9 Reassessing the history of Soviet workers: opportunities to criticize and participate in decision-making, 1935–1941

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Only in recent years have Soviet industrial workers of the 1930s been described in the West as anything more than slaves or victims of a brutal dictatorship.[1] Like many depictions of the Soviet people as a whole during the 'Great Terror', the mass arrests of 1935–1939, the older treatments have been at once ennobling and demeaning: ennobling because for many suffering evokes sympathy and demonstrates the innocence of the sufferer, so that workers become virtual saints through their martyrdom; demeaning because older studies have shown workers only as passive, meek recipients of actions, utterly without initiative or influence in their environment. In turn, this view is essential to the totalitarian model, in which the omnipotent state dominates the impotent society.[2]

Studies taking this view of Soviet workers have typically not delved beyond sources like law codes and leaders' statements; ironically, inquiries into the lives of proletarians have only rarely featured their voices. In part this reflected the notion that, since the state supposedly controlled everything, only it was worthy of attention in writing the story. The result was something of a self-fulfilling prophecy, since on the basis of this kind of evidence the state did appear to be all-powerful.[3] A law might be adopted, a policy announced – Western and Soviet writers alike agreed, without supporting their conclusions, that workers then leaped to fulfil the state's wishes. In the USSR, this obedience was described as stemming from enthusiasm, in the West from fear. Soviet studies of workers in this span, now thoroughly denounced in the USSR, have therefore also dehumanized them and have been terribly dull to boot.[4]

Another reason for the statist emphasis in earlier Western works was the problem of access to sources in the USSR, particularly archival

materials, but also local newspapers and journals. All of these reveal a greatly more complex picture than previously described. With the advent of glasnost, availability of sources has improved considerably. However, older studies also ignored the reminiscences of workers already available in the United States in the form of interviews with ex-Soviet citizens.[5]

More recent Western investigations have substantially modified the older picture by offering considerable insight into, for example, the difficulties encountered by the regime in controlling the turnover of workers, labour-management relations, and the Stakhanovite or model worker movement. There is a valuable study of the politics of production in the sense used by Michael Burawoy; that is, the focus is the important roles workers played in the day-to-day determination of production, wages, and job assignments.[6] Another recent monograph examines shop-floor culture and the adaptive mechanisms workers used to make life more bearable in the factories.[7] Much remains to be done; for example, there is still no usable study of an individual Soviet factory or industry in the 1930s. Another area ripe for inquiry is the impact of mass arrests during the Terror on factory life.

This chapter examines the spectrum of ways in which workers voiced complaints and influenced decision-making regarding their own environment at this time. 'Participation' and 'criticism' in this context refer to both formal opportunities, through established organizations and forums, and informal possibilities, through contacts and influence on the shop floor. The nature, limits and results of tolerated criticism expressed by workers are also discussed. Several of the recent investigations touch on these areas,[8] but largely as peripheral concerns. They merit direct attention, however, since they are at the heart of workers' sense of whether the regime responded to them meaningfully and positively.

Obviously there were limits to the objections anyone could make, yet that simple truth also conceals much. The view of an émigré construction engineer on criticism in general, which applies to his experience before World War II, is worth quoting at some length.

> The Soviet system is a dictatorship, but on the other side you must recognize that there exists a big criticism of the small and responsible workers excluding criticism of the regime, the party or the Politburo. No doubt in their authority can be expressed, and a word against the regime, the Politburo or the party and this is the end of you. You can criticize the secretary of a *raikom* [district party committee] but it is fairly dangerous. Also you can criticize comrade Ivanov [the equivalent of Mr Smith] who works as a [second or lower] secretary of the *raikom*. If you criticize him nothing will come to you.

The engineer maintained that such a man was open to criticism even regarding official duties. 'If you do this you defend the Soviet regime by criticizing the way he does his party work.'[9] To this one might add that speaking out was a good deal safer if the critic had a desirable social background as a child of the former oppressed classes.

It may be that workers did not widely want to criticize Stalin or the system as a whole; there is insufficient evidence to judge. None the less, in a broad sense fear defined the parameters of permitted speech. But within the obvious constraints lay a great many important concerns open to criticism and not conditioned by fear; this area is the subject of this chapter.

Workers did sometimes suffer arrest, for example in several cases when they produced too much waste on the job.[10] They also entered prison as 'babblers', those who, usually when drunk, transgressed the unwritten rules about criticism.[11] But taken together, the sources reveal relatively few cases of this type. On the other hand, there are instances in which workers spoke against broad policies but were not punished; these will be discussed below. At other times close links to superiors meant that workers were swept up in arrests which began at a higher level. Hence when the chief of the Donbass mine trust entered jail in 1937, fifteen others in the same organization followed, down to two or three workers.[12] Finally, workers were also charged as 'wreckers', particularly in the worst years for arrests, 1937–8. Yet the sources indicate overwhelmingly that industrial toilers were the least likely of any social group to be arrested in the Great Terror; this was the consensus of the thousands of émigrés, for example, who answered questionnaires in the Harvard Project survey after the war.[13] Since considerable evidence argues against the view that the population generally feared arrest,[14] it follows that workers would have felt even less of a threat from the state than other individuals.

While coercion and manipulation of workers certainly existed on a large scale, much more went on in the factories. Workers often did not behave as though they had been conditioned by a 'system of repression'.[15] Rather than accepting such assertions about the context, it is necessary to establish that context in the first place, through the use of detailed evidence. The larger questions here are to what degree workers had any meaningful input and influence in the factory environment, and to what extent the influence they possessed imparted to them a sense of the regime's legitimacy. If something is now known about the politics of Soviet productivity, there is still little understanding of the broader subject of workers' politics.

Former Soviet workers sometimes described their situation in the late

1930s using terms that support the view of their peers as fear-ridden slaves. Virtually all of the twenty-six émigré factory workers or employees interviewed by J.K. Zawodny in the early 1950s said that they had been afraid to complain about anything. For instance, a former coal miner spoke of 'this horrible fear of being arrested'.[16] Many analyses of the period rest upon such generalizations, but in fact this is only the beginning of the story, for the very same people who made these statements sometimes offered specific evidence from their own experiences which undermines their general observations. Were this inquiry a legal trial, any court would rule that the second kind of evidence (if the first is really evidence at all) is considerably more important.

The regime regularly urged its people to criticize local conditions and their leaders, at least below a certain exalted level. For example, in March 1937 Stalin emphasized the importance of the party's 'ties to the masses'. To maintain them, it was necessary 'to listen carefully to the voice of the masses, to the voice of rank and file members of the party, to the voice of the so-called "little people", to the voice of ordinary folk [*narod*]'.[17] The party newspaper *Pravda* went so far as to identify lack of criticism with enemies of the people: '*Only an enemy* is interested in seeing that we, the Bolsheviks . . . do not notice actual reality . . . Only an enemy . . . *strives to put the rose-coloured glasses of self-satisfaction* over the eyes of our people.'[18]

But were not these calls merely a vicious sham, so that only carefully chosen, reliable individuals could make 'safe' criticisms?[19] The evidence suggests otherwise.

One of the men Zawodny interviewed offered a curious story from 1939, by which time the 'Great Terror' had supposedly 'broken' the entire nation or reduced it to a 'scrap heap of humanity'.[20] Once a lathe operator, at the time of the incident this respondent was second in charge of his shop. During one of the endless bond drives, the party committee of the factory called in all the workers to sign up. Here is the tale:

> There was even a man we knew worked for [the] NKVD [the political police] at the table. A girl came in – a Komsomolka. They gave her the standard speech – she had to work for nothing for a while. She just turned around, bent down, put her skirt over her head, and she said, 'Comrade Stalin and you all can kiss me whenever it is most convenient for you,' and she left. I am telling you, I saw that and I was numb with fear. All those men behind the table, they just sat silently. Finally, one of them said, 'Did you notice, she didn't have pants on?' and everybody started to laugh.

The girl got away with her act; she was not arrested.[21]

Among the same interviews is one with a former furnace operator

who insisted that 'nobody really complained' and said that he did not express criticism even to his own wife, for fear she might say something to a neighbour which would lead to his arrest. But this same man recalled that once he went to the 'head of the Ukrainian government', presumably the president of the Ukrainian republic. The worker and his wife had been denied passports because of her social origin, and the authorities had told them to move at least 100 kilometres from their city of residence. But the president ordered that passports be issued to the couple, and they never had to move.[22]

In fact, the Zawodny file contains numerous reports of cases in which workers were not at all reluctant to complain. Some respondents even had a positive view of the way grievances were handled in general: 'honestly, I have to say that the People's Court usually rendered just sentences favouring the workers, particularly with regard to housing cases', said a former accountant.[23] A man who had been a worker, rising to become an electrical engineer and finally chief of a shift in a power station, reported that 'Anyone could complain in a formal way, especially when he had the law behind him. He could even write to a paper, and in this way to let the higher officials know about his complaint.'[24] This often happened: for example, in the first half of 1935 workers sent 2,000 letters, many of which undoubtedly contained criticisms, to *Voroshilovets*, the newspaper of the Voroshilov factory in Vladivostok.[25]

What resulted when ordinary people took their complaints to the press? A civil engineer interviewed after the war remembered that people frequently complained about the poor quality of construction and that he had to spend a considerable amount of time responding. Citizens protested to the city soviet, 'and then when they see that it doesn't help they write direct to Stalin'. Answers would come back to his organization from Stalin's secretariat with a standard message, 'We send these complaints to you for investigation and taking of necessary measures'. The chief of the whole housing administration in the area would then tell the engineer, 'Let me know in three days what has been done'.[26]

The Smolensk Archive contains numerous examples of both these standardized replies from central organs concerned with complaints, which besides Stalin's secretariat included such bodies as the Party Control Commission and the Special Sector of the Central Committee, and of the actions subsequently taken in Smolensk *oblast'* (the rough equivalent of a province).[27] In early 1936 a worker at the Red Handicraft factory complained, apparently to various officers, about corruption, delays in pay, and rudeness by the officials of his *artel'*, a voluntary,

cooperative association of workers. Four separate investigations followed, two by the *oblast'* party committee, one by an official of the relevant union, and one by the *oblast'* procuracy. Several of these confirmed the accusations, and the *artel'* leaders had to take steps to correct the situation, while the *raion* (approximately the equivalent of an American county) party secretary had to go to Smolensk and report to *oblast'* authorities on his monitoring of the affair.[28] Surely the *artel'* officials in question then behaved better toward workers.

Sometimes complaining did not go well for the initiator. Zawodny's lathe operator, working as an instructor in 1936, had a conflict with the *raion* party committee over his housing. He had gone to the party and his labour union about the problem but had obtained the impression that they wanted bribes from him. At that point he wrote to *Trud*, the national trade union newspaper, which published his letter. Immediately the town party committee called him in. 'Do you know that it is forbidden to write a letter like that?' an official asked him. The question seems almost surreal, since a national periodical would hardly publish a 'forbidden' complaint. The incident instead reveals the attitudes of local officials, who were unhappy at interference from above. Hence it is necessary to ask whom, exactly, did workers fear, if they were apprehensive? Local satraps had the power either to make life extremely uncomfortable for people or to grant them favours; to offend the authorities on the spot was clearly dangerous at times, as it is in many a society. But central officials did not welcome that situation, judging by this and other evidence.[29]

One of Zawodny's respondents expressed dismay at the idea that a worker would have made use of any organization to protest about a problem. 'No. Man! This would be like putting your head into the lion's mouth. It would be silly. I wanted to be alive.'[30] But specific evidence again belies a general opinion. Besides offering informal verbal criticisms and writing to newspapers, workers utilized other means of expressing dissatisfaction. First, they could go to the Rates and Conflicts Commissions (RKKs) within each factory to challenge decisions regarding pay, job classification or dismissal. These bodies had an equal number of representatives from the employer and from the factory or shop union committee. If workers failed to win their cases at that level, they could appeal to the people's courts or to the central committees of their unions.[31] To cite one illustration of the way this system worked, in 1938 the Central Committee of the paper workers' union considered 796 appeals of RKK decisions, of which 263 were resolved in favour of workers. 1939 saw even more protests to the union central committee, 1,002 in all;[32] obviously workers were not afraid to use this means of

defending their rights. The fact that so many appeals reached the highest body of this union indicates that a vastly greater number of cases went through the RKKs themselves.

Union officials called *instruktory* often travelled from the organization's headquarters to factories, where they listened to complaints from workers. For example, in March 1936 an instructor heard about problems from workers in the mechanical and pouring shops of the Orenburg metallurgical plant. They complained about poor materials, lack of supplies, and production norms that had been set too high. In his report to the presidium of the union central committee the instructor urged it to suggest to the relevant trust, the next level of industrial organization, that the 'mistakes' he had heard about needed correction. The affair had dangerous overtones, as workers had suggested that wrecking was responsible for the problems.[33] In this instance labour unions, usually pronounced all but dead by this time in Western literature,[34] in fact still had some power to act on workers' behalf. Other examples of the same point will be given below.

This account also shows that workers considered it possible to complain about a subject as sensitive as production norms. They objected to new norms in the Khar'kov tractor factory in January 1936, too, with remarkable results. A normer had reduced the time allotted to a job from eight to four minutes. Workers in a tool shop challenged the decision and presented the old rate to the normer, who then reversed his change. In another shop of the same factory a normer set pay at a 'low' rate for a job. 'At the insistence of the union group the one guilty of these [second] mistakes', the normer Nikitin, was fired from the factory and remanded to a court. Published in the official journal of the Central Trade Union Council (VTsSPS), the report of these incidents depicted them with complete approval.[35] Such articles undoubtedly encouraged other workers to protest in the same manner.

The Commissariat of Justice also heard and responded to workers' appeals. In August 1935 the Saratov city prosecutor reported that of 118 cases regarding pay recently handled by his office, 90 or 76.3 per cent had been resolved in favour of workers.[36] Representatives of the Commissariat occasionally went to factories to solicit or respond to complaints, as happened in Khabarovsk in July 1936.[37]

Workers participated by the hundreds of thousands in special inspectorates, commissions, and brigades which checked the work of managers and institutions. These agencies sometimes wielded substantial power. For instance, the former worker turned inspector V.R. Balkan, together with a union official, investigated an accident at his Moscow factory in 1937. Finding the cause in improper testing of

materials, the two fined the head of the production shop 100 roubles, about a week's pay, and placed a reprimand in the foreman's record.[38] The book which recounted this story was published as a guide to action for other union officials and inspectors and therefore also encouraged similar action by workers.

The Stakhanovite movement and workers' criticism

During the night of 30–1 August 1935, a slim and pleasant-looking twenty-nine year old, Aleksei Stakhanov, cut 102 tons of coal in one shift at a mine in the Don River basin (Donbass). This amounted to 14 times the prescribed norm. Though at first the achievement received only moderate publicity, within weeks the 'Stakhanovite movement' spread across the country, through many branches of the economy.[39] Everywhere workers scrambled to set production records. Eventually there were even Stakhanovite mail carriers and waiters,[40] an idea which would have appealed to many a visitor to the USSR in later years.

The Stakhanovite movement has usually been described as a drive by the state to squeeze more production out of the workers.[41] This is certainly true, as the regime utilized the new production records as examples of how much workers could achieve and then proceeded to raise norms in various industries during 1936 and subsequent years as well.

Yet this point is only a minor part of the story. In the first place, Soviet industry had already witnessed various 'movements' intended to boost productivity. Workers had long been used to such campaigns.[42] A second important point about the impact of Stakhanovism, one contrary to the old image that all workers somehow suffered from the movement, is that a relatively small percentage of the labour force was directly affected by the raised norms. Although many discussions of norms have been published,[43] their significance in practice requires further clarification. To begin with, some workers earned straight hourly wages; obviously the concept of a work norm did not apply to this group at all. For the rest, pay depended not only on norms (*normy vyrabotki*) but on rates (*rastsenki*) and job classification (*razriad*) as well. A portion of industrial workers were paid according to progressive piece rates, meaning that wages increased progressively above a fixed level of production, the norm. Still other workers earned by flat piece rates, a system in which norms had no direct impact, since by definition pay depended only on the amount produced. Sometimes rates increased along with or independently of norms, so that those on flat rates immediately earned more even when norms when up.[44] Those on progressive rates might

also lose little or nothing with an increase in norms provided that the rates stayed the same or rose.[45] A sympathetic foreman could raise the classification of a worker, granting a higher rate for some kinds of work.

Although for those on flat rates, falling short of or exceeding the norm made no difference by itself in terms of income, it could affect promotion and status, particularly whether one became a 'Stakhanovite' or not. There was never a clear policy to determine who gained the title; in some cases it was applied to workers who merely fulfilled their norms, while in a few plants supervisors simply designated workers wholesale as Stakhanovites.[46] Sometimes the title had nothing at all to do with norms, but simply with working well or suggesting innovations.[47] Among Iaroslavl' weavers, the term referred merely to 'a worker who has mastered new technology well and has learned how to utilize all its potential.'[48] Achieving Stakhanovite status meant a wide range of things, from better access to apartments and consumer goods down to having a favoured place in the factory cafeteria or one's name on an honour roll.

Subtracting the workers on hourly wages and flat piece rates leaves 32 per cent of all industrial toilers paid on the progressive piece rate system as of 1 January 1938.[49] To give a hypothetical example of the last scheme, a lathe operator might have had a norm of 10 fittings per hour. Making those 10 earned the worker a certain rate per piece. If he or she produced 11, or 110 per cent, a bonus would come into effect – say, 10 per cent extra for the eleventh piece. At 15 fittings per hour the next level of bonuses would begin, at 20 fittings yet a higher level started, and so forth. Such a worker obviously had a great incentive to exceed the norm; and to reiterate a point, only such workers had reason to care directly about norms.

Stakhanovism did not represent an entirely new departure regarding norms; they had regularly been raised before, though admittedly not by so much. However, the new norms of 1936 and succeeding years were often not especially difficult to reach, so that many workers quickly met the new targets. For example, in one group of four Far Eastern coal mines, the range of those miners not fulfilling the new norms by May 1936 was from 5.4 to 15.4 per cent.[50] By June 1938, despite further rises in norms, only 0.7 per cent of workers in electrical power could not fulfill them. The same figures for selected other industries were 4.8 per cent in coal, 11 per cent in chemicals and 27.9 per cent in paper, the highest proportion among available figures.[51] In October of the same year, *average* fulfilment of the norms in four factories involved in heavy industry ranged from 147.6 to 172.6 per cent.[52] Often the workers who could not quickly achieve the new norms were those who had just been

hired and thus had not yet gained sufficient experience or on-the-job training to work effectively.

New norms were not always introduced into practice, despite orders from above to do so. At the Voroshilov factory in Vladivostok in May 1936 a turner was still working according to the old norms. His foreman signed work orders without filling in pay rates or specifying the time allotted for completion of the job.[53]

Set too high, norms would impel workers like the turner to take another job, something frequently easy to accomplish in view of the constant labour shortage. After another round of norm increases in 1939, the Elektrosila plant in Leningrad 'lost 7,000 workers. Almost the whole body of workers changed.' Both norms and the premium system changed at the same time at Elektrosila, causing pay for some proletarians to fall 30–40 per cent.[54] Obviously the effect of such thorough turnover on production was devastating. To avoid this outcome executives of two weaving trusts sent thirty-eight requests to have norms lowered to the Commissariat of Light Industry in 1938. In a few cases the Commissariat allowed the changes.[55] Acting completely on their own, managers in the Donbass in 'very many' cases raised job rates and lowered norms; in one group of mines this happened four times in 1937 alone.[56]

Managers abused the pay system so much, generally to keep workers on the job, that the national trade union chief, N. M. Shvernik, complained publicly about the situation in August 1938. Citing two factories that had developed elaborate premium systems, he charged that the pay schemes 'were thought up especially to get around the directives of the party and the government and that an increase in wages must be accompanied by a growth in productivity and a rise in the skill of the worker'.[57] But executives faced a hard choice: they could either act strictly according to the rules on pay, in which case they could lose workers and fall into the very dangerous position of not fulfilling their factories' production plans, or they could accommodate workers by paying them more whenever that could be done quietly. Usually the second course was safer, at least as long as the enterprise fulfilled the plan. Thus workers exercised yet another kind of influence within the factories, circuitous but powerful, by virtue of their ability to leave. As the example of Elektrosila shows, they maintained this possibility even after the adoption of a law in December 1938 intended to tie them to their workplaces.[58] The forces of the market for labour were simply too strong to yield to socialist directives.

The problem of labour turnover leads to another point about norms: it was neither desirable nor possible to introduce new ones without

consulting workers. For this reason in April 1935 the head of the Moscow *oblast'* trade union council insisted that there 'should not be one worker touched by the review of norms with whom no one [from the union] has spoken, to whom it has not been explained why his norm is being examined. It is forbidden to take such measures administratively.'[59]

Each major branch of industry, some ninety altogether, held a conference in early 1936 to discuss the course of the Stakhanovite movement and its impact on production, focusing specifically on norms. These conferences and the discussions on norms throughout Soviet industry at this time provided further new opportunities for workers to be heard. In preparation for the conferences, workers in various enterprises at least made recommendations regarding norms, while some reports indicate that very broad discussions took place among the hands.[60] To cite one example of how the new norms were actually determined, 70 per cent of the new ones adopted in early 1936 at the Voroshilov factory in Vladivostok were set by technical personnel on the basis of their observations of workers.[61] This practice facilitated slowdowns by workers who wished to minimize the increases in norms; as a proletarian from the Stalingrad tractor factory admitted, when being observed for norm-setting, 'any worker will deceive at every step'.[62] There were also opportunities for communication and connivance between supervisors and workers while setting norms.

Still, involving workers in determining new standards was now to be standard practice, as underscored by the Moscow *oblast'* union council in April 1936 when it strongly criticized the administration of the Krasnaia Presnia factory for not doing so. The council resolved to inform the central committee of the relevant union and the Commissariat of Heavy Industry of the transgression, which made it impossible for workers to earn premiums.[63]

Worker involvement in determining norms sometimes resulted in proposals to raise some but lower others, for example at the Ordzhonikidze lathe factory.[64] Several branch conferences recommended retaining certain norms at their current level,[65] while others reduced the increases urged by individual factories.[66] Therefore the fact that Stakhanovites typically represented workers at the conferences did not mean that the trend-setters could think only of how to boost norms rapidly and steeply. The basic constraints of work by norms still applied.[67]

The problems inherent in setting norms without considering the practical impact or involving workers again became evident at another Far Eastern factory, the Kaganovich works, in the summer of 1937. According to a newspaper report, two engineers had determined new norms in

their offices during the spring of 1936. Management then demanded fulfilment but did not create the necessary conditions, a failure labelled 'the blow of an enemy'. By September 1937 about 50 per cent of the factory's workers still could not fulfil the 1936 norms. Then, 'after broad consideration by Stakhanovites, masters, and shop heads', lower standards were established. Although at the time of the article the two engineers were still employed in the area,[68] it seems likely that the secret police soon arrested them.

For all these reasons, the Stakhanovite movement was not a crude bludgeon used to beat all workers into vastly greater production, despite the drive to raise norms. However, it did accomplish something else for the industrial labour force which was of grave importance. The movement provided new status for workers in voicing criticism, urging and even demanding changes in production processes, and getting supervisors' attention in general. New forums appeared in which Stakhanovites could speak out, while some old and weak mechanisms for input now revived.

Strident criticisms of working and living conditions quickly began to surface, drawing on support from the highest level. In May 1935 Stalin had offered a new slogan: instead of the old 'technology decides everything', he now said that 'cadres decide everything'. In context, 'cadres' meant almost anyone. For, he continued, this slogan 'demands that our leaders display the most careful attitude toward our workers, toward the "small" and the "big", no matter what area they work in'.[69] Taking advantage of Stalin's emphasis and referring to his words, an article in the major trade union journal in September 1935 lashed out at housing conditions for workers at the electrical stations of Uzbekistan. In one room of four square metres lived six workers, while three different families totalling seven people occupied a room of seven square metres. Some employees had to sleep on bare earthen floors.[70]

Workers themselves, undoubtedly bolstered by the title of Stakhanovite that many now bore, began to speak frankly. A major early move in this campaign was the First All-Union Conference of Male and Female Stakhanovites, held in Moscow in mid-November. One of the leading worker-speakers was Nikita Izotov, like Stakhanov a coal miner. Indeed, there had already been an 'Izotov movement' to raise productivity and norms in 1932–3. But that idea never spread widely, since at that point the party had other concerns in mind, particularly bolstering managers' authority after a long assault on it in the 'Cultural Revolution' of 1928–32.[71] However, by 1935 the leadership was prepared to foster a vast productivity movement. The key problem of the second Five Year Plan period, 1933–7, was how to get more out of

the newly-built industries rather than how to construct plants and bring in labour in the first place.[72]

Worker enthusiasm was essential to boosting productivity. In order to help whip up zeal, the party leaders were quite willing to encourage workers to speak out; workers needed to feel that the Stakhanovite movement was theirs in a meaningful way. Therefore with Stalin, Molotov, and other top officials sitting behind him, Izotov was blunt:

> Stakhanovites spoke to me and asked me to convey the following to the government: they earn a lot, but there is little to buy. One says: I need a piano, another – a bicycle, a third, a record player, radio and all sorts of cultural goods, which are necessary, but which are not [available] in the Donbass.[73]

Aleksandr Busygin, a stamping press operator with a stature in the movement almost as high as that of Stakhanov himself, made an indirect but clear comment at the conference on the economic situation of most workers. Earlier almost all his money went for food, 'but now, I think, it will be necessary to improve the food, and I'll be able to get new clothes, and even to furnish the apartment better'.[74] Thus the leading Stakhanovites took the new opportunity to address the national leadership in person about the general plight of workers. Even if, as may well have been the case, the Stakhanovites who spoke at the conference were selected and prompted from above, that does not matter; the importance of their statements was that they constituted a signal to the country that a policy of soliciting and listening to workers' complaints was now in place. More precisely, an existing policy now took on new emphasis and dimensions.

Industrial workers quickly began to attack their supervisors in other settings. In December 1935 workers in glass and chemicals in Moscow *oblast'* spoke up about the failure of managers and technical personnel to supply materials adequately, make timely repairs, and conduct 'correct accounting'. The problems had come to the attention of the *oblast'* administration for local industry, which remarked that it was 'necessary to end the insufficient development of work on the penetration of Stakhanovite methods'.[75]

At a meeting of Stakhanovites and executives of the ceramics industry, also held in December 1935, a moulder insisted in his own rambling way that six months before

> our bosses lived, but the workers got by [*pozhivali*] . . . [now] our bosses don't look quite like that, since they are combing their hair, on the contrary, probably they are being combed . . . And they will look after us at the factory as they should. This is correct. But we don't believe it. We believe it when the director curses – well, okay, you live well, but we live badly.[76]

It does in fact appear that managers were being 'combed' by their own superiors. An official of the People's Commissariat in charge of ceramics production chastized 'Comrade Frantsev', a plant manager, at the same session for not creating the 'essential conditions' or giving workers the support they needed to improve their output. 'Shame, Comrade Frantsev', the official scolded, and called for 'wider self-criticism' as a means of eliminating the problems.[77] In Soviet parlance, 'self-criticism' implied both that one would chastize oneself and be criticized by others.

Some managers had already absorbed the message from above on how to relate to the Stakhanov movement. Another worker at the same conference outlined the ways managers in his factory had responded to his requests for help in improving output, so that he had gone from making 1,200–1,300 pieces per shift to about 2,000.[78] Such executives understood that they had better be more receptive than before to proletarians' concerns.

In February 1936 a group of Murmansk workers joined in the chorus of complaints. During a general meeting of workers from all three shifts at the city railroad depot, strong criticism of union leaders and management emerged because they had allegedly done nothing to help ordinary hands become Stakhanovites. Some workers averred that, 'Whatever you say, however many suggestions you make about removing the defects and disorders in production, no one does anything. On the contrary, later they pressure those who spoke up with criticisms. It's better to keep quiet.'[79]

This report points to several broad themes. Local officials or managers had again tried to stifle criticism, but the national trade union journal, *Voprosy profdvizheniia* (Problems of the Trade Union Movement), published the story and welcomed it. In part this was because, as the article again suggests, criticism and suggestions from workers tended to go hand in hand. Eliciting proposals from rank-and-file employees was a key element of the Stakhanovite movement. Finally, local attempts in Murmansk to silence workers had backfired: somehow they had enlisted the aid of the trade union journal and, worse yet, dissatisfaction with the pressure on critics had spread so far among the depot workers that they had turned out in a mass meeting clearly intended to intimidate management and union leadership. With the spotlight of a national publication on them, it is certain that the Murmansk officials moved quickly to attempt to satisfy their workers.

In at least two factories, workers were able to effect the firing of supervisors who failed to satisfy them in the new situation. Both cases involved heads of production shops, an important position, particularly

in heavy industry. At the Chisovsk metal plant, workers ousted the head of the rolling shop for forbidding them to finish more than 50 tons of metal per shift. 'For sabotage of the [Stakhanovite] movement' the head of the rolling shop at the Chernozem metal factory lost his post 'at the insistence of a [production] conference', the report continued.[80]

These conferences, first held in 1923,[81] had fallen into quietude by the early 1930s. Now, however, they began to revive. On 17 October 1935 the party Central Committee and VTsSPS together issued a circular to all union organizations directing them to see that the 'basic content of work of the production conferences becomes the struggle for the removal of shortcomings hampering the Stakhanovite movement'. Among the problems listed were defects in the organization of production, supply of materials, and the 'inertness' of managerial personnel.[82]

Numerous reports indicate that production conferences did in fact now respond to the new thrusts of Stakhanovism. In its early phase, the sources imply, all workers in a given setting were welcome to attend the meetings. At the Vostokostal' (Eastern Steel) plant, workers made 87 per cent more proposals for changes in production in 1936 than they had in 1935. During September 1935 workers at the Skorokhod shoe factory in Leningrad made seventy-eight proposals at production conferences; in October, after the Stakhanovite movement had gained momentum and publicity, they made 212 suggestions. A further 250 followed at November meetings.[83]

Proletarians undoubtedly offered many ideas in the hope that they might be recognized as Stakhanovites simply by virtue of such contributions; nevertheless, they must have felt a greater sense of legitimacy for the political system in view of the solicitation of their views. This seems clear in an account from a railroad depot in Zagorsk, about sixty-eight kilometres north of Moscow. In the autumn of 1935 the conferences 'began not with words but with deeds'. They now allowed workers to examine collectively exactly where problems with repairs existed. '"Until this time we had the opinion that blabbing was the occupation of the production conferences. Now we see that it isn't that way," said workers.'[84]

At the important Zavod imeni Stalina (the Factory named after Stalin) auto plant in Moscow, now the Likhachev works, the conferences also changed radically with the advent of the Stakhanovite movement. 'At once the production conferences ceased to be boring. Earlier at these conferences foremen spoke most, and [they] spoke about fulfilment of the [production] programme only drily. Now the important issues of vital practice are considered there.' Workers attended to questions of how to improve specific jobs; the discussions

were concrete, probing which engineers and technicians would help workers and how. These changes improved communications at the factory between technical personnel and workers.[85] The production conferences had revived as an important means of worker participation, one which managers could not ignore.

Workers used these meetings and other means to express concerns about job conditions in view of the incentives to become Stakhanovites. An engineer speaking at the ceramics meeting of December 1935 reported that, 'The Stakhanovite demands that he comes to work and finds at the work place everything that he needs in the proper quantity.'[86]

Not satisfying such demands placed supervisors in jeopardy; in the Moscow coal basin seventeen men, ranging from directors of mines down to brigade foremen were fired, demoted, warned, or even remanded to courts in the last few months of 1935 alone for 'sabotage' of the Stakhanovite movement.[87] A dispatcher of the Moscow river port received a five-year prison sentence in late 1935 for counter-revolutionary activity after he had assigned a Stakhanovite brigade to unload a cargo that was not its speciality. The group filled only 64 per cent of the norm.[88]

Time and again, proletarians accused managers of failing to arrange conditions so that ordinary workers could become Stakhanovites. Managers supposedly did not provide proper raw materials and tools, organize production rationally, or give requisite instruction. Quite often workers linked such charges to wrecking. For instance, in the summer of 1937, with the mass arrests in full stride, the Stakhanovite Iakov Chaikovsky, a steel maker at the Comintern plant, 'sharply criticized the executives of the factory'. Earlier the factory had become a leading one, he claimed, thanks to the movement. But now the administration displayed a 'formal attitude' toward it, and the plant had regressed. It was necessary 'to bring order into production arrangements' so that 'big outputs' could be achieved again. In the same report a Stakhanovite from a Khar'kov factory accused management of allowing the movement to develop chaotically, on its own. Workers did not know from one day to the next what jobs they would be doing. All this and more was linked to 'enemies' in a series of factories.[89]

Especially in 1937, such charges could prove fatal to managers, but this did not necessarily occur. At the Red Star factory a meeting of the *aktiv* took place in May 1937. Whether or not this plant had earlier witnessed more broadly-based production conferences, at this juncture the participants consisted of Stakhanovites, engineers, and technical employees. Though participants were not identified by occupation,

Stakhanovites at least listened to a frank exchange of views on production problems. Several speakers traded charges about whose fault the difficulties were. But instead of leading to arrest, another member of the *aktiv* suggested a 'simple resolution': the antagonists should 'think over all defects, take measures and the matter will go better'.[90] Criticism did not have to mean rancour or repression.

In general, the Stakhanovite phenomenon made things more difficult for executives and engineers, as it often did for workers, with the difference that managers bore responsibility for seeing at one and the same time that production went smoothly and that workers had the chance to become Stakhanovites. That was not an easy combination to achieve. Since more responsibility rested on the shoulders of white-collar personnel than on workers, executives and engineers were more likely to be identified as the malevolent causes of shortcomings during the heated atmosphere of the 'Great Terror' and therefore to wind up in the GULag system.[91]

Certainly courts sometimes convicted workers of undermining the Stakhanovite movement. In Sverdlovsk *oblast'* thirteen workers, as well as thirty-four other people, had been convicted of this 'crime' by the end of November 1935.[92] These workers either feared that the new norms, now widely expected, would be difficult to achieve, or they resented the new higher pay and privileges of their comrades, or both.[93]

However, probably recognizing that repression was only likely to spread discontent, in March 1936 the Presidium of the Supreme Court of the USSR announced a change in policy. 'In many cases courts have incorrectly judged individual backward workers as enemies of the people for incorrect remarks', the Presidium reported. In its view such statements often reflected the workers' inability to cope with the new conditions; that is, some workers could not make the new norms. Their negative remarks do not 'indicate their opposition to the Stakhanovite movement or sabotage'. What was needed was not court action but 'mass explanatory work'.[94] In other words, workers were not to be punished for speaking against the movement; instead, managers and other officials were directed to help discontented workers master the new standards.

Criticism of Stakhanovism as a policy, which was a direct challenge to the regime, did not always result in arrest. An archival report dating from some point in late 1935 lists several workers excluded from the party or their trade union or fired for criticism of the movement, but gives no indication that they were arrested.[95] 'In our mine there was an old worker who was not afraid' to call the movement by a word derived from a vulgar term for copulation, former mining engineer recalled.[96] A

woman identified as a 'pure proletarian' pronounced Stakhanovism 'nonsense' at her factory, but the only result was that managers talked to her.[97] When a young woman at one factory got a set of Lenin's works as a prize for her job performance, an old worker called out, 'That is what the whore [*sterva*] deserves'. General laughter and some confusion followed, 'but finally nothing was done about it'.[98] In contrast to the negative comments, it should be noted, some émigré workers offered a much milder, somewhat positive appraisal of Stakhanovism on their part and their fellows'.[99]

Workers continued to make serious criticisms of their supervisors and environment through the next few years. For example, in the twenty-four months following September 1937 the Central Committee of the communication workers union received 2,007 complaints from workers about 'incorrect' actions of managers. 432 were resolved in favour of the workers, 837 were rejected, and the rest were 'in process'.[100] At Leningrad factory meetings in 1937, 1938, and 1939 workers were outspoken about problems ranging from low pay through poor supply of materials to a firing after a conflict with a foreman. For example, the worker Krumgol'ts castigated the management of the Leningrad mechanical factory in May 1939 for its 'poor use of cadres' and 'disorderly attitude toward people and work'. He attacked the director, Kurushin, by name for failure to 'check decisions' in his shop. Kurushin then interrupted to say, 'They are being checked'. When Krumgol'ts rejoined with 'That's not noticeable', Kurushin remarked that, 'They are being checked every day, for your information'. This drew applause from the meeting. At the same session the worker Barzin told a long story of how he had been fired as a 'disorganizer' after a conflict with a foreman in which he had cursed the boss 'Russian style'. This description drew laughter from the audience.[101] Thus workers in the city which had supposedly suffered at least as much as any other in the 'Great Terror' were still able to criticize a director to his face and apparently to get a job back after cursing a supervisor, as in Barzin's case.

In the period just prior to the war, this picture changed somewhat. Both the Terror and the Stakhanovite movement had faded, while managerial authority had revived to a fair degree. The press spoke frequently of the need to support managers and engineers,[102] and the police ceased to arrest them so cavalierly.[103] These changes meant that a long period of turbulence in industry was over; with its passing workers' opportunities to protest, criticize, and participate in decision-making declined to some extent.

Yet this was only relative to the levels of the preceding few years. Workers continued to contest firings in the rates and conflicts commis-

sions, the union inspectors, and the courts.[104] Complaints still came to other officials, too, for instance the 231 to the Altai *krai* soviet for the period 15 February–19 March 1940 mentioned in an article abut 'toilers' complaints'.[105]

Up to the war, factory workers frequently acted as though they possessed a mandate to criticize. One émigré recalled that his stepmother, a factory worker, 'often scolded the boss' and also complained about living conditions, but was never arrested.[106] John Scott, an American employed for years in the late 1930s as a welder in Magnitogorsk, attended a meeting at a Moscow factory in 1940 where workers were able to 'criticize the plant director, make suggestions as to how to increase production, improve quality, and lower costs'.[107]

Leningrad factory *aktiv* meetings of 1940 were relatively calm, and the charge of wrecking or sabotage was absent when participants voiced criticism. One example is a gathering at the Red Vyborzhets factory in June 1940; it quietly but frankly covered a series of economic questions. The worker Sheinin remarked that in the eight or nine years he had been there, this was the first meeting he had attended which was 'devoted exclusively to economic problems'.[108] In this sphere his right to be heard was intact.

The evidence presented here gives some indication of the range of options available to workers with grievances. Many if not most of these were well established and permanent. As far as the topics of complaint are concerned, certainly they were limited. John Scott found that if Moscow workers railed against problems within the factory itself, they fell silent when foreign policy came up.[109]

While sane, calm, and sober, no worker would have dared to say that socialism was a poor system or that Stalin was an idiot. But such bounds allowed a great deal that was deeply significant to workers, including some aspects of production norms, pay rates and classifications, safety on the job, housing, and treatment by managers. This occurred at a time when American workers in particular were struggling for basic union recognition,[110] which even when won did not provide much formal influence at the work place.

Far from basing its rule on the negative means of coercion, the Soviet regime in the late 1930s fostered a limited but positive political role for the populace. In a system whose officials at virtually all levels felt tremendous pressures to juggle figures and lie to their superiors, frank information was of great value. If it came from workers, nominally the country's rulers, so much the better. Complaints and suggestions constantly flowed upward, giving the authorities at higher levels at least the

illusion that they were in touch with the people. Central officials could appear to be the defenders of the common folk. As some of the sources cited here suggest, workers sometimes believed that that was true. It cost the Stalinist leadership nothing to offer this kind of positive element in the system, and it encouraged greater productivity and commitment to the regime.

The Soviet political structure in the late 1930s was certainly authoritarian above, in the formation of broad policy guidelines. But at lower levels of society, in day-to-day affairs and the implementation of policy, it was participatory.[111] Earlier concepts of the Soviet state require rethinking: the workers who ousted managers, achieved the imprisonment of their targets and won reinstatement at factories did so through organizations which constituted part of the state apparatus and wielded state powers. No sharp distinction between state and society existed, though there were immense differences between levels of the state. Obviously such a system did not constitute democracy, but it did provide important ways of participation.

It is of course extremely difficult to say with any precision how widely workers gained a sense of the regime's legitimacy from their opportunities to criticize and participate in decision-making. One émigré recalled that life was getting better in 1940, and he linked this change to the reasons people fought for the regime in the war.[112] Admittedly young at the age of thirteen to know how adults felt, he still probably absorbed a mood from his father, who was a worker. Other evidence comes from a woman born in 1918. She also thought that 1940 was a good time: 'There was no unpleasantness, there were no arrests, nobody was sent into exile, there were no denunciations in the newspapers, everybody was working.'[113] These remarks accord well with the atmosphere at Leningrad and Moscow factory meetings in the same year. One observer noted that in 1939 the young workers of Leningrad, along with the students and the newly-created intelligentsia, were overwhelmingly loyal.[114] An émigré who had been a worker, then an engineer, believed that 'immediately before the war and during the war even the non-party element was co-operating willingly', though he tempered this statement with the opinion that older workers felt some antipathy to the regime.[115] John Scott found great optimism in Magnitogorsk at the same time.[116] Coupled with the opportunities which still characterized the system for seeking other jobs, obtaining education, and advancing in one's career,[117] workers' chances to speak out and participate in shaping the factory world must have meant a great deal to them. It is difficult to explain the level of Soviet war production, achieved under extraordinarily difficult circumstances, and the victory itself in any other way.

Only by staying on the surface of the story and limiting the use of evidence to certain kinds of sources can the system be described as one in which coercion overwhelmingly determined the course of workers' lives. Only by assuming that repression suffused daily existence have scholars been moved to see the necessity of force everywhere. Delving deeper into the picture reveals a wide range of compromises, contradictions and dynamics. Stalin may have been a vicious murderer in the Kremlin, but a few blocks away managers had to grapple with the question of how to make the plan and keep workers on the job at the same time. This and similar issues meant that ultimately relatively little was controlled by government or party decree, which often expressed pious wishes rather than commands which were then fulfilled. In grappling with the fluidity and contradictions of the situation, workers found many ways in which they could contribute their thoughts and exercise some influence over their environment. Neither martyrs nor helpless puppets, they played a significant role in both the achievements and the state-sponsored violence of the period.

Notes

1. For older treatment of workers in this period, see Manya Gordon, *Workers Before and After Lenin* (New York, 1941); Arvid Brodersen, *The Soviet Worker: Labor and Government in Soviet Society* (New York, 1966); Solomon M. Schwarz, *Labor in the Soviet Union* (New York, 1951); and Robert Conquest, *Industrial Workers in the U.S.S.R.* (New York, 1967), among other works. Newer treatments of the subject include Francesco Benvenuti, 'Stakhanovism and Stalinism, 1934–1938', CREES Discussion Papers, SIPS no. 30, University of Birmingham, 1989; Hiroaki Kuromiya, *Stalin's Industrial Revolution: Politics and Workers, 1928–1932* (Cambridge, 1988); Lewis H. Siegelbaum, *Stakhanovism and the Politics of Productivity in the USSR, 1935–1941* (New York, 1988); Donald Filtzer (who in various ways affirms the older viewpoint), *Soviet Workers and Stalinist Industrialization: The Formation of Modern Soviet Production Relations, 1928–1941* (Armonk NY, 1986); and Vladimir Andrle, *Workers in Stalin's Russia: Industrialization and Social Change in a Planned Economy* (New York, 1988). A useful work which looks at some of the same issues involving criticism and participation by workers in the 1920s is William J. Chase, *Workers, Society, and the Soviet State: Labor and Life in Moscow, 1918–1929* (Urbana IL, 1987).
2. This view of Soviet government and society draws on an old tradition of analysis regarding the tsarist state and society. See, for instance, the classic pre-revolutionary work of V.O. Kliuchevsky, *A Course in Russian History: The Seventeenth Century*, trans. Natalie Duddington (Chicago,

1968), p. 8; and Richard Pipes, *Russia under the Old Regime* (New York, 1974), p. 21. On 'totalitarianism' for the USSR in this period see, for instance, Adam B. Ulam, *Stalin: The Man and his Era* (New York, 1973); and Mikhail Heller and Aleksandr M. Nekrich, *Utopia in Power: The History of the Soviet Union from 1917 to the Present*, trans. Phyllis B. Carlos (New York, 1986). For treatments of the Terror which take this view and set the USSR into the theoretical context of totalitarianism, see Carl J. Friedrich and Zbigniew K. Brzezinski, *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy*, 2nd edn (Cambridge MA, 1965), p. 169; and Alexander Dallin and George W. Breslauer, *Political Terror in Communist Systems* (Stanford CA, 1970), p. 5. Terror and fear are considered the most essential characteristics of totalitarian systems by Friedrich and Brzezinski, *Totalitarian Dictatorship, passim* and p. 15; Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, new edn (New York, 1966), p. 344; and Zbigniew K. Brzezinski, *The Permanent Purge: Politics in Soviet Totalitarianism* (Cambridge MA, 1956), pp. 17 and 27.

3. The epitome of this approach is probably Conquest, *Industrial Workers*.
4. ' "Kruglyi stol": aktual'nye zadachi izucheniia sovetskogo rabochego klassa', *Voprosy istorii*, no. 1 (January 1988).
5. J.K. Zawodny file, twenty-six interviews with former Soviet factory workers, Hoover Institution Archives. These interviews were conducted in the early 1950s. The Harvard 'Project on the Soviet Social System' was conducted for the United States Air Force. Interviews took place in 1950–1, largely in displaced persons camps in West Germany, although a few were held in New York. There were A schedule interviews, which were life stories, and B schedule interviews, which were sessions on specialized topics. This material will be cited here as HP, the number assigned to the interviewee, A or B, volume, and page numbers. Short biographical data from the pre-war period will also be provided, if available, using the designations given in the A series data. The interviewers translated the material into occasionally awkward English.
6. This is Siegelbaum, *Stakhanovism*. He draws on Michael Burawoy, *The Politics of Production: Factory Regimes under Capitalism and Socialism* (London, 1985).
7. Andrle, *Workers in Stalin's Russia*.
8. Ibid., pp. 29 and 61; Siegelbaum, *Stakhanovism*, pp. 10, 142, 250–4.
9. HP number 470, A, v. 23, pp. 16–17; a Russian male born about 1913.
10. HP number 380, A, v. 19, pp. 5–6; a Belorussian male born about 1923, a rank-and-file worker. Arrests of workers on this basis appear to have been rare, judging by the other sources used for this study.
11. Eugenia Ginzburg, *Journey into the Whirlwind*, trans. Paul Stevenson and Max Hayward (New York, 1967), p. 180.
12. HP number 470, A, v. 23, p. 25.
13. Raymond Bauer and Alex Inkeles, *The Soviet Citizen: Daily Life in a Totalitarian Society* (Cambridge MA, 1959), pp. 105–8.
14. See my 'Fear and belief in the USSR's "Great Terror": Response to arrest, 1935–1939', *Slavic Review*, vol. 45, no. 2 (1986). Extensive calculations of the prison and labour camp population in the late 1930s, based on

sentencing, labour force, unionization, and voting data, are in Ger P. van den Berg, 'Quantitative aspects of the Stalinist system of justice and terror in the Soviet Union', in F.J.M. Feldbrugge, ed., *The Distinctiveness of Soviet Law* (Dordrecht, 1987). On p. 139, van den Berg estimates that about 2.2 million people were in labour camps in 1940. The Soviet scholar V. Zemskov claims to have seen data from a 'civil archive' which indicates that there were 839,000 total prisoners in the prison and camp system in 1936 and 1,344,408 in 1940. Of these 12.6 per cent in the first year and 33.1 per cent in the second had been arrested for 'counter-revolutionary crimes'. At present this is as close as we have to official Soviet data on the numbers caught up in the Terror. 'Arkhipelag GULag glazami pisatel'ia i statistika', *Argumenty i fakty*, no. 45 (1989), p. 5. Such figures are far lower than the seven to fifteen million in the labour camps by 1940 given in older works and repeated in Robert Conquest, *The Great Terror: A Reassessment* (New York, 1990), p. 485. The lower numbers – which in no way reduce the horror of the arrests and the sense of moral outrage they should provoke – do however suggest that the regime did not set out to terrorize the population and that the impact of the Terror was far less than is generally thought. This is also the thrust of the impressionistic evidence and personal reports cited in my 'Fear and belief'.

15. The comment that such a system existed for workers and was the key factor in determining their behaviour was made at the IV World Congress for Soviet and East European Studies, Harrogate, England, 25 July 1990 by Francesco Benvenuti during his commentary on an earlier draft of this article. Of course, this is a restatement of the notion that a 'system of terror' gripped the USSR in the late 1930s. To some extent Andrea Graziosi, '"Visitors from other times": Foreign workers in the prewar *piatiletki*', *Cahiers du monde russe et soviétique*, vol. 29, no. 2 (April–June 1988), repeats the view that Soviet workers' lives were overwhelmingly determined by coercion. But her reliance on testimony from foreign workers in the USSR, who often arrived and behaved as labour aristocrats, is not adequate compared to detailed testimony from ex-Soviet workers themselves.
16. Zawodny file, first interview set, respondent 2; and see respondent 11. It may well be that such general statements were prompted by the atmosphere of the early Cold War. Several respondents indicated suspicion of Zawodny, so that they may have told him things considered safe at that time.
17. I.V. Stalin, *Sochineniia*, tom 1 [XIV], 1934–1940, ed. Robert H. McNeal (Stanford, 1967), p. 238; and see similar statements on pp. 86–7, 100–1, 131, and 232.
18. Quoted in O.A. Ermansky, *Stakhanovskoe dvizhenie i stakhanovskie metody* (Moscow, 1940), p. viii. No date was given for the *Pravda* statement, but the foreword to the book was written in December 1938, so the comment came before that.
19. I have heard such remarks many times, for example at the IV World Slavics Congress and at the Symposium on the USSR's Great Purges at Michigan State University, May 1986.

20. Conquest, *Great Terror*, p. 434; Harrison Salisbury, 'Foreword', in Ruth Turkow Kaminska, *I Don't Want to Be Brave Any More* (Washington DC, 1978), p. xii.
21. Zawodny file, set II, respondent 19.
22. Ibid., set I, respondent 1.
23. Ibid., set I, respondent 8.
24. Ibid., set II, respondent 15.
25. *Tikhookeanskaia zvezda* [hereafter TZ], 21 July 1935, p. 1.
26. HP number 611, A, vol. 29, pp. 18–19. This was a male Ukrainian born about 1905 into a middle-class family.
27. Vsesoiuznaia kommunisticheskaia partiia (bol'shevikov). Smolenskii oblastnoi komitet. The Smolensk Archives. This source will be cited here as SA with a box number, reel number if appropriate, WKP (file) number, and *list* (l. or ll.). SA box 44, reel 43, WKP 386, 389. There is even a case of a member of the secret police, the NKVD, removed from his job and arrested after a complaint regarding his abuse of power: ibid., WKP 386, l. 43, 10 February 1936.
28. Ibid., ll. 314–20 and 288.
29. *Rabochaia Moskva*, 27 September 1935, p. 3, published a letter from a worker charging that she was fired because she had criticized the director of her factory for feeding his pigs from the cafeteria account and keeping the smelly animals at the plant. The local union organization would not help her.
30. Zawodny file, set I, respondent 1.
31. *Kodeks zakonov o trude*, vtoroe izdanie, s izmeneniiami na 1 oktiabria 1938 g. (Moscow, 1938), pp. 44, 155–6.
32. Soiuz rabochikh bumazhnoi promyshlennosti SSSR. Tsentral'nyi komitet, *Otchet tsentral'nogo komiteta professional'nogo soiuza rabochikh bumazhnoi promyshlennosti, 1973–1939 gg.* (Moscow, 1939), p. 44.
33. Tsentral'nyi Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Narodnogo Khoziaistva [hereafter TsGANKh], f. 7622, o. 1, d. 202, ll. 1–7.
34. On the supposed death of trade unions, see Conquest, *Industrial Workers*, pp. 151–6; Gordon, *Workers Before and After Lenin*, p. 98; and Jay B. Sorenson, *The Life and Death of Soviet Trade Unionism 1917–1928* (New York, 1969), p. 253.
35. L. Shkol'nikov, 'Rol' profsoiuzov v stakhanovskom dvizhenii na KhTZ', *Voprosy profdvizheniia* [*VP*], no. 1 (January 1936), p. 62.
36. 'Praktika mest', *Sovetskaia iustitsiia* [*SIu*] no. 23 (August 1935), p. 12.
37. *TZ*, 22 July 1936, p. 3. The Justice representatives promised to investigate workers' complaints about poor ventilation, mistakes in calculating pay, holidays, and lack of help with technical study.
38. *Profaktivisty rasskazyvaiut o svoei rabote* (Moscow, 1937), p. 30.
39. On the beginnings of the Stakhanovite movement see Siegelbaum, *Stakhanovism*, pp. 66–86; and Semen Gershberg, *Stakhanov i stakhanovtsy*, izdanie vtoroe (Moscow, 1985), pp. 9–31.
40. The waitress is pictured in *Krasnoe znamia* (Tomsk), 5 February 1939, p. 2; the mail carrier's photograph is in ibid., 29 November 1938, p. 2. Tsentral'nyi Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Oktiabr'skoi Revoliutsii

[TsGAOR], f 5451, o. 19, d. 227, l. 28, mentions a women's hairdresser who did hair in ten minutes instead of the norm of twenty, without a single complaint.

41. The conventional interpretation of the movement may be found, for example, in one of the standard texts on Russian and Soviet history, Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, *A History of Russia*, fourth edn (New York, 1984), p. 502.
42. Norms were raised in various industries in 1932; *Rabochii klass v upravlenii gosudarstvom (1926–1937 gg.)* (Moscow, 1968), pp. 232–3. They increased in auto factories in May 1935; TsGANKh f. 7622, o. 1, ed. khr. 604.
43. Norms are discussed, for example, in Siegelbaum, *Stakhanovism*, almost *passim*; and in John Scott, *Behind the Urals: An American Worker in Russia's City of Steel* (Bloomington IN, 1973), p. 149.
44. TsGANKh f.4086, o. 2, d. 4731, ll. 2, 7; ibid., f. 7995, o. 1, d. 333, l. 198; Ermanskii, *Stakhanovskoe dvizhenie*, p. 330. Under the law, managers had the right to fire or transfer workers not making norms. But in view of the labour shortage and the pressure from above to help workers achieve norms, this was probably rare.
45. TsGANKh f. 7622, o. 1, d. 53, l. 6, a resolution of the auto-tractor industry branch conference, February 1936 stating that 'only clearly erroneous rates . . . should be reviewed'. Ibid., f. 4086, o. 2, ed. khr. 3365, l. 74, files of the Commissariat of Heavy Industry, a letter of 12 June 1936 indicating that in machine building rates are to be kept the same except in cases of technical changes; other examples could be given.
46. Ermanskii, *Stakhanovskoe dvizhenie*, pp. 17–20.
47. Tsentral'nyi Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Moskovskoi Oblasti [TsGAMO], f. 6852, o. 1, d. 367, l. 1, the Moscow oblast administration of local industry, division of glass and chemicals; and 'Vtoraia godovshchina', *Stakhanovets*, no. 8 (1937), p. 3.
48. V.I. Andrianov and V.V. Solov'ev, *Gavrilog-Iamskie tkachi* (Iaroslavl', 1963), p. 78.
49. B. Markus, 'Trud', *Bol'shaia Sovetskaia entsiklopediia*, the supplementary volume 'Soiuz Sovetskikh Sotsialisticheskikh Respublik' (Moscow, 1947), p. 1,117. Markus refers to 'working hours', but I have taken this as a rough approximation of number of workers.
50. *TZ*, 16 July 1936, p. 3.
51. Siegelbaum, *Stakhanovism*, p. 262. In this entire period there was strong and steady pressure on managers from above to bring workers up to fulfillment of the norms. See, among many examples, V. Chekryzhov and L. Kaminer, 'Itogi peresmotra norm vyrabotki v mashinostroenii', *Profsoiuzy SSSR*, no. 7 (July 1939), p. 51, which refers to a resolution of the VIII plenum of VtsSPS.
52. TsGANKh f. 4086, o. 2 d. 4731, l. 14. This is an undated letter to Lazar Kaganovich, Commissar of Heavy Industry, from the head of the auto-tractor division of the commissariat, Merkulov; data are given through October 1938.
53. *TZ*, 26 May 1936, p. 3.
54. Leningradskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Oktiabri'skoi Revoliutsii i Sotsialisticheskogo Stroitel'stva [LGAOR], f. 2140, o. 21, d. 265, ll. 10–11. This from the stenographic record of an *aktiv* meeting, 19 February 1940.

55. TsGANKh f. 7604, o. 8, ed. khr. 117, *passim*.
56. Ermanskii, *Stakhanovskoe dvizhenie*, p. 330. A. Minevich, 'Uporiadochit' zarabotnuiu platu v kamennougol'noi promyshlennosti', *Profsoiuzy SSSR*, no. 8–9 (August–September 1939), pp. 73–4, reports that at one Donbass mine in 1938, 35 norms were lowered even though the old ones were being filled by 150–160 per cent.
57. N.M. Shvernik, 'O rabote profsouizov po zarabotnoi plate', *Profsoiuzy SSSR*, no. 12 (August 1938), p. 17.
58. The law of 1938 is discussed, for example, in Filtzer, *Soviet Workers*, pp. 235–9. He shows that this and other laws designed to restrict workers' ability to change jobs were widely evaded.
59. *Rabochaia Moskva*, 6 April 1935, p. 2. The official was Ia. Soifer.
60. For examples of workers' active involvement in determining the new norms, see TsGANKh f. 7604, o. 8, ed. khr. 33, l. 30, for the branch conference of the linen industry in April 1936; and D. Mochalin, 'Uchastie proforganizatsii v peresmotre norm v transportnom mashinostroenii', *VP*, no. 3 (March 1936), pp. 82–3.
61. *TZ*, 15 June 1936, p. 3.
62. TsGANKh f. 7622, o. 1, d. 54, l. 208. This is from the branch conference of the auto-tractor industry, February 1936.
63. TsGAMO f. 5687, o. 1, d. 42, l. 38.
64. Ermanskii, *Stakhanovskoe dvizhenie*, p. 246; and see TsGANKh f. 4086, o. 2, ed. khr. 3365, l. 280, a communication to the division of labour of the metal industry from the Kaganovich factory, Moscow.
65. Ermanskii, *Stakhanovskoe dvizhenie*, p. 246; TsGANKh f. 7604, o. 8, ed. khr. 33, l. 154, the otdel pen'kozavodov GUPDI [?], dating from early 1936; ibid., f. 4086, o. 2, ed. khr. 3286, l. 8, from the conference of the transportation department of the Commissariat of Heavy Industry, March 1936.
66. Ibid., l. 10: one factory had recommended a 61 per cent increase in a norm, but the conference set the new one at 33 per cent. Another case involved a recommendation of a 46 per cent rise from a factory, which the conference reduced to 23 per cent.
67. See Burawoy, *Politics*, pp. 10, 183, and 287 on the constraints of working by norms in other countries.
68. *TZ*, 3 September 1937, p. 3. Some norms were also lowered in the auto-tractor industry at the beginning of 1937, when officials realized that some had been set too high in 1936: V.A. Sakharov, *Zarozhdenie i razvitie stakhanovskogo dvizheniia (na materialiakh avtotraktornoi promyshlennosti)* (Moscow, 1985), p. 59.
69. Stalin, *Sochineniia*, tom 1 [XIV], p. 62, in a speech to graduates of the Red Army Academy, 4 May 1935.
70. M. Taub, 'Kak zabotiatsia o liudakh na elektrostantsiiakh Uzbekistana', *VP*, no. 9 (September 1935), pp. 73–6.
71. Siegelbaum, *Stakhanovism*, p. 54.
72. Alec Nove, *An Economic History of the U.S.S.R.* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1972), pp. 226–7.
73. *Pervoe vsesoiuznoe soveshchanie rabochikh i rabotnits-stakhanovtsev, 14–17 noiabria 1935 g. Stenograficheskii otchet* (Moscow, 1935), p. 165.

74. Ibid., p. 151.
75. TsGAMO f. 6852, o. 1, d. 290, l. 40, the Moscow oblast administration of glass and chemical plants, 17 December 1935.
76. Tsentral'nyi Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv RSFSR [TsGA RSFSR], f. 52, o. 1 ed. khr. 14, l. 60, stenographic record, 8 December 1935.
77. Ibid., l. 18.
78. Ibid., l. 54.
79. F. Voropaev, 'Profrabotu na transporte – na uroven' stakhanovskogo dvizheniia', *VP*, no. 2 (February 1936), p. 17.
80. M. Voskresenskaia and L. Novoselov, *Proizvodstvennye soveshchaniia – shkola upravleniia (1921–1965 gg.)* (Moscow, 1965), p. 92.
81. See Chase, *Workers, Society*, pp. 264–82 on the production conferences in the 1920s. Voskresenskaia and Novoselov, *Proizvodstvennye*, p. 10, find the roots of the conferences in the production *iacheiki* (cells) of 1921 and date the first real production conference at the end of that year in Moscow.
82. Ibid., p. 91.
83. Ibid., p. 94.
84. *Profrabota po-novomu: rasskazy predfabzavkomov, tsekhorgov i gruporgov* (Moscow, 1936), p. 81.
85. R. Sabirov, 'Kak profgruppa stala sploshnoi Stakhanovskoi', *VP*, no. 1 (January 1936), pp. 66–7. See A. Egupov, 'Stakhanovskie sutki, piatidnevki i dekady na Podol'skom zavode', *VP*, no. 2 (February 1936); and L. Rovskii, 'Kak ne nado pomogat' stakhanovskomu dvizheniiu', *VP*, no. 2 (February 1936) for accounts of the revival of production conferences in Podol'sk and Khar'kov.
86. TsGA RSFSR f. 52, o. 1, ed. khr. 16, l. 173.
87. TsGANKh f. 7566, o. 1, ed. khr. 2816, ll. 4–5. Commissariat of Heavy Industry, materialy po podmoskovskomu basseinu. Stakhanovskoe dvizhenie.
88. *SIu*, no. 1 (January 1936), p. 3.
89. P. Moskatov, 'Pomoch' stakhanovtsam dal'she razvernut' stakhanovskoe dvizhenie', *VP*, no. 17 (September 1937), p. 18.
90. TsGANKh f. 4086, o. 2, d. 4265, ll. 2–5, Commissariat of Heavy Industry, otdel truda. Protokol tekhnicheskogo soveshchaniia i perepiska o provedenii aktivov na metallurgicheskikh zavodakh. 1937.
91. Arrests of engineers are recounted in, for example, G. Andreev [Gennadii A. Khomianov], *Trudnye dorogi; vospominaniia* (Munich, 1959), p. 19; and Fedor Ivanovich Gorb, 'Chernyi uragan', memoir in his file in the Bakhmeteff Archive of Russian and East European History and Culture, Columbia University [hereafter BA], pp. 16 and 48. Arrests of managers can be deduced from disturbing figures regarding executives in coal production for October 1938. Of 858, only 98 or just over 11 per cent had been in their positions for more than eight months. TsGANKh f. 7566, o. 1, d. 3537b, l. 2; Commissariat of Heavy Industry, Glavnoe upravlenie sostave rabotnikov.
92. *SIu*, no. 4 (February 1936), p. 3.
93. See Siegelbaum, *Stakhanovism*, pp. 190–204.
94. *SIu*, no. 14 (May 1936), p. 3. Already in ibid. no. 11 (April 1936), pp. 8–9,

the journal, which was the official organ of the Commissariat of Justice, denounced the practice of sending workers and technical personnel to courts for opposition to Stakhanovism, calling this a direct contradiction of Stalin's words at the Stakhanovite conference in November 1935. In fact, Stalin had said that first the 'conservative elements of industry' who were not helping the movement should be persuaded to do so. If that failed, 'more decisive measures' would be required. Stalin, *Sochineniia*, tom I [XIV], p. 98.

95. TsGAOR f. 5451, o. 19, d. 227, ll. 113, 116. This file is VTsSPS, reports from central committees of unions, 1935.
96. HP number 1497, A, v. 35, p. 18, a male Russian mining engineer born about 1909; his father was a tsarist army officer.
97. TsGA RSFSR f. 52, o. 1, ed. khr. 16, ll. 140–1, a report of 10 December 1935. An engineer at the Kuznetsk metal plant said in 1935 that the Stakhanov movement was like the northern practice of putting meat on a stick in front of a dog to make it run faster, but no action against him is recorded; TsGAOR f. 7952, o. 5, d. 66, l. 4, Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo 'Istoriia fabrik i zavodov'. Kuznetskii metallurgicheskii kombinat im. Stalina. Stenogrammy besed s rabochimi o stroitel'stve i rabote zavoda, 1935.
98. HP number 65, B2, v. 3, pp. 29–30. The respondent was a construction engineer probably born sometime between 1900 and 1903; no A schedule information is available.
99. HP number 639, A, v. 30, p. 13; number 13, A, v. 2, p. 10; number 92, A, v. 7, p. 5; number 190, A, v. 14, pp. 14–15; number 65, B2, v. 3, p. 30, reported that except for the incident when the 'whore' got Lenin's works, 'you could not observe any isolation of Stakhanovites from the rest of the workers'. Most of these sources are also given in Siegelbaum, *Stakhanovism*, pp. 191–3.
100. Tsentral'nyi komitet professional'nogo soiuza rabotnikov sviazi, *Otchet tsentral'nogo komiteta professional'nogo soiuza rabotnikov sviazi. Sentiabr' 1937–sentiabr' 1939 gg.* (Moscow, 1939), pp. 69–70.
101. LGAOR, f. 1633, o. 15, d. 394, l. 37, a meeting at the Krasnyi Vyborzhets plant on 5 September 1937; f. 1253, o. 3, d. 81, ll. 50–51, a meeting of 3 June 1938 at the Leningrad metal plant; and d. 99, ll. 30–31, a meeting at the Leningrad mechanical factory on 6 May 1939. At the latter meeting the foreman Por'es reported that Stakhanovites had voiced severe criticism to him of expenditures in the plant. Workers also criticized managers by name in Magnitogorsk in June 1938; TsGANKh f. 4086, o. 2, d. 4344, ll. 4, 8, 9. This was the Commissariat of Heavy Industry, Glavnoe upravlenie metallurgicheskoi promyshlennosti, otdel kapital'nogo stroitel'stva. Preniia po dokladu nachal'nika stroitel'nogo upravleniia 'Magnitostroi' na slete stakhanovtsev.
102. See, for example, G.M. Il'in, 'Novyi pod"em sotsialisticheskogo sorevnovaniia', *Stakhanovets*, no. 11 (1938), p. 34. Il'in was director of the Hammer and Sickle factory in Moscow.
103. By 1939 NKVD investigators were 'more competent', they were 'concerned with technical and industrial sabotage' and often had the education

to look carefully into charges, and they sometimes asked civilian engineers for their opinions on cases. See, respectively, HP number 70, B, vol. 2, p. 6, a Russian shop chief in textile mills, probably born in the 1890s; S. Swianiewicz, *Forced Labour and Economic Development* (London, 1965), p. 144; also Ashot M. Arzumanian, *Taina bulata* (Erevan, 1967), pp. 109–10; and Victor Kravchenko, *I Chose Freedom: The Personal and Political Life of a Soviet Official* (New York, 1946), pp. 289–91.

104. For example, in *SIu*, no. 4 (February 1939), pp. 31–2; ibid., no. 14 (July 1939), p. 6.
105. *Altaiskaia Pravda* [Barnaul], 27 March 1940, p. 1.
106. HP number 153, A, vol. 12, pp. 31–2, a Russian male airplane mechanic born in 1927 into a worker's family.
107. Scott, *Behind the Urals*, p. 264.
108. LGAOR f. 1633, o. 15, d. 485, l. 29. Actually, as early as 3 June 1938 there was a calm discussion of the factory's situation involving Stakhanovites and other workers with the new director at the Leningrad metal factory: ibid., f. 1253, o. 3, d. 81, ll. 50–51.
109. Scott, *Behind the Urals*, p. 264.
110. See Sidney Fine, *Sit-down: The General Motors Strike of 1936–37* (New York, 1969). And see the grim letters from American workers about their conditions in this decade in *'Slaves of the Depression': Workers' Letters About Life on the Job*, ed. Gerald Markowitz and David Rosner (Ithaca NY, 1987). The first letter, p. 1, to the Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins, has the line 'I'll sign my name, but if my boss finds out – .'
111. I do not believe that this ability to participate and criticize pertained so much to peasants, but much more research is needed on that subject. In the meantime, there are a few indications that peasants had some say in day-to-day affairs on the collective and state farms and that at least in some cases they chose their own chairpersons. See Roberta T. Manning, 'Government in the Soviet countryside in the Stalinist thirties: The case of Belyi Raion in 1937', *The Carl Beck Papers in Russian and East European Studies*, no. 301 (1984); and Fedor Belov, *The History of a Soviet Collective Farm* (New York, 1955).
112. HP number 153, A, v. 12, p. 54.
113. HP number 59, A, v. 5, p. 29; a Russian female chemist born about 1918 whose family was 'superior intellectual'.
114. G. Arkitin, 'Politicheskie nastroeniia naseleniia g. Leningrada v leto 1941', BA, pp. 4–7.
115. Zawodny file, set II, respondent 16; this comment was essentially repeated in set II, respondent 13, who added that 'The workers understand the fact that we have to build and build and build'. Perhaps older workers still in the factories were more disgruntled partly because, unlike so many of their fellows, they had not been promoted out of their situation.
116. Scott, *Behind the Urals*, p. 205.
117. On education and upward social mobility, see Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Education and Social Mobility in the Soviet Union 1921–1934* (Cambridge, 1979).