

The Five Years Plans of Joseph Stalin



In 1929, Stalin became the undisputed ruler of Russia. He saw that his nation was way behind the west in modernization and industrialization. In order to survive, he had to reform the country. He also knew that a strong economy could create a strong military and the future of Russia becoming a global power.

Stalin created a series of **Five-Year Plans**. He brought industry under state control and all development was planned by the state. He created an organization called **GOSPLAN**, where the state decided what and how much was to be produced and where it was to be produced. The two main areas of concentration for his plan were the **Heavy Industries** (iron, coal, steel, and oil) and **Agriculture**.

The First Five-Year Plan was from 1929 to 1932

The Second Five-Year Plan was from 1933 to 1937

The Third Five-Year Plan was from 1938 to 1941 (when it was interrupted by World War II).

Each plan created a series of **quotas** (targets) that had to be met for each industry. As time went on, these targets were raised to a point that they could not be met. However, in many areas of production, vast improvements were made.

The following table shows Stalin's progress. The column under 1927 is the base line, i.e. before the Five-Year Plans. The Quotas (targets for each plan are in the brackets).

Commodity	1927	1932	1937
Coal	35 million tons	64 mt (75 mt target)	128 mt (152 mt target)
Oil	12 million tons	21 mt (22 mt target)	29 mt (47 mt target)
Iron Ore	5 million tons	12 mt (19 mt target)	Unknown
Pig Iron	3 million tons	6 mt (10 mt target)	15 mt (16 mt target)
Steel	4 million tons	6 mt (10 mt target)	18 mt (17 mt target)

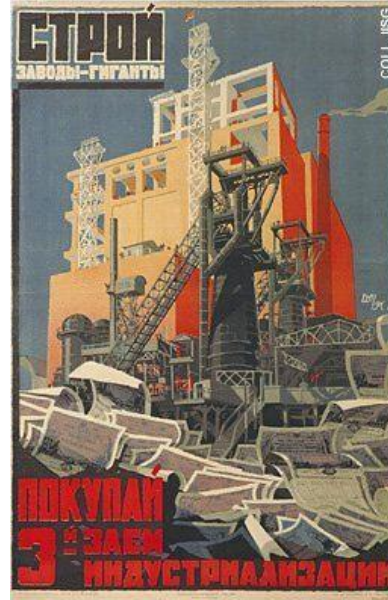
mt = Metric Tons

Though these appear to be excellent results, it must be remembered that the base year (1927) was low by European standards. However, it was a massive jump forward for Russia.

A major part of the **Second Five-Year Plan** was to create new infrastructure and communication systems, such as railways and roads and then develop the chemical industry.

The **Third Five-Year Plan** put an emphasis on weapons and military production which required input from heavy industry as Stalin feared future Russian involvement in World War II.

Stalin brought in outside help from foreign countries to aid in his development programs. He also changed Lenin's plan of running industry through soviets (workers councils as to how industries should be run). Stalin now named individual managers to each facility. They were responsible for fulfilling the quotas. Good managers were well rewarded. Unsuccessful managers paid a severe price for failure.



Failures of the Five-Year Plans

Agriculture/Farming

Before the Russian Revolution there had been 16 million farms in the country. It now had 25 million. The theory was that the small farmers only produced enough food to feed themselves. The large farmers, on the other hand, were able to provide a surplus that could be used to feed the factory workers in the towns. These large farms were owned by **kulaks** (individual land-owners). Stalin's government officials argued that the state, in order to undermine the power of the kulaks, should create large collective farms. This plan was called **Collectivization**. Thousands of people from various parts of Russia were now ordered to become farmers and move to the agricultural regions in order to provide for the state. Many kulaks resisted these orders and subsequently burned their fields and destroyed their machinery halting any food production. To motivate the kulaks to do work under Stalin's plan, they had to be given incentives, "the ability to enrich" themselves. The tax system was changed in order to help kulaks buy out smaller farms. In an article in the government newspaper it promised the kulaks that they could now "Enrich yourselves, develop your holdings. And don't worry that they may be taken away from you."

However, collectivization did not work as planned and Russia soon witnessed several major famines.

Heavy Industry

There were several major flaws in the Five-Year Plans. There were no spare parts made which meant that factories were idle for many weeks because they could not fix and of the broken or worn out machines.

Stalin's plan was to use peasants as factory workers. They were not skilled at all and many had no idea how to use the "modern" machinery correctly. This factor only added to the damage.

Factories began to inflate their production figures and lie to the authorities due to the high quotas and lack of production. Punishments for not meeting their targets were severe so the managers falsified their output figures in order to save their lives (executed as an "enemy of the people") or spend the rest of their lives in state workcamps.

So much stress was placed on production that many of the materials produced were sub-standard. Many buildings and special projects were completed with inferior materials, which subsequently collapsed after a short while.



Life for the workers under Stalin's regime.

Life was hard for the factory worker. Unsafe working conditions and long hours were normal. Their pay was minimal and there were little or no consumer goods produced to buy even if they had any spare money to spend. So why did these people work so hard? The younger generation in Russia were still idealistic. The whole concept of communism was still intoxicating. Stalin became known as "Uncle Joe" and this generation were willing to suffer a few years of hardship to receive Stalin's promise of a better society.

Propaganda fueled the workforce. Everywhere across Russia posters were visible showing the success of Stalin's Five-Year Plans. Rewards were given to the best workers. Groups of workers were encouraged to compete against each other. The most famous instance was the coal miner Alexi Stakhanov. He was said to have mined 102 tons of coal in a single shift. This was fourteen times the amount expected from one person. According to Stalin, if one worker could perform this amount then everyone else could do the same! To be rewarded for hard work you were called a Stakhanovite. Stakhanov was taken away from his mining job and toured the country making pro-Stalin speeches on hard work. Ironically, there is no clear evidence that Stakhanov produced that amount of coal in one day as stated by the regime.

The threat of **labor camps (gulags)** was an incentive for workers to perform well. Absenteeism from work was a punishable offence, often resulting in being fined or having your ration book taken away from you. By 1940, not reporting to work resulted in a prison sentence. All workers had to carry labor books which stated whether you had worked hard or not. Bad comments in your book from your manager meant jail time.

Much of the physical labor was performed by prisoners. They were literally “worked to death,” it did not matter if they died, only that the task was completed. As they were in prison in the first place then the government was allowed to use them as they saw fit.



Life in a Gulag

Conclusion

For all of the problems and hardships caused by the Five-Year Plans, by 1941, Stalin has transformed Russia into a world-class industrial power. This was to be vital for Russia as World War II was about to test her to the extreme.



Long Live Our Leader and Teacher, the Great Stalin! (1948 poster)