

## WERE STALIN'S ECONOMIC POLICIES A SUCCESS OR A FAILURE?

### Why did the Soviet Union need to change?

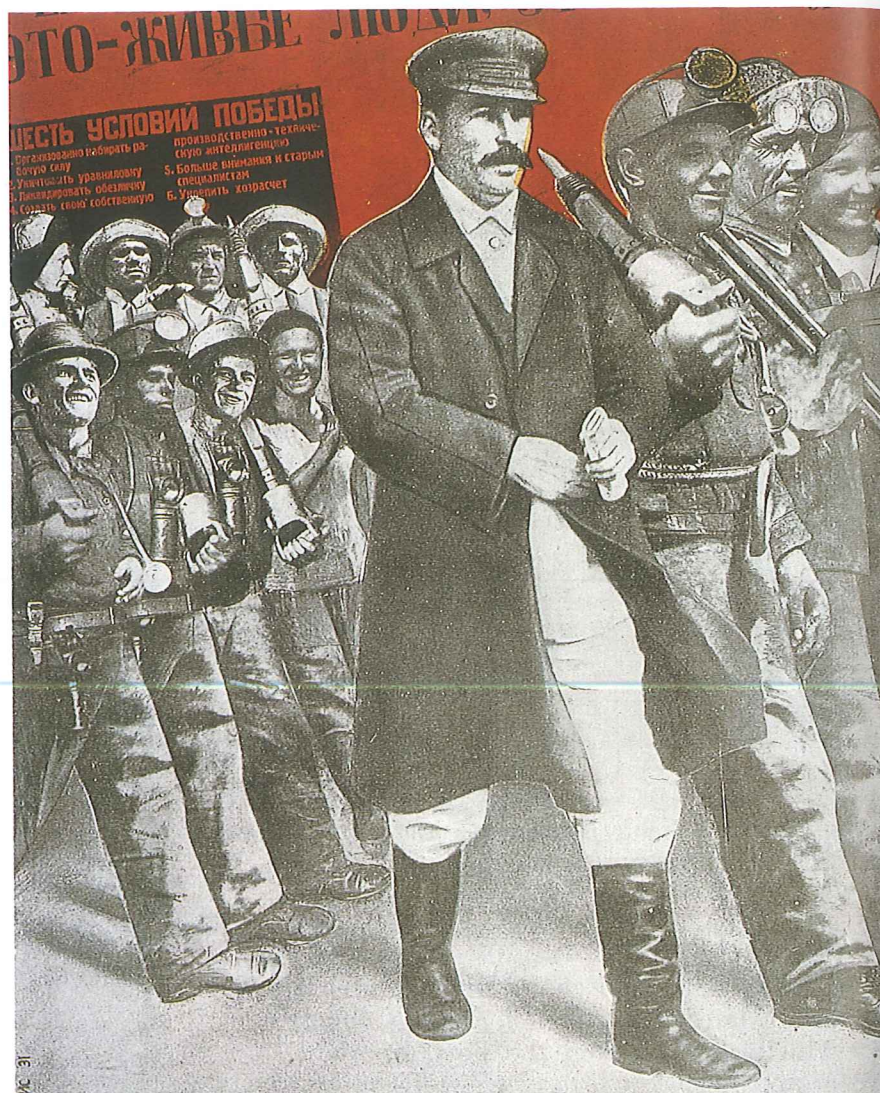
IN 1928, the USSR was still a poor, backward country, producing fewer industrial goods than many smaller countries. Stalin aimed to transform it into a modern, powerful industrial nation.

There were three main reasons for developing industry quickly:

- to provide the machinery, especially tractors, needed to mechanise farming and produce more food
- to catch up with the Western world and make Russia less dependent on the West for industrial goods
- to have a strong industry capable of producing armaments so that Russia could defend itself from attack.

But to develop industry, it was also necessary to develop agriculture. Agriculture in the USSR was still not very sophisticated, and Stalin needed to produce more food, especially grain, to feed the growing number of workers. He also needed to export grain to foreign countries in order to earn foreign currency to buy essential industrial machinery and goods. Stalin chose to change agriculture by collectivisation (see pages 95–101).

1. Why was it so important to the Communists to industrialise the USSR?
2. Why was agriculture so closely linked to industrial development?
3. Why, according to Stalin in Source 2, was it important to make the changes quickly?
4. a) What image of Stalin is presented in Source 1?  
b) Why would Stalin want the Russian people to see this poster?

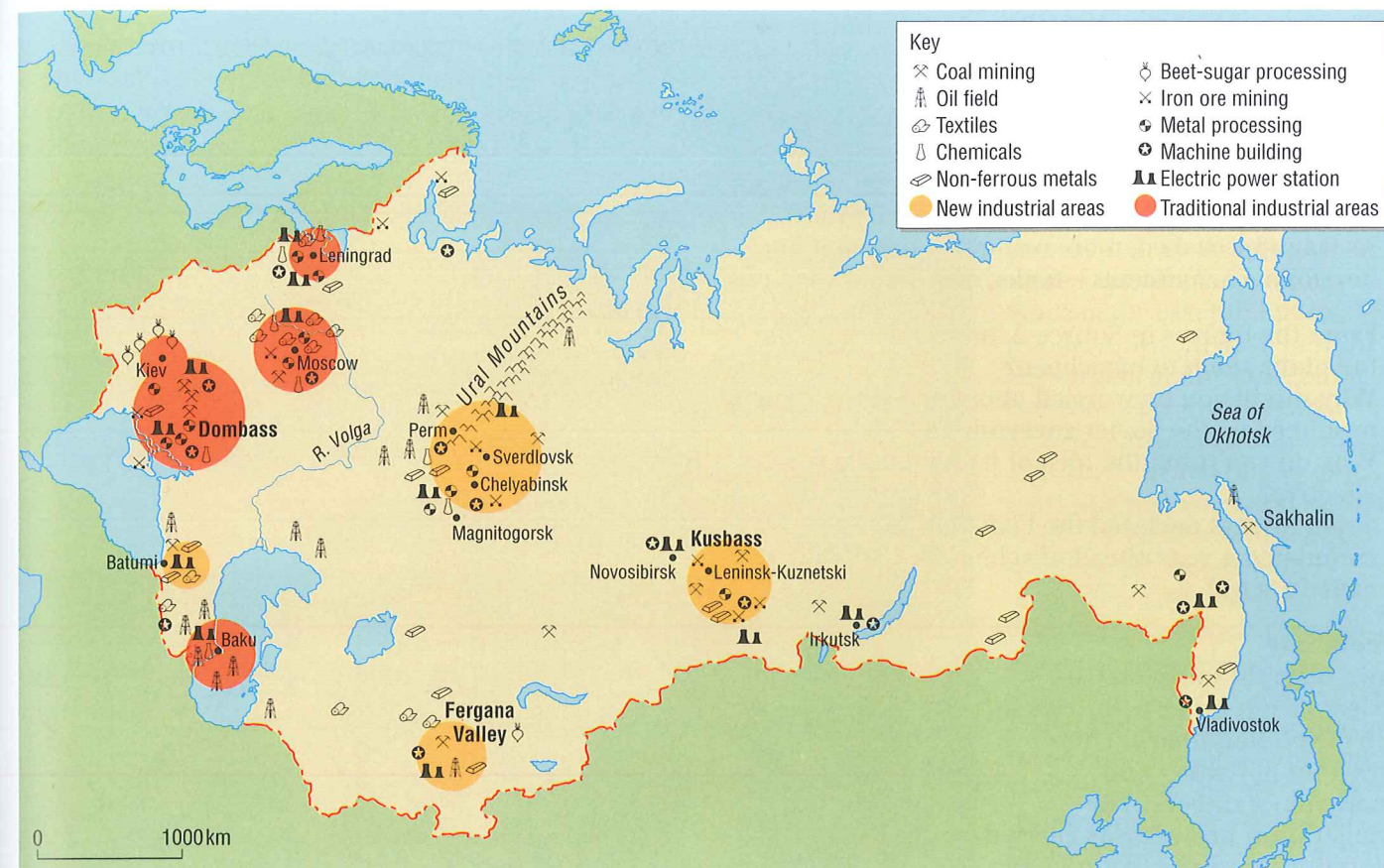


**SOURCE 1** A propaganda poster showing Stalin marching alongside miners, made during the first Five-Year Plan

**SOURCE 2** From Stalin's Collected Works, 1931

*“We must . . . create in our country an industry which would be capable of re-equipping and organising not only the whole of our industry but also our transport and our agriculture . . . The history of Russia shows . . . that because of her backwardness she was constantly being defeated . . . We are 50 or 100 years behind the advanced countries. We must make good this lag in ten years. Either we do it or we will go under.”*

## How did Stalin industrialise the USSR?



**SOURCE 1** A map showing the new industrial centres

### The planned economy

Stalin and the Communist Party believed that the way to develop industry and run the economy was through state planning. The state would determine not only what should be produced, but also how, when and where it would be produced. It also determined prices and wages. To organise this sort of planning, the idea of Five-Year Plans was adopted. The detailed planning of the economy was carried out by Gosplan, the state planning agency.

#### Five-Year Plans

First:	1928–32
Second:	1933–37
Third:	1938–41 (interrupted by the Second World War)

1. Why did Stalin build the new industrial centres so far to the east, a long way from Moscow and St Petersburg?
2. How is a free-market economy different from a planned economy?

### How did the Five-Year Plans work?

The plans set production targets, which industries had to reach. For example, the coal industry was set the target of producing 75 million tons of coal by 1932. To achieve this, coal-producing areas and local managers were given their own specific targets. Source 2 shows the production targets set by each plan.

- The first Five-Year Plan emphasised heavy industries – coal, oil, iron and steel, electricity – to lay the foundations for future industrial growth. The targets set were unbelievably high and unrealistic, but remarkable results were achieved. Coal and iron both doubled their output; electric power production almost trebled; 1,500 new industrial plants were built. The building of over 100 new towns, some carved out of nothing, was started.

- The second Five-Year Plan gave heavy industry top priority, but communications, especially railways, became important to link cities and industrial centres. New industries, such as chemicals and metallurgy, grew enormously.
- The third Five-Year Plan ran for only three years, up to 1941, when Russia entered the Second World War. As war approached, more resources were put into developing armaments – tanks, planes and weapons.

1. From the figures in Source 2, how successful do the plans seem to have been?
2. Why might you be worried about accepting figures produced by the Soviet government?
3. Why do you think the idea of using targets was effective?
4. Stalin always declared the Five-Year Plans completed a year ahead of schedule. Can you explain why?

**Specialists**

Stalin brought in specialist advisers from other countries to help develop industry. There were a lot of British and American engineers. The Dnieper dam project was carried out under the supervision of an American, as was the building of the Soviet asbestos industry. The Ford motor company helped the Soviet car industry to build 140,000 cars in 1932.

**Single managers**

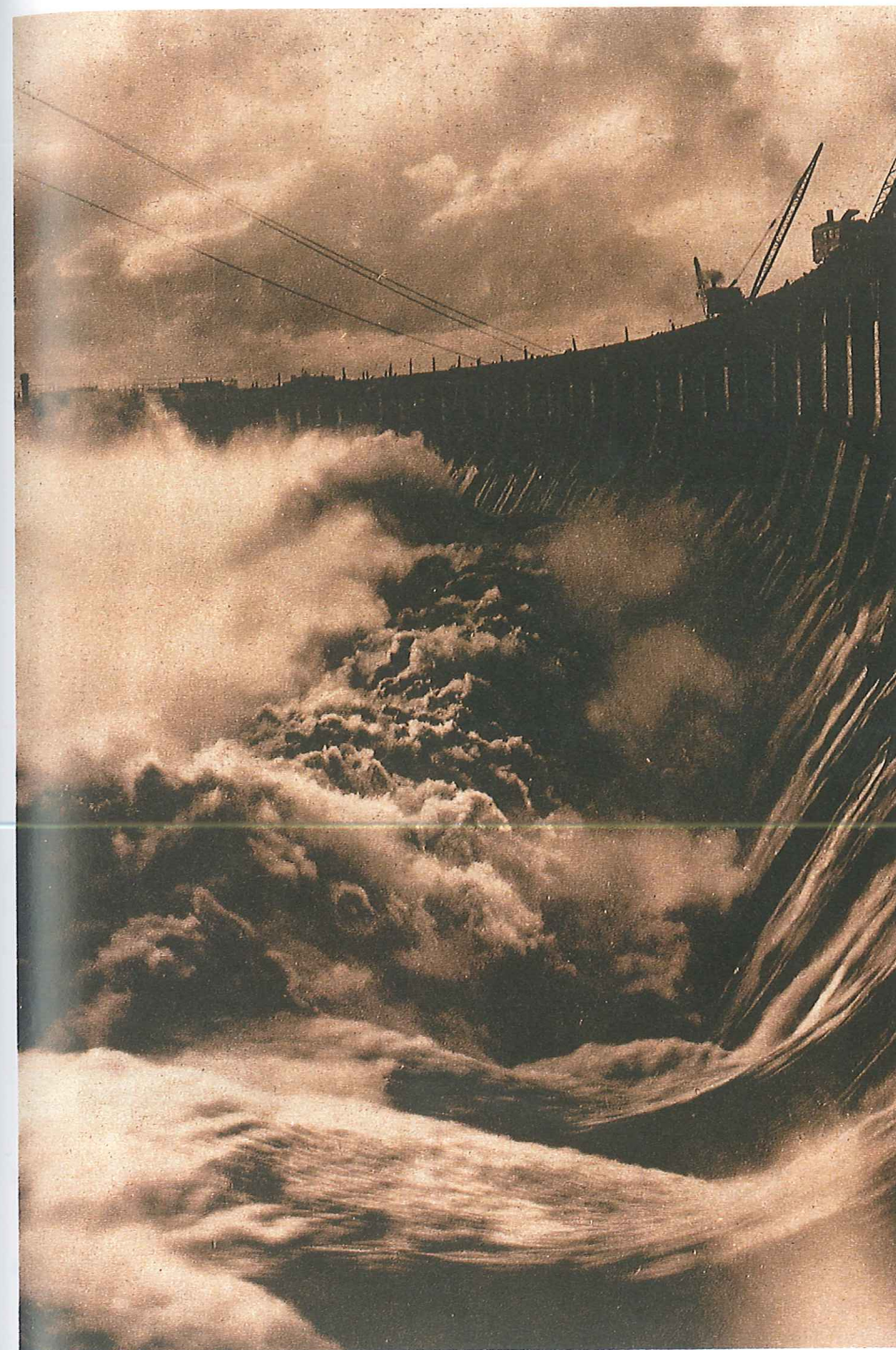
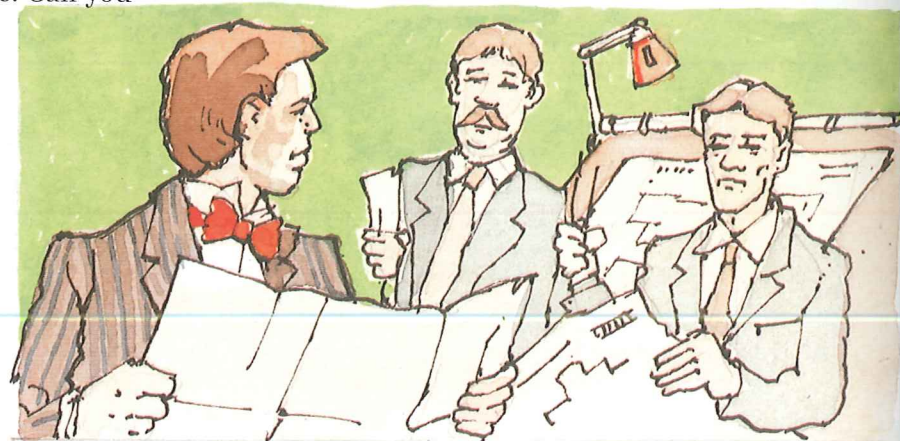
Stalin reintroduced single managers to run state enterprises and factories. The idea of workers' control was left far behind. Stalin thought he would get better results from individual managers who were directly responsible for the targets they had to fulfil. Trade unions were told not to interfere. Managers who did well were richly rewarded, many receiving large houses and motor cars.

**Spectacular achievements**

A feature of all the plans in the 1930s were spectacular building projects, held up as showpieces of Soviet achievement. These included the dam on the River Dnieper in eastern Russia, the Moscow–Volga canal and the Moscow Metro – an underground train system with stunning stations built on a grand scale.

**SOURCE 2** Production figures for 1927 (before the first Five-Year Plan), and for the first two Five-Year Plans, in millions of tons. Production targets are shown in brackets

	1927	1932	1937
Coal	35	64 (75)	128 (152)
Oil	12	21 (22)	29 (47)
Iron ore	5	12 (19)	not known
Pig iron	3	6 (10)	15 (16)
Steel	4	6 (10)	18 (17)



**SOURCE 3** The Dnieprostroi Dam, built in the 1930s

**If things go wrong, blame the workers**

Despite these apparent successes, the central planning was not very efficient. In some industries there was over-production, in others under-production, so that factories were kept idle for weeks, waiting for essential parts. Yet the drive was always to fulfil the targets at any cost. Some of the goods produced were almost unusable because they had been turned out so quickly by untrained workers. Mistakes were made: machines were unwittingly wrecked by unskilled workers, many of them ex-peasants who had been used to only the most primitive levels of technology.

But these mistakes could not be admitted – the system could not be at fault. So ‘wreckers’ or ‘saboteurs’ were found and blamed. As early as 1928, when the coal mines in the Donbass region fell behind target, 53 engineers were accused of conspiracy to wreck the Soviet coal-mining industry. This led to the famous Shakhty trial. Other SHOW TRIALS were to follow.

The hysteria and fear created by the trials and accusations of sabotage had important effects. People covered up mistakes and faults. Output figures were inflated so that industries could not be accused of failing to fulfil their targets. Workers were intimidated so that they would work harder.

### How were the workers made to work so hard?

Workers in the 1930s received few rewards. Their wages were low and there were few consumer goods to buy until the end of the 1930s. Food was short and their working conditions and hours were appalling. Houses were of low standard. So how did Stalin get them to work so hard?

#### A better society

Many workers, especially the young, were inspired by the great task of transforming Russia. They volunteered to work on distant projects under arduous conditions. They believed in the worth of what they were doing, and were prepared to make sacrifices. They thought they were building a better society for their children.

#### Propaganda

A huge propaganda campaign in the cinema, on radio and in newspapers and posters was mounted to encourage people.

#### 1. In Source 4:

- Who does the man in the top hat represent?
- Why is he laughing at the idea of the Five-Year Plan?
- Why has his expression changed in 1933?
- What was the purpose of this poster?

#### Awards

Awards and honours were given to individuals and groups who worked hard. Groups were also encouraged to compete against each other. One famous worker, Alexei Stakhanov, gave birth to the Stakhanovite Movement, dedicated to hard work. Stakhanov was a Donbass miner who was supposed to have moved 102 tons of coal on his own in one shift – some fourteen times the amount one man would be expected to produce. This was held up in newspapers and posters as a model for others to follow. Workers who exceeded production targets could become Stakhanovites. This entitled them to better housing, free holidays and cash prizes.



**SOURCE 4** A Soviet cartoon, 1933. The sign being held up reads 'Five-Year Plan'

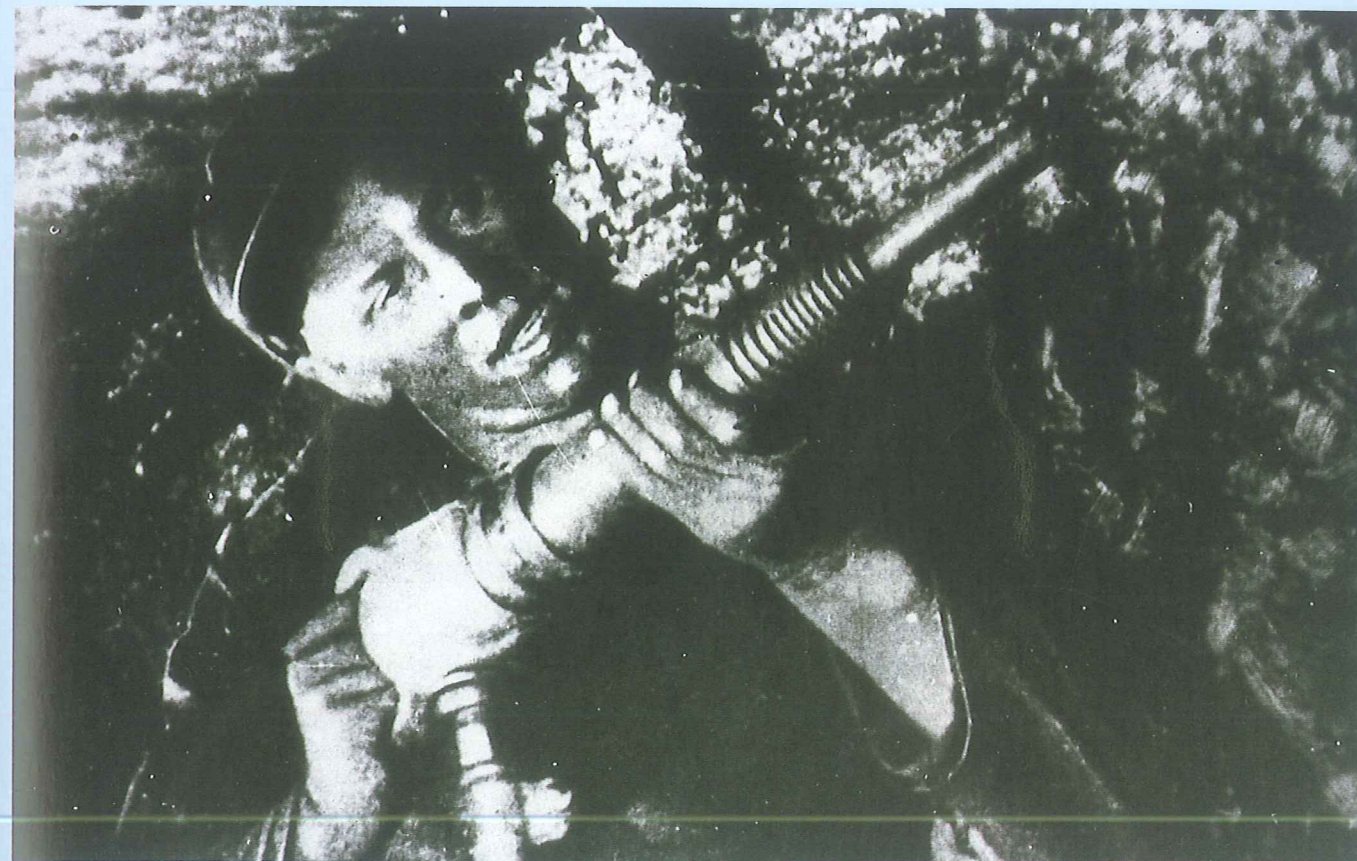
#### Wages

Wages were also used as incentives. Wages were usually paid according to how much was produced. Skilled workers could get up to four times the wages of their unskilled comrades. Those who moved up into management could get much more.

#### Punishments

Not all workers responded to the propaganda campaigns, and measures were introduced to deal with slackers. The fear of being accused of sabotage and sent to a labour camp encouraged workers to carry out their tasks obediently. There was also a strict code of labour discipline with tough punishments:

### Was Stakhanov's story true?



**SOURCE 5** A photograph of Alexei Stakhanov

The Stakhanov story was a set-up. He had two helpers who shored up the tunnel and removed the coal while he worked at the coal face with his pick. It is likely that other Stakhanovites also asked others to help them so that their tremendous achievements would be reported in newspapers.

Although they got rewards, Stakhanovites were often very unpopular with other workers, as they pushed up the production norm (the amount a worker had to produce in a shift), on which wages were calculated.

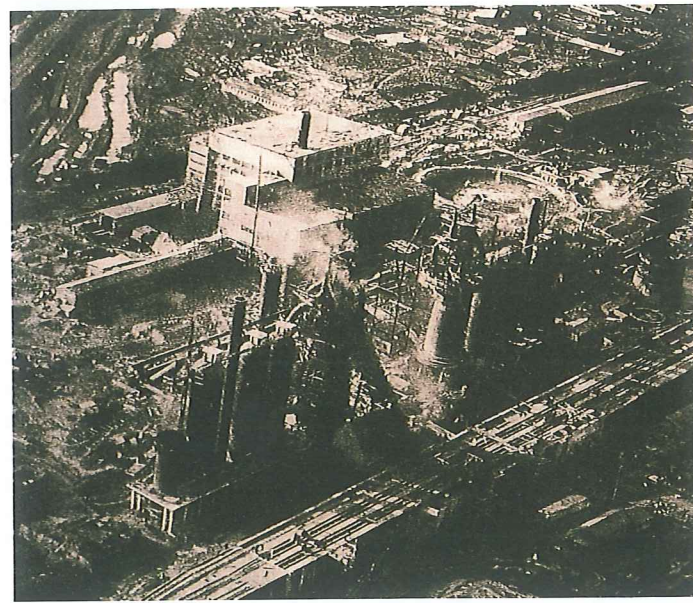
- Absenteeism was punished by fines, loss of ration cards or dismissal. By 1940, it had become a crime and a prison sentence was given for second offences.
- Workers had to carry labour books, which recorded their jobs and unfavourable comments about them. A bad record could lose a worker food rations or lead to imprisonment.

A large proportion of the workforce consisted of forced labour. These workers were made to work hard by compulsion, fear of physical punishment or being denied food. Often the really heavy work involved in constructing dams, canals and building projects – clearing sites, digging foundations – was done by prisoners, many of whom were peasants sent to labour camps as a result of COLLECTIVISATION.

#### TASK

- Make a list of the positive ways in which workers were encouraged to increase production.
- Which of these ways would you consider to be Socialist and which non-Socialist?
- Why do you think that propaganda and the Stakhanovite campaign were such an important part of Stalin's methods?
- 'Coercion and fear were the main ways Stalin got workers to work hard.' How far do you agree with this statement?

## SOURCE INVESTIGATION



**SOURCE 1** A photograph showing an industrial plant being built at Magnitogorsk

**SOURCE 2** From *The Socialist Sixth of the World*, by Johnson and Hewlett, London, 1939

“On the right bank of the small river which skirted the mountains lay the Cossack village of Magnitnaya. In 1929, windswept flowery meadows lay beyond the village . . . The mountain was one vast lump of iron ore . . .

An area of 54 square kilometres was selected for the site of Magnitogorsk. Workers of 35 nationalities assembled and built barracks for workers . . .

The attack upon the mountain began. Ledges 30 feet high were cut in it to get the ore.

Enormous structures rose; the housing of huge ore crushers . . . batteries of coke ovens and blast furnaces towering to the height of 150 feet.

The city itself is planned with care: Soviet factories turn out men as well as steel: seventeen great blocks of buildings, each with its own department store, school, restaurant, and creches; each apartment in the blocks of flats with its own bath, running water, electric light, gas and central heating.

By 1934 the mills turned out about 10 million tons of cast iron. By 1937 this had grown to 14.5 million tons. Steel production increased nine and a half times to upwards of 17.5 million tons.”

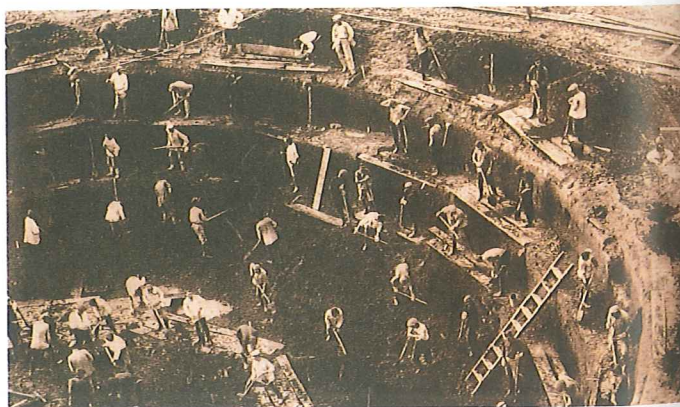
**MAGNITOGORSK WAS** a showpiece of Soviet achievement, but how was it built and what was the ‘Socialist city’ like?

1. a) What impression of the building of Magnitogorsk is given in Source 2?  
b) Do you think the writer was a supporter of the Soviet Union? Explain your answer.
2. a) On what points do Sources 2 and 3 agree?  
b) How is Source 3 different? Suggest reasons for this.
3. Who carried out the work at Magnitogorsk, according to Sources 2 and 3?
4. Does this suggest enthusiasm for the building of the Soviet dream?

**SOURCE 3** John Scott was an American who voluntarily went to Russia to join in the building of a new country. He spent several years at Magnitogorsk. This is an extract from his book *Behind the Urals*, published in 1942

“Brigades of young enthusiasts from every corner of the Soviet Union arrived in the summer of 1930 and did the groundwork of railroad and dam construction necessary. Later, groups of local peasants came to Magnitogorsk because of bad conditions in the villages, due to collectivisation. A colony of several hundred foreign engineers and specialists arrived to advise and direct the work.

From 1928 until 1932, nearly a quarter of a million people came to Magnitogorsk. About three-quarters of these new arrivals came of their own free will, seeking work, bread cards, better conditions. The rest came under compulsion.”



**SOURCE 4** A photograph of workers digging in Magnitogorsk



**SOURCE 5** Workers looking at a board showing production plans and targets

## Problems and hazards

**SOURCE 6** From *Behind the Urals* by John Scott

“Another cause of loss of working time was bad organisation of labour . . . a brigade would be sent to pour concrete foundations before the excavation work was finished. Workers would be sent to a job for which there were no materials or for which essential tools or blueprints were not available . . .

The scaffold was coated with about an inch of ice . . . besides being very slippery, it was very insecure. It swayed and shook as I walked on it . . . I was just going to start welding when I heard someone shout, and something swished past me. It was a rigger who had been working at the very top. During the entire winter of 1932–33, the riggers got no meal, no butter, and almost no sugar or milk. They received only bread and a little grain cereal.

In early April it was still bitter cold . . . everything was still frozen solid. By May, the ground had thawed and the city was swimming in mud . . . Welding became next to impossible as our ragged cables short-circuited at every step . . . Bubonic plague had broken out in three places not far from Magnitogorsk . . . The resistance of the population was very low because of undernourishment during the winter and consistent overwork. Sanitary conditions during the thaw were appalling . . . By the middle of May the heat was intolerable. In the barracks we were consumed by bed bugs and other vermin, and at work we had trouble keeping to the job.”

## Encouragement

**SOURCE 7** From *Behind the Urals* by John Scott

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

In 1938, though the city was still in a primitive state . . . it did boast 50 schools, three colleges, two large theatres, half a dozen small ones, seventeen libraries, 22 clubs, eighteen clinics . . . a large park had been constructed in 1935.

The city of Magnitogorsk grew and developed from the dirty chaotic construction camp of the early 1930s into a reasonably healthy and habitable city.”

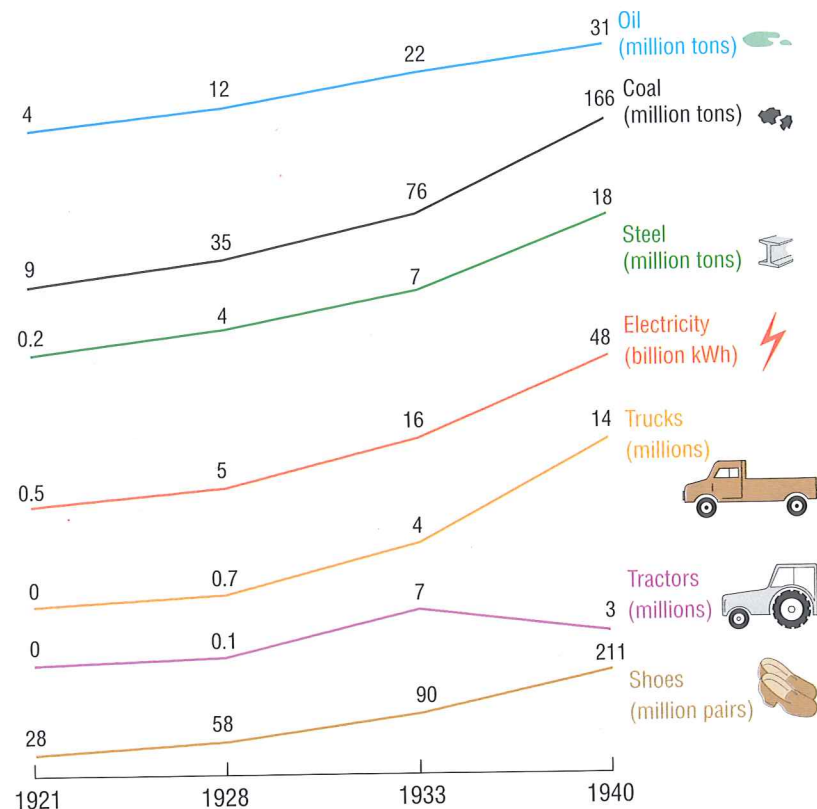
5. Using Sources 3 and 6, make a list of the problems involved in building Magnitogorsk.
6. What did Magnitogorsk consist of in 1929? What was it like by 1938?
7. Do the sources on these two pages support the statements about how industrialisation took place, made on pages 87–91? Find three examples to justify your answer.
8. How reliable do you think John Scott is as a source of evidence?

## ACTIVITY

It is 1938. You are a Party activist who travels around industrial centres in the USSR encouraging workers. Use Sources 1–7 to write a speech about the achievements of Magnitogorsk that you will give to workers elsewhere. You can add ideas of your own using information from pages 87–91. These could include:

- industrial achievement throughout the USSR
- the Stakhanovite campaign
- the problems of wreckers and saboteurs
- the future for Soviet children.

# Was industrialisation successful?



**SOURCE 1** Industrial production figures, 1921–40, based on data collected by the Soviet government

1. Do the figures in Source 1 prove that Stalin's industrialisation programme was successful?
2. How reliable is Source 2 as evidence of industrial achievement?
3. Do Sources 3 and 4, written by Western historians, support Source 2?
4. What do you think were the 'failings and shortcomings' that Westward refers to in Source 4?

## ACTIVITY

Write an assessment of Stalin's industrialisation policy. Include in it:

- the reasons why Stalin wanted to industrialise Russia quickly
- whether the plans achieved his aims
- the sort of achievements that marked the Five-Year Plans
- the problems in the new industries
- the price some workers had to pay for industrialisation.

Write a paragraph summing up the good and the bad points about Stalin's policy.

**SOURCE 2** A Soviet view of the achievements of the second Five-Year Plan, from *History of the USSR*, by Y. Kukushkin, 1981

“While the economies of the capitalist countries were sinking ever deeper into recession, the Soviet economy was booming . . . The second sections of the Magnitogorsk and Kuznetsk iron and steel complexes were completed ahead of schedule. At the start of the Five-Year Plan a major victory was scored on the industrialisation front when the Urals and Novo-Kramatorsk heavy engineering plants went into operation . . .

Good progress was made in constructing new railways and motorways . . . 4,500 new factories, plants, mines and power stations were commissioned, three times as many as in the first Five-Year period . . .

During the second Five-Year Plan period, industrial output went up by 120 per cent. The USSR moved into first place in Europe and second in the world in gross industrial output.”

**SOURCE 3** From *The Russian Century* by Brian Moynahan, 1995

“Huge plants were built in Magnitogorsk, Chelyabinsk, Stalingrad; the giant hydroelectric scheme on the Dnieper, which quintupled Soviet electric power output . . . was for two years the world's largest single construction site . . . New mines were opened in Kazakhstan; heavy industry reached into Georgia. Moscow's cobbled winding lanes were replaced by broad avenues and concrete buildings, beneath which ran a subway system with marbled stations.”

**SOURCE 4** From *Endurance and Endeavour*, by N. Westward, 1973

“The failures and shortcomings cannot disguise the fact that by 1941 the main aim of Stalin's policy of rapid industrialisation had been achieved. The USSR . . . was one of the world's great industrial powers.”

# Why did Stalin introduce collectivisation?

IN MAY 1929, the new Five-Year Plan for Agriculture announced that five million households were to be put into collective farms by 1932–33.

## How were collective farms formed?

Peasants in a particular area were encouraged to put their individual plots of land together to form a collective farm or KOLKHOZ. They had to hand over their animals and tools to the farm, which would be run by a committee. The idea was that they would work together and share everything, including what the farm produced. Some of the produce would be sold to the state at a low price and, in return, the state would provide agricultural

machinery such as tractors, and help the peasants to farm more efficiently.

There were other types of collective farms. In the 'toz' type, the peasants owned their own land but shared machinery. Some, called 'sovkhozes', were owned and run by the state. But the kolkhoz was the type preferred by the Communists.

Many peasants were unhappy about the idea of the kolkhoz, as Source 1 shows.

1. The peasants here put forward a number of reasons why they do not think collective farms a good idea. Write down these reasons in your own words.



**SOURCE 1** From *Red Bread*, by Maurice Hindus, 1931. A lot of peasants had objections to collective farms, as the author discovered when he visited the village where he used to live, in 1929