

## **Primary Sources about the FIVE YEAR PLAN**

### **From *Spartacus Educational***

#### **(1) Joseph Stalin, speech (1931)**

No comrades... the pace must not be slackened! On the contrary, we must quicken it as much as is within our powers and possibilities. To slacken the pace would mean to lag behind; and those who lag behind are beaten.... The history of old Russia... was that she was ceaselessly beaten for her backwardness. She was beaten by the Mongol Khans, she was beaten by Turkish Beys, she was beaten by Swedish feudal lords, she was beaten by Polish-Lithuanian Pans, she was beaten by Anglo-French capitalists, she was beaten by Japanese barons, she was beaten by all - for her backwardness... We are fifty or a hundred years behind the advanced countries. we must make good this lag in years. Either we do it or they crush us.

#### **(2) British Embassy report (21st June 1932)**

A record of over-staffing, overplanning and complete incompetence at the centre; of human misery, starvation, death and disease among the peasantry... the only creatures who have any life at all in the districts visited are boars, pigs and other swine. Men, women, and children, horses and other workers are left to die in order that the Five Year Plan shall at least succeed on paper.

#### **(3) Eugene Lyons, *Assignment in Utopia* (1937)**

The period of the Five Year Plan has been christened Russia's "Iron Age" by the best-informed and least sensational of my American colleagues in Moscow, William Henry Chamberlin. I can think of no more apt description. Iron symbolizes industrial construction and mechanization. Iron symbolizes no less the ruthlessness of the process, the bayonets, prison bars, rigid discipline and unstinting force, the unyielding and unfeeling determination of those who directed the period. Russia was transformed into a crucible in which men and metals were melted down and reshaped in a cruel heat, with small regard for the human slag.

It was a period that unrolled tumultuously, in a tempest of brutality. The Five Year Plan was publicized inside and outside Russia as no other economic project in modern history. Which makes it the more extraordinary that its birth was unknown and unnoticed.

The Plan sneaked up on the world so silently that its advent was not discovered for some months. On the momentous October first of 1928, the initial day of the Five Year Plan, we read the papers, fretted over the lack of news and played bridge or poker as though nothing exceptional was occurring. It was the beginning of a new fiscal year, precisely like the October firsts preceding it. The "control figures" or plan for the ensuing twelve months were rather more ambitious, with new emphasis on socialization of farming through state-owned "grain factories" and voluntary collectives of small holdings. But they were not sufficiently different from other years to arrest the attention of competent observers.

The fact is that the Kremlin itself was far from certain that a new era had been launched. It had not yet charted a course. Or rather, it had charted alternative courses and hesitated in which direction to

move. Not until Stalin and his closest associates see fit to reveal what happened in the crucial months of that autumn will we know how close the Soviet regime came to choosing a course which would have altered the whole history of Russia and therefore of the present world.

There was nothing in the figures for the fiscal year of 1929 that committed the ruling Party to a Five Year Plan of the scope eventually announced. But a feeling of tense expectancy now stretched the country's nerves taut. A sharp turn of the wheel to one side or the other was inevitable, and the population squared for the shock. Economic difficulties were piling up dangerously and the Kremlin could not steer a middle course much longer. Food lines were growing longer and more restive. The producers of food had tested their strength and tasted a measure of victory; they rebelled more boldly against feeding the urban population and the armies for rubles which could buy nothing. Millions of grumbling mouths had to be either filled with food or shut by force.

A partial crop failure in southern Russia aggravated the situation. Grain collections were not going well and, as always happened under these circumstances, the collectors began to resort to strong-arm tactics. Arson and assassination flared up once more in the villages, and Red troops were said to be "pacifying" the most unruly districts with lead. Schools, clubs, government buildings, and other institutions typifying the Soviet power were burned down in dozens of places. The published details of the peasant revenge were sufficiently harrowing, and what the press reported, we all assumed, was no more than a fraction of the picture. Death penalties, with and without trials, were the government's automatic answer. But they did not suffice. Something decisive had to be done that would either placate the peasants or end their insubordination.

#### **(4) James William Crowl, *Angels in Stalin's Paradise* (1982)**

With the defeat of Trotsky and the Left Wing in 1927, Stalin apparently began to look for a way to outmaneuver the final power bloc in the Party: the Right Wing led by Bukharin, Rykov and Tomsky. It was not by accident that the economy provided him with the issues he needed to destroy his erstwhile allies. Midway through 1927 the Politburo had initiated an ambitious economic program that included a number of expansive construction projects such as the Turkish-Siberia railroad and the Dnieper dam. Such an undertaking involved a risk since it was to be underwritten largely by the sale of grain, and the grain collection program had become increasingly unreliable during the mid-1920's. The yearly crises stemmed in part from insufficient supplies of consumer goods, but they were even more the result of the low price the government offered for grain. As a result of that price, peasants turned over to the state only the grain they were required to deliver through the procurement quotas, and they sold the rest through Nepmen on the private market where the price was substantially higher. Yet, in order to raise the additional revenue needed for the industrial program in 1927, the state dropped its price for grain still lower and cracked down on the private market in an effort to force the peasants to sell their grain to the state at the lower price. The peasants responded, however, by feeding their grain to their cattle, turning it into alcohol, or hoarding it in expectation of higher prices. By late 1927, grain collections fell off more sharply than in earlier years, and the regime faced a crisis.

Signs of disagreement over the response to the crisis appeared as early as October 1927. Stalin and his henchmen sounded the need for anti-kulak measures, while Bukharin and his allies worried aloud about the lagging collections but insisted on the need for caution in finding a solution. Unity was maintained at the Fifteenth Party Congress in December, however, as even the Politburo

rightists agreed that action was needed to convince the peasants to relinquish their supplies. Thus the Congress that vanquished Trotsky fairly bristled with leftist declarations.

A heavier, graduated procurement tax was issued that hit directly at the kulaks and promised to bring the state additional grain. In addition, a land act rescinded the right to hire labor and lease land that had been granted to peasants in 1925 and 1926, and kulaks were deprived of their voting rights in order to curtail their power in the village soviets. The Congress encouraged collectivization as well, although it stressed that it should be a gradual and voluntary process. Because of such measures, the Fifteenth Congress is often cited as marking the end of the N.E.P. era.

In the weeks following the Congress, Bukharin, Rykov and Tomsky apparently again supported Stalin in the attempt to compel the peasants to turn over their grain. Stalin was given control of the effort, and he singled out West Siberia for his personal attention since the harvest there had been excellent and the peasants were believed to be holding back substantial grain supplies. Though the Politburo still issued reassuring reports claiming that the Party had not broken with past agricultural policy, the Soviet press wrote about the grain "front" as if a military campaign had begun. Violence was widespread as officials tried to ferret out the grain, and Alec Nove claims that for some time thereafter such arbitrary and violent grain seizures were referred to as the "Urals-Siberian" method, after Stalin's tactics of early 1928. Though grain collections lagged and even the new procurement quotas fell short in January and February, by March the grain seizures were successfully at last in bringing the state the needed grain.

Until February and March of 1928, when the confrontation with the peasants reached a highpoint, it appears that Bukharin reluctantly agreed that temporary measures against grain-hoarding were necessary. The violence of the campaign was repulsive to the Politburo Right, however, and jolted it into an awareness of the deep division that had been developing in the Party since the fall of 1927. As a result, the two Politburo factions clashed repeatedly in the late winter, and Stalin found it necessary to publicly repudiate the "Urals-Siberian" methods at times over the next few months. Nevertheless Stalin had apparently committed himself to a radical economic stance by the late winter of 1927-1928, if only as a means of striking at his foes, and the power struggle had begun again in earnest.

#### (5) Eugene Lyons, *Assignment in Utopia* (1937)

Was the first Five Year Plan a "success"? For whom and for what? Certainly not for the socialist dream, which had been emptied of human meaning in the process, reduced to a mechanical formula of the state as a super-trust and the population as its helpless serfs. Certainly not for the individual worker, whose trade union had been absorbed by the state-employer, who was terrorized by medieval decrees, who had lost even the illusion of a share in regulating his own life. Certainly not for the revolutionary movement of the world, which was splintered, harassed by the growing strength of fascism, weaker and less hopeful than at the launching of the Plan. Certainly not for the human spirit, mired and outraged by sadistic cruelties on a scale new in modern history, shamed by meekness and sycophancy and systematized hypocrisy.

If industrialization were an end in itself, unrelated to larger human ends, the U.S.S.R. had an astounding amount of physical property to show for its sacrifices. Chimneys had begun to dominate horizons once notable for their church domes. Scores of mammoth new enterprises were erected. A quarter of a million prisoners -a larger number of slaves than the Pharaohs mobilized to build their

pyramids, than Peter the Great mobilized to build his new capital-hacked a canal between the White and the Baltic Seas; a hundred thousand survivors of this "success" were digging another canal just outside Moscow as the second Plan got under way. The country possessed 3 blast furnaces and 63 open hearth furnaces that had not existed in 1928, a network of power stations with a capacity four times greater than pre-war Russia had, twice as many oil pipe lines as in 1928. Hundreds of machines and tools formerly imported or unknown in Russia were being manufactured at home and large sections of mining were mechanized for the first time. The foundations were laid for a new industrial empire in the Urals and eastern Siberia, the impregnable heart of the country. Two-thirds of the peasantry and four-fifths of the plowed land were "socialized"-that is, owned and managed by the state-employer as it owned and managed factories and workers. The defensive ability of the country, in a military sense, had been vastly increased, with new mechanical bases for its war industries.

Measured merely for bulk, the Plan achieved much, though it fell far short of the original goals. On the qualitative side, the picture is much less impressive. Here, we find reflected the low caliber of the human material through which the Plan was necessarily translated from paper to life. Overhead costs were greater all along the line than expected.