

First five-year plan

The **first five-year plan** (Russian: И пятилетний план, первая пятилетка) of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics(USSR) was a list of economic goals, created by General Secretary Joseph Stalin and based on his policy of Socialism in One Country. It was implemented between 1928 and 1932.

In 1929, Stalin edited the plan to include the creation of "kolkhoz" collective farming systems that stretched over thousands of acres of land and had hundreds of peasants working on them. The creation of collective farmsessentially destroyed the kulaks as a class (dekulakization). Another consequence of this is that peasants resisted by killing their farm animals rather than turning them over to the State when their farms were collectivized.^[1] This disruption led to a famine in Ukraine, Russia, Kazakhstan as well as areas of the Northern Caucasus. Despite the ruinous loss of life, the introduction of collective farms allowed peasants to use tractors to farm the land, unlike before when most had been too poor to own a tractor. Public machine and tractor stations were set up throughout the USSR, and peasants were allowed to use these public tractors to farm the land, increasing the food output per peasant. Peasants were allowed to sell any surplus food from the land. However, the government planners failed to take notice of local situations. In 1932, grain production was 32% below average;^[2] to add to this problem, procurement of food were up by 44%. Agricultural production was so disrupted that famine broke out in several districts.^[3]

Because of the plan's reliance on rapid industrialization, major cultural changes had to occur in tandem. As this new social structure arose, conflicts occurred among some of the majority of the populations. In Turkmenistan, for example, the Soviet policy of collectivization shifted their production from cotton to food products.^[4] Such a change caused unrest within a community that had already existed prior to this external adjustment, and between 1928 and 1932, Turkmen nomads and peasants made it clear through methods like passive resistance that they did not agree with such policies.^[4]



Propaganda stand dedicated to the first five-year plan in Moscow. 1931 colour photo by Branson DeCou.

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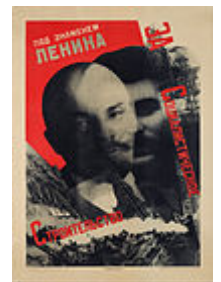
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Reasoning for the first five-year plan

Prior to launching the first Soviet five-year plan, the Soviet Union had been facing threats from external sources as well as experiencing an economic and industrial downturn since the introduction of Bolshevik rule.^[5] The first war threat emerged from the East in 1924.^[6] A war scare arose in 1927^[7] when Western nations, like Great Britain, began cutting off diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union. This created fear among the Soviets that the West was preparing to attack the Soviet Union again; during the Russian Civil War, foreign powers had occupied portions of Russian territory. The fear of invasion from the west left the Soviets feeling a need for rapid industrialization to increase Soviet war-making potential, and to compete with the western powers. At the same time as the war scare of 1927, dissatisfaction grew among the peasantry of the Soviet Union. This dissatisfaction arose from the famine of the early 1920s, as well as from increasing mistreatment of the peasants.^[8] Also during this time the secret police (the OGPU) had begun rounding up political dissenters in the Soviet Union.^[9] All these tensions had the potential to destroy the young Soviet Union and forced Joseph Stalin to introduce rapid industrialization of heavy industry so that the Soviet Union could address external and internal threats if needed.

Rapid growth of heavy industry

The central aspect of the first Soviet five-year plan was the rapid industrialization of the Soviet Union. The need for rapid industrialization was once again out of the fear of impending war from the West. If war were to break out between the Soviet Union and the West, the Soviets would be fighting against some of the most industrialized nations in the world. The rapid industrialization would inhibit fears of being left unprotected if War between the Soviets and the West were to occur. To meet the needs of a possible war, the Soviet leaders set unrealistic quotas for production.^[10] To meet those unrealistic needs, the facilities had to be constructed quickly to facilitate material production before goods could be produced. During this period 1928-1932, massive industrial centers emerged in areas that were highly isolated before. These isolated areas included Magnitogorsk, Dnieper, and Nizhny Novgorod.^[11] During this era of Soviet history heavy industry was supposed to experience a 350% increase in output.^[10] To achieve this massive economic growth, the Soviet Union had to reroute essential resources to meet the needs of heavy industry. Programs not necessary to heavy industry were cut from the Soviet budget; and because of the redistribution of industrial funding, basic goods, such as food, became scarce.^[12] The Soviet Union then decided that the workers necessary for further industrialization should be given most of the available food.^[13] From this rapid industrialization a new working class emerged in the Soviet Union.^[14] During this time the industrial workforce rose from 3.12 million in 1928 to 6.01 million at the end of the plan in 1932.^[15]



Industrialization poster for the first five-year plan made by Gustavs Klucis

Agricultural collectivization

The first five-year plan also began a period of rapid agricultural collectivization in the Soviet Union. One reason for the collectivization of Soviet agriculture was to increase the number of industrial workers for the new factories.^[10] Soviet officials also believed that collectivization would increase crop yields and help fund other programs.^[10] The Soviets enacted a land decree in 1917 that eliminated private ownership of land. This agricultural collectivization was however a failure for the Soviets. Vladimir Lenin tried to establish removal of grain from wealthier peasants after the initial failure of state farms but this was also unsuccessful. Peasants were mainly concerned for their own well being and felt that the state had nothing of necessity to offer for the grain. This stock piling of grain by the peasantry left millions of people in the city hungry leading Lenin to establish the New Economic Policy to keep the economy from crashing. NEP was based more on capitalism and not socialism, which is the direction the country wanted to head toward. Stalin's extreme push during his first five year plan and force collectivization was partly in response to his distaste for the NEP.^[16]

At the end of 1929 the Soviets asserted themselves to forming collectivized peasant agriculture, but the "Kulaks" had to be "liquidated as a class," because of their resistance to fixed agricultural prices.^[17] Resulting from this, the party behavior became uncontrolled and manic when the party began to requisition food from the countryside.^[17] Kulaks were executed, exiled or deported, based on their level of resistance to collectivization^[18]. The kulaks who were considered "counter-revolutionary" were executed or exiled, those who opposed collectivization were deported to remote regions and the rest were resettled to non arable land in the same

region.^[18] In the years following the agricultural collectivization, the reforms would disrupt the Soviet food supply.^[17] In turn, this disruption would eventually lead to famines for the many years following the first five-year plan, with 3-4 million dying from starvation in 1933.^[19]

Prisoner labor

To meet the goals of the first five-year plan the Soviet Union began using the labor of its growing prisoner population. Initially the Soviet leaders sought to decrease the number of prisoners in the Soviet Union so that those resources could be rerouted to the five-year plan.^[20] This legislation led to many dangerous prisoners being released from prison into labor camps.^[21]

Early in the plan, however, the Communist leaders realized the necessity and the benefit of prisoner labor to complete the five-year plan. At this time the Soviet leaders attempted to orchestrate an increase in prison population.^[20] The people of the Soviet Union began being sentenced to forced labor, even when they committed small offenses, or committed no crime at all.^[21] Many of the prisoners used for labor were peasants who had resisted indoctrination.^[22] This was an attempt by the Soviet Union to acquire free labor for the rapid industrialization; however, it led to the incarceration of many innocent people in the Soviet Union. Eventually Western nations, such as the United States, began to boycott goods produced by this form of labor.^[23]

Successes of the first five-year plan

The success of the first five-year plan was that the Soviet Union began its journey to becoming a world superpower through industrialization. Stalin declared the plan a success at the beginning of 1933, noting the creation of several heavy industries where none had existed,^[24] and the plan was fulfilled in four years and three months instead of five years.^[25] Walter Duranty received the 1932 Pulitzer Prize for Correspondence for his coverage of the first five-year plan. Duranty's coverage of the five-year plan's many successes led directly to Franklin Roosevelt officially recognizing the Soviet Union in 1933.^[26]

The first five-year plan also began to prepare the Soviet Union to win in the Second World War. Without the initial five-year plan, and the ones that followed, the Soviet Union would not have been prepared for the German invasion in 1941. Due to the rapid industrialization of the plan, the Soviet Union was able to build the weapons it needed to defeat the Germans in 1945.^[27]

Failures of the first five-year plan

The failures of the first five-year plan were numerous. The first plan was destined for failure from the beginning because of unrealistic quotas set for industrialization that, in reality, would not be met for decades to come. One of the problems was the goals for the plans were not set and those that were, were constantly changed.^[28] Each time one quota was met, it was revised and made larger, which quickly eliminated any chance of the plan succeeding.^[28]

Secondly, the collectivization created a large-scale famine in the Soviet Union in which over 10 million died.^[19] These famines were among the worst in history and created scars which would mark the Soviet Union for many years to come and incense a deep hatred of Russians by Ukrainians, Tartars, and many other ethnic groups. Hitler used the disregard of human life by Russians toward non-Russians as one of his bases to conduct Operation Barbarossa and gain initial victories over the Russians. These failures would lead to the plan being discontinued after four years instead of five.^[29]

Legacy

A number of streets and squares in major Russian cities are named after the plan, including the First Five-Year Plan Street in Chelyabinsk and Volgograd, and First Five-Year Plan Square in Yekaterinburg.

See also

- Five-year plans for the national economy of the Soviet Union
- Economy of the Soviet Union

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