**C How did the workers fare under the plans?**

**FOCUS ROUTE**
As you work through pages 184–193, use a table like the one below to collect information about the impact of the industrialisation plans on the workers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ways in which the plans benefited the workers</th>
<th>Ways in which the workers suffered under the plans or did not do well</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Did the workers support the plans?**

The urban working classes and young people in general were enthusiastic at the beginning of the plans. They were carried forward by the spirit of cultural revolution and wanted to move forward to build a new world which would probably bring real benefits only for their children. They were participating in the great construction projects of socialism (see Sources 12.5–12.7 on page 174).

On a more practical note, workers believed they would be better off. The real wages of the people had risen only slowly under the NEP and unemployment had been high in the late 1920s. Social historians have found evidence suggesting that young professionals, such as doctors and lawyers, were among those most excited by the industrialisation push. They also approved of the attack on the bourgeois specialists. Young workers were proud of their 'old' managers still strutting around giving orders and engineers enjoying privileges while they slaved away.

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

**Women in the labour force**

One of the most important sources of new labour was women. Some ten million women entered the workforce. Women dominated some professions, particularly medicine and school teaching. The less well educated, especially tough ex-peasant women, became factory workers. Generally, women were paid less and found it more difficult to gain advancement than men. However women were working in jobs that they had not done before, as Source 12.14 on page 185 shows.

Sarah Davies’ survey of women workers in Leningrad in 1935 (Popular Opinion in Stalin’s Russia: Terror, Propaganda and Dissent 1931–41, 1997) showed that women workers in the city made up 44 per cent of the workforce but were likely to be less well paid, less literate and less involved in political and technical education than their male counterparts. The issues that were most important to them were their children’s needs, queues and fluctuating prices, not surprising as women had to look after the home as well as work. Their chances of reaching the top were limited. Of 328 factory directors, only twenty-two were women and seventeen of these were in textile and sewing factories where well over three-quarters of the workforce were women. There were only four women head doctors in hospitals, even though 50–60 per cent of all doctors were women.

**AT MAGNITOGORSK**

Almost half of the workers in January 1935 were under 24 and typically experienced, male, unskilled and illiterate.

In 1935, about one-fifth (40,000) of the population were exited peasants. John Scott (Behind the Ural, 1942) estimates that between 1928 and 1929 about three-quarters of new arrivals came of their own free will seeking work and the rest came by compulsion. Few of the engineers had real engineering experience. A colony of several hundred foreign engineers and specialists arrived to direct and work.

**SOURCE 12.15**

S. Korchine, Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization, 1995, p. 95, writing about the fluidity of labour.

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

**Did the workers support the plans?**

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

This turnover was not restricted to the peasants. Skilled and semi-skilled workers soon found that skills were at a premium and that managers, desperate to fulfil their targets, were anxious to attract them. They began to compete for skilled workers by offering higher wages or additional perks, such as extra food rations. These workers were able to move easily between jobs and this contributed to the destabilising effect of high labour turnover on industrial enterprises. One Communist leader talked of Russia being like a huge ‘nomadic gypsy camp’ and Moshe Lewin likened it to a ‘quicksand society’ (see Source 12.19 on page 187).

The skills shortage was one of the biggest problems the planners faced. In 1931, it was estimated that less than seven per cent of the workforce were skilled. A survey in 1935 showed that only seventeen per cent of those recruited to industry had any skills. In Elektrozavod, a $255,000 lathe from the USA lay unused for want of a minor repair which workers were unable to perform. Untrained, clumsy workers were doing an astonishing amount of damage to expensive imported machinery and were turning out poor-quality goods. Machines were not properly oiled and maintained. There were stories of whole production runs being ruined by ill-educated and untrained ex-peasants.
How did the party respond to its labour problems?

FOCUS ROUTE
1. Draw a diagram to record the main ways in which the Soviet government tried to deal with the problems it faced.
2. Compare these with the solutions you suggested in the Activity on page 186.
3. What surprises you about some of the methods adopted by the Communists?

Wage differentials and incentives
To stop workers 'flying' from job to job, wage differentials (i.e. paying some people more than others) were introduced to reward those who stayed put and acquired skills. Managers were allowed to pay bonuses. Other incentives were also used, such as awarding honours to outstanding workers; these were not just moral rewards but could bring perks and privileges such as access to closed shops, better housing and better clothes. Egalitarianism in wages was abandoned as early as 1951.

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

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

Tough measures
A series of measures were brought in between 1930 and 1955 to deal with absences. These included dismissal, eviction from factory-owned homes and loss of various benefits. Causing damage or leaving a job without permission could lead to a prison sentence. The intimidation and terror applied to the bourgeois specialists were also applied to the workers.

The degree of control increased during the Second and Third Five-Year Plans. In 1958, labour books were issued, along with internal passports. The labour book gave details of a worker's labour history, qualifications and any misdemeanours. It was very difficult to survive without one of these. In 1940, absenteeism became a crime, with two offences bringing a prison sentence.

Forced labour
Some labour shortages were solved by using forced labour, especially for the worst jobs in the worst conditions. Around 500,000 prisoners worked on the Baltic-White Sea Canal, many of them kulaks arrested during the collectivisation drive. After April 1930 all criminals sentenced to more than three years were sent to labour camps to produce cheap labour. The government decreed that these camps should be self-supporting. Lumber camps were set up in the forests of the frozen north and the timber produced was exported to help earn money for industrial investment. The number of forced labourers increased when the Great Purges got into full swing in the mid-1930s.

Propaganda and encouragement
A huge propaganda campaign was mounted to encourage workers to raise their productivity, which was outstandingly low during the First Five-Year Plan (see Sources 12.10 and 12.21). Shock-brigade campaigns (mounting intensive efforts to build structures such as dams) and 'socialist competition' were tried to raise work norms but they enjoyed only limited success. Probably the most significant propaganda initiative was the Stakhanovite movement (see pages 190-192). Although this caused some problems in the economy, productivity rates did improve.
In 1930 work began on a dam on the Urals River to supply the steel factory with water. Shock work began: “There was social competition between left and right banks. The target date moved forward but the dam was built in a record 74 days, well ahead of schedule. One contemporary writer wrote: 'The Magnitogorsk dam was the school at which people began to respect Bolshevik miracles.' But it was not deep enough and the water froze; there was a chronic shortage of water, and a new dam five times as big was started almost immediately. When it was completed the first dam was submerged."


"SOURCE 12.20 M. Lewis, 'Society, State and Ideology during the First Five-Year Plan', 1976, in C. Ward (ed.), The Stalinist Dictatorship, 1998, pp. 178–79. Lewis has an interesting background. Born in Poland in 1921, he became active in left-wing politics, escaping from the Nazis to work in the Soviet Union on a kolkhoz and in a mill. He was an officer in the Red Army for a brief time. After the Second World War he spent ten years in a kibbutz in Israel before holding academic positions in France, Britain and the USA."

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

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

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

"SOURCE 12.21 A Soviet propaganda poster, in the Struggle for Fuel and Metal, produced in 1933 with the aim of spurring on the workers to fulfil the Five-Year Plan. Gustav Klimt, the creator of this poster, was a Viennese portraitist and his posters were reproduced thousands of times. A party member since 1920, he was a loyal Stalinist, but neither this nor his work for the party could save him when he was denounced by a jealous rival during the purges; he was shot in 1938."

"SOURCE 12.22 J. Scott, Behind the Uboh, 1942, p. 49. Scott describes aspects of the attempts to motivate workers in Magnitogorsk."

"In 1933 wage differentials were approximately as follows: the average monthly wage for an unskilled worker in Magnitogorsk was something in the neighbourhood of 100 rubles; a skilled workers' apprentice 200, a skilled worker, 400; an engineer with experience 600 to 800; administrators, directors etc., anywhere from 600 to 1000. The heavy differentiation plus the absence of unemployment and the consequent assurance of being able without difficulty to get any job in any profession learned, supplemented and stimulated the intellectual curiosity of the people. The two together were so potent that they created a student body in the Magnitogorsk night schools of 1933 willing to work eight, ten or even twelve hours on the job under the severest conditions, and then come back to night school, sometimes on an empty stomach and, sitting on a benchless wooden bench, in a room so cold that you could see your breath a yard in front of you, study mathematics four hours straight..."

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


"Dear Martha,

We are both wives of locomotive drivers of the rail transport of Magnitogorsk. You probably know that the rail transport workers of the MMK (Magnitogorsk Metallurgical Complex) are not fulfilling the plan, that they are disrupting the supply of the blast furnaces, open hearths and rolling shops... All the workers of Magnitogorsk accuse our husbands... Every day there are stoppages and breakdowns in rail transport... No, fulfill the plan! It is necessary to work like the best workers of our country work. Among such a work we are your husband, Aleksandr Panteleevich Kovalov. He always works like a shock worker, exceeding his norms, while economizing on oil and lubricants... My husband receives prizes every month... My husband's locomotive is always clean and well taken care of...

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

"Therefore, I ask you, Martha, to talk to your husband... Persuade him that he must work honourably, conscientiously, like a shock worker. Teach him to understand the words of comrade Stalin, that work is a matter of honour, glory, courage and heroism..."
You are going to take part in a STAKHANOVITE simulation. To do this you need to split your class into groups of four or five. Each group takes on one of the roles below. The crucial characters are starred.

- The manager*
- Assistant manager
- Would-be Stakhanovite*
- Local party secretary*
- At least one, but not more than three, ordinary workers

The scenario
A worker in a factory producing steel wants to make an attempt to gain Stakhanovite status by raising his production rate enormously. You have to decide whether your character will support this attempt. To do this you need to think about:

- your position at the moment:
  - your aims
  - what you have to do to achieve these aims and be successful
  - the problems you face.

- what the implications of a successful attempt will be for you and others.

Then decide whether you will or will not support the attempt, setting out your reasons clearly.

How to proceed

1. Read the material on pages 191–193 about Stakhanovites, working conditions and the pressures on a manager in 1936 in industry. Different members of your group can read different parts and then you can pool your knowledge.

2. Discuss in your group how your character will respond by considering the points in a) and b) above. Decide on your response (if possible, the whole group should agree) and prepare your case for a meeting of all the characters, to be held in the next lesson. Some groups may wish to consult with others before the meeting, for example the groups playing the workers or the groups playing the manager and assistant manager.

3. Hold the meeting of all the characters to decide if the attempt should go ahead. The characters should be prepared to argue their cases aggressively in an open meeting.

4. Come out of role and discuss the following questions:

a) What decisions were made and why were they made?

b) What does the situation tell you about the tensions in Soviet society?

c) What were the advantages/disadvantages of Stakhanovism for:

i) the individual
ii) the factory/mines/workplace!

b) How effective was the Stakhanov movement as a mechanism for driving up productivity?

c) What can we learn about the relationship between politics and economics in the USSR in the 1930s?

Source: 12.24 Alexei Stakhanov, the coal miner whose astonishing output inspired countless other workers to copy his example

At ten o’clock on 50 August 1935, Alexei Stakhanov, a pneumatic-pick operator, began his special shift. After five hours of uninterrupted work he had cut 102 tons of coal, almost sixteen times the norm of 6.5 tons per shift. How was this done? The idea came from Konstantin Petrov, party organiser at Central Omrino in the Don Basin. Central Omrino lagged behind its plan quota and Petrov wanted to do something about it. He knew Stakhanov usually produced above the norm results on his shift. Ideal conditions were set up: an uninterrupted supply of compressed air, a good pick, two carefully selected proppers (to prop up the roof as Stakhanov cut away the coal) and ample supplies of timber. Handers were on hand to take the coal away. Petrov was there, holding a lamp on the coal face. Normally, the miners working on the face that Stakhanov cut produced around 52 tons in total per shift, but they did their own propping. Stakhanov with his support team cut twice the amount that the eight miners would have produced.

 Barely two hours after Stakhanov had finished, Petrov assembled a party committee at which Stakhanov was acclaimed for his world record for productivity – the correct path to guarantee the fulfillment of the annual plan ahead of schedule. Stakhanov received 200 rubles (instead of the normal 50 rubles), a bonus equal to a month’s wages, an apartment reserved for technical personnel with a telephone and comfortable furniture, passes to the cinema and live performances at the local workers’ club, and places at a holiday resort. He also had his name prominently displayed on the mine’s honour board. A special meeting of coal hewers was called, with compulsory attendance of local party, union and managerial leaders. Sectional competitions were set up for miners to emulate Stakhanov’s achievements. The party got the response it wanted. Several miners demanded the chance to beat the record, and by 5 September two had done so. Others were warned: “All those who try to slander Stakhanov and his record will be considered by the party committee as the most vile enemies of the people.”

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

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

V. P. Ogordishin was the son of a peasant from Smolensk. He was awarded labour hero, named 1957 and Dec. 1959. The second-highest-earning worker in Magnitogorsk Steel Mill was awarded with a brand new motor cycle and an individual house with its own garage, 70% per cent paid for by the factory. Before the revolution perhaps only a factory owner could have afforded such a house. He became a household name.

PARTY SECRETARIES

Party Secretaries were charged with overseeing the implementation of Moscow’s orders. They were judged by the output of major industrial enterprises in their areas – over fulfilment of plan targets was demanded at any cost, and health and safety issues came a poor second. They would use their influence to help managers secure scarce supplies in competition with factories from other areas. Failure to meet a target might have serious consequences. The Stakhanovite campaign gave them the chance to overcome inertia in industry and put pressure on managers to improve productivity and raise output.

WORKERS

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

When Stakhanovism started, workers resented the increased norms (these went up by around 50% in some enterprises) and there was increased tension between managers and workers. Some workers demanded to become Stakhanovites in order to gain increased pay and privileges. For example, they demanded good tools, but other workers resented that the would-be Stakhanovites got the best equipment.

MANAGERS

Managers had to fulfil their targets and would do anything, including bribery and corruption, to do it. They could only fulfill their targets with the co-operation of the workers. Managers were especially desperate to keep skilled workers: some managers registered non-existent workers on the payroll and distributed their ration cards to favoured workers. Harsh laws on absenteeism were not enforced. Payments were made for work that had never been done and bonuses were paid wherever possible. Moscow attacked the overpayment of wages but managers were more worried about failing to meet production targets. They made up success stories to keep Moscow happy. Soviet managers had a saying: ‘It’s necessary not to work well but to account well.’ Stakhanovism prevented managers with problems. Workers put them under a lot of pressure to be classified as Stakhanovites and wanted good tools to do the job more efficiently, but there were not enough of these to go around. Such shortages frustrated workers and could lead to them charging managers with wrecking ‘by hindering us from working in a Stakhanovite fashion’. Managers also had to deal with other problems arising from Stakhanovism, such as:

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

PRESSURES FROM ABOVE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Targets</th>
<th>Books must balance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There was increasing pressure from party officials to fulfill targets. Failure could lead to severe actions on managers.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some factories were cut substantially from 1936 onwards and enterprises were expected to pay for the fuel, raw materials and labour they needed from their own income.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

ECONOMIC PRESSURES

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

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

Competition from military spending
From 1936 onwards there was an unflagging increase in spending on the armed forces (from 34.4% of the budget in 1931 to 16.1% in 1936 and 37.5% per cent in 1940) and the military was given priority in the allocation of materials.

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