving Metallostroi of its obligations and granting Avtostroi total control of the site. The presidium then instructed the Victors' to reorganize the administrative apparatus at the construction site and 'liquidate all stoppages' by 10 September. Vesenkha also convened yet another conference of administrative and technical personnel for 'exchanging experience' and outlining the steps necessary to complete construction on time. To add force to the reorganization, in early September the Central Committee in Moscow decreed that the factory's party organizations should assume greater responsibilities at the plant. To ensure the implementation of this directive, the Central Committee transferred thirty-nine party, trade union and Komsomol officials to the factory site on a permanent basis.

The injection of party stalwarts, coupled with a minor purge of the party apparatus at the factory and the naming of Sergo Ordzhonikidze as the new chairman of Vesenkha, brought only a momentary burst of activity. By early 1931, Agapov was warning again of an impending crisis that would delay production even if the plant were completed on time. Apparently, neither Avtostroi nor Stal', a trust that manufactured steel products, had made plans to provide Nizhnii-Novgorod with the speciality steels that were needed for various parts. Avtostroi had let the months slip by, 'waiting for something to turn up'; Stal' had delayed its planning until September 1930, only then to discover that none of its factories could supply the steel that Avtostroi required. Both agencies, Agapov complained, had been 'secretly cherishing hopes of importing steel'.

The chairman of VATO, M. S. Mikhailov, tried to refute these charges by admitting that shops already completed were not yet equipped but insisting, contrary to Agapov's reports, that the biggest task remaining was to finish construction, which was 'only 30 percent complete'. One can hardly imagine a worse line of defence. Not surprisingly, *Za industrializatsiinu* launched a full-scale assault on Mikhailov and VATO's administrative apparatus. Vesenkha, meanwhile,

sent still another commission to investigate conditions at Nizhnii-Novgorod and summoned Avtostroi's chief of construction, the secretary of the party committee at the plant and the editor of the factory's newspaper to explain the situation. Their reports, and the commission's findings, drew an unsettling picture of serious delays in building and equipping the main shops. Much work had been accomplished, but Vesenkha was not satisfied with partial progress. It was more interested in learning why the heating plant was behind schedule, when the ventilation and sewage systems would be installed and whether VATO and Avtostroi would ever reach agreement with a variety of factories and trusts for the provision of ball bearings, starters, rubber, glass and other critical commodities.

In mid-February 1931, Vesenkha responded to the chaos by again reorganizing the chain of command at the factory, while the STO issued a detailed decree covering virtually every outstanding question of supply and future production. The decree gave VATO and Avtostroi until 1 April to calculate the total cost of bringing the factory on line and spelled out the obligations of every enterprise and bureau involved in construction. Although this was Moscow's strongest intervention to date, little came of it. A month later, *Za industrializatsiinu* reported that the STO decree remained 'suspended in the stifling air of bureaucracy'. VATO and Avtostroi were putting their final estimate together 'at a snail's pace'. In early March, officials from the trusts and factories responsible for supplying the automobile plant gathered to clarify delivery schedules and costs, but agreed to nothing. To be sure, an official of Vesenkha's Electro-Technical Association gleefully observed that with the STO decree in hand it was now possible to 'grab some people by the throat and get everything we need for production'. What he wanted, however, was 400,000 gold rubles to import machinery the association was supposed to produce itself.

In retrospect, it is amazing that Avtostroi completed even the most critical shops and assembly lines by the 1 November deadline. In a report of late March, Vesenkha's inspection commission cited as the greatest barriers to progress the same factories, trusts and industrial combines criticized months before. Decrees from the Central Committee in late April and from Vesenkha in late May intoned a familiar refrain of unfulfilled plans and obligations on the part of the same organizations. —

In late August, despite insistent demands from Moscow, Vesenkha's inspectorate had to admit that all of the presidium's decrees since March 'were being fulfilled extremely unsatisfactorily'.

Reports of ongoing transport problems and 'innumerable losses' resounded in the press throughout the summer, complaints that were not addressed until late September and October. The mobilization of party cadres for work at Nizhnii-Novgorod played a role in this transformation, although the decisive event occurred on 10 September, when Ordzhonikidze and his deputy, Lazar Kaganovich, descended from Moscow to rectify the situation. Work proceeded furiously after their departure, and the main shops of the huge industrial enterprise were

completed, for the most part, by the first of November. Avtostroi had only to install the remaining complement of sophisticated machinery and fill out its work force, whereupon the factory would be ready to start production.

Meeting these requirements, however, often depended on constant intervention from higher authorities in Moscow, particularly Vesenkha, and in some cases even this intervention was not enough to guarantee progress. As we have seen, the contract between Amtorg and Ford provided Vesenkha with drawings and specifications for all equipment related to the manufacture of Model A cars and Model AA trucks. Avtostroi received these designs, but the USSR's underdeveloped machine tool industry, Vesenkha's desire to begin production as quickly as possible and a general proclivity to take the easy route of imports all guaranteed that Avtostroi and its suppliers would rely heavily on foreign companies for equipping the automotive plant. The chief administrators in Vesenkha routinely fought this tendency; the drastic decline in Soviet export earnings in the wake of global depression led them to redouble their efforts. But the general policy of reducing Soviet imports did not always apply to Nizhnii-Novgorod.

Moscow attached a great deal of political and economic significance to the automobile factory. As one of the 'projects of first importance' it had to be brought on line 'no matter what the cost', ensuring that Avtostroi would receive whatever it needed, 'even if it be to the temporary disadvantage of other enterprises'. Such priority status, however, did not always provide a magical solution to the problems that occasionally blocked progress. Placing an order for American machinery did not guarantee that Amtorg's representatives would act promptly, avoid dickering over prices or make proper shipping arrangements. Nor could it overcome the effects of the Soviet Union's inadequate port facilities and overburdened railways, which delayed shipments to the factory, or of the overworked, hapless administrators at Nizhnii-Novgorod, who often lost track of equipment once it arrived. Officials of VATO and Avtostroi constantly complained about these problems and constantly turned to higher authorities in Vesenkha, whose timely intervention and generous funding usually sufficed to resolve them.

On the labour front, however, the shortages were too extreme and the interests too diverse to permit desperate officials the luxury of complying with orders from Moscow. Although Avtostroi sent at least 230 workers and engineers to study at Ford's plants in the United States, this number made up only a fraction of the skilled workers required at Nizhnii-Novgorod, and some of those trained in the United States actually were assigned to other plants under VATO's control. Like every other industrial enterprise of the time, in other words, Avtostroi had to struggle against an enervating shortage of skilled workers and fantastic rates of turnover in the labour force.

Although problems on the labour front grew out of the increasing demand for workers of every description, VATO and Avtostroi followed policies that made a

bad situation worse. As late as October 1930 neither agency had bothered to determine how many workers the automobile factory would need. Earlier in the summer, Avtostroi had simply estimated its requirements at 13,200. That figure then jumped to almost 16,000, fell to 14,000 by the start of the new year, and finally settled at 12,700. In fact, VATO was willing to cannibalize the cadres of its other plants; along with Avtostroi, it simply assumed that the automobile plant's priority status would allow it to steal from other organizations when the need arose. In early January 1931, VATO announced that it 'hoped' to satisfy Avtostroi's current needs by transferring 600 skilled workers from its AMO plant in Moscow. The news astonished that factory's director, who knew that only 280 workers at his plant had the skills that VATO required. Once VATO began to search beyond its own confines, it had to contend with hundreds of other bureaus and enterprises that also needed workers and often were willing to defy Moscow's orders to release personnel to Avtostroi.

As part of its response to the STO's decree of late February 1931, Vesenkha ordered twelve of its subordinate organizations to transfer 1080 workers and engineers to the automotive complex. More than a month passed before even one organization complied with the decree. The others stonewalled, sending Avtostroi's emissaries out to the provinces to talk to the directors of their subordinate plants, who usually claimed that only their superiors in Moscow could release workers. Some plant directors were frank. One declared that 'without a formal reprimand' for not complying with the decree, he 'would not even talk about it'. Another proclaimed that 'there are no people and we will not release any' and then invited his guest to 'write a report to Vesenkha'. Only a few directors were willing to hand over the requisite personnel: the boss at Metallist, for example, demanded 3710 rubles for each worker; the one at Dvigatel' Revoliutsii generously limited his price to 600 rubles.

Avtostroi demurred, and wisely so, because these costly workers surely would not have stayed long at Nizhnii-Novgorod, where the dreadful living conditions led to a fantastic labour turnover. In early January 1931, Agapov reported that more than half of the skilled workers thus far acquired had 'disappeared from the field of view' or 'dispersed to other enterprises'. Although Avtostroi was scheduled to receive fifty additional specialists that month, it had 'absolutely no idea where to put them'. Indeed, the plans so far drawn up would provide housing for no more than two-thirds of the projected work force. Making matters worse, the units constructed fell far short of the number originally targeted and were in such 'catastrophic condition' that workers 'ran from the construction site'.<sup>9</sup>

Despite more than two years of mishaps, delays and obstruction, Avtostroi somehow achieved enough at Nizhnii-Novgorod to begin operations on 1 January 1932 and wheel out the first complement of Soviet-produced trucks. Within a few months, however, the main assembly line had to be shut down

because of a lack of parts from other shops within the complex and a dearth of supplies from ancillary industries, problems that would continue to plague production well after the plant came fully back on line. Thereafter output steadily increased, but the facility at Nizhnii-Novgorod never lived up to Osinskii's dreams. By the end of the First Five-Year Plan the Soviet Union was producing only 23,900 vehicles, some 15,000 *less* than the defeated advocates of the 'handicraft' approach had envisioned. Not until 1937 would the entire Soviet automotive industry produce the 130,000 units that had earlier been expected from Nizhnii-Novgorod alone.

The failure to achieve planned results was a direct consequence of the political decision to demand progress on every economic front at once, which in turn created an environment deadly to the rational pursuit of plans. By setting an overly ambitious industrial agenda, Moscow threw the national economy into turmoil as administrators at the centre and managers in the field fought strenuously to secure the resources needed to meet their individual responsibilities. Waste, inefficiency and bureaucratic arbitrariness rapidly overtook the economy, forcing top policymakers to intervene constantly in the administrative process to ensure that certain priorities would be observed.

The ordeal at Nizhnii-Novgorod, however, reveals the limits of such intervention and the lack of Moscow's control over the execution of its policies. Even after Vesenkha squelched the attempt to block automobilization and gave Avtostroi priority status, it could not force such subsidiary bodies as Metallostroi and Stal' to obey directives that conflicted with other tasks. Nor could Vesenkha, the STO or even the Central Committee bring individual managers to heel when their directives threatened the interests of enterprises enjoying the protection of powerful agencies in Moscow. Only through constant intervention and the reallocation of resources directly under its control was Vesenkha able to guarantee that Avtostroi would achieve the minimum desirable results.

At Nizhnii-Novgorod, as throughout the national economy, improvisation replaced planning. Although acknowledging the suzerainty of Moscow, bureaucracies at the centre and in the field, not to mention the enterprises they controlled, took on all of the characteristics of sovereign, independent states. Under conditions of extreme scarcity and severe competition for resources, they alternately negotiated or warred over the men, money and matériel necessary to complete their tasks and increase their power. Such was the reality of the First Five-Year Plan in the field of automobilization.

#### NOTES

[Reorganized and renumbered from the original.]

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Eugene Roseboom Prize for best graduate seminar paper of 1987; and the *Slavic Review's* anonymous referees for valuable criticisms. Mary C. Brennan and William K. Wolf merit a special note of gratitude for their advice and patience.

1. The literature is too large to cite comprehensively, but for convenient summaries see Sheila Fitzpatrick, 'New Perspectives on Stalinism', and the responses to it in *Russian Review*, 45 (October 1986): 357-413; and the ensuing debate in *ibid.* 46 (October 1987): 375-431.

2. Here, too, the literature is vast. The works most useful for this study include Alexander Erlich, *The Soviet Industrialization Debate, 1924-1928* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960); E. H. Carr and R. W. Davies, *Foundations of a Planned Economy, 1926-1929* (New York: Macmillan, 1971) vol. 1; Moshe Lewin, *Political Undercurrents in Soviet Economic Debates: From Bukharin to the Modern Reformers* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974); and Kendall E. Bailes, *Technology and Society under Lenin and Stalin: Origins of the Soviet Technical Intelligentsia, 1917-1941* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978).

3. Maurice Dobb, *Soviet Economic Development since 1917*, 2nd rev. edn (New York: International Publishers, 1966) 230-41; Carr and Davies, *Foundations of a Planned Economy* 1: 843-74, 982.

4. E. A. Rees, *State Control in Soviet Russia: The Rise and Fall of the Workers' and Peasants' Inspectorate, 1920-34* (London: Macmillan 1987) 138.

5. *Ibid.* See also S. G. Wheatcroft and R. W. Davies eds., *Materials for a Balance of the Soviet National Economy, 1918-1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985) chapter 3.

6. Allan Nevins and Frank E. Hill, *Ford: Expansion and Challenge, 1915-1933* (New York: Scribner, 1957) appendix 1.

7. Both Gosplan and Vesenkha had been purged of their 'more cautious planners' in October 1928 (see Rees, *State Control in Soviet Russia*, 174).

8. Nevins and Hill, *Ford: Expansion and Challenge*, appendix 1.

9. Americans who worked in the USSR during the First Five-Year Plan agreed that the tremendous turnover in labour was prompted by the search for food and better living conditions.

#### THE ASSAULT ON THE PEASANTRY

Lenin, in his last testament to the party, had stressed the alliance (*smychka*) between the workers and peasants. It was imperative, in Lenin's opinion, that the workers – meaning of course the party and state – should not antagonize the peasantry as had been the case during war communism. Lenin had learned the lesson that the peasants still had the power to frustrate the long-term aims of the party. However, in 1929 Stalin unleashed an all-out assault on the peasantry. Like industrialization, the policy was built on central government agencies, enforcement squads and central exhortation. Volunteer groups of young party activists and



sympathisers were recruited and sent into the countryside to build a collectivist co-operative agriculture. In the guise of a mass movement of peasants, within months vast tracts of the country were reported to have been successfully collectivized. As with industry, the targets were stepped up and, in autumn, the slogan 'Liquidate the kulaks as a class' was proclaimed. Officially, a great class struggle was sweeping the rural areas, aided and abetted by the volunteers but supposedly led by poor peasants. However, the idea of collectivization as a class struggle between peasants was a complete fiction. The communal peasantry stood together, by and large, in defence of their villages and communes. Rather, in the name of 'total collectivization' (*sploshnaia kollektivizatsiia*), a veritable war was unleashed on the peasants. Long before Soviet archives were opened we had extraordinary direct testimony to the events from documents captured by the Germans as they invaded Smolensk. In turn, Germany, too, was invaded and the documents found their way to the United States. In a remarkable compilation Merle Fainsod, in *Smolensk under Soviet Rule*, portrayed collectivization from original records. The collectivization squads often got out of control. Fainsod quoted reports of confiscation of the clothes people were actually wearing, and of food being 'confiscated' straight from the oven (with leftovers being used to smear icons). Not surprisingly, the peasants resisted the crudely enacted policy. Many of them slaughtered livestock rather than hand it over to the new collective farms. In many places peasants resorted to as much force as they could muster. While it was not enough to challenge the Red Army in a military sense it did precipitate a political crisis. Army chiefs warned Stalin that they would not be responsible for the actions of their troops if they were called upon to engage in bloody repression of the peasants. Like most policies of the period collectivization was pursued to the point of chaos. In any case, the winter months had, cunningly, been chosen for the assault so that actual agrarian production would be least affected. Continual deepening of the crisis into early 1930 threatened the spring sowing which was crucial to the harvest. Some sort of order had to be restored.

In a move of colossal cynicism, Stalin, having exhorted the collectivization squads to work full out, now cut the ground from under their feet. In a short sharp article entitled 'Dizzy with Success', published in the party newspaper *Pravda* on 2 March 1930, the excesses of the process were blamed on the grass roots activists themselves. In so doing, Stalin diverted blame from the central authorities. Within weeks the supposed 50 per cent of farms which had been collectivized fell to a quarter. A calmer pace of collectivization ensued and it was only in 1936 that virtually every farm had been collectivized. The costs of the process had been enormous. A figure of a million 'kulak' families driven out has become generally accepted. Many of this number were killed defending their property or died en route to their places of exile and imprisonment. Livestock numbers appear to have fallen catastrophically. Only in 1938 were the production levels of 1928 once more attained. Soviet agriculture appeared to have lost a decade of growth.

However, the largest single cost was the loss of life in the famine of 1932-3 which was engendered by the disruption of the countryside. The famine has always been one of the most controversial episodes in Soviet history. While it was happening, the authorities tried to hide it from Soviet citizens, the foreign press and, perhaps most important, from foreign, especially Japanese, intelligence which would welcome such clear signs of Russian weakness and possibly seek to take advantage of it. A number of western journalists, including Malcolm Muggeridge, succeeded in getting news of the famine out into the world's press. However, radical papers denied the existence of mass famine. In more recent times, two issues have dominated discussion – the numbers involved and the reasons for it. On the former question, a number of around five million deaths – mostly of the weakest groups of the very old and the very young – is the current best guess, making the famine the most costly episode in the 1930s in terms of loss of life, more so even than the purges. On the second issue, motivation, an attempt was made in 1986 by Robert Conquest to argue that it was deliberately inflicted, primarily to quell the rising fires of Ukrainian nationalism. Pointing largely to circumstantial evidence, notably the closing of the Ukrainian border at the height of the famine supposedly to prevent relief supplies from getting through, the argument was put forward. It succeeded in reaching a wide audience with extracts from Conquest's book being serialized in broadsheet newspapers.

The scholarly community was less impressed. For many who studied the question carefully Conquest's thesis fell at the first hurdle. The famine spread far beyond the Ukraine, having severe effects in South Russia and other parts of the Caucasus. The article by Davies, Tauger and Wheatcroft poses a much more direct challenge. Using newly-released figures for grain stocks and grain production, many of them from papers which the leadership themselves saw, the authors show that the Soviet Union was not withholding vast reserve stocks which might have alleviated the famine. Given the need for a strategic reserve in case of war – a possibility heightened by the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931 – there was not enough to feed the peasants. Rather than a deliberate terror-famine the authors uncover a more plausible but almost equally chilling story of incompetence and bungling. Believing, as they had done in 1918 and 1919, that peasants were holding back hidden reserves ('hoarding' in Soviet terminology), grain squads were encouraged to fulfil very high quotas of appropriation. When the truth dawned on the authorities, in mid-winter 1932/3, much of the requisitioned grain had been disposed of, including sale abroad for machinery needed for the plan. As a result there was insufficient grain to save the peasants who, far from hoarding reserves, had lost practically everything down to the last grain. Never again were such inflated requisition targets imposed.

Overall, the verdict on collectivization has been universally damning. It led to famine, shortages and the 'crippling' of Soviet agriculture, this last, in Cold War times especially, tending to mean that Soviet agricultural production remained much

lower than American. This was true but the geographical and climatic conditions were vastly different making it difficult to engage in crude, direct comparison. Nonetheless, Soviet agriculture remained a major weakness and, whatever meaning one may wish to attribute to it, the process was not imposed on the East European satellites even at the height of Sovietization in the late 1940s. Even so, while it is no justification either of the policy or, even more markedly, of the methods by which it was implemented, collectivization did mark a historic turning point. For the first time in its history, the centre of gravity of Russian society was no longer to be found in the countryside. While it was only around 1962 that the majority of the Soviet population was declared to be urban-dwelling, from 1929 onwards the peasantry, until then not only the majority of all Russians from the beginning of their history but also the bedrock of all previous Russian societies, was broken. Its traditional institutions, notably the commune which had enjoyed a golden age in the 1917-28 period, were broken up.

Also, it should not be overlooked that collectivization freed the city from the threat of famine. In 1919, Petrograd and other cities had seen mass starvation. After collectivization a stable and growing level of state grain procurement was secured. Only with this security could urbanization proceed. Similarly, the secure grain appropriation system enabled the USSR to fight more successfully in the 1941-5 period than its tsarist predecessor. Finally, the mass expulsion of peasants from land created a large, drifting, labour force which was quickly sucked into new industrial projects like the Dnepr dam, the Nizhnii Novgorod automobile plant and the massive Soviet Pittsburgh, Magnitogorsk, under construction in the Urals.

As well as being a disaster, collectivization was also a historic turning point in Russia's evolution, perhaps more so even than the revolution of 1917 itself. Stalin had made a decisive turn towards industry and modernization. In so doing, he had well and truly shredded the *smychka*. What would Lenin have said? Since Lenin's assumption was that the peasants could not be defeated he would have had to go along with the fact that, despite disregarding Lenin's solemn advice, Stalin had succeeded. Lenin's defeat by the peasants had become Stalin's victory over them.

### **R. W. Davies, M. B. Tauger and S. G. Wheatcroft 'Stalin, Grain Stocks and the Famine of 1932-3'**

Most western and all Soviet studies of the Stalinist economy have ignored the role played by the stockpiling of grain in the agricultural crisis of the early 1930s. Thus in his major work on Stalinist agriculture published in 1949, Naum Jasny frankly admitted that data were insufficient to reach a conclusion, merely noting that 'stocks from former years probably declined during 1932'.<sup>1</sup> Baykov, Dobb, Volin and Nove said nothing about grain stocks. At the time, western commentators did pay some attention to the possibility that the stockpiling of grain exacerbated the famine. In autumn 1931 Japan invaded Manchuria, and in spring 1932 British diplomats reported that Karl Radek had told them that, owing to the threat of war in the far

east, enough grain had been stored to supply the army for one year. In February 1933 the notorious but shrewd journalist Walter Duranty wrote in *The New York Times* of 'the unexpected additional demand for grain necessitated by the Far Eastern war danger last winter'.<sup>4</sup> Since the food and fodder grain consumed by the Red Army in one year amounted to about 800,000 tons,<sup>5</sup> this would have been enough to provide a rather modest annual bread ration for several million people. A stockpile of this size was, of course, less important than the 4.79 million tons exported from the 1931 harvest or even than the 1.61 million tons exported from the 1932 harvest (see Table 4, below). But was such a military stock accumulated in those years?

Enlightenment had to await the opening of the Russian archives. The impact of the first revelations about grain stocks has been dramatic. On the basis of a preliminary, unpublished typescript by the eminent Russian historian V. P. Danilov, Robert Conquest has announced that the archives have revealed that in the famine year of 1932-3 Stalin was holding immense grain stocks, the existence of which was previously completely unknown. He wrote in *Slavic Review* 'there were 4.53 million tons of grain in various reserves – the *Neprikosvennyi Fond* and the special *Gosudarstvennyi Fond*, neither (he [Danilov] points out) justified by any danger to the country, and readily available to prevent the real danger – mass death by famine.'<sup>6</sup> Addressing a wider public in *The Times Literary Supplement* Conquest further explained: 'even apart from the fact that the 1.8 million tons of grain exported would have been enough to have prevented the famine, there were in addition two secret grain reserves between them holding 4.53 million tons more, which were not released to the starving peasantry'.<sup>7</sup> Grain stocks of 4.53 million tons would certainly have been enough to feed millions of peasants in 1932-3. One ton of grain provided a good bread ration for three persons for a year, so 4.53 million tons would have provided bread for some 13-14 million persons for a year.

In view of the importance of grain stocks to understanding the famine, we have searched Russian archives for evidence of Soviet planned and actual grain stocks in the early 1930s. Our main sources were the Politburo protocols, including the *osobyie papki* ('special files', the highest secrecy level), and the papers of the agricultural collections committee Komzag, of the committee on commodity funds and of Sovnarkom. The Sovnarkom records include telegrams and correspondence of V. Kuibyshev, who was head of Gosplan, head of Komzag and the committee on reserves, and one of the deputy chairs of Sovnarkom at that time. We have not obtained access to the Politburo working papers in the Presidential Archive, to the files of the committee on reserves or to the relevant files in military archives. But we have found enough information to be confident that this very high figure for grain stocks is wrong and that Stalin did not have under his control huge amounts of grain which could easily have been used to eliminate the famine.

The definition of ‘grain stocks’ is a complicated business. The literature divides them into two main categories: ‘invisible stocks’ (*nevidimye zapasy*) and Visible stocks’ (*vidimye zapasy*). The former are those held by peasants (and in the 1930s by collective and state farms) for food, seed, fodder and emergencies. Peasant carry-over is very difficult to assess; the official estimate for 1 July 1926 was 7.21 million tons, while a careful independent estimate amounted to only 4.19 million tons.<sup>8</sup> These calculations were of some politico-economic importance: the central political authorities believed and sought to demonstrate that peasants and collective farms were concealing substantial stocks; peasants and collective farms sought to minimize knowledge of their stocks. During the grim winter of 1932-3, the authorities seized the seed stocks of collective farms on the pretext or belief that concealed grain stocks were available to them. In the archives widely varying estimates of invisible stocks for the early 1930s may be found; not surprisingly, they show a general decline in the course of 1931-3 and an increase in following years. The ‘visible stocks’ rather than the invisible stocks will be our main concern in this article. These were those which had passed from producers to traders, to state and other collection agencies and to subsequent grain-consuming organizations, plus stocks in transit.

Soviet statistical agencies estimated the total of all visible stocks on 1 July 1929 at 1.76 million tons, of which there were:

held by state and cooperative collection agencies	0.912
held by consuming organizations (including industry)	0.331
miscellaneous	0.141
in transport system	0.376

The figure in Table 1 for 1 July 1929, 781,000 tons, is a revised official estimate by Komzag of the figure given above for state and cooperative collection agencies, 912,000 tons. It thus excludes grain held by consuming organizations and in the transport system. This was that part of the visible stocks which the state had more or less readily at its disposal for distribution to the population, for export and for other uses. These stocks were generally known in the statistics as ‘availability with the planning organizations’; we shall refer to them here as ‘planners’ stocks’. Planners’ stocks were further divided into ‘commercially available’ and ‘various funds’ (see Table 2). The ‘funds’ were those parts of the planners’ stocks which were set aside for special purposes, sometimes in special stores, sometimes merely notionally. As we shall show, the funds included both the ‘untouchable fund’ (*Neprikosnovennyi fond* or *Nepfond*) and the ‘mobilization fund’, also known as the ‘state fund’ (*Mobfond*, *gosudarstvennyi fond* or *gosfond*). ‘Commercially available’ was something of a misnomer: it referred to stocks held by grain-collection and related agencies which could be passed on to consumers in accordance with an approved plan of utilization.

**Table 1** Published figures for grain stocks, 1928-33 (thousand tons of ‘planners’ stocks’ in grain equivalent)

	Of this ‘various funds’	
1 July 1928	486	
1 August 1928	367	
1 December 1928	1745	
1 January 1929	1531	
1 July 1929	781	
1 August 1929	724	
1 January 1930	7838	
1 July 1930	2084	1379
1 August 1930	1462	
1 December 1930	9791	
1 January 1931	8278	
1 July 1931	2332	1114
1 August 1931	2026	
1 December 1931	9264	
1 January 1932	9095	2033
1 July 1932	1360	635
1 August 1932	1012	
1 January 1933	8499	3034
1 July 1933	1997	1141
10 July 1933	1654	944

These figures do not include grain in transit in the transport system (*v puti*) or the grain held by grain-consuming organizations.

Grain stocks naturally varied considerably during the course of the agricultural year, reaching a peak immediately after a harvest and falling to their lowest levels just before the next harvest. Harvesting and the grain collections began in the south in early July but in many other areas not until August. Normally the 1 July figure was given as the minimum level of stocks; but this was not quite accurate. During July grain available from the new harvest in the month as a whole is less than grain consumed and stocks continue to fall until the last days of the month. 1 August would be a better date for assessing minimum stocks but data for that date are not always available. Thus, quite apart from the need for a permanent grain reserve, a major problem for the central authorities was the need for ‘transitional stocks’ (usually known as *perekhodiashechie ostatki*) to enable continuous supply at the end of one agricultural year and the beginning of the next. Ever larger transitional stocks were needed from 1928 onwards, with the attenuation of the grain market and the dependence of larger numbers of people on state supplies (including many peasants in grain-deficit areas). From 1930 onwards state allocations of grain for internal purposes only (food rations, army, industry, etc. but excluding exports)

amounted to some 1.35-1.5 million tons a month. Moreover, areas requiring supplies were often thousands of kilometres from the main grain-producing areas; and once available, the grain had to be processed and delivered.

**Table 2** Published figures for grain stocks, by type of grain, 1 July 1932 and 1 July 1933 (thousand tons of planners' stocks in grain equivalent)

	1 July 1932			1 July 1933		
	Commercial stocks	Various funds	Total	Commercial stocks	Various funds	Total
Rye and rye flour	193	351	544	273	507	780
Wheat and wheat flour	246	125	371	248	369	617
Total main food grains	439	476	915	521	876	1397
Fodder and minor grains	286	159	445	335	265	600
Total	725	635	1360	856	1141	1997

In the course of establishing a state grain monopoly in the mid-1920s, the Soviet authorities did not succeed in building up a state grain reserve. In December 1927 the directives for the Five-Year Plan approved by the XV Party Congress stressed the importance of the accumulation of stocks in kind and foreign currency reserves during the course of the plan. The accumulation of stocks of all kinds would achieve 'the necessary insurance against large vacillations in the conjuncture of the international market, and against a potential partial or general economic and financial blockade, against a bad harvest within the country, and against a direct armed attack'. But a Soviet grain handbook published in 1932 noted that 'all attempts to create a large grain reserve did not have positive results', even though 'the difficulties experienced in 1927/28 and 1928/29 revealed the categorical necessity of creating such a reserve'. According to Soviet data, on 1 July 1929 the total amount held in the state grain fund (*gosfond*), including the remnants of the centralized milling levy from the previous harvest amounted to only 69,000 tons.

*The 1929 harvest and the 1929/30 agricultural year*

On 27 June 1929 the Politburo adopted a much-increased plan for grain collection from the 1929 harvest, resolving:

In accordance with the resolution of the XV Congress on the formation of a grain fund, it is considered necessary to create an untouchable stock amounting to 100 million *poods* [1.638 million tons] of food grains... It is considered that the untouchable stock may not be expended by anyone in any circumstances without special permission from the Politburo and Sovnarkom of the USSR.<sup>9</sup>

Two months later, on 29 August 1929, Stalin wrote to Molotov, praising the success of the first stage of grain collection from the 1929 harvest and emphasizing the importance of reserve stocks, that 'we must and can accumulate 100 mln *poods* [1.638 million tons] of *untouchable stocks* [*neprikosnovennnye zapasy*], if we are really Bolsheviks and not empty chatterers.' By the beginning of December, 13.5 million tons of grain had been collected, well over twice as much as on that date in any previous year; and the first drive for the collectivization of agriculture was rapidly accelerating. Stalin, jubilant and jovial, again wrote to Molotov: *Greetings to Molotsbtein!* ... The grain collections progress. Today we decided to increase the untouchable fund of food grains to 120 million *poods* [1.966 million tons]. We will raise the rations in industrial towns such as Ivanovo-Voznesensk, Kharkov, etc.'

**Table 3** Reserve grain funds by fund, type of grain and organization: archival data, 1 July 1932 (thousand tons in grain equivalent)

	<i>Gosfond</i>			<i>Fond</i>	
	<i>Gosfond</i>	<i>Nepfond</i>	<i>fond<sup>d</sup></i>	MKe	Total
<i>Zagotzerno<sup>a</sup></i>	138	159	–	13	310
<i>Sayuzmuka<sup>b</sup></i>	124	141	–	–	266
<i>Soyuzkrupa<sup>c</sup></i>	78	–	–	–	78
Total	340	301	2.6	13	656
Of which,					
Rye and rye flour	137	214	1.6	13	366
Wheat and wheat flour	40	87	0.5	0	128
Fodder and minor grains	163	–	0.5	–	163

*Source:* these figures, dated 1 September 1932, are given in RGAE, f. 8040, op. 3, d. 40 on both II. 129-30 and 148-50. Here total planners' stocks are given as 1.386 million tons. This is somewhat larger than the revised figure published in 1934 of 1.360 million tons, of which 635 thousand tons was 'various funds' (see Tables 1 and 2 above). It should be noted that *Nepfond* and *Gosfond* both unambiguously appear as component elements in the total grain stocks of 1.385 million tons.

*Notes:* Discrepancies in the total are due to rounding.

<sup>a</sup> State corporation responsible for grain collections.

<sup>b</sup> State corporation responsible for converting grain into flour.

<sup>c</sup> State corporation responsible for groats.

<sup>d</sup> State fund of high-quality seeds.

<sup>e</sup> Special fund of Moscow party committee.

The grain handbook of 1932 noted that the establishment of a grain reserve 'was posed as a central and top-priority task for the grain campaign of 1929/30'. The main statistical journal, reporting record grain stocks accumulated by 1 January 1930, noted that 'a fundamental difference between the stocks of the current year and the stocks of the previous year is the formation of a special fund, not used for current needs, while in past years grain was used entirely for meeting current

requirements.’ The journal described this ‘untouchable fund’ as ‘having an insurance function in case of a bad harvest or any other extraordinary needs’.

Although grain collections from the 1929 harvest were extremely large, they had both to supply grain to many consumers who had previously obtained it on the peasant market and to provide for increase export. Planners’ stocks increased by 1.3 million tons between 1 July 1929 and 1 July 1930, reaching 2.084 million tons. The Politburo deemed it possible to allocate only 786,000 tons of this to the Nepfond on 1 July 1930; but explained that this amount was to be ‘absolutely untouchable’.<sup>11</sup>

*The 1930 harvest and the 1930/31 agricultural year*

The harvest of 1930 was surprisingly good: collections were 38 per cent higher than in the previous year and more than twice as much as in 1928/29 (see Table 4). Planners’ stocks on the peak date of 1 January 1931 were even higher than on 1 January 1930 (see Table 1); on that basis the Politburo concluded on 7 January that *Nepfond* could amount to 150 million *poods* (2.457 million tons) and that, in addition, the ‘mobilization fund’ (*Mobfond*) could amount to 50 million *poods* (.819 million tons) – 3.276 million tons in all.<sup>12</sup> *Mobfond* was later described by Kuibyshev as intended to provide adequate grain (and other commodities), amounting to 1 1/2 – 2 months’ supply, to cover delays in supplies during mobilization and to make some provision for the largest industrial and political centres. But, although planners’ stocks had increased to 2.332 million tons on 1 July 1931 and remained as high as 2.026 million tons on 1 August 1931 (see Table 1), they were far below the level of reserve stocks proposed by the Politburo on 7 January 1931.

**Table 4** State grain collections, 1928/29-1932/33 (including milling levy; in thousand tons)

		of which, used for export
1 July 1928-30 June 1929	10790 <sup>1</sup>	-184 <sup>2</sup>
1 July 1929-30 June 1930	16081 <sup>1</sup>	1343 <sup>2</sup>
1 July 1930-30 June 1931	22139 <sup>1</sup>	5832 <sup>2</sup>
1 July 1931-30 June 1932	22839	4786
1 July 1932-30 June 1933	18513	1607

<sup>1</sup>See Robert W. Davies, *The Socialist Offensive: the Collectivisation of Soviet Agriculture, 1929-1930* (Cambridge, 1980) 429.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, 432.

*The 1931 harvest and the 1931/32 agricultural year*

Unlike the 1930 harvest, the 1931 harvest was poor (and much worse than the Soviet political authorities believed). Nevertheless, grain collections in the agricultural

year 1931/32 slightly exceeded the 1930/31 level (see Table 4) and the authorities continued their efforts to accumulate substantial reserve stocks. Their aims were now somewhat less ambitious: in October 1931 the Politburo decided that *Nepfond* and *Mobfond* together should total 150 million *poods* (2.457 million tons), as compared with the 200 million *poods* specified to the Politburo decision of 7 January 1931. But it also decided to consolidate central control over the reserves: both the ‘grain *Nepfond* and the grain-fodder *Mobfond*’ were to be transferred from *Narkomsnab* (the People’s Commissariat for Supplies) to the committee on reserves – a powerful organization, whose chair was Kuibyshev and whose vice-chair, Iagoda, was head of the OGPU. The Politburo intended that ‘warehouses and personnel’ should also be transferred to the committee on reserves; but at this time they apparently remained in the grain collection and processing network. Use of grain deemed to be part of *Nepfond* or *Mobfond* required permission of the committee on reserves or even the Politburo. Sovnarkom further decreed that all 2.457 million tons were to be transferred to the committee on reserves by 1 December 1931, together with large stocks of other foodstuffs, consumer goods and metals. By 1 January 1932, the grain set aside in ‘various funds’, nearly all of which was *Nepfond* and *Mobfond*, amounted to 2.033 million tons (see Table 1): the plan for the reserve funds had been largely achieved.

But this apparent triumph was short-lived. The demand for grain relentlessly increased. Grain exports in the agricultural year 1931/32 were one million tons less than in 1930/31; simultaneously, however, state grain allocations within the USSR increased (see Table 4). The increase in internal utilization in 1931/32 was part of a process which had been proceeding relentlessly since 1929, resulting from a substantial increase in the number of industrial and building workers and their dependants; a growing necessity to supply grain for seed and food to collective farmers and others in areas where harvests had been low and grain collections too high; an increase in the use of grain to feed sections of the population, including cotton-growers and timber-cutters who had previously obtained their grain from the market, and to feed exiled *kulaks* and others; an increased consumption of grain by industry. The total amount of grain allocated by the state for internal use increased from 8.400 million tons in 1928/29 to 16.309 million tons in 1931/32; in 1931/32 alone the increase amounted to 2.477 million tons. The pressure on stocks was relentless.

Despite demand, the Politburo endeavoured to reduce the rate of issue of grain. In March 1932 it agreed to drastic cuts in the bread ration for consumers on the lower-priority ration Lists 2 and 3. Many requests for additional rations, even from high-priority industries, were refused. These reductions and the irregular delivery of bread and other food supplies led to famine in the towns in spring 1932. Among the urban population of the lower Volga region the death rate more than doubled between January and July 1932; among the urban population of the Kiev region it increased by 70 per cent; and even in Moscow the death rate rose by one-third.

But the severe measures of March 1932 failed to reduce to the level of the available grain food allocations to which the state was committed. On 23 May 1932, an alarmed Kuibyshev prepared a memorandum concerning the grain situation for the Politburo in which he outlined the additional measures needed if an uninterrupted grain supply to the main industrial centres was to be maintained until the new harvest; his proposals even included the reduction of the bread ration for workers on the Special List and List 1. The draft memorandum preserved in the Kuibyshev papers includes his handwritten note in blue crayon:

With a full sense of responsibility I want to emphasize that last year we had 88.8 million *poods*, [1.45 million tons] [of food grains] on 1 July, and that in the current year there will be only 57.7 million *poods* [0.945 million tons].

What does this mean?

It means that we can cope with the supply of bread only by an exceptional level of extremely thorough organization.

Another handwritten sentence, crossed out, reads, 'I ask you to give to the committee on reserves dictatorial powers until the new harvest'.

The Politburo did not accept Kuibyshev's proposal to reduce rations for the Special List and List 1; but on 25 May it decided that it was necessary before 1 July to collect the outstanding 14 million *poods* (229,000 tons) of grain from the remains of the 1931 harvest, to add more barley to the food grains and to transfer various grain stocks from one part of the country to another. It also reduced the allocation to the military by about 16 per cent, and called for the acceleration of the import of grain from Persia and its immediate transfer to the far east. In spite of all these measures, it was estimated that planners' stocks of food grains (excluding fodder) would decline from 2.01 million tons on 10 May to 0.886 million tons on 1 July. For the difficult months of July and August 1932 when the new harvest was beginning to come in, the Politburo also resolved that all grain collected from the new harvest would be used solely to supply industrial centres and the army.

In the outcome, planners' stocks on 1 July 1932 were as low as the Politburo had anticipated in May: food grains amounted to 915 thousand tons and all grains to 1.36 million tons – 1 million tons less than on 1 July 1931 and even less than on 1 July 1930. *Nepfond* and *Mobfond*, intended to total 2.457 million tons and reaching about 2 million tons on January 1932, amounted to only 0.641 million tons on 1 July (see Tables 2 and 3). The demand for grain had impelled the Politburo to use up most of its 'untouchable' fund. On 1 July total stocks of food grain amounted to about one month's supply: in Ukraine, the lower Volga and north Caucasus less than a month's supply was available. Following the Japanese invasion of Manchuria, the authorities had utterly failed to build up grain stocks in east Siberia and the far east: total stocks of food and fodder grains in these two

regions amounted to at most 190,000 tons on 1 July;<sup>15</sup> the 1 million tons of military stocks that Radek reported to the British was apparently sheer bluff.

#### *The 1932 harvest and the 1932/33 agricultural year*

In May 1932, in preparing its plans for the forthcoming harvest, the Politburo somewhat reduced the grain collection plan below the previous year's level and sought to fill the gap by permitting trade in grain at market prices once collection quotas had been met. But the sharp decrease in grain stocks below the 1931 level had greatly alarmed the authorities. In spite of the reduced collection planned in May, on 16 July 1932 the Politburo again sought to set aside substantial stocks in *Nepfond* and *Mobfond* from the new harvest. It resolved that in 1932/33 *Gosfond* (state fund, another name for *Mobfond*) would amount to 55 million *poods* (0.901 million tons) and *Nepfond* to 120 million *poods* (1.966 million tons), 2.867 million tons in total. On 9 December 1932 the Politburo approved a reduced plan for grain utilization in 1932/33 by which *Gosfond* and *Nepfond* would still total 2.867 million tons on 1 July 1933; together with transitional stocks, all planners' stocks would amount to 3.699 million tons on 1 July, as compared with 1.36 million tons on the same date of 1932 (see note 5). Thus the authorities certainly *planned* to hold very substantial stocks at the end of the 1932/33 agricultural year (if not the 4.53 million tons claimed by Robert Conquest). And on 1 January 1933, with total stocks at their seasonal peak, as much as 3.034 million tons were attributed to Various funds' (the main components of which were *Gosfond* and *Nepfond*) (see Table 1).

The grain utilization plan for 1932/33 was built on illusion. While grain exports were again reduced, this time by 3 million tons below the previous year's level, grain collections declined by over 4 million tons (see Table 4). The net decline in grain available for internal use amounted to more than 1 million tons (see Table 4, collections minus export in 1932/33 versus 1931/32), and this placed an immense strain on resources, quite incompatible with the decision to allocate 2.339 million additional tons to planners' stocks on 1 July 1933 as compared with 1 July 1932. Moreover, the grain balance of 9 December 1932 had assumed that *no* grain should be allocated to the countryside for seed and food, apart from earmarked allocations to cotton growing and other specialized areas. In the course of the first six months of 1933, the Politburo reluctantly, little by little, released between 1.99 million and 2.2 million tons in seed, food and fodder, primarily as allocations or 'loans' to areas which had been stripped of grain by the state collectors earlier in the year. While neither large enough nor timely enough to prevent the devastating famine, these allocations did use up most of *Nepfond* and *Gosfond* which had been set aside at the beginning the year.

In spring 1933, as in the previous year, leading grain officials addressed a series of urgent memoranda to the Politburo warning of shortages. In March a memorandum from Chernov to Stalin, Kaganovich, Molotov and Kuibyshev pointed out that receipts of food grain might be 0.5-0.6 million tons less than in the

grain utilization plan of 9 December 1932, while expenditure might be 0.5 million tons more; the shortfall in oats and barley might amount to a further half million tons.<sup>16</sup> A memorandum from Kleiner to Kuibyshev, prepared in February or March, concluded that on 1 July 1933 *Nepfond* would be 0.256 million tons less than planned on December 9. Two or three months later, on 17 May, a telegram from Kleiner to Stalin and Kuibyshev makes it clear that the situation had drastically deteriorated: 'surpluses in the *Nepfond* are almost exhausted'. To provide seed, food and fodder the Politburo had agreed to release 69 million *poods* (1.13 million tons) from the committee on reserves, so that only 100 million *poods* (1.638 million tons) remained in all its reserves; Kleiner asked for conditional permission to use a further 15 million *poods* (0.246 million tons) from funds of the committee on reserves.<sup>17</sup>

Within a few weeks the situation had apparently deteriorated still further. On 4 June 1933, Chernov sent a memorandum to Stalin, Kaganovich, Molotov and Kuibyshev, setting out the results of the 1 May inventory of the remaining grain (*ostatki*) in the USSR. Chernov estimated that, as a result of commitments made in May and June, all planners' stocks would total 84.7 million *poods* (1.392 million tons) on 1 July 1933, including food grains amounting to 63.8 million *poods* (1.045 million tons), a slightly larger amount than on 1 July 1932. In several places the memorandum referred to this estimate as the 'transitional remainder including funds' (*perekhodiashebnii ostatok vkliuchaia fondy*).<sup>18</sup>

In practice, the level of grain stocks was apparently somewhat greater than Chernov and the other officials anticipated. When Chernov submitted the grain plans for the following year, 1933/34, to Stalin Kaganovich and Molotov on 4 July 1933, he stated, as he had a month previously, that the total transitional stock, including *fondy*, on 1 July 1933 was 1.392 million tons (including 1.045 million tons of food grains). But the grain utilization plan for 1933/34 approved a month later by the Politburo recorded the 'availability' of all grains on 1 July, including *fondy*, as 1.825 million tons (including 1.386 million tons of food grains). The final official figure published in the grain yearbook was 1.997 million tons (including 1.397 million tons of food grains) (see Tables 1 and 2). We have not yet found any satisfactory explanation of the discrepancy between these three sets of figures.

The planners' stocks available on 1 July 1933 certainly included enough grain to save the lives of many peasants. But they amounted not to 4.53 million tons but to less than 2 million tons, smaller than the stocks available on the same date three years previously. The alternative figures for 1 July 1933, including the published figure (1.997 million tons), certainly include both *Gosfond* and *Nepfond*. Robert Conquest's confusion about the level of stocks may be due to a somewhat ambiguous passage in Chernov's memorandum dated 4 July 1933, submitting the draft grain plans for 1933/34 to the Politburo. He proposed that in 1933/34 *Nepfond* should be '120 million *poods* [1.966 million tons], the same level as last year', while *Gosfond* should be 'significantly increased to 72 million *poods* [1.179 million tons] instead of

the 55 million *poods* [0.901 million tons] of last year'. According to this draft, then, both *fondy* together would amount to 3.145 million tons. But Chernov's tables and the figures approved by the Politburo make it clear that 'the same level as last year' did not mean the *actual* reserve stock in July 1933 but instead the stock *planned* in July 1932.<sup>19</sup> In 1933/34 *Nepfond* and *Gosfond* had to be built up from existing planners' stocks. Thus the plan approved by the Politburo on 7 August 1933 fixed total grain stocks on 1 July 1934 at 3.941 million tons, including a total *Gosfond* and *Nepfond* of 2.776 million tons; the Politburo compared this with the *total* stocks on 1 July 1933 of only 1.825 million tons.<sup>20</sup>

The failure to establish reserve stocks at planned levels also meant that the efforts to build up grain stocks in the far east had again been unsuccessful. According to the published data, total planners' stocks in east Siberia and the far east amounted to only 0.147 million tons on 1 July 1932, increasing to 0.269 million tons on 1 July 1933; some additional stocks, not included in these figures, were held by the army itself. But the serious effort to build up grain stocks in the far east began not after the 1931 harvest, as Radek and Duranty claimed at the time, or even after the 1932 harvest, but only during and after the 1933 harvest. It was not until July 1933 that Chernov received an urgent commission from Stalin to create a 'special defence fund' of 70 million *poods* (1.147 million tons) in east Siberia and the far east. This grain stock would require extensive new grain stores, since those of *Mobfond* in the far east and east Siberia had a capacity of only 0.143 million tons.

How reliable were these data on grain stocks? After the civil war, during which local authorities underestimated the level of stocks, the Soviet authorities were anxious to obtain accurate and timely figures. In the early 1920s a comprehensive system was established, by which monthly estimates of grain stocks by local statistical departments were supplemented by quarterly on-site inventories. Statistical departments telegraphed regular 'short summaries' to the centre two weeks after each survey, followed by more detailed (and more accurate) reports sent through the mail. The same system was used in 1930-4. In 1928 A. Mikhailovskii, at that time the principal authority on grain statistics, claimed that the figures for the USSR which were assembled centrally from these data were 'quite reliable'. The data on grain stocks for 1932-3 were also, in our opinion, 'quite reliable'. This is not to say that they should be accepted uncritically. The discrepancy between the lowest and highest figures for all planners' stocks on 1 July 1933 – 1.397 million and 1.997 million tons – dramatically illustrates this point. If the later and higher figure is correct, the additional 0.6 million tons of grain could have saved many lives. But this figure does not appear in any of the records we have used until some weeks after the end of the agricultural year and it was evidently not known to the Politburo before July 1933.

There were no private inventories of grain stocks kept for Stalin and his immediate entourage, separate from those regularly assembled by the normal

state agencies; the figures in the top-secret files of Sovnarkom, of Kuibyshev's secretariat and in the special files (*osoby papki*) of the Politburo all coincide. These figures also agree – somewhat to our surprise – with the figures for grain stocks published in the unclassified small-circulation *Ezhegodnik khlebooborota* (*Grain Collection Annual*).<sup>21</sup>

But the relationship between public and secret statistics in the USSR was complicated. While they were identical for grain stocks, the exaggeration in the published figures for the grain harvests is well known. And our research shows that those responsible for planning and recording grain allocations did not contradict – even in private – the distorted official harvest figures; they therefore included in the grain balances a large residual item so that consumption could be brought in line with the alleged harvests.<sup>22</sup> And in the extreme case of the defence budget for 1931-4, the large increases in these years were concealed by the deliberate decision of the Politburo to publish falsified figures. The true figures appeared only in documents classified as top-secret and were more than treble the size of the published figures.” The complicated relations between archival and published data can only be established by investigating each case on its merits.

We therefore conclude:

1. All planners' stocks – the two secret grain reserves, *Nepfond* and *Mobfond* or *Gosfond*, together with 'transitional stocks' held by grain organizations – amounted on 1 July 1933 to less than 2 million tons (1.997 million tons, according to the highest official figure). Persistent efforts of Stalin and the Politburo to establish firm and inviolable grain reserves (in addition to 'transitional stocks') amounting to 2 or 3 million tons or more were almost completely unsuccessful. In both January-June 1932 and January – June 1933 the Politburo had to allow 'untouchable' grain stocks set aside at the beginning of each year to be used to meet food and fodder crises. On 1 July 1933 the total amount of grain set aside in reserve grain stocks (*fondy*) amounted not to 4.53 million tons as Conquest claimed but to only 1.141 million. It is not surprising that after several years during which the Politburo had failed to establish inviolable grain stocks, Kuibyshev in early 1933 recommended a 'flexible approach' to *Nepfond* and *Mobfond*, denied that they were separate reserves and even claimed that the flexible use of the two *fondy* had enabled uninterrupted grain supply in spring and summer 1932.

2. We do not know the amount of grain which was held by grain-consuming organizations, notably the Red Army, but we suspect that these 'consumers' stocks' would not change the picture substantially.

These findings do not, of course, free Stalin from responsibility for the famine. It is difficult, perhaps impossible, to assess the extent to which it would have been possible for Stalin to use part of the grain stocks available in spring 1933 to feed starving peasants. The state was a monopoly supplier of grain to urban areas and the army; if the reserves of this monopoly supply system – which amounted to four-six weeks' supply – were to have been drained, mass starvation, epidemics

and unrest in the towns could have resulted. Nevertheless, it seems certain that if Stalin had risked lower levels of these reserves in spring and summer 1933, hundreds of thousands – perhaps millions – of lives could have been saved. In the slightly longer term, if he had been open about the famine, some international help would certainly have alleviated the disaster. And if he had been more far-sighted, the agricultural crisis of 1932-3 could have been mitigated and perhaps even avoided altogether. But Stalin was not hoarding immense grain reserves in these years. On the contrary, he had failed to reach the levels he had been imperatively demanding since 1929.

#### NOIES

[Reorganized and renumbered from the original.]

The authors are most grateful to Oleg Khlevnyuk for his assistance in research for this article.

1. Naum Jasny, *The Socialized Agriculture of the USSR: Plans and Performance* (Stanford, 1949) 757.

2. See Alexander Baykov, *The Development of the Soviet Economic System* (New York, 1947); Maurice Dobb, *Soviet Economic Development since 1917* (London, 1948); Lazar Volin, *A Century of Russian Agriculture: From Alexander II to Khrushchev* (Cambridge, 1970); Alec Nove, *An Economic History of the USSR* (Harmondsworth, 1969).

3. Jonatham Haslam, *Soviet Foreign Policy, 1930-33: The Impact of the Depression* (New York, 1983) 84.

4. Walter Duranty, *Duranty Reports Russia* (New York, 1934) 342.

5. This figure, for the agricultural year 1932/33, includes the OGPU (secret police) armies. In this paper our discussion takes place in terms of the agricultural year, which ran from harvest to harvest, 1 July-30 June.

6. *Slavic Review* 53, no. 1 (Spring 1994): 318.

7. TLS, 11 February 1994. In *The New York Review of Books*, 23 September 1993, he drew attention more briefly to 'the figures on the millions of tons of available grain reserves' which demonstrated that 'the famine of 1933 was deliberately carried out by terror'.

8. See S. G. Wheatcroft, 'Grain Production and Utilisadon in Russia and the USSR before Collectivisation', PhD. thesis (CREES, University of Birmingham, 1980) 561-65.

9. The resolution added that the Council of Labour and Defence should report to the Politburo on the size of additional *mobfond* (mobilization fund) of food grains.

10. Total visible stocks amounted to 11.756 million tons on 1 January 1930, as compared with only 3.780 million on 1 January 1929. Of these, 'planners' stocks' amounted to 7.838 million tons (see Table 1).

11. Note that by 1 August 1930 planners' stocks had fallen to 1.462 million tons (see Table 1).

12. These figures apparently included fodder grains as well as food grains.



13. We have been unable to ascertain whether *mobfond* is the same as the 'military stocks' (*voennyi zapas*) of 25 million *poods* (0.410 million tons) referred to in the protocols of the Politburo for 13 April 1930.

14. In these years the part of the population which received rations was divided into four main groups or lists (*spiski*), depending on state priorities. In order of priority these were the special list (*osobyi spisok*), and Lists 1, 2 and 3.

15. The later published figure was 147,000 tons.

16. Chernov was the principal person concerned with the practical details of grain collection and allocation.

17. The memorandum referred to food grains only. I. M. Kleiner was appointed deputy chair of the committee for agricultural collections (*Komzrag*) on 5 March 1933.

18. Chernov complained that the situation was made more difficult by the plan to supply before 1 July an additional 6.1 million *poods* (100,000 tons) of food and fodder grain to the military and 4 million *poods* (66,000 tons) to the far east; he insisted that it was impossible to supply the additional fodder to the far east.

19. The mythical 4.53 million tons was evidently obtained by adding together the *planned* (and non-existent) *Nepfond* and *Gosfond* (1.966 + 1.179 million tons) and the expected *total* stocks on 1 July 1933 (1.392 million tons)! In view of the importance of this memorandum, all three of us have independently checked it and all the other documents in the file in which it appears; nowhere is there any evidence of the existence of a stock of 4.53 million tons on 1 July 1933.

20. Chernov's proposal to increase *Gosfond* to 72 million *poods* was not taken up by the Politburo.

21. These published figures are in some respects more detailed and regular than those in the archives and we have therefore used them in our tables.

22. The grain balances for these years will be discussed in R. W. Davies and S. G. Wheatcroft, *The Years of Hunger: Soviet Agriculture, 1931-1933* (forthcoming).

23. See R. W. Davies, 'Soviet Military Expenditure, 1929-33: A Reconsideration', *Europe-Asia Studies* 45 (1993): 577-608.

In: Read, Christopher, Ed. *The Stalin Years*. 66-101