Soviet Workers and Late Stalinism

Soviet Workers and Late Stalinism is the first study of labour and labour policy during the critical period of the Soviet Union's postwar recovery and the last years of Stalin. It is also the first detailed social history of the Soviet Union in these years available to non-Russian readers. Using previously inaccessible archival sources, Donald Filtzer describes for the first time the tragic hardships faced by workers and their families right after the war; conditions in housing and health care; the special problems of young workers; working conditions within industry; and the tremendous strains which regime policy placed not just on the mass of the population, but on the cohesion and commitment of key institutions within the Stalinist political system, most notably the trade unions and the procuracy. Donald Filtzer's subtle and compelling book will interest all historians of the Soviet Union and of socialism.

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Labour and the Restoration of the Stalinist System after World War II

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University of East London

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore,
São Paulo, Delhi, Dubai, Tokyo

Cambridge University Press
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521815031

First published 2002

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-0-521-81503-1 Hardback
ISBN 978-0-521-03920-8 Paperback

Transferred to digital printing 2009

To Mick, Sue, and Natasha

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Preface and acknowledgements

Every idea for a book has a particular genesis, and the genesis of this one lies in a monumental stupidity. When I first began to teach Soviet history, and for quite a few years thereafter, I was somehow possessed of the insane notion that the USSR's experience during World War II was essentially of military importance, and that the political and social history of the period were relatively uninteresting. I therefore used to race through this part of the syllabus as quickly as possible. I knew from standard texts, of course, that the war had seen a number of changes in state policy, for example, a tacit toleration of semi-private trade in agriculture and a rapprochement with the Orthodox Church, but I nevertheless managed to keep such inconvenient pieces of information from challenging my basic prejudices. Yet deep down inside I knew there was something not quite right with this interpretation. When I had read K. S. Karol's autobiography, *Solik*, I remember marvelling at his descriptions of the way in which soldiers separated from their units or whose companies had been destroyed or dispersed in battle wandered more or less freely around the country seeking another military unit to which they could attach themselves. Films about the war made in the Khrushchev and Brezhnev years painted a similar picture of a population over which the state – the Stalinist police state – was exercising surprisingly little control during a time of dire national emergency. The scales finally fell from my eyes when I read John Barber's and Mark Harrison's social history of the USSR during the war, *The Soviet Home Front*, in which they described how the regime intensified the centralization of some key areas of decision-making and social life (primarily economic and military planning and internal discipline within the factories), but at the same time radically decentralized others, most notably the delegation of a great deal of independence down to local Party and state bodies which needed such discretion and flexibility in order successfully to prosecute the war.

This process of intellectual self-reform, however, posed another dilemma. During the 1930s the Stalinist regime and the emerging Soviet elite had waged a bloody confrontation with the majority of their own

society, and partially with themselves, in order to put in place a stable and reproducible social and economic system from which they could extract their privileges. To ensure the perpetuation of this system and their domination over it they had also erected a strong police state. Yet in the wake of the Nazi invasion the regime had been forced to relax many of its controls over the population. But if this was the case, how after the war did the regime put the genie back in the bottle, so to speak, that is, how did it restore the system of power relations that it had struggled to erect prior to 1941? This was going to be my Big Idea. I soon, discovered, however, that it was not my idea at all. When discussing it with my former colleague, Robert Service, he immediately directed me to a newspaper interview on precisely this theme given during *perestroika* by the Soviet historian, Gennadii Bordyugov, and to a series of articles by another Russian historian, Elena Zubkova. Zubkova's articles proved to be a revelation, for as I discuss in the introduction, she had identified a more or less similar problematic and begun to work towards an answer. It was from these articles, and the monograph, *Obshchestvo i reformy*, into which she developed them, that I went on to construct the detailed study of labour and industry that is the subject of the present book. The approach I have adopted therefore owes much to her early analysis and in many ways extends it.

The successful completion of the research and the production of a hopefully successful monograph owe a great deal to an inordinately large number of people and institutions. Starting first with collective entities, pride of place should probably go to the archivists and staff at the many archives listed in the bibliography. The archives in Russia struggle under almost unimaginable resource constraints, yet without exception everywhere I worked I encountered supreme professionalism and warmth, an immeasurable amount of indispensable advice, and some very excellent senses of humour.

The second collective thanks are to the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at the University of East London. The department's research committee financed all of my visits to the archives plus attendance at a number of international conferences, at which I was able to present preliminary drafts of most of the book's chapters as papers. Our research committee is a model of how a working-class institution with very little money can manage a research budget in a way that allows hard-pressed staff to find time to develop their research and produce publications. I speak not just for myself, but for everyone in my department, when I say that other British universities might wish to emulate our system. I am grateful, too, to colleagues who never complained when I took off as soon as summer teaching had ended and left them to sit through the

tedium of end-of-year examiners' meetings (I did, however, always have my marking done before I left). As the work was nearing completion the department generously gave me a sabbatical during the academic year of 2000/1, which, in combination with a Research Leave Award from the Arts and Humanities Research Board, allowed me to finish off the research and write the book.

The third collective thanks are to the Arts and Humanities Research Board and the British Academy for their financial support. As already mentioned, the AHRB funded the first half of my sabbatical leave, during which I completed the final tranche of research prior to writing the manuscript. The British Academy kindly gave me an international conference grant, which allowed me to present a draft of the conclusion to the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies conference in November 2000.

The final collective thanks go to the former Soviet citizens in Baltimore and Samara who allowed me to interview them about their experiences after the war. The relatively small number of direct quotations or references to these interviews in the book may give the impression that they were of peripheral importance, but this is quite misleading. Their accounts played a profound role in shaping my understanding of this period, not the least by showing the pitfalls of document-based histories. The tiniest points of detail dropped into the middle of a conversation could prove decisive to explaining the larger context of a topic or to compelling me to rethink an erroneous or overly presumptuous interpretation.

As for the many individuals who helped me, it is simply impossible to say that one person's contribution was greater than another's. They all were important in different ways, and so I shall just cite people in alphabetical order.

Chris Burton read through the section of chapter 3 which deals with public health, offered many corrections and comments, and, most importantly of all, directed me to additional archival sources without which I could not have worked the material into a form which warranted inclusion in the final manuscript.

Tim Butler, in addition to his role as chair of our departmental research committee, has given me a tremendous amount of moral encouragement over the years, including at some very key moments in the early 1990s when I was beginning to think I'd never again complete another piece of serious research. It was largely thanks to Tim that I began this project in the first place.

Bob Davies and I spent quite a few lunch times in the archives in Moscow discussing my work and, as always, he gave me more insights than I can count into what it all might mean.

Sarah Davies invited me to give a paper at the 1999 conference of the British Association of Slavonic and East European Studies, which served as an early draft of chapter 4. Our discussions of her own work on postwar Stalinism played no small role in helping me to work out my larger analysis of the period.

Sheila Fitzpatrick acted as discussant at this panel and posed for me a number of key questions to which I would need to find the answers before turning the paper into a publication. As it turned out, it was the search for these answers which led me on to the material which became chapter 5.

Juliane Fürst discussed with me her dissertation research on the Komsomol after the war and helped me to understand my material on young workers in its broader perspective. She also kindly took time off from her own work to find, read, and copy key documents for me in the Komsomol archive when I could not get to Moscow to do this myself.

Ina Giller, formerly of the Jewish Community Center in Baltimore, arranged for me an exhaustive programme of interviews there in January 1997.

Lena Gordeeva transcribed all of my interview tapes and offered valuable advice on how to interpret the experiences which my interviewees reported.

Yoram Gorlizki invited me to participate in a panel he organized at the 1999 conference of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies; the paper I presented there became a draft outline of the final book.

Barbara Harrison, Chair of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at the University of East London, has given me a great deal of moral and administrative support over the course of my research, and authorized my sabbatical during the academic year 2000/1.

Mark Harrison generously read the manuscript draft, offered very extensive and detailed comments and suggestions, and gave advice on how to interpret the economic data.

Julie Hessler spent many, many hours reading through the chapters on the standard of living, suggested corrections and additional sources, and engaged in ongoing correspondence and debate which played a very large part in helping me to clarify my ideas and to present the material more accurately.

Sylvia Hudson handled the paperwork for all my trips to Russia, kept me (sometimes reluctantly on my part) in touch with real-world events while I was in Moscow, and together with Diane Ball, Susan Fitzgerald, and Iris Stevens, proves what I believe to be a general law of British higher education: that the brains, as well as the soul, behind any successful academic department reside in the office staff.

Natasha Kurashova has over the years discussed with me every single aspect of the research and how to interpret it – not to mention giving the odd bit of help with tricky linguistic issues and rather large amounts of support and encouragement.

Vera Kurashova helped me to track down urgently needed references which I could not find in the UK.

Hiroaki Kuromiya read a draft of the manuscript, made a number of important corrections, and offered key suggestions for revision. His strong support of the project has been warmly appreciated.

Kevin Murphy also read the manuscript, suggested some very substantial corrections, directed me to the archive documents I needed to make these changes, and shared with me the findings of his own work in local archives in this period.

Stefan Plaggenborg invited me to contribute a lengthy chapter on the Soviet economy and society during the postwar period to a volume of the *Handbuch der Geschichte Rußlands* under his editorship, which provided me with an early opportunity to systematize my ideas and work out what eventually became a final plan for the book.

Pavel Romanov organized a programme of interviews for me in Samara during the summer of 1998.

Bob Service was instrumental (and not for the first time in my career) in the early stages of the work helping me to formulate the issues and advising me on key sources to help me to get started.

Peter Solomon arranged for me to present a summary of my research to a conference of the University of Toronto's Stalin Era Research and Archive Project, and invited me to participate in the panel he organized at the VI World Congress for Central and East European Studies in Tampere, Finland, in the summer of 2000. The paper I presented there turned out to be a near-final draft of chapter 5 of the book, and benefited greatly from Peter's comments. Peter also gave me advice on sources to use for my research into the procuracy, and provided me with photocopies of relevant material which he had found in the files of the procuracy and the Ministry of Justice.

Isabel Tirado helped me to learn my way around the Komsomol archive and devoted a lot of time to discussing with me what I had found there.

Steve Wheatcroft gave advice on how to interpret family budget data, and directed me to additional files I needed to complete that part of the manuscript.

Elena Zubkova gave me priceless – and that is far too mild a word – help in the early stages of my research. She instructed me about the various sources I would need to use, helped me to define the topic more precisely, referred me to key Russian secondary sources, and gave a lot

of useful information on the significance of specific items I was finding in the archives.

Finally, some of the material in chapters 2 and 3 appeared originally in the article, 'The Standard of Living of Soviet Industrial Workers in the Immediate Postwar Period, 1945–1948', published in *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 51, no. 6, 1999, pp. 1013–38, and is used here with the kind permission of the journal.

As readers will gather from this list, I have been extremely fortunate. Colleagues have shown tremendous generosity reading and commenting on conference papers and draft chapters, engaging in lengthy and time-consuming correspondence, agreeing to informal meetings so that I could ask for advice and help, sharing information about which archives and which documents I should use, and sharing copies of documents which they had found themselves. The spirit of solidarity and cooperation they have shown has been a paragon of what academic research should be about. I hope that in some small way I have been able to repay their favours. For all their input, however, none of them carries any blame or responsibility for the mistakes and shortcomings that almost certainly are still there. For those only I can take full credit.

Terms and abbreviations

FZO (pl., FZO)	factory training school (*shkola fabrichno-zavodskogo obucheniya*), a three- or six-month training school for 'mass' trades
glavk (pl., *glavki*)	chief administration, a subdivision of a ministry
Gosplan	State Planning Commission (Gosudarstvennaya planovaya komissiya)
Gulag	Chief Administration of Camps, more generally used as the name for the system of MVD labour camps
ispolkom	executive committee (*ispolnitel'nyi komitet*)
ITR	engineering and technical personnel *(inzhenerno-tekhnicheskie rabotniki)*
kolkhoz	collective farm (*kollektivnoe khozyaistvo*)
kolkhoznik (pl., *kolkhozniki*)	collective farmer or collective farm member
komandirovka	temporary posting or assignment to work in another locality
Komsomol	Communist Youth League, formally known as the All-Union Leninist Communist Union of Youth, or VLKSM
kulaks	prosperous peasants deported into internal exile or sent to labour camps during collectivization of the 1930s
militia	police (*militsiya*) – the regular police force, as distinct from the secret police

Mintyazhstroi	Ministry of Construction of Enterprises in Heavy Industry (Ministerstvo stroitel′stva predpriyatii tyazheloi promyshlennosti)
MPS	Ministry of Railways (Ministerstvo putei soobshcheniya)
MTS	machine-tractor station
MVD	Ministry of Internal Affairs (Ministerstvo vnutrennikh del), in charge of the system of labour camps (Gulag) and police (militia)
norms	individual output quotas for workers on piece rates
obkom	oblast′ committee (*oblastnoi komitet*) of Communist Party, trade union, or other organization
oblast′ (pl., oblasti)	region, roughly equivalent to a province
orgnabor	organized recruitment of workers
ORS (pl., ORSy)	Department of Workers' Supply (Otdel rabochego snabzheniya)
Procuracy	Public Prosecutor's Office
procurator	public prosecutor
progul	unauthorized absenteeism from work
raikom	district committee (*raionnyi komitet*) of Communist Party, trade union, or other organization
raion (pl., raiony)	district (administrative subdivision of a city, oblast′, or other larger territorial unit)
RSFSR	Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (Rossiiskaya Sovetskaya Federativnaya Sotsialisticheskaya Respublika)
RU (pl., RU)	trade school (*remeslennoe uchilishche*) under the Ministry of Labour Reserves, a two-year training school in skilled trades
sovkhoz	state farm (*sovetskoe khozyaistvo*)
sovkhoznik (pl., *sovkhozniki*)	state farm worker
SSSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (Soyuz Sovetskikh Sotsialisticheskikh Respublik)

Stakhanovites	model workers rewarded for achieving high output targets or, especially in the postwar period, adopting allegedly advanced production methods
TsSU	Central Statistical Administration (Tsentral′noe statisticheskoe upravlenie)
VLKSM	All-Union Leninist Communist Union of Youth (Vsesoyuznyi Leninskii Kommunisticheskii Soyuz Molodezhi) – see Komsomol
VTsSPS	All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions (Vsesoyuznyi Tsentral′nyi Sovet Professional′nykh Soyuzov)
ZhU (pl., ZhU)	trade school (*zheleznodorozhnoe uchilishche*) to train skilled workers for the railways; equivalent to an RU

The notes use standard abbreviations for Russian archive references, which consist of five elements:

1. The abbreviation of the archive name (the full names of the archives are given in the bibliography).
2. f. = *fond*, or fund. These generally correspond to a particular institution or major subdivision of an institution, for example, the USSR Procuracy, an industrial ministry, or a specific trade union.
3. op. = *opis′*, or inventory. The *opisi* are the primary subdivisions of a *fond*. Sometimes the *opisi* represent subdivisions or departments within an organization; some *fondy* simply divide the *opisi* chronologically.
4. d. = *delo*, or file. These are the actual folders containing the documents.
5. l. = *list(y)*, or sheet(s). Russian archives give files sheet numbers, rather than page numbers, since a file almost always contains many different documents, each of which had its own separate pagination when it was originally written.

Thus a typical reference will be something like this: GARF, f. 8131, op. 29, d. 476, l. 259–60. The document will be in GARF (State Archive of the Russian Federation), *fond* 8131 (Procuracy of the USSR), *opis′* 29, *delo* 476, *listy* 259–60.