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Lewis H. Siegelbaum

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STAKHANOVISM AND THE POLITICS
OF PRODUCTIVITY
IN THE USSR, 1935-1941

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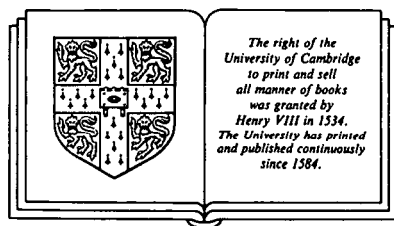
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Preface

This book is about work and politics during a discrete and important phase of the Soviet Union's history. "Work" here refers to industrial production as performed by manual workers and as organized and supervised by managerial and technical personnel. "Politics" is defined in the broad sense of the ways in which workers and their bosses as well as party and trade union functionaries at the enterprise and higher levels participate in and thereby help to reproduce production relations. Given the weakness of market forces in the Soviet system, the methods and tempo of production as well as the system of incentives are determined to a large extent administratively. But the execution of administrative orders inevitably entails a considerable degree of maneuvering and manipulation. Hence, one may speak of a peculiar kind of politics of production, or in the case analyzed here the politics of productivity.

Although raising labor productivity has been a nearly constant aim of the Soviet leadership, at no time in Soviet history did that aim assume such importance as in the latter half of the 1930s. Stakhanovism was an expression of this aim and, as such, intruded into the lives of most Soviet citizens. How they responded to the challenge of raising productivity is as much a part of this story as the challenge itself. Thus, culture as well as ideology, the politics of the shop floor as well as the formulation of policy at the highest levels of the political system, resistance to Stakhanovism as well as the mobility of Stakhanovites within the emerging system of industrial relations – all have a legitimate place in our analysis.

Stakhanovism is merely one of many Soviet phenomena of the 1930s that have been in need of closer examination by historians.

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Preface

This book seeks not only to assess and make more intelligible that phenomenon, but to contribute to a fuller understanding of a period long dominated in Western historiography by the personality of Stalin and the Great Purges. While acknowledging the critical role of state coercion, I have tried to demonstrate that the relations between state and society in the industrial sphere were far more complex and their boundaries more fluid than is commonly recognized. That Stakhanovism was both a state policy and a social phenomenon and that the one aspect can be properly understood only in the light of the other illustrates this general point.

I embarked on this study while living and teaching in Australia. I carried out my research and writing on three continents over a period of eight years, in the course of which I was assisted by many institutions and individuals. A grant from the Vice-Chancellor's Development Fund at La Trobe University made possible at an early stage in the project the purchase of microfilm copies of many key Soviet journals. The International Research and Exchanges Board supported research trips to Britain, Finland, and the Soviet Union, for which I am particularly grateful. I also wish to express my gratitude to Carolyn Rogers for expediting my application to be affiliated with the Institute of History of the USSR in Leningrad during my visit in 1986.

Earlier in my research, I was fortunate to be the recipient of a short-term grant from the Kennan Institute at the Woodrow Wilson Center in Washington, D.C. This enabled me to exploit the Library of Congress's valuable collection of Soviet materials and work in the National Archives. I also received a grant-in-aid from the American Council of Learned Societies that made possible research at Harvard University's Russian Research Center, the repository of that university's Interview Project on the Soviet Social System. Support from the Russian and East European Studies Program at Michigan State University and the Russian and East European Studies Center at the University of Illinois is also gratefully acknowledged.

Being married to a librarian, I am acutely aware of the contributions that librarians make to scholarly research. Several assisted me and deserve my gratitude. They are John Horacek and others on the staff of the Borchardt Library at La Trobe

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University, the Slavic Reference Service at the University of Illinois, the librarians at the Biblioteka Akademii Nauk in Leningrad, and, especially, the wonderfully efficient and cooperative staff of the Helsinki University Library's Slavic Division. Finally, for her encouragement and advice, for her willingness to put up with Stakhanovites when I was around and the burdens of being a single parent when I was not, I owe special thanks to Leena Siegelbaum.

Numerous individuals read drafts of chapters, made suggestions about improving them, allowed me to see their own work in progress, and in other ways contributed to this book. Diane Koenker did all of these things and provided encouragement when it was most needed; Hiroaki Kuromiya shared his immense bibliographic knowledge and, by example, set the highest standards for doing labor history; Ron Suny helped me to see the broader picture and was the best of comrades. I am extremely grateful to Sheila Fitzpatrick for answering my odd queries and for inviting me to participate in the series of highly stimulating workshops she organized in 1985–6 and to Kendall Bailes, whose book on the technical intelligentsia was an inspiration and a model. I also thank Barry Carr, Steve Niblo, Gabor Rittersporn, J. Arch Getty, Robert Thurston, Don Filtzer, Henry Norr, R. W. Davies, Richard Stites, John Ackerman, William McCagg, Gordon Stewart, Anne Meyering, and Morton Siegelbaum (my sternest critic) for listening to me ramble on about Stakhanovism and in their own ways challenging me to do the best I could. None should bear any responsibility for my errors, oversights, or malapropisms.

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Russian terms and abbreviations

aktiv selected participant in party-sponsored activities

artel traditional peasant-derived work collective

brak spoilage, wastage

brigadir head of work brigade

dekada ten-day period

edinonachalie principle of one-person managerial responsibility

funktsionalka the functional principle of administration and division of labor

glavk main administration (of a branch of industry)

gorkom city committee (of party, trade union, etc.)

Gosplan State Planning Commission

kolkhoz collective farm

Komsomol All-Union Leninist Communist League of Youth

kul'turnost' quality of being cultured according to authorized standards

LP *Leningradskaia pravda*

Mash. *Mashinostroenie*

Narkomtiazhprom People's Commissariat of Heavy Industry

NFI *Na fronte industrializatsii*

obezlichka lack of personal responsibility

obkom regional committee (of party, trade union, etc.)

oblast' administrative region

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Russian terms and abbreviations

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ORS Department of Workers' Supply

otlichniki workers honored for high quality of output

partorg party organizer dispatched by Central Committee

PI Puti industrializatsii

praktik professional lacking educational qualifications

progressivka progressive (i.e., accelerated) piece-rate wage system

PS Partiinoe stroitel'stvo

raikom district committee

raion administrative district

RP Ratsionalizatsiia proizvodstva

RSFSR Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic

SD Sotsialisticheskii Donbass

SIu Sovetskaia iustitsiia

Sovnarkom Council of People's Commissars

SZ Sovetskaia zakonnost'

TsIK Central Executive Committee (of All-Union Congress of Soviets)

udarnik shock worker

uravnilovka leveling; petty bourgeois egalitarianism

Vesenkha Supreme Council of the National Economy

VTsSPS All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions

vydvizhentsy working-class promotees

ZI Za industrializatsiiu