

Immortal through Labor:  
The Stakhanovite Movement in Soviet Ideology

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## Part I

### Bolshevik Miracles and Scientific Faith:

#### The Stakhanovite Movement in the Marxist-Leninist Civil Paradigm

“Collectives of Stakhanovites perform miracles!” trumpeted *Pravda* headlines in the weeks following Stakhanov’s famous record.<sup>1</sup> Conferences echoed that Stakhanovite workers, multiplying rapidly across the Soviet Union, were “creating miracles in our everyday workplaces,” and writers reported that “every day brings with it fresh miracles of socialist production.”<sup>2</sup> “Everything about the Stakhanovite movement,” concludes the *Stakhanovets* journal, “is miraculous, fascinating, original.”<sup>3</sup>

The initial record of Donbass coal miner Alexei Stakhanov and the subsequent records of his follower “Stakhanovites” indeed seemed miraculous. Under a norm of 6 tons, Stakhanov famously hewed 102 tons of coal in a six hour shift on the night of 30/31 August 1935.<sup>4</sup> A few weeks later, Stakhanov exceeded his own record with an output 227 tons of coal in six hours, only to be quickly surpassed by competitive coworkers, one of whom achieved 536 tons of coal in a

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<sup>1</sup>“Stakhanovskoe dvizhenie shiritsia vo vse strane,” *Pravda*, 15 October 1935, p.3. See also A. A. Andreev, “Priem vinogradovtsev-tekstil’shchikov i obuvshchikov sekretarem TsK VKP(b),” *Pravda*, 19 October 1935, p.1; Likhacheva, “Rech’ tov. Likhacheva, Pervoe vsesoiuznoe soveshchanie rabochikh i robotnits – stakhanovtsev promyshlennosti i transporta,” *Pravda*, 16 November 1935, p.3.

<sup>2</sup> The first quote is from Kirsanov, the secretary of the Central Committee Union of Fur Industry Workers, at a conference of fur industry Stakhanovites on 28 October 1935. GARF f. R5451, o.19, d.240, l.29ob. The second is from G. Friedrich, *“Miss U.S.S.R.”: The Story of Dusya Vinogradova* (Moscow: Co-operative Publishing Society of Foreign Workers in the U.S.S.R., 1936), 38.

<sup>3</sup> D. Zaslavskii, “Chudesa nashei strany,” *Stakhanovets*, no. 1 (1936): 4–6.

<sup>4</sup> One journalist marvels, “our norm [for hewing coal] with a pneumatic drill was 6 tons. And then, one magnificent day, Stakhanov, now a hero of our country, managed 102 with a tons by pneumatic drill...After Stakhanov followed others, producing 200, 300, 400, and finally, 552 tons of coal. How did this happen?” Semen Gershberg, *Stakhanov i Stakhanovtsy* (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1981). Chairman of the Council of People’s Commissars Vyacheslav Molotov similarly applauded the incredible growth of industrial production before and after Stakhanov’s historic record. At the First All-Union Conference of Stakhanovites, Molotov compared the norm of 6-7 tons and the then praiseworthy 16-17 tons by the “very best mines” to present output of hundreds of tons of coal per shift. V. M. Molotov, “O stakhanovskim dvizheniem i kul’turnosti rabocheho klassa” in *Pervoe vsesoiuznoe soveshchanie rabochikh i robotnits – stakhanovtsev, 14-17 noiabria 1935 g.* (Sverdlovsk: Gazetno-zhurnal’noe izdatel’stvo Sverdlovskogo obkoma VKP(b) “Ural’skii rabochii,” 1935), 28.

single shift.<sup>5</sup> In other sectors of heavy industry, Alexander Busygin of the Gorky Automobile Factory produced 1050 shaft parts against a norm of 675, while Ivan Gudov operated a milling machine at 410% the norm speed. “Stakhanovite” work ethic also invigorated light industry production: Nikolai Smetanin lasted 1400 pairs of shoes in a shift, and weavers Dusya and Maria Vinogradova simultaneously operated 216 electric “Northrop” looms.<sup>6</sup>

Stakhanovite record-breakers were not only beacons of higher socialist production, but they also became exalted as Soviet icons. The Stakhanovites, of course, were not “religious” in the traditional sense; Soviet propaganda made clear the contradictions between religion and Stakhanovism. “Mastering technology, as a rule,” affirmed one pamphlet, “makes people anti-religious. Take, for example, the Stakhanovite movement. Why were priests and sectarian preachers so unnerved by the emergence of the Stakhanovite movement? Why have they sent Alexei Stakhanov entire packets of letters, trying to persuade him to give up Stakhanovite labor?”<sup>7</sup> While evidence of religious leaders’ frenzied attempts to abort the Stakhanovite movement has yet to be adduced, the message was clear: Stakhanovism and religion should have been mutually exclusive.

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<sup>5</sup> For a quantitative comparison of specific workers’ output before the Stakhanovite movement and during the Stakhanovite movement, see RGASPI f.85, o.29, d.633, l.12. Stakhanov, for example, is reported to have produced 14-15 tons per shift on average, and 25 tons maximum, before the implementation of “Stakhanovite” methods, while he increased his output to 60-70 tons on average, and 227 tons maximum, after August 1935. Miron Dyukanov, another famous miner from the Central-Irmino (Stakhanov’s) mine who exceeded Stakhanov’s 30 August record several days later, was reported to have produced 11-12 tons of coal per shift on average before the Stakhanovite methods were introduced, and 45-60 tons on average, with maximum of 115 tons, afterward. Even more dramatically, an average of 35 tons of coal per shift were attributed to miner Ivan Artyukhov, who achieved an output of 536 tons in a single shift in the months following Stakhanov’s record.

<sup>6</sup> In transport, Peter Krivonos conducted a train at 40 kilometers per hour against a norm of 24; in agriculture, Maria Demchenko harvested 523 quintals of sugar beets per hectare [~ 46 000 pounds per acre], and Pasha Angelina averaged plowing 1255 hectares [~ 3100 acres] per day on a tractor against a norm of 160 hectares [~ 395 acres]. Semen Gershberg, *Rabota u nas takaia: zapiski zhurnalista-pravdista tridtsatykh godov* (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1971), 350-356; Dusya Vinogradova, *Tekstik’shchiki* (Moscow: Profizdat, 1938), 13.

<sup>7</sup> F. Komelovich, *Antireligioznaiia propaganda v sovremennykh usloviakh: sbornie materialov* (Moscow: Moskovskii rabochii, 1937), 38.

And yet, the hyper-productive records of Stakhanovite workers in the mid-1930s were hailed as “Bolshevik miracles.” On the one hand, it was foreseeable that propaganda would glorify the meteoric rise of heavy industry; Soviet workers had overcome vast, untamed expanses of nature, established the foundation for an industrial superpower, and were overtaking production speeds of the most advanced western countries.<sup>8</sup> Surprisingly, however, it was precisely the word “miracle” [*chudo*] and its derivatives – the same Biblical word describing the Seven Plagues of Egypt and Jesus’s signs in Galilee – that was employed in characterizing the Stakhanovites’ feats.<sup>9</sup> The Stakhanovite movement, through this vocabulary, became saturated with religious connotation.

The “Bolshevik miracles” of the Stakhanovites, moreover, were attributed to “faith.” Faith [*vera*], the iconic opening word of the Orthodox creed [*simvol very*] that had once signified reverence for the supernatural, became a response appropriate for communist politics. Unwavering faith came to be, in particular, a requisite quality of a worker-hero. When asked for the definition of a Stakhanovite, one exemplary turner at the Leningrad Works included that a Stakhanovite necessarily “believes in the victory of socialism, the victory of the system which is giving us a better life.”<sup>10</sup> Many Stakhanovites were indeed characterized by their faith: the acclaimed miner Miron Dyukanov explained that a Stakhanovite “worked for the splendid future, which he sees

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<sup>8</sup> People’s Commissar of Railways and Transport Lazar Kaganovich captures the radical transformation of predominantly agricultural pre-revolutionary Russia and the meteoric rise of Soviet industry: “where there were once deserts, now there are first-class metallurgical and automobile-producing factories.” L. M. Kaganovich, “Stakhanovsko-krivonovskoe dvizhenie – zalog novogo moshchnogo pod’ema sotsialisticheskogo khoziaistva,” in *Pervoe vsesoiuznoe soveshchanie rabochikh i rabotnits – stakhanovtsev*, 48.

<sup>9</sup> Mat. 28:19 CARS; John 4:45 CARS.

<sup>10</sup> Lewis H. Siegelbaum, *Stakhanovism and the Politics of Productivity in the USSR, 1935-1941* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 152. A *Pravda* article, attempting to define a “Stakhanovite,” similarly settles on the criterion of faith in the government: “A Stakhanovite is a premier citizen of the Soviet Union, an agent [*deiatel’*] of the government, a flaming patriot of our great country.” “Ko vsem rabochikh i rabotnitsam, inzheneram i tekhnikam, khoziaistvennikam i sluzhashchim, ko vsem trudiashchimsia Moskvyy i moskovskoi oblasti,” *Pravda*, 3 September 1937, p.2.

and knows, and in which he believes,” while Stakhanov’s “rural equivalent” beet farmer Maria Demchenko attested that “nothing could sway my faith” in the communist order.<sup>11</sup> Alexei Stakhanov himself illustrated the centrality of a particularly Soviet faith to the Stakhanovite movement. “I am a non-believer,” reported Stakhanov, when asked by the historical-biographical archive in Vienna about his religious affiliation. “In God, that is. But what I do believe in, is the ultimate victory of communism across the world.”<sup>12</sup>

Stakhanov and the Stakhanovites thus became paragons of “right faith” and were celebrated as the most devout Soviet citizens. Besides offering an alternative belief system to a secular society, the “miracles” of Stakhanovite production resurrected a sense of the sacred that had been lost in anti-religious campaigns. Much more than an economic campaign, Stakhanovism became an ideological – and even religious – phenomenon.

### **Marxism-Leninism: A Civil Religion?**

Stakhanovism was not, however, an isolated appeal to religious sentiment, but integrated into the complex of sacred symbols and values that Soviet ideology as a whole had developed. Many historians, adducing explicit references to “faith” and the “sacred cause” of communism, have proposed the idea of a Soviet “civil religion.” Marxism-Leninism, the official ideology of the Soviet Union, presented itself as the single objective source of truth, offering a comprehensive

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<sup>11</sup> RGASPI f.85, o.29, d. 633, l.12; A. Severnii, “Diukanov,” in *Stakhanovskoe dvizhenie: sbornik dokumentov, materialov, statei i ocherkov, napechatannykh v “Za industrializatsiiu,”* (Moscow: Izdanie gazeta “Za industrializatsiiu,” 1935), 224; Mary Buckley, *Mobilizing Soviet Peasants: Heroines and Heroes of Stalin’s Fields* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2006), 67; Mariia Demchenko, *Kak ia stala zapevaloi piatisotmits* (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo detskoj literatury, 1937). In another example, renowned miner Ivan Artyukhov, who hewed 536 tons of coal in a single shift in September 1935, was described as “moving toward his goals resolutely, believing [veri] in the [socialist] future.” For other examples, see also Gudov, *Put’ stakhanovtsa*, 50, 84; G. Friedrich, “*Miss USSR*”: *The Story of Dusya Vinogradova* (Moscow: Co-operative Publishing Society of Foreign Workers in the USSR, 1936), 40; Mariia Demchenko, *Poliubi zemliu*, (Moscow: “Molodaia Gvardiia,” 1973), 173; P. Angelina, *O samom glavnom: moi otvet na amerikanskuiu anketu* (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo “Pravda,” 1948), 46.

<sup>12</sup> Stakhanov, *Rasskaz o moei zhizni*, (Moscow: OGIZ SOTsEKGIZ, 1938), 141.

explanation of the world based on an understanding of science and an analysis of history. Along with other common features of traditional religions – such as professing a sacred history for a chosen people and promising a future of glory and abundance – Marxism-Leninism’s “monopoly on truth” has led historians to deem Soviet ideology more of a religion than a science.<sup>13</sup> James Thrower, for instance, employs Rousseau’s concept of a “civil religion” to convey that Soviet ideology resembled a religion in function, if not in content.<sup>14</sup> James Ryan, in like fashion, has argued that the official ideology of the Soviet Union served as a “political religion.”<sup>15</sup> Adding to the list of Marxism-Leninism’s religious features, Ryan highlights a teleological perspective appealing to an ultimate purpose of life and a sanctification of violence to achieve this end.<sup>16</sup>

Other historians have even further advanced the parallel between Marxism-Leninism and traditional religions. Yuri Slezkine, for one, has understood Marxism-Leninism to be a “pre-ordained, non-falsifiable” “messianic cult,” and Marx to be a “millenarian prophet” who “succeeded in translating a prophecy of salvation into the language of science.”<sup>17</sup> Bolshevism, Slezkine suggests, in a word, was often “about the soul, not politics.”<sup>18</sup> Stephen Kotkin has alternatively pronounced the Soviet Union a “theocracy.” Marxism-Leninism, according to Kotkin, “never a set of politics, has always been a powerful dream for salvation on earth.”<sup>19</sup> Entranced with “industry-worship,” Soviet society, in Kotkin’s theory, recognized Party leaders

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<sup>13</sup> James Thrower, *Marxism-Leninism as the Civil Religion of Soviet Society: God’s Commissar* (Lewiston: E. Mellen Press, 1992), 173.

<sup>14</sup> Thrower, *Marxism-Leninism*, 109-111, 142.

<sup>15</sup> James Ryan, “The Sacralization of Violence: Bolshevik Justifications for Violence and Terror during the Civil War,” *Slavic Review* 74, no. 4 (2015): 818.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 818-825.

<sup>17</sup> Yuri Slezkine, *The House of Government: A Saga of the Russian Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 73, 113, 951.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 715.

<sup>19</sup> Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 225, 293.



as “high priests” in whom it confided “absolute faith and devotion.”<sup>20</sup> Kotkin insists, however, that the “civil faith” of the Soviet Union remained an external concern – “it was not necessary to believe. It was necessary, however, to participate as if one believed” – while historian Jochen Hellbeck contends that Soviet citizens were expected to “revolutionize their souls” as well as outwardly display loyalty to the regime.<sup>21</sup>

Even some Soviet Party theoreticians highlighted the religious qualities of Marxism-Leninism. Anatoly Lunacharsky, the People’s Commissar of Enlightenment until 1929, for example, attested to the “religious sentiments” contained in Marxism’s “understanding that an individual life is valuable only in connection with the grand scope of the collective life.”<sup>22</sup> Contrasting Marxism’s “anthropocentrism” to the “theocentrism” and “egocentrism” of past eras – both of which Lunacharsky judged to be fundamentally “anti-religious” – he concluded, “we are inclined to pronounce [Marxism] the highest form of religiosity.”<sup>23</sup> If Marxism resembled a religion, then it was, in particular, a religion of labor: work, according to Marx, was the basic, fundamental act of a human being to change his surroundings, relations, and self.<sup>24</sup> In this case, the Stakhanovites – who embodied the hyper-productive capacities of Soviet labor – were natural candidates to become icons of a Marxist-Leninist faith.

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 33, 295.

<sup>21</sup> Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*, 220; Jochen Hellbeck, “Working, Struggling, Becoming: Stalin-Era Autobiographical Texts,” *The Russian Review* 60, no. 3 (2001): 340–359.

<sup>22</sup> A. Lunacharskii, *Religiia i sotsializm*, vol. 2 (Saint Petersburg: Izdatel’stvo Shipovnik’’, 1911), 347.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 338. Note that Lunacharsky’s assessment of Marxism, and of religion, is positive, as opposed to western historians’ critiques of Marxism-Leninism’s “hypocrisy” in calling itself a science while operating as a faith. Lunacharsky explains that religion is both desirable and necessary for the success of a society: “religion is enthusiasm, and without enthusiasm, nothing great can be achieved.” A. Lunacharskii, *Religiia i sotsializm*, vol. 1 (Saint Petersburg: Izdatel’stvo Shipovnik’’, 1908), 227-228.

<sup>24</sup> Karl Marx, “The German Ideology” in Robert C. Tucker, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2nd ed (New York: Norton, 1978), esp. 150-155; P. Walton, A. Gamble, and J. Coulter, “Image of Man in Marx,” *Social Theory and Practice* 1, no. 2 (1970): 69–84.

## Faith or Science?: The Marxist-Leninist Civil Paradigm

Comparisons of Marxism to a religion remain, nevertheless, highly controversial, not least because Marx conclusively renounced religion, which he decried as “the opium of the people.”<sup>25</sup> Marxism presents itself instead as a philosophy of “dialectical materialism,” which maintains that only matter exists and that the present is the product of strictly logical historical developments.<sup>26</sup> Lenin, for his part, perpetuated Marx’s uncompromisingly secular stance, denouncing any references to a “socialist religion” as “despicable flirtation with God.”<sup>27</sup> According to Marxism-Leninism, it was new innovations, a deeper understanding of the natural sciences, and a commitment to the scientific method that were to be the means by which Soviet workers would conquer nature and surge toward the communist future. Rather than faith in the supernatural, Marxism-Leninism was to be justified by scientific advancement alone.

The most controversial discussions of a Soviet “civil religion,” therefore, contend that the quasi-religious features of Marxism-Leninism were incompatible with its understanding of itself as a science. Among the previously mentioned historians, James Thrower considers that “the final mistake that Marxism-Leninism made, [leading to its eventual collapse] was to see itself as a science – a claim that was patently false.”<sup>28</sup> Historian Nicholas Riasanovsky similarly brands Marxism-Leninism as a “pseudo-science” in addition to a “pseudo-religion,” arguing that Soviet ideology’s pretention to omniscience and promise of “salvation” were fundamentally unscientific qualities.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> “Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people.” Karl Marx, “A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right,” Marxists Internet Archive, 2009. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/critique-hpr/intro.htm>.

<sup>26</sup> Nicholas Riasanovsky and Mark Steinberg, *A History of Russia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 481; Thrower, *Marxism-Leninism*, 4; Smolkin, *A Sacred Space is Never Empty: A History of Soviet Atheism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 13-14.

<sup>27</sup> Victoria Smolkin, *A Sacred Space Is Never Empty*, 13.

<sup>28</sup> Thrower, *Marxism-Leninism*, 173.

<sup>29</sup> Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, *A History of Russia*, 6th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 470.

Thrower's and Riasanovsky's judgments ultimately echo the criticism of Polish historian Leszek Kolakowski, who, in more drastic proportions, declares, "Marxism is a doctrine of blind confidence that a paradise of universal satisfaction is awaiting us just around the corner...it is a caricature and a bogus form of religion, since it presents its temporal eschatology as a scientific system, which religious mythologies do not [even] purport to do."<sup>30</sup> Subsequent references to a Marxist-Leninist "religion" – following Kolakowski's precedent – have therefore often connoted critical dismissal of the Soviet Union's scientific aspirations. The present thesis, in this regard, will construct a different vocabulary to discuss the "faith" and "miracles" officially promoted in Soviet society, while simultaneously recognizing the scientific focus of Marxism-Leninism.

It is first necessary to develop the argument that the Soviet Union indeed fulfilled its claims to scientific rigor. Stakhanovism, in particular, exemplified the centrality of industrial science to the Soviet worldview. Sculpted from the clay of Marxist-Leninist ideology, Stakhanovism's attention to scientific precision validates, by extension, Marxism-Leninism's own serious preoccupation with science.

The "miracles" of the Stakhanovites, for one, were officially ascribed to technological advancements.<sup>31</sup> As foremost milling machine-operator Stakhanovite Ivan Gudov attests, it was precisely a "technical education" by which Soviet workers "can perform and do perform miracles."<sup>32</sup> Stalin himself condoned this religious vocabulary, in so far as it applied to Soviet science. In a speech in May 1935, Stalin famously prognosed that "technology [*tekhnika*], wielded

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<sup>30</sup> Leszek Kolakowski, *Main Currents in Marxism*, vol. 3 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 526. Historians such as Stephen Kotkin, on the other hand, do not view the scientific and quasi-religious elements of Marxism-Leninism to be incompatible. Referencing Kolakowski in particular, Kotkin suggests that "the historian should not so quickly dismiss Marxism's claim to be scientific." Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*, 8.

<sup>31</sup> "Technical education," it was proclaimed, was to be "the right hand of the Stakhanovite movement." RGASPI f.85, o.29, d.133, l.53.

<sup>32</sup> I. Gudov, *Put' stakhanovtisa: rasskaz o moei zhizni* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe sotsial'no-ekonomicheskoe izdatel'stvo, 1938), 56). Gudov was idolized for his record of operating a milling machine at a speed of 34 millimeters per minute, 410% of the norm. Semen Gershberg, *Rabota u nas takaia*, 352-353.

by people who have mastered technique [*tekhnika*], can and must produce miracles [*chudesa*].”<sup>33</sup>

Three months later, Alexei Stakhanov, wielding superior Soviet industrial technique, delivered on Stalin’s order for a “Bolshevik miracle.”

Even if Stakhanovism appeared to become religious in form, it certainly remained secular in content. Manifesting deep concerns with the state of Soviet science, the Stakhanovite movement implemented various measures to accelerate industrial growth. Stakhanovite conferences, first of all, gathered workers both from within local districts and from across the Soviet Union to discuss recent advancements in their trades.<sup>34</sup> Workers were expected to “study constantly,” improve their own habits in the workplace, and share their insights with colleagues.<sup>35</sup> Optimal production methods, furthermore, were researched and published in handbooks, from which aspiring workers could glean advice from leading Stakhanovites.<sup>36</sup>

Print media such as newspapers and journals were furthermore mobilized to spread new, “Stakhanovite” techniques. The “Tribune of the Stakhanovite” section of *Pravda*, for instance, provided a platform for Stakhanovites to discuss achievements in their trades.<sup>37</sup> *Stakhanovets*, a monthly (bi-weekly in 1936) journal devoted exclusively to the Stakhanovite movement,

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<sup>33</sup> I.V. Stalin, “Rech’ v kremlevskom dvortse na vypuske akademikov krasnoi armii, 4 maia 1935 g.” in *Sochineniia* (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo “Pisatel’.” 1946), 14: 61. Note that *tekhnika* can be translated as either “technology” or “technique.” This famous phrase from Stalin’s May 1935 Red Army graduation speech is translated in both ways. On the one hand, a translation of this speech on Marxists.org, for example, reads, “In the charge of people who have mastered technique, technique can and should perform miracles.” J. V. Stalin, “Address to the Graduates from the Red Army Academies,” Marxists Internet Archive, 2008. <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1935/05/04.htm>. Compare historian Sheila Fitzpatrick’s translation of the same phrase: “Technology directed by people who have mastered that technology can and must produce miracles.” Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Cultural Front: Power and Culture in Revolutionary Russia*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 169.

<sup>34</sup> Benvenuti, *Fuoco sui sabatatori!: Stachanovismo e organizzazione industriale in Urss, 1934-1938* (Roma: V. Levi, 1988), 408; Illarion Yankin, *Notes of a Stakhanovite* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1952), 29.

<sup>35</sup> A. G. Stakhanov, *Tvoe rabochee mesto* (Volgograd: Nizhne-volzhskoe knizhnoe izdatel’stvo, 1980), 54.

<sup>36</sup> Buckley, *Mobilizing Soviet Peasants*, 118. See for instance Mariia Demchenko, *Poliubi zemliu*.

<sup>37</sup> Siegelbaum, *Stakhanovism*, 117.

introduced workers to methods that had catalyzed famous Stakhanovites' production successes.<sup>38</sup> Stakhanov, in the first issue of *Stakhanovets*, for instance shares his approach to coal mining, advising workers to become intimately familiar with their pneumatic drills and to develop a "correct orientation toward the particular conditions of the rock face."<sup>39</sup> This familiarity, in fact, was ultimately to culminate in a metaphorical "merging" of the worker with his machine into the New Soviet Man.<sup>40</sup>

In addition to methodological advice, *Stakhanovets* aimed – under the slogan that “we should know about the magnificent achievements of people of our country” – to inspire workers with the stories of other Stakhanovites' successes.<sup>41</sup> Articles entitled, for instance, “A Five-Story House in 30 Workdays,” “Moscow Canal,” and “Underground Airfields,” exhibit some of the contemporary achievements of Stakhanovite workers.<sup>42</sup> To accomplish similar feats, *Stakhanovets* recommended constant, heavy doses of “self-criticism.” In one article, People’s Commissar of Heavy Industry Sergo Ordzhonikidze – the primary sponsor of the Stakhanovite movement, as Part II will contend – affirmed, “the more we criticize our deficiencies, the faster we will be able to correct them; we will criticize each other, we will compete with each other, and we will all together rise to the vanguard of heavy industry.”<sup>43</sup> Workers were to learn from their own mistakes, from

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<sup>38</sup> *Stakhanovets*, in the words of one article, aimed to propagate, in particular, a sense of “admiration for the miracles of division of labor” that the Stakhanovite movement had manifested. I. G. Aleksandrov, “Moi ideal: ne 40 000, a 1000 rabochikh vozvodiat Dneprostroï,” *Stakhanovets* no. 1 (1936), 14.

<sup>39</sup> Aleksei Stakhanov, “Udvaivaem dobychu uglia,” *Stakhanovets* no.1 (1936), 17.

<sup>40</sup> Stakhanov, implicitly, was advocating for the complete Stalinist “mechanization of man.” For a discussion of the “merging” of man with machine, a propos the New Soviet Man, see for instance, Slava Gerovitch, “‘New Soviet Man’ Inside Machine: Human Engineering, Spacecraft Design, and the Construction of Communism,” *Osiris* 22, no. 1 (2007): 140, 155.

<sup>41</sup> “Tri vyvoda iz geroicheskogo pokhoda ‘Cheliuckina,’” *Stakhanovets* no.2 (1937), 42.

<sup>42</sup> “Piatietazhnyi dom v 30 rabochikh dnei,” *Stakhanovets* no.1 (1937), 63; “Kanal Moskva,” *Stakhanovets* no.5 (1937), 12-13; “Podzemnye aerodomy,” *Stakhanovets* no.7 (1937), 33.

<sup>43</sup> Ordzhonikidze, “Po-stalinski borot’sia za protsvetanie nashei rodiny,” *Stakhanovets* no.15 (1936), 2.

each other, and even from western countries such as America.<sup>44</sup> Constructive self-criticism was encouraged, in other words, from any source and at any cost.

The Marxist-Leninist foundation on which Stakhanovism was shaped clearly demanded an unremitting atmosphere of self-criticism and a steadfast commitment to technological advancement. In this respect, it cannot be dismissed as unscientific. The faith that the Stakhanovites professed and the science that they practiced, evidently, must not be irreconcilable. One philosopher of science, Thomas Kuhn, in fact, proposed that faith and science, in general, are not only compatible, but inextricable.<sup>45</sup> Kuhn argues that the human understanding of science rests on axiomatic “paradigms,” which must be accepted on faith.<sup>46</sup> Only once a “paradigm” has been adopted can “normal science” proceed, refining the paradigm and expanding its range of applications.<sup>47</sup> The “paradigm,” in this way, allows for cumulative construction of scientific knowledge; only rarely, in “scientific revolutions,” is faith in the axiomatic “paradigm” reexamined.<sup>48</sup>

Marxism-Leninism – at once committed to progress in the industrial sciences and inspiring in its adherents “faith in the splendid future” – can perhaps be understood as a paradigm, and as the “civil paradigm” of Soviet society. Axiomatically, the Soviet worldview accepted the

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<sup>44</sup> I. G. Aleksandrov, “Moi ideal: ne 40 000, a 1000 rabochikh vozvodiat Dneprostroy,” *Stakhanovets* no. 1 (1936), 15.

<sup>45</sup> Kuhn describes science as largely tradition-based: “normal science, the activity in which most scientists inevitably spend almost all their time, is predicated on the assumption that the scientific community knows what the world is like. Much of the success of the enterprise derives from the community’s willingness to defend that assumption.” Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1962), 5.

<sup>46</sup> According to Kuhn, “there can be no scientifically or empirically neutral system of language or concepts”; all scientific discourse belongs to one or another paradigm. In the adoption of a particular paradigm, moreover, “neither proof nor error is at issue,” but it is instead a “conversion experience” that is required. While scientists may claim that paradigm shifts occur because the new axioms allow for more extensive application than the old worldview, Kuhn argues that “the man who embraces a new paradigm at an early stage must often do so in defiance of the evidence provided by problem-solving. He must, that is, have faith that the new paradigm will succeed with the many large problems that confront it, knowing only that the older paradigm has failed with a few. A decision of that kind can only be made on faith.” Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 145, 150, 157.

<sup>47</sup> Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, esp. 35-42.

<sup>48</sup> Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 6, 18-20, 110-112.

trajectory of history that Marx had proposed and Lenin had interpreted. Technical improvements stimulated by a culture of “self-criticism,” on the other hand, contributed to “normal science” that aimed to fulfill and accelerate Marx’s historical narrative.<sup>49</sup> In referring to a Marxist-Leninist “civil paradigm,” in this way, the “faith” and “miracles” of the Stakhanovite movement can be situated in an ambient Soviet value system, while at the same time emphasizing the scientific character of Stakhanovism in particular, and Marxism-Leninism in general.

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Marx had once prophesied that the working class was destined for a “world-historical” role.<sup>50</sup> In 1935, with the emergence of the Stakhanovites, the realization of this projection appeared imminent. Inspiring hope, reverence, and enthusiasm, these hyper-productive workers augured both the rise of the New Proletariat and the dawn of the communist future.

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<sup>49</sup> Stakhanovite milling machine-operator Gudov, for example, attests to the convenience of a paradigm in eliminating the re-discovery of ideas, relations, or techniques. “Until now,” he remarks, “thousands and thousands of people have devised and invented what had already been devised and invented and what they could have quickly utilized without risk or any more effort.” Marx’s paradigm of industrial development, in this way, obviated the need to reinvent, allowing workers instead to build constructively on the discoveries of the collective.

<sup>50</sup> Marx, “The German Ideology” in Tucker, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 162.

## Part II

### Sacralizing Productivity: The Creation of the Stakhanovite Movement in Soviet Ideology

According to official sources, the Stakhanovite movement originated spontaneously, producing an unprecedented “species of heroes, arising from no one knows where.”<sup>51</sup> With the germination of these new, fundamentally socialist “prototypes of people of the future” also sprouted “new ethics, new morals” that were to serve as a compass in navigating the path to communism.<sup>52</sup> Representing a “culture that revered labor,” the Stakhanovite movement was an “entirely new” and extremely important “historical movement, comprising a new page in the history of socialism.”<sup>53</sup>

As an economic phenomenon, however, Stakhanovism was hardly unprecedented; instead, it was a natural continuation of precursor movements dating to the advent of the Soviet Union. The earliest forerunner to the Stakhanovite movement were *subbotniki*, or “voluntary Saturdays,” organized immediately after the 1917 Revolution to accelerate the transition from a predominantly agricultural to an industrial economy. *Subbotniki*, in the words of Lenin, constituted “the beginning of [our] battle for productivity.”<sup>54</sup> The trend of labor enthusiasm was continued in the 1920s by groups of *udarniki*, or “shock workers,” described by one historian as workers who “[performed] particularly arduous or urgent tasks.”<sup>55</sup> A subbranch of the *udarniki*, known as *otlichniki*, were

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<sup>51</sup> Francesco Benvenuti, *Fuoco sui sabotatori!*, 200.

<sup>52</sup> A.A. Zhdanov, *Itogi dekabrskogo plenuma TsK VKP(b)* (Leningrad: Partizdat TsK VKP(b), 1936), 7; G. Rykhan, “Prostaia biografiia,” *Stakhanovets* no.1 (1936): 10. Historian Lewis Siegelbaum argues that the Stakhanovite movement “contained instructions about how to live, as well as how to work.” Offering “a model of behavior and a set of values,” the Stakhanovite movement was an ideological development as much as an economic project. Siegelbaum, *Stakhanovism*, 148, 213.

<sup>53</sup> Siegelbaum, *Stakhanovism*, 298; GARF f.R5451, o.19, d.240, l.27o.

<sup>54</sup> V.S. Bogushevskii, ed., *Stalinskoe plemia stakhanovtsev* (Moscow-Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo izobrazitel'nykh isskustv, 1936), 9.

<sup>55</sup> Lewis H. Siegelbaum, *Stakhanovism*, 40.



later distinguished for the quality, in addition to the quantity, of their production.<sup>56</sup> Finally, the Soviet struggle for productivity evolved into the Izotovite movement in the early 1930s; besides achieving remarkable output, Izotovites also assisted less competent workers.<sup>57</sup> Many of the first Stakhanovites, in fact, participated in these earlier productivity campaigns, distinguishing themselves through outstanding performance prior to Stakhanov's record in August 1935.<sup>58</sup> From an economic perspective, Stakhanovism was clearly "a result of the long-standing, persistent, and strained revolutionary battle" for productivity, and even Party leaders admitted that Stakhanovite records were "not at all unexpected [but] prepared by the precursory developments in socialist competition."<sup>59</sup>

While the seeds of Stakhanovite production had long since been sown by previous industrial campaigns, Stakhanovism was unprecedented as an ideological phenomenon. The Stakhanovite movement quickly shed its economic character; in the words of one leading historian of Stakhanovism, "the movement, apparently, lost every original motive of productivity in order to become 'a powerful movement of all [Soviet] people' and a triumphant display of the 'heroism of victorious socialism.'"<sup>60</sup> Party leaders affirmed that Stakhanovites were not "just people who had mastered technology and who produce high industrial output," insisting instead that they were "new people, the premier [*peredovye*] people of the socialist epoch."<sup>61</sup> The Stakhanovites,

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<sup>56</sup> *Stakhanovskoe dvizhenie* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo "Znamia udarnika," 1935), 6.

<sup>57</sup> Francesco Benvenuti, *Fuoco sui sabotatori!*, 157; Nikita Izotov, *Moia zhizn', moia rabota* (Khar'kov: Ukrains'kii Robitnik, 1934), 93, 104.

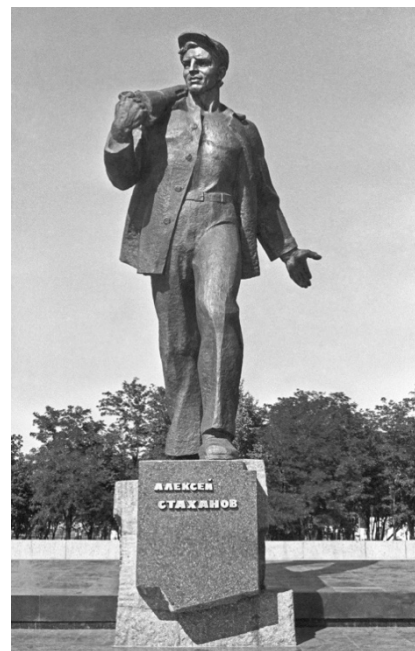
<sup>58</sup> Lewis H. Siegelbaum, "The Making of Stakhanovites, 1935-36," *Russian History* 13, no. 2/3 (1986): 259-92. The director of one trust complains that workers in his mine had achieved superior output before the Stakhanovite wave of "recordmania" but remained unrecognized: "I have to say frankly, that we overslept our own 'Stakhanovite' movement. In June [of 1935], our driller Miasnikov hewed 112 tons [compared to Stakhanov's 102 tons in August], and we didn't even notice." RGASPI f.85, o.29, d.119, l.114.

<sup>59</sup> V. M. Molotov, "O stakhanovskom dvizhenii i kul'turnosti rabochego klassa" in *Pervoe vsesoyuznoe soveshchanie rabochikh i robotnits - stakhanovtsev*, 30; *Stakhanovskoe dvizhenie* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo "Znamia udarnika," 1935), 4.

<sup>60</sup> Benvenuti, *Fuoco sui sabotatori!*, 171.

<sup>61</sup> *Stakhanovskoe dvizhenie*, 4.

embodying Bolshevik work ethic and communist faith, became the subjects of poetry, film, paintings, and sculptures; the Donbass city Kadiievka where Stakhanov began his mining career was even renamed “Stakhanov.”<sup>62</sup> None of the participants in the precursor productivity campaigns, in contrast, were acclaimed as new “species of heroes” who “produced miracles” through their “faith” in the Party. The novelty of the Stakhanovite movement thus consisted not in worker’s performance, but in the glorification bestowed upon them. Unprecedented, in particular, was the extent to which Stakhanovite laborers were conceived as shining examples of the New Soviet Man, to be emulated not only by other workers but by Soviet society as a whole. Through the inexorable efforts of several Party officials, the Stakhanovite movement was not only invested with “enormous historical importance” but also inscribed in the Marxist-Leninist civil paradigm, grounded in the sacred roots of Lenin’s legacy and Marx’s prophecies.<sup>63</sup>



Statue of Alexei Stakhanov in Stakhanov, Ukraine

Vadim Erlikhman, “Kogda strana prikazhet byt’ geroem,” *Rossiiskaia gazeta* no.8 (2015).

<sup>62</sup> One such poem glorifying the Stakhanovites imagines with remorse how Leningrad Party boss Sergei Kirov, assassinated in 1934, one year before the outbreak of the Stakhanovite movement, would have been delighted by the Stakhanovite New Soviet Men: “The miner Alexei Stakhanov/ Raises the flag of mourning/ Above the legendary mine/ Central Irmino/ If only that year had not been!/ In the quieting Kremlin hall/ The eyes of three thousand Stakhanovites/ Fill with fiery tears/ He [Kirov] would have shaken Stakhanov’s hand/ Cheered “hurrah!” for Vinogradova/ He would have praised Smetanin/ with Leningrad pride...” Viktor Gusev, “Kirovu” in *Bessmertie: Pamiati S. M. Kirova: Literaturnyi-khudozhestvennyi Sbornik* (Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel’stvo khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1939), 114-115. See also *Pervoe vsesoyuznoe soveshchanie rabochikh i rabotnits - stakhanovtsev*, 137; “V sadu iablonia,” in A. M. Gor’kii, *Krasnaia armia: tvorchestvo naroda SSSP* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe voennoe izdatel’stvo narkomata oborony SSSP, 1938); “Fil’m o metode Gudova,” *Stakhanovets* no.7 (1937), 46.

<sup>63</sup> Ordzhonikidze, *Stakhanovskoe dvizhenie, vozglavliaemoe velikim Stalinyim, poidet semimil’nymi shagami* (Moscow: SNTI NKTP SSSP, 1936), 19.



Alexandr Deineka, *Stakhanovtsy*, Oil on Canvas, 1937, Perm Art Gallery, <http://www.deineka.ru/work-stakhanovtsy.php>.

### The Search for Icons

The need for Soviet icons, ironically, may have emerged as a result of Soviet anti-religious campaigns. Priests were arrested, churches were destroyed, polemics were disseminated in newspapers, and the League of the Militant Godless attempted on a mass scale to detach Soviet citizens from their monotheistic religions.<sup>64</sup> Scientific atheism, however, failed to generate support for the regime; it offered, at best, a “spiritual vacuum.”<sup>65</sup> Even worse for the atheistic Soviet state, religious tenacity persisted. Traditional belief systems offered concrete moral prescriptions, eased the fear of death, and satisfied the desire for milestone rituals; scientific atheism, on the other hand,

<sup>64</sup> Victoria Smolkin, *A Sacred Space Is Never Empty*, 4, 17; Nicholas S. Timasheff, *Religion in Soviet Russia, 1917-1942* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1942), 34-39; James Thrower, *Marxism-Leninism*, 34-35. Historian Robert Service informs that only a twelfth of Russian Orthodox priests were still serving the Church by 1941, and that only 30,543 religious buildings, out of 73,963 operating in 1917, remained in use by April of 1936. By 1939, all monasteries had been closed, and only around one hundred Orthodox churches had survived. Service, *Stalin*, 268, 301, 442-443.

<sup>65</sup> Smolkin, *A Sacred Space Is Never Empty*, 104.

seemed to neglect the “emotional and aesthetic needs” of the population.<sup>66</sup> The Soviet people continued to demand a church; the Party had to become a church.<sup>67</sup>

Soviet leaders were aware of the critical need for new, sacred symbols to inspire personal attachment to the regime. Efforts to generate religious sentiment ranged from the construction of the “supernatural” Moscow metro – a “working Bolshevik church of modernity” – to blessing underdeveloped parts of the Soviet Union with electricity – a sign that “the state had seized control of nature” and had “[attained] divine power.”<sup>68</sup> Ultimately, the Soviet belief system that emerged centered around the figure of Lenin.<sup>69</sup> Although Lenin resolutely opposed his cult while alive, the Bolshevik leader was sacralized after death by his associates, who mobilized themes and terminology from Orthodox Christianity to exalt the late leader. Reminiscent of communion in Christ, each Soviet citizen was to “participate” in Lenin, who was embodied in the collective. As Trotsky explained, “in all of us there is a part of Lenin, and this is the best part in each of us.”<sup>70</sup> Lenin, furthermore, was conceived as a duality, comprised of “Ilyich the man and Lenin the immortal,” and later as an omnipotent spirit eternally guiding the Soviet people toward communism.<sup>71</sup> Even the Christ-like iconography of the Lenin cult, however, was insufficient to

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<sup>66</sup> Thrower, *Marxism-Leninism*, 47.

<sup>67</sup> Nicholas Timasheff claims that the Soviet population remained predominantly religious in the 1930s, continuing to “want a church,” in spite of Soviet anti-religious campaigns. Timasheff, *Religion in Soviet Russia*, 96. Victoria Smolkin argues that the Party, aware of atheistic campaigns’ failure to generate support for the regime, “discovered that it had to become a church and [therefore launched a] revolutionary attempt to turn an ideology into a religion.” Smolkin, *A Sacred Space Is Never Empty*, 19, 32.

<sup>68</sup> Andrew Jenks, “A Metro on the Mount: The Underground as a Church of Soviet Civilization,” *Technology and Culture* 41, no. 4 (2000): 697–724, 700, 708; Julia Bekman Chadaga, “Light in Captivity: Spectacular Glass and Soviet Power in the 1920s and 1930s,” *Slavic Review* 66, no. 1 (2007): 82–105, 103, 105.

<sup>69</sup> At this stage, the Soviet state was confronted with a case of “Lefort’s Paradox”: Marxism-Leninism professed to represent an “objective truth” of history, which necessarily existed external to society, inaccessible and often unpersuasive. The Soviet Union attempted to resolve this contradiction in the way Lefort’s Paradox is typically untangled, that is, with “the figure of the ‘master,’ who, by being presented as standing *outside* ideological discourse and possessing *external* knowledge of the objective truth, [allows] it ‘to appear through himself.’” Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006). 10.

<sup>70</sup> Thrower, *Marxism-Leninism*, 83.

<sup>71</sup> Tumarkin, *Lenin Lives!: The Lenin Cult in Soviet Russia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 167.

supplant traditional religion. According to an official yet never-published census of 1936, around 55% of Soviet citizens declared themselves, in spite of the atheistic stance of the state, to be believers.<sup>72</sup> Soviet leaders soon realized – as the Soviet writer Andrei Platanov wrote – that “what we need is a live person”; contemporary icons, saints, prophets were necessary to kindle the dream of communism.<sup>73</sup>

Foremost in the pursuit of worker-icons was People’s Commissar of Heavy Industry, Sergo Ordzhonikidze. Characterized as “the motor in the country’s economic development,” Ordzhonikidze was credited with “creating the base of [Soviet] industry with fire, love, and wisdom.”<sup>74</sup> Pursuing even further development of heavy industry, and especially determined to “find New [Soviet] People in the working class and make heroes out of them,” Ordzhonikidze was primarily responsible for crafting the Stakhanovites into an ideological, quasi-religious phenomenon.<sup>75</sup> Ordzhonikidze explained to one *Pravda* journalist the imperative to find precisely working-class heroes of the Soviet Union: “In capitalist countries, no one can compare to the popularity of gangsters like Al Capone. But for us, under socialism, the most famous people should be heroes of labor.”<sup>76</sup> On the day of Stakhanov’s 30 August record, however, Ordzhonikidze was on vacation in Kislovodsk. When he discovered that the record had passed nearly unnoticed,

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<sup>72</sup> Riasanovksy, *A History of Russia*, 586; Robert Service, *Stalin: A Biography* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 442-443.

<sup>73</sup> Slezkine, *House of Government*, 447.

<sup>74</sup> RGASPI f.85, o.1S, d.167, l.2; A. Mikoian, “V polose velikogo pod’ema” in *Pervoe vsesoiuznoe soveshchanie rabochikh i robotnits - stakhanovtsev*, 98. One international observer characterized Ordzhonikidze as follows: “He comes off as stern and friendly at the same time; he speaks Russian with a strong Georgian accent, which sounds light-hearted. His word choice in Russian is quite limited, but he all the more clearly expresses his views with these ‘thousand words,’ and his speeches are distinguished by their energy, clarity, and simplicity. He calls things how they are. His position in the country’s economic development is that of a motor. He is full of energy; his political position and the trust of Stalin give him the necessary aura.” RGASPI f.85, o.1S, d. 167, l.2. Historian Lewis Siegelbaum adds that Ordzhonikidze, “known affectionately as ‘Sergo’ and apparently regarded with genuine affection by many production specialists...presided over the stabilization of industrial relations and the improvement in the working and living conditions of his subordinates. In doing so, he seems to have been guided by the principle that those who could get the job done should be employed irrespective of their past political affiliations.” Siegelbaum, *Stakhanovism*, 30.

<sup>75</sup> *Stakhanovets*, no.2 (1937): 2.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

acknowledged only in a castaway paragraph on the last page of the 2 September edition of *Pravda*, Ordzhonikidze was “beside himself.”<sup>77</sup> Immediately grasping Stakhanov’s potential as a symbol, he proceeded to call numerous trusts, committees, and organizations. After nearly a week of silence, Ordzhonikidze was eventually able to ensure that Stakhanov’s name was rarely absent from the daily newspaper for the following two years.<sup>78</sup>

From the day of Stakhanov’s record, Ordzhonikidze worked tirelessly to sustain the fire of “recordmania,” eventually acquiring the sobriquet “People’s Commissar of Stakhanovites.”<sup>79</sup> Even though Stakhanovism was officially proclaimed to have originated “of itself, spontaneously, from below,” many Soviet citizens and even Party officials recognized Ordzhonikidze as the “inspirator and organizer of the Stakhanovite movement.”<sup>80</sup> A number of contemporary historians also credit the Commissar of Heavy Industry as the lead sponsor of the Stakhanovites movement.<sup>81</sup> The extent and range of his efforts, however, remains largely unexplored. It is thus necessary here to delineate the scope of Ordzhonikidze’s sponsorship, which will serve as essential context for the Commissar’s projections to transform the Stakhanovite productivity campaign into an alternative, Marxist-Leninist belief system.

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<sup>77</sup> Gershberg, *Rabota u nas takaia*, 321.

<sup>78</sup> *Pravda* journalist Semen Gershberg writes, “having received the *Pravda* issue mentioning Stakhanov, Ordzhonikidze immediately called Moscow, the Commissariat of Heavy Industry, Glavugol’, and finally the Donbass section of the Party. He met with Kadievskia, with the trust Kadievugol’...He called the redaction of *Pravda* and advised the press workers to make heroes out of the Stakhanovites [*podniat’ imia Stakhanova na shehit*].” Semen Rakhmil’evich Gershberg, *Stakhanov i stakhanovtsy*, 7.

<sup>79</sup> “Recordmania” is a term used by Lewis Siegelbaum. Siegelbaum, *Stakhanovism*, 76. The title “People’s Commissar of Stakhanovites” appears, for instance, in *Stakhanovets*, no. 2 (1937): 2; Mikhail Grinberg, “Pamiat’ Sergo,” *Stakhanovets*, no. 6 (1937): 23; Stakhanov, *Rasskaz*, 132.

<sup>80</sup> Stalin, *Sochineniia*, 14:86; Semen Gershberg, *Rabota u nas takaia*, 320. See also *Narkom Stakhanovtsev*, 24, 55; *Pervoe vsesoiuznoe soveshchanie rabochikh i robotnits stakhanovtsev*, 172.

<sup>81</sup> R. W. Davies and Oleg Khlevnyuk, “Stakhanovism and the Soviet Economy,” 879; Oleg Vital’evich Khlevniuk, *In Stalin’s Shadow: The Career of “Sergo” Ordzhonikidze* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1995), 78; Siegelbaum, *Stakhanovism*, 73.

Less than two weeks after Stakhanov's initially unnoticed record, managers of Donbass mines were already receiving telegrams from Ordzhonikidze, reminding them of the "wonderful movement of coal-mining heroes in the Donbass" and warning that those individuals resisting the Stakhanovite movement "need to be removed immediately."<sup>82</sup> In one telegram, the Commissar pressured, "the Donbass cannot fail to fulfill its plan this year, and so far, there is still a threat of unfulfillment."<sup>83</sup> The ultimatum, he clarified, was either to support the Stakhanovites "by all means possible" or to be "driven out of the ranks of industrial workers."<sup>84</sup> According to the memoirs of workers, Ordzhonikidze did not hesitate to fulfill such threats to dismiss those who remained unenthusiastic about Stakhanovite production.<sup>85</sup>

Besides intimidating directors of mines and factories, Ordzhonikidze chaired meetings of the People's Commissariat of Heavy Industry, in which he addressed deficiencies in the workplace and proposed expeditious solutions.<sup>86</sup> Intently following the progress of the Stakhanovite movement, the "People's Commissar of Stakhanovites" reviewed attendees' complaints while mercilessly criticizing managers, whom he held accountable for unacceptable levels of production. Ordzhonikidze frequently demanded at conferences, "can anyone explain to us, why it turns out

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<sup>82</sup> S. Ordzhonikidze, "Telegramma Stalino, tt. Sarkisovu, Bazhanovu, 12 sentiabria 1935," in *Stakhanovskoe dvizhenie*, 101-102.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid. Stakhanov recognized Ordzhonikidze's crucial role in catalyzing the all-Union movement that came to bear his name: "only a few days after my record, the Donbass miners received a telegram from Sergo, who explicitly established the importance of the emerging all-Union movement and proposed a concrete path for its development." RGASPI f.85, o.1, d.113, l.144.

<sup>84</sup> S. Ordzhonikidze, *Zadachi tiazheloi promyshlennosti v sviazi so stakhanovskim dvizheniem* (Voronezh: Voronezhskoe oblastnoe knigoizdatel'stvo, 1936), 27-28.

<sup>85</sup> Alexander Busygin recalls Ordzhonikidze's visit to the Gorky factory in June of 1936: when the Commissar saw that metalworkers were using primitive, outdated methods, "Ordzhonikidze became frightfully angry. 'If that's the way you're producing metal,' he declared, 'then we have no need for it,' and just then ... fired the director from work." Busygin, *Zhizn' moia i moikh друзей*, 37-38.

<sup>86</sup> Ordzhonikidze was apparently effective in sponsoring industrial records, due to his expertise in heavy industry. The "People's Commissar of Stakhanovites" demonstrated a high degree of familiarity with industrial sciences at conferences and in his interactions with workers. In the words of one journalist, "Ordzhonikidze knew all the subtleties of metallurgy. But he spoke about coal, about oil, about automobile production, about construction, all with the same competency," while Stakhanov similarly adduces that he felt he could always converse with Ordzhonikidze as a fellow miner "[*po shakhterski*]." Gershberg, *Rabota u nas takaia*, 341; RGASPI f.85, o.1, d.113, l.145.

that you worked well yesterday, but today you're falling behind – what's the problem?"<sup>87</sup> He also summoned particular directors, for instance to "answer here why Manometr [factory] is failing to produce."<sup>88</sup> When a manager of Stalin Oil attempted to justify low output, Ordzhonikidze characteristically interrupted, "Are you going to continue complaining about 'objective circumstances,' or are you going to work? Your entire speech is anti-Stakhanovite."<sup>89</sup> The sharp criticism of the Commissar revealed an acute sensitivity both to any fall in industrial production, and to attitudes not yet calibrated with the "new ethics" of the Stakhanovite movement.

Such criticism not only exposed inadequate zeal among specialists, but constructively aimed to ameliorate industrial conditions and consequently stimulate further Stakhanovite initiatives. Ordzhonikidze asked managers and workers to reflect on their needs at the factory and, in turn, promised to fulfill their requests. Stakhanov recalls one occasion on which Ordzhonikidze sought the miner's opinion for increasing Donbass coal output. Voicing the shortage of rubber hoses to supply compressed air for pneumatic drills, Stakhanov was immediately promised 500 meters of hoses. "[Ordzhonikidze] did not forget his promise," reports Stakhanov. "The hoses arrived in no time. After that, the Central-Irmino miners often turned to Sergo, asking for help with various matters, including improving public facilities – Sergo was always warm and responsive to their requests."<sup>90</sup> Among his other efforts, Ordzhonikidze organized extended Stakhanovite shifts (such as five-day, ten-day, or twenty-day shifts) and attempted to allay anxiety that higher, Stakhanovite production would result in increased norms.<sup>91</sup> Conference transcripts from the

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<sup>87</sup> RGASPI f.85, o.29, d.133, l.14.

<sup>88</sup> RGASPI f.85, o.29, d.119, l.61.

<sup>89</sup> RGASPI f.85, o.29, d.119, l.14.

<sup>90</sup> RGASPI f.85, o.1, d.113, l.148.

<sup>91</sup> In a June 1936 telegram, Ordzhonikidze proposes that directors of the foresting industry stage a twenty-day [*dvukhdekadnik*] Stakhanovite shift, starting from 15 June 1935. RGASPI f.85, o.29, d.638, l.1. Ordzhonikidze received letters, for instance from a technical director of the trust "Sverdlovugol'," relaying workers' concerns that Stakhanovite labor would increase norms and decrease earnings. RGASPI f.85, o.29, d.704, l.1.



Commissariat of Heavy Industry suggest that the Commissar was genuinely concerned with achieving real production growth, and never – as some historians accuse – content to fabricate the numbers of Stakhanovites’ production records.<sup>92</sup>

Numbers, however, remained but a means to undergird the “historical movement” of New Soviet People, rather than an end in themselves. As Ordzhonikidze clarified at a December 1935 All-Union People’s Commissariat of Heavy Industry Conference, “we’re not talking about producing 11 tons with a pneumatic drill instead of 7 tons, or 4 ½ thousand [tons] with a cutting machine instead of 3 thousand. That is all trifles, it’s all nonsense. We’re not talking about [numbers], but about grand perspectives...This is an important development in the highest degree...one that will exalt us to incredible heights.”<sup>93</sup> The essence of the Stakhanovite movement, the Commissar insisted, comprised not production statistics but the emotional value of the Stakhanovites.<sup>94</sup> “Until now, many people still have not understood the enormous meaning of the Stakhanovite movement,” lamented Ordzhonikidze in another speech, at the Communist Party Plenum of 1935. “Many equate the Stakhanovite movement with fulfillment or non-fulfillment of the program of their factory, their mine, their enterprise. If they fulfill the production program, they are confused what more we want from them.”<sup>95</sup> What Ordzhonikidze’s comrades in the department of Heavy Industry did not understand, was that the Stakhanovites represented a new type of socialist labor, as Marx had presaged. This new variety of socialist labor was concerned,

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<sup>92</sup> A common accusation of western historians is that “hyper-productive” Soviet industrial achievements seemed incredible because they were not, in fact, grounded in real production. Stephen Kotkin suggests that the “tyranny of quantity” encouraged workers and managers alike to claim output matching assigned production quotas, even if the material had not actually been produced, or if the resulting quality rendered it unusable. Kotkin reports that “as of early 1937, the Magnitogorsk works had accumulated 6.5 million rubles’ worth of unusable pig iron and 9.7 million rubles’ worth of rejected rolled steel – all useless, except for when it came time to count and report total output.” Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*, 63-65.

<sup>93</sup> RGASPI f.85, o.29, d.119, l.246, 251.

<sup>94</sup> A. Mikoian, “V polose velikogo pod’ema” in *Pervoe vsesoiuznoe soveshchanie rabochikh i rabotnits stakhanovtsev*, 98; Gershberg, *Rabota u nas takaia*, 329-330.

<sup>95</sup> Ordzhonikidze, *Zadachi tiazheloi promyshlennosti*, 16-17.

above all, with actualizing the potential of the individual worker. Work was not to be a mechanical, apathetic process, as it was under capitalism, which degraded the worker to the status of a replaceable machine. Socialist work, instead, was to establish “human relations” with “the living person – the Stakhanovite.”<sup>96</sup> After all, technique without enthusiastic, loyal Soviet people employing this new knowledge – in Stalin’s expression – was “dead” technique.<sup>97</sup>

In order to cultivate such “human relations” with the new “species of heroes,” Ordzhonikidze visited factories and mines in person. From the accounts of workers, Ordzhonikidze not only exuded a “warm concern for our mine,” but also “knew and loved each Stakhanovite” on a personal basis.<sup>98</sup> Stakhanovites vouch that the Commissar was the “best friend of the Stakhanovites” and was “completely on our side.”<sup>99</sup> Two Stakhanovite drillers of Factory No.37 adduce, for example, that “[Ordzhonikidze] sincerely and attentively listened to us, persistently asking us what was hindering us from working even better...He knew that Makarova recently became a mother and that now she has a son. He asked about the child’s health. He remembered his promise to arrange for Slavnikova to study at the Industrial Academy and kept his word.”<sup>100</sup> A coal miner similarly attests that “in 1934 [when] I fell ill, Sergo took me to the Kremlin hospital. He gave orders to call my wife and ask her if she needed anything, and took care of my children. Sergo regularly called the hospital on the phone and asked about my health...”<sup>101</sup> The personal

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<sup>96</sup> GARF f.R5451, o.19, d.401, l.61. The theme of “living being” or “real person” recurs in characterizations of Stakhanovites, in contrast to their working-class predecessors who were treated, under capitalism, as “sub-human.” See for instance Demchenko, *Poliubi zemliu*, 34. The Soviet preoccupation with the “living person” is rooted in Marx’s aim to “make man a human being,” as he explains in his letter to Ruge in 1843. Man strives, according to Marx, to return, in particular, to his natural state as a “communist being.” P. Walton et al., “Image of Man in Marx,” 69.

<sup>97</sup> Stalin, *Sochineniia*, 14:61.

<sup>98</sup> A. Stakhanov, “Nezabyvaemye vstrechi” in *Narkom stakhanovtsev: stakhanovtsy strany o Sergo Ordzhonikidze* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe sotsial’no-ekonomicheskoe izdatel’stvo, 1937), 36; “Traurnye mitingi na predpriiatiakh,” in *Narkom stakhanovtsev*, 32.

<sup>99</sup> B. M. Pashkin, *Rabotat’ tak, kak uchil Sergo* (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo Narkomkhoza RSFSR, 1939), 28; Busygin, *Zhizn’ moia i moikh druzei*, 39.

<sup>100</sup> Nina Slavnikova and Mariia Makarova, “Klianemisia tvoim imenem,” in *Narkom Stakhanovtsev*, 28-29; RGASPI f.85, o.29, d.634, l.8.

<sup>101</sup> Nikita Izotov, “On umer na boevom pochtu,” in *Narkom Stakhanovtsev*, 30.

connection between the Stakhanovites and their patron, before long, were described in terms of familial relations, as Ordzhonikidze became “a real [*rodnoi*] father to us,” while the Stakhanovites, in turn, were “the sons of our beloved Sergo.”<sup>102</sup>

Both the words of Ordzhonikidze – in public speeches and in unpublished conference transcripts – and the memoirs of countless workers testify to the Commissar’s sincere belief in the revolutionary potential of the Soviet proletariat, and the Stakhanovites in particular, to create the New Soviet Man. It may be impossible to know conclusively Ordzhonikidze’s intentions in sponsoring the Stakhanovite movement, but evidence overwhelmingly suggests that he was genuinely committed to realizing the ideal Marxist-Leninist proletarian. Other considerations may, on the other hand, quite plausibly have accompanied this vision of the future communist worker in order to motivate Ordzhonikidze’s indefatigable sponsorship. Soviet industry, for one, remained painfully underdeveloped in comparison to many western capitalist countries; even if “numbers” were not Ordzhonikidze’s primary concern, higher production, in any case, was a welcome boon to the Soviet Union’s continued industrialization efforts. In addition, Soviet officials desperately needed to secure popular support for the regime and convert the 55% of citizens who rejected the state’s atheistic position to a more amenable, Marxist-Leninist paradigm.<sup>103</sup> Ordzhonikidze may also, more slyly, have been accumulating power in what one historian has termed his “immense semi-autonomous fiefdom in heavy industry.”<sup>104</sup> In juxtaposition with the simultaneously increasing cult of personality surrounding Stalin, Ordzhonikidze may have sought, as sponsor of the Stakhanovites, to consolidate his own coalition in the Party – one that he, undoubtedly, believed represented the true essence of the Soviet “proletarian dictatorship.”

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<sup>102</sup> A. Busygin, “Uezzhaia s zavoda na uchebu...” in *Stakhanovets* no.10 (1937): 11; Stakhanov, *Rasskaz*, 128.

<sup>103</sup> Riasnovsky, *A History of Russia*, 586.

<sup>104</sup> Kotkin, *Stalin: Waiting for Hitler, 1929-1941*, 550.

Ordzhonikidze's alliance of sponsors for the Stakhanovite movement included several other prominent Soviet officials. Andrei Zhdanov, the Communist Party manager of Leningrad, was, for one, recognized as an inspiration for Stakhanovites in the Leningrad region.<sup>105</sup> Lazar Kaganovich, the People's Commissar of Transport, was revered by Stakhanovites in the railroad and transportation industries as a patron saint. One machinist-Stakhanovite of the Slaviansk railway depot, Petr Krivonos, expressed that "I feel the strength, influence, and support of Comrade Kaganovich every day on the locomotive, on the road, at home, and it seems that he is always with me, that he follows my every achievement at work. This has even more increased my resolve and confidence at work."<sup>106</sup>

Party official Nikolai Shvernik also aided in the struggle to transform Stakhanovism into a mass ideological movement. As Chairman of Trade Unions in the Central Committee, Shvernik received missives from Stakhanovites announcing their records and voicing their requests, and in turn wrote letters to the directors of factories, demanding "cultured conditions" of labor to encourage Stakhanovite work.<sup>107</sup> Shvernik chaired meetings of the All-Union Central Soviet of Trade Unions, at which he testified to the capacity of workers to "perform miracles," agitated for increased propaganda coverage of the Stakhanovite movement, and affirmed that "the Stakhanovite movement requires the sharpest, most merciless self-criticism of all and any deficiencies."<sup>108</sup>

Finally, Georgy Pyatakov – Ordzhonikidze's "indispensable" Deputy Commissar of Heavy Industry known among foreign observers as the "brains of the People's Commissariat [of Heavy

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<sup>105</sup> GARF f. R5451, o.19, d.218, l.2ob, 3ob, 7.

<sup>106</sup> Petr Krivonos, *Moi metody raboty* (Khar'kov: Ukrains'kii robotnik, 1935), 68.

<sup>107</sup> GARF f.R5451, o.19, d.241; "Pis'mo sekretaria VTsSPS t. Shvernika vsem predsedateliyam fabrichno-zavodskikh i mestnykh komitetov, 22 dek. 1935" in *V nogu so stakhanovskim dvizheniem!* (Tashkent: Uzprofizdat, 1936), 3.

<sup>108</sup> GARF f. R5451, o.19, d.16, l.1; N. Shvernik, *Stakhanovskoe dvizhenie i zadachi professional'nykh soiuzov* (Moscow: Profizdat, 1935), 13, 25.

Industry]” – might be considered the second most crucial sponsor of Stakhanovism.<sup>109</sup> Pyatakov actively participated in Commissariat of Heavy Industry conferences, interjecting – like Ordzhonikidze – criticism and suggestions into the reports of workers, managers, and engineers. Pyatakov was also known to advise Stakhanovites personally. The first automobile mechanic-Stakhanovite Alexander Busygin was, for instance, received by Pyatakov, who – as *Pravda* reported – inquired into Busygin’s methodology and, noting Busygin’s complaint concerning the quality of steel from the “Red October” steel plant, immediately sped a letter to “Red October,” demanding improved quality of steel.<sup>110</sup> It was predicted in an article of the German newspaper *Frankfurter Zeitung* – eerily, as Part IV will discuss – that if Pyatakov were to lose his position, “it would be a loss for Soviet industry,” and consequently for the Stakhanovite movement, “not easily recovered.”<sup>111</sup>

The Stakhanovite movement, clearly, was born and developed on the initiative of various industrial sponsors and Party officials, spearheaded by Ordzhonikidze. The volume of conferences, telegrams, funding, and media attention that Ordzhonikidze managed to orchestrate for the Stakhanovite movement indicated grand projections – more ambitious than even the most astronomical production increases – for this “undeniably historical movement.”<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Fitzpatrick, *On Stalin’s Team: The Years of Living Dangerously in Soviet Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 78; RGASPI f.85, o.1S, d.167, l.3; Joel Carmichael, *Stalin’s Masterpiece: The Show Trials and Purges of the Thirties, the Consolidation of the Bolshevik Dictatorship* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1976); R.W. Davies and Oleg Khlevnyuk, “Stakhanovism and the Soviet Economy,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 54, no. 6 (2002): 879.

<sup>110</sup> “Tov. Busygin u zamestitelia narkoma tiazheloi promyshlennosti tov. Piatakova,” *Pravda*, 18 October 1935, p.3.

<sup>111</sup> RGASPI f.85, o.1S, d.167, l.3.

<sup>112</sup> *Stakhanovets*, no. 2 (1937): 2.

## Lenin's Legacy

Beyond the sphere of economics, the Stakhanovite movement was exalted by Ordzhonikidze and his team of “inspirators and organizers” to an ideological, if not religious, dimension. Shadows of the Commissar’s intentions shade his criticism of workers who reason, “we gave you the coal that your output plan demanded, so isn’t it all the same whether we do it like Stakhanov or not? [*budet eto po A. Stakhanovu ili po-Ivanovu – ne vse li ravno?*]” Ordzhonikidze illuminates the error in this interpretation, “No, comrades, it is not all the same. These attitudes are dangerous for the successful development of the Stakhanovite movement. These attitudes are anti-Stakhanovite attitudes. We need to wage decisive war against these attitudes.”<sup>113</sup> The correct attitude, if not a sense of duty to fulfill industrial quotas, was the awe and splendor that religion had once inspired; Stakhanovism was to be something sacred. Ordzhonikidze, for his part, insisted on describing the Stakhanovite movement in particularly religious vocabulary. One Stakhanovite was perplexed by Ordzhonikidze’s word choice: “Sergo for some reason especially stressed the word ‘miraculous’ [*chudesnyi*]. There seemed to be a special, new meaning in that strange word.”<sup>114</sup> Colored with the religious overtones of Ordzhonikidze’s word choice, the Stakhanovite movement soon acquired a sacred character, in an attempt to fill the “empty space” induced by anti-religious policy.

If the Stakhanovites were to be integrated into Soviet ideology, then it remained for them to establish a connection with the “divine” figures of Marxism-Leninism. The Marxist-Leninist civil paradigm centered around the cult of Lenin; it was, in this way, the Lenin cult that served as the foundation for the Stakhanovites’ own glorification. Both Party leaders such as Andrei Zhdanov and Stakhanovite workers including Stakhanov himself, moreover, referred to the sacred

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<sup>113</sup> S. Ordzhonikidze, “Po-stalinski borot’sia za protsventanie nashei rodiny,” *Stakhanovets* no. 15 (1936): 10.

<sup>114</sup> Gudov, *Put’ stakhanovtisa*, 34.

obligation to “realize the grand orders of Lenin” or “fulfill the precepts of Lenin,” explicitly christening the Stakhanovites as the ideological progeny of Lenin.<sup>115</sup>

Lenin, in particular, was the original hyper-productive worker, portrayed by his associates as a “workaholic” in managing the government, authoring articles, and developing socialist theory.<sup>116</sup> Many of Lenin’s ailments were, in fact, attributed to his hyper-productivity. Official ideology, in this way, magnified the devotion that Lenin was said to harbor for the Soviet people, for whom he labored endlessly and sacrificed even his health.<sup>117</sup> Although Lenin may have, in reality, taken sufficient time to rest and recover from work, “the assertion that Lenin never rested became part of the cult mythology” of Marxism-Leninism.<sup>118</sup> The trope of the hyper-productive worker that characterized the Lenin cult finally returned and resonated in Donbass miners’ achievements of 1935. In overfulfilling production norms dozens of times over, Stakhanovite labor was reminiscent of the incredible speed and quantity of Lenin’s work. The clear link between Lenin and the Stakhanovites thus reserved for the latter a vital position in the Soviet civil paradigm.

While productivity in general was elemental to the cult image of Lenin, it was innovative production in particular that distinguished Lenin – the inventor of Marxist-Leninist theory – from other Soviet leaders. According to Lenin, socialist labor would allow workers also to “develop their potential and find their talent” for creative endeavors.<sup>119</sup> Modelled on Lenin’s example,

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<sup>115</sup> Benvenuti, *Fuoco sui sabatatori!*, 158; Stakhanov, *Rasskaz*, 111.

<sup>116</sup> Tumarkin, *Lenin Lives!*, 41.

<sup>117</sup> Neurasthenia likely linked to complications from the assassination attempt Lenin suffered was, for instance, ascribed to “overwork,” while the sclerosis responsible for Lenin’s death attacked the leader’s brain, said to have become vulnerable from years of exertion and strain. The Commissar of Health Nikolai Semashko interpreted Lenin’s autopsy to reveal the “superhuman mental activity, life of constant agitation, and ceaseless anxiety [that eventually] brought our leader to untimely death.” Tumarkin, *Lenin Lives!*, 112, 172.

<sup>118</sup> Tumarkin, *Lenin Lives!*, 172.

<sup>119</sup> V. I. Lenin “Kak organizovat’ sorevnovanie,” in V. I. Lenin, *K voprosu o sotsialisticheskom sorevnovanii: tri stat’i* (Moscow-Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel’stvo, 1930), 8.

Stakhanovites were expected to be similarly innovative.<sup>120</sup> Ordzhonikidze, who “deeply believed [*gluboko verit*] in the creativity of the masses,” insisted that the Stakhanovites were not merely to work perfunctorily, but rather to be the vanguard of new improvements in their field, daring to propose unprecedented arrangements and procedures. The Stakhanovites were thus branded “people of a creative type,” whose technological discoveries and methodological improvements were advertised, for instance in the *Stakhanovets* journal [see below article in *Stakhanovets*].<sup>121</sup> Personifying both the hyper-productive and creative potential of socialist labor, the Stakhanovites thus became, in the words of one *Pravda* journalist, “one of the clearest proofs of Lenin’s prescience [*predvidenie*].”<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> According to the director of Glavstankoinstrument (Glavnoe upravlenie stankostroitel’noi i instrumental’noi promyshlennosti), V. T. Lapin, a worker deserved the title “Stakhanovite” only if he had invented new technical devices or methodology. Benvenuti, *Fuoco sui sabatatori!*, 192.

<sup>121</sup> P. P. Postyshev, “Rech’ na slete stakhanovtsev Kieva” in *Stakhanovskoe dvizhenie*, 7. See also Busygin, *Sversheniia*, 192; Friedrich, *Miss U.S.S.R.*, 1. One Stakhanovite driller, Illarion Yankin, describes, at a conference of the People’s Commissariat of the Non-Ferrous Metals Industry, his proposal of “new technique” that he and a fellow Stakhanovite had developed. “So here’s what I suggest,” begins Yankin, “suppose we try using more than one drill at a time...Semivolos [another Stakhanovite] works with a hand drill, and we use telescope feed drills, TP-2’s, which work automatically in vertical drilling. In other words, if I start two drills at the first face and have another two ready at the second and as many at the third, I can take care of a lot.” Illarion Yankin, *Notes of a Stakhanovite*, 29-30.

<sup>122</sup> Gershberg, *Stakhanov i stakhanovtsy*, 207.



# От рекордов одиночек К СТАХАНОВСКИМ СМЕНАМ, ЦЕХАМ и ЗАВОДАМ

**Фрезеровщик т. Волков**  
Завод «Красный Октябрь», Ленинград

Фрезеровщик т. Волков продумал способы рационализации своего участка по фрезеровке спиралей тонких и длинных сверл.

Ввиду значительной длины и малого диаметра сверла фрезеровка спирали производилась с весьма малой подачей, вследствие чего выпуск продукции на данной операции не превышал 6—7 сверл в смену.

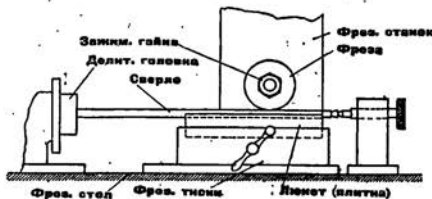
После некоторых опытных работ т. Волкову удалось сконструировать специальный люнет, с применением которого производительность станка резко повысилась и прежние нормы были перевыполнены более чем на 300 проц.

Люнет этот весьма несложной конструкции, состоит из металлической планки длиной 150 мм, вдоль которой посредине профрезерована полукруглая канавка, соответствующая диаметру фрезеруемого сверла (возможно также применение и призматической канавки).

Пользование указанным люнетом весьма несложно и заключается в следующем.

Сверло, предназначенное для фрезеровки спиралей, устанавливается общеизвестным методом, т. е. один конец его укрепляется в делительной головке или в специальном приспособлении, а другой конец поддерживается центром.

Под сверло устанавливаются и закрепляются нормальные фрезерные тиски, в которых в свою очередь закрепляется люнет, так чтобы сверло по всей



своей длине плотно лежало в канавке люнета (см. рисунок), чем предотвращается изгиб сверла при фрезеровании. Это приспособление дало возможность т. Волкову применить при обработке тонких сверл повышенную подачу, допускавшуюся ранее лишь при фрезеровке спиралей толстых сверл. Выпуск тонких сверл возрос до 30—32 штук в смену при незначительных затратах на изготовление специального люнета (опорной планки)

**Револьверщик т. Андреев**  
Завод «Электроаппарат», Ленинград

Рабочий-стахановец автоматнo-револьверного цеха револьверщик т. Андреев, работающий на станке «Питтлер», резко повысил свою производительность труда за счет установления новых, повышенных режимов резания и коренного пересмотра технологического процесса. Так, технологический процесс на об-

работку железного буфера (рис. 1), изготовляющегося из прутка диаметром 45 мм, т. Андреев пересмотрел следующим образом. Приводим сравнительные данные, характеризующие технологический процесс, как он выглядел до и после изменения его т. Андреевым.

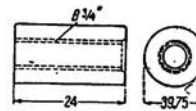


Рис. 1

*Технологический процесс, разработанный т. Андреевым*

1. В комбинированной оправке (рис. 2) одновременно сверлить под резьбу, проточить диаметр 39,75 мм и снять фаску.

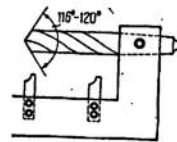


Рис. 2

- Процесс по технологической карте*
1. Центровать.
  2. Проточить диаметр 39,5 мм.
  3. Сверлить диаметр 16,5 мм под резьбу.
  4. Подрезать торец и закруглить.
  5. Отрезать.

2. Снять внутреннюю фаску (внутреннюю фаску т. Андреев снимает при выводе сверла из отверстия сдвиганием вбок).

3. Отрезать деталь при небольшой подаче.

Режим резания по норме при проточке и сверловке:  
Число оборотов шпинделя —  $n = 275$  об/мин  
и подача —  $s = 0,2$  мм/об.

Режим резания, применяемый т. Андреевым:

$n = 480$  об/мин,  
 $s = 0,87$  мм/об.

При отрезке подача у т. Андреева равна 0,006 мм/об и осуществляется автоматически, в то время как по норме подача должна производиться вручную.

В результате у т. Андреева фактическое время изготовления составляет 1,59 против 3 минут по норме.

На другой детали — железной соединительной муфте (рис. 3) — т. Андреев также изменил и режим резания и технологический процесс.

Вместо американского патрона он применяет специальный патрон с зажимными губками.



Рис. 3

The article begins, "Milling machine operator Volkov invented a way to optimize his method of milling with spirals of thin and long drills..."

<sup>123</sup>Volkov, "Ot rekordov odinochek k stakhanovskim smenam, tsekham i zavodam," *Stakhanovets* no.1 (1936): 26.

Besides Lenin's hyper-productive persona, the Stakhanovites were afflicted with the same "glorification of the individual" that Lenin had bemoaned had come to characterize his cult.<sup>124</sup> Besides inescapable references to Lenin's political theory, Lenin's image was everywhere; in a setting of communally-oriented ideals, this "glorification of the individual" was conspicuous. While portraits and photographs of Lenin adorned "Lenin Corners" that had patently come to replace the "icon corners" of past religious centuries, Stakhanov's image was likewise hung to inspire younger generations of coal miners. The "exaltation of the productive initiative of a single worker" thus resurfaced anew in the Stakhanovite movement, although the Stakhanovites, like Lenin, remained rhetorically "the first among equals," who aimed to uplift all of Soviet society to their glorified status.<sup>125</sup>



"We are preparing for labor achievements on the front of socialist construction!"

O. Eigeo, "Podgotovimsia dlia trudovykh podvigo na fronte sotsialisticheskogo stroitel'stva!" Leninizdat: Leningrad, 1967, Poster.

<sup>124</sup> Benvenuti, *Fuoco sui sabatatori!*, 254. Lenin was repelled by the "glorification of the individual" and the attempts at "god-building" by his comrades. Confronted with the seeds of his own cult, Lenin reacted with distaste, "It is shameful to read...They exaggerate everything, call me a genius, some kind of special person...All our lives we have waged an ideological struggle against the glorification of the personality, of the individual; long ago we have settled the problem of heroes. And suddenly here again is a glorification of the individual!" Tumarkin, *Lenin Lives!*, 90. In the end, however, it was Lenin's image that became the frontispiece of the Marxism-Leninism civil paradigm. Although unintentionally, Lenin may have contributed to his own "glorification." Lenin understood that Soviet workers, in the years immediately following the Bolshevik Revolution, remained undeveloped and unprepared to bear the revolutionary role that Marx prescribed for them. Lenin thus settled "Lefort's Paradox" (see note 17) by identifying the Soviet state as the "master" directing the people to "higher, revolutionary truth"; he admitted that "a special apparatus, a special machine for suppression [of capitalists], the 'state,' is still necessary" in the transition period from capitalism to communism. V. I. Lenin, "The Economic Basis of the Withering Away of the State," Marxists Internet Archive. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/staterev/ch05.htm>. At the same time, Lenin identified himself with the state and was, in the words of one historian, "unable to separate himself from his creations, the party and the government." Tumarkin, *Lenin Lives*, 60. If the state and the Party directing it were to guide the Soviet Union to their promised "salvation on earth," and Lenin imagined himself to be synonymous with the state, it is only natural that the cult of Lenin became the heart of the Soviet civil paradigm.

<sup>125</sup> In explaining the difference between her rise to the status of a Soviet hero and the rise of an English peasant to the status of a lord, Pasha Angelina distinguishes, "the main [difference]...is that my rise is not an exception. If that lord

The Lenin cult, furthermore, employed the language of Russian folklore, and especially references to the *bogatyry* heroes of cultural myths. The All-Russian Agricultural and Domestic-Industrial Exhibition, for instance, described, “above beautifully arranged palms and a sea of harmoniously collected flowers is the portrait of a *bogatyry*’ woven from thousands of living plants. This is Comrade Lenin.”<sup>126</sup> This same vocabulary of Russian folk heroes was passed on to the Stakhanovites. As historian Lewis Seigelbaum explains, “the earliest characterization of Stakhanov was that of *bogatyry*’. Defenders of the faith, heroes of the people, and symbolic of all that was noble and good, the *bogatyry* of Kievan Rus’ were transplanted, in the rhetoric of the times, to the more mundane reality of the Soviet factory.”<sup>127</sup> Ordzhonikidze, in his turn, capitalized on the magnificence that Russian folk traditions evoked, ostentatiously “referring to the Stakhanovites as Soviet *bogatyry*.”<sup>128</sup> As hyper-productive, innovative workers whose glorification as individuals was couched in terms of Russian folk traditions, the Stakhanovites clearly inherited Lenin’s ideological legacy.

### Marx’s Prophecy

The roots of the Stakhanovite movement in the Marxist-Leninist paradigm reached even deeper than Lenin’s iconic example; the Stakhanovites purportedly manifested precisely the ideal, future man that Marx had envisioned. In Marxist theory, the progress of history was determined by rational, scientific laws; the era of capitalism, in particular, was destined to crumble and give

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– as it is fairly stated in the journal – “rose from the people” to the status of a lord, then I rose together with the people. That is the main [difference].” P. Angelina, *O samom glavnom*, 5. Many historians, however, interpret the “glorification of the individual” that came to characterize the Stakhanovite movement as a retreat from Soviet collectively-oriented values. See for instance Nicholas S. Timasheff, *The Great Retreat*, 136.

<sup>126</sup> Tumarkin, *Lenin Lives!*, 126.

<sup>127</sup> Siegelbaum, *Stakhanovism*, 148-149.

<sup>128</sup> Stakhanov, *Rasskaz*, 57.

way to socialism, followed by the final triumph of communism.<sup>129</sup> Following Marx's trajectory, the Soviet Union in 1934 was declared to have escaped the capitalist cycle of exploitation and breached the socialist era.<sup>130</sup> One year later, the Stakhanovite movement not only proved the decisive victory of socialism in the Soviet Union, but also marked the threshold between socialism and communism, initiating the ascent to Marx's final stage of historical progress.<sup>131</sup>

Concretely, the Stakhanovites actualized Marx's prescriptions that the communist man of the future was to be both a manual laborer and a scientist.<sup>132</sup> Stakhanovite labor, it was proclaimed, was "a combination of manual and mental work," fulfilling Marx's prediction that "the contradictions between intellectual and physical labor will disappear" with the coming of the communist social order.<sup>133</sup> Labor was, in other words, to be a "fusion of body and mind."<sup>134</sup> As simple manual laborers who had risen to an admirable level of technical expertise, the Stakhanovites embodied the communist slogan that "every worker in the Soviet Union has the full opportunity to acquire an education and training equal to that of a technician or an engineer."<sup>135</sup> In

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<sup>129</sup> History, according to Marx, develops along a predictable trajectory; the division of labor and the alienation of man from nature is said to be "anthropologically necessary." P. Walton, "Image of Man in Marx," 74; Marx, "The German Ideology" in Tucker, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 162. Marx theorizes that the bourgeoisie necessarily develop the means of production, which create a proletarian class that will, eventually and inevitably, cause the demise of the bourgeoisie. Friedrich Engels and Karl Marx, "Manifesto of the Communist Party" in Tucker, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 478, 483.

<sup>130</sup> David L. Hoffmann, *Stalinist Values: The Cultural Norms of Soviet Modernity, 1917-1941* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 4.

<sup>131</sup> Zhdanov, *Itogi dekabrskogo plenuma TsK VKP(b)*, 5; I. V. Stalin, "Rech' na pervom vsesoiuznom soveshchanii stakhanovtsev" in *Pervoe vsesoiuznoe soveshchanie rabochikh i robotnits stakhanovtsev*, 7; Benvenuti, *Fuoco sui sabatatori!*, 209.

<sup>132</sup> In Marx's projections, the communist worker was to gain conscious control of both material and intellectual production. Marx, "The German Ideology" in Tucker, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 164. In contrast, the division of labor that characterized capitalist economies was said to separate intelligence from physical labor. Walton, "Image of Man in Marx," 75.

<sup>133</sup> Alexei Stakhanov, *The Stakhanov Movement Explained by Its Initiator Alexei Stakhanov* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1939), 30; K. Marks and F. Engel's, *Kritika gotskoi programmy*, (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1960), 20. See also Ordzhonikidze, "Po-stalinski borot'sia za protsventanie nashei rodiny," 5.

<sup>134</sup> Jochen Hellbeck, *Laboratories of the Soviet Self: Diaries from the Stalin Era* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 84.

<sup>135</sup> P. Angelina, *O samom glavnom*, 31; N. Smetanin, *Who Directs Soviet Industry* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1939). See also Stakhanov, *The Stakhanov Movement*, 30. Stakhanovites discuss their opportunities to receive an engineer's education, for example in Friedrich, *Miss U.S.S.R.*, 21-22; P. N. Angelina and V. M.

order to become the hyper-productive innovators of Lenin's precedent, it was not only possible but necessary for the Stakhanovites to advance their technical knowledge and become "professors of their trades."<sup>136</sup> The Marxist-Leninist paradigm, moreover, required that precisely manual laborers "bloom into intellectuals."<sup>137</sup> According to Marx, the material and intellectual realms were not antithetical, independent, or even qualitatively distinct; consciousness was determined by material experience, and especially by labor.<sup>138</sup> As Soviet theoretician Anatoly Lunacharsky explained, physical and intellectual being were various stages of the same phenomenon; consciousness consisted specifically of "organized labor experience."<sup>139</sup> In this theory, the rich labor experience of manual workers such as the Stakhanovites, who daily occupied themselves with industrial technology, uniquely qualified them to serve in the scientific vanguard of their industries.<sup>140</sup>

The Stakhanovite movement also seemed to manifest another of Marx's projections – that the laborer under communism would work "for himself" rather than for an external authority.<sup>141</sup> A Stakhanovite was said to "work not for a master, but for himself, for his own country," in contrast to his western counterparts in capitalist countries.<sup>142</sup> The coal-mining, textile-weaving, or beet-

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Bakholdina, *Zhenshchina na traktore* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo kolkhoznai i sovkhoznoi literatury 'Sel'khozgiz,' 1935), 15.

<sup>136</sup> K. E. Voroshilov, "Za moshchnoe stakhanovskoe dvizhenie v strane i Krasnoi armii" in *Pervoe vsesoiuznoe soveshchanie rabochikh i robotnits – stakhanovtsev*, 76.

<sup>137</sup> Dusia Vinogradova, *Tekstik'shchiki*, 9; Molotov, "O stakhanovskom dvizhenii i kul'turnosti rabocheho klassa" in *Pervoe vsesoiuznoe soveshchanie rabochikh i robotnits stakhanovtsev*, 36, 76.

<sup>138</sup> Marx, "The German Ideology" in Tucker, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 155.

<sup>139</sup> A. Lunacharskii, *Religiia i Sotsializm*, vol. 2, 334.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 346.

<sup>141</sup> The worker, through labor, was to achieve "self-fulfillment"; he was an end in himself, rather than a means of production. Walton, "Image of Man in Marx," 77; Karl Marx, "Wage Labor and Capital" in Tucker, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 204. Subjected to the exploitation of capitalism, on the other hand, the worker was "robbed thus of all real life-content [and became] abstract individuals," instead of human beings. Marx, "The German Ideology," in Tucker, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 191.

<sup>142</sup> Gudov, *Put' stakhanovtsta*, 123. See also Stakhanov, *The Stakhanov Movement Explained by Its Initiator Alexei Stakhanov*, 20; Friedrich, *Miss U.S.S.R.*, 15; Izotov, *Moia zhizn', moia rabota*, 42; Demchenko, *Kak poluchit' ne menee 500 tsentnerov sakharnoi svekly s gektara* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo kolkhoznai i sovkhoznoi literatury "Selkhozgiz," 1936), 6; Stalin, "Rech'" in *Pervoe vsesoiuznoe soveshchanie rabochikh i robotnits stakhanovtsev*, 13.

farming Stakhanovite workers themselves, rather than their managers or supervisors, were heroized, showered with credit, adulation, and material rewards for their labor achievements.<sup>143</sup>

By living in a collective of similarly productive innovators and intellectuals, the communist man of the future was moreover to enjoy both material and psychological prosperity.<sup>144</sup> Confirming Marx's prophecy that individual happiness would finally be attained with the "correct" relation of the proletariat to his work – "for himself," instead of for the benefit of a capitalist manager – the Stakhanovites, in Soviet ideology, were able to discover happiness.<sup>145</sup> One worker, contrasting his current position as a Stakhanovite automobile mechanic with a dismal past outside of Soviet purview, learned that "physical labor at the factory can be delightful, creative, and not just a means to make a living."<sup>146</sup> If – as celebratory beet farmer Maria Demchenko asserts – socialist "labor was the highest happiness," then "there was no greater happiness, than to be on the Stakhanovite path."<sup>147</sup> Not only, then, did Stakhanovite labor mirror the conditions that Marx had envisioned, but these worker-intellectuals were said to have tasted the rewards that Marx had presaged.

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<sup>143</sup> Stakhanovites were individually rewarded with apartments, automobiles, furniture, bicycles, rifles, etc., while collectives might receive radios, telephones, movie theaters, clubs, schools, etc. For a discussion of material rewards, see for instance, Sheila Fitzpatrick and Yuri Slezkine, eds., *In the Shadow of Revolution: Life Stories of Russian Women from 1917 to the Second World War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 331-340, 359-364.

<sup>144</sup> Marx proposed that man is a social being; only in a community can he properly cultivate himself. Marx therefore envisions that communism will generate a genuine community, as opposed to an imagined state that alienates its members. Marx, "The German Ideology" in Tucker, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 197-198.

<sup>145</sup> Marx, "The German Ideology," in Tucker, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 192.

<sup>146</sup> A. Busygin, *Sversheniia* (Moscow: Profizdat, 1972), 192.

<sup>147</sup> Mariia Demchenko, *Kak poluchit' ne menee 500 tsentnerov sakharnoi svekly s gektara*, 86; Gudov, *Put' stakhanovtisa*, 41; See also Petr Krivonos, *Moi metody raboty*, 66.

The Stakhanovite movement appeared entirely “foreseen, foretold, and prepared by Marx.”<sup>148</sup> In so far as the experience of the Stakhanovites seemed to align with Marx’s prescience, the hyper-productive ideological progeny of Lenin were redefined to be the true Marxists; as the *Stakhanovets* journal asseverated, “a communist cannot fail to be a Stakhanovite.”<sup>149</sup> Stakhanovism, in this regard, shone as a promising vehicle to expand faith in the Marxist-Leninist civil paradigm. It ultimately rested, however, on the Party elite to transform Stakhanovism from “a movement of a couple of record-breakers to the beginning of a powerful movement of the entire Soviet people.”<sup>150</sup> Only through continued sponsorship from the Party could hyper-productivity acquire the mass dimensions of a popular religion and supplant attachment to traditional beliefs.

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<sup>148</sup> D. Zaslavskii, “Chudesa nashei strany,” *Stakhanovets* no. 1 (1936): 6.

<sup>149</sup> A. Agranovskii, “Kommunist – stakhanovets,” *Stakhanovets* no.1 (1936): 10.

<sup>150</sup> P. P. Postyshev, “Rech’ na slete stakhanovtsev Kieva” in *Stakhanovskoe dvizhenie*, 3. Accepting the responsibility to fan the flames of “recordmania,” one Party official recognized, “everything depends on correct leadership and organization of the Stakhanovite movement. Everything now depends on us to realize the grandest successes of this movement in the shortest time possible.” A. Andreev, *Stakhanovskoe dvizhenie i nashi zadachi* (Moscow: Partizdat, 1936), 31.

### Part III

#### Echoes of Orthodoxy: Stakhanovite Records in the Eternal Approach of Bolshevik Virtue

In the struggle to sacralize the Stakhanovite movement, Ordzhonikidze – “the best friend of the Stakhanovites” – sponsored autobiographies of the leading Stakhanovite workers. According to one reporter’s memoir, Ordzhonikidze approached a team of *Pravda* journalists, entreating the newspaper crew to help Stakhanov and his followers write their biographies, which were to be like “fairy tales [*skazki*] of the socialist epoch.”<sup>151</sup> The achievements of the Stakhanovites, in Ordzhonikidze’s projections, would not only be popularized for contemporary society, but immortalized for all of history.<sup>152</sup> “We are all mortal, even Stakhanov,” ruminated Ordzhonikidze. “But if we publish books about such people as Stakhanov, Busygin, Gudov, the Vinogradovas, we will immortalize [*my naveki obessmertim*] the achievements of the Soviet working class forever.”<sup>153</sup>

The ideal experience of a devout Stakhanovite, however, perpetuated not only the legacy of Lenin and Marx, but also incorporated other sacred traditions that were foreign to the Marxist-Leninist paradigm. In part, the vocabulary, themes, and references shrouding the Stakhanovite movement were framed by Russian folk traditions. The group of workers awarded with national-heroic status came to be known as the “Stakhanovite tribe” [*plemia stakhanovtsev*], distinguished

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<sup>151</sup> Gershberg, *Stakhanov i stakhanovtsy*, 4.

<sup>152</sup> The adjective “immortal” [*bessmerten*] was gaining popularity in Soviet rhetoric. In a speech at a reception of metallurgy and coal mining workers in 1937, for instance, Stalin famously declared that “leaders come and go, but the people remain. Only the people are immortal. The rest is fleeting.” Stalin, “Rech’ na prieme rukovodiashchikh rabotnikov i stakhanovtsev metallurgicheskoi i ugol’noi promyshlennosti rukovoditeliami partii i pravitel’sтва, 29 oktiabria 1937 g.” in *Sochineniia*, 14:254. As historian Yuri Slezkine discerns of Soviet ideology, “the key to true immortality is faith in the coming of Communism.” In return for their unswerving faith in the Marxist-Leninist paradigm, in this way, the Stakhanovites were rewarded with immortality. Slezkine, *The House of Government*, 636.

<sup>153</sup> Gershberg, *Stakhanov i stakhanovtsy*, 4-5.



by their acquired “blood relationship” to their “fathers” Stalin and Ordzhonikidze.<sup>154</sup> Even more strikingly, however, the Stakhanovite experience was patterned on Russia’s Orthodox Christian tradition. Familiar Christian themes – including conversion, catechism, proselytism, judgment, baptism, and perpetual demonstrations of faith – abounded in references to the Stakhanovite movement.

The official Stakhanovite “hagiographies” sponsored by Ordzhonikidze thus appealed to the sense of sublimity contained in Orthodox vocabulary, which would have been familiar to many workers from their childhoods. Although it may not be possible to discern whether Stakhanovites believed or rejected the Marxist-Leninist faith reflected in their party-sponsored biographies, the following chapter attempts instead to understand the ideal experience of a devout Stakhanovite as it was imagined, designed, and projected by Party officials. These autobiographies – “monuments of the completed self,” in the words of one historian – were testaments of common workers who had risen to the status of national heroes, offering an imitable template of “correct” belief.<sup>155</sup>

## Conversion

“My life started here, in the mines,” declared Stakhanov, delimiting a radical conversion from his benighted, rural past to the brilliant, industrial present.<sup>156</sup> All members of the “Stakhanovite tribe,” in fact, shared the experience of conversion. One could not be born a hyper-productive Stakhanovite worker any more than one could be born a Marxist-Leninist. Tradition, after all, was anathema to Marx, who insisted that each proletarian must develop his own

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<sup>154</sup>V.S. Bogushevskii, ed., *Stalinskoe plemia stakhanovtsev* (Moscow-Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo izobrazitel'nykh isskustv, 1936); Siegelbaum, *Stakhanovism*, 150.

<sup>155</sup> Hellbeck, *Laboratories of the Soviet Self*, 126.

<sup>156</sup> Aleksei Stakhanov, *Moi metod* (Moscow: Partizdat TsK VKP(b), 1935), 10.

consciousness. Stakhanovite status, like Bolshevik faith, was necessarily acquired, and never inherited.<sup>157</sup>

Induction into the Orthodox religion, in comparison, most commonly involved baptism nine days after birth.<sup>158</sup> The concept of “conversion” [*obrashchenie*] was, however, familiar as the “passage of one faith to another.”<sup>159</sup> If, as historian Victoria Smolkin suggests, Soviet ideology was a mutually exclusive alternative to traditional religion, then Marxism-Leninism required precisely a conversion from a former Christian worldview.<sup>160</sup> Conversion to Marxism-Leninism, while departing from Orthodox theology, sought to preserve the association of joy with baptism and alternative receptions into the Orthodox faith.

Historians have observed, in a general context, that conversion was a prominent motif in Soviet speeches, autobiographies, and diaries. Yuri Slezkine, for one, discerns that “the key moment and the structural center in all Soviet darkness-to-light life stories is the moment of final and more or less sudden illumination through conversion.”<sup>161</sup> This moment – in which the subject realizes his commitment to the communist ideal – sharply divides his existence into a “old life” and a “new life.” To historian Jochen Hellbeck, the Soviet trope of awakening to Bolshevism – often celebrated in formal admission to the Communist Party – clearly parallels the Christian idea of rebirth.<sup>162</sup>

The most stimulating environment for rebirth in the religion of labor was, naturally, the workplace. Workers identified with their shop, and often spoke of their “native [*rodnoi*] factory”

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<sup>157</sup> Yuri Slezkine describes the Bolsheviks as a sect rather than a church, as membership in the Party was determined by voluntary association instead of by birth. Slezkine, *The House of Government*, 93.

<sup>158</sup> Doris Bradbury, *The Russian Orthodox Church* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1982), 70.

<sup>159</sup> V. M. Voskoboinikov, *Entsiklopedicheskii pravoslavnyi slovar'* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo "Eksmo," 2007), 383.

<sup>160</sup> Smolkin, *A Sacred Space is Never Empty*, 43.

<sup>161</sup> Sheila Fitzpatrick and Yuri Slezkine, eds., *In the Shadow of Revolution: Life Stories of Russian Women from 1917 to the Second World War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 23.

<sup>162</sup> Hellbeck, *Revolution on My Mind*, 311.

as a kind of “birthplace.”<sup>163</sup> The forge was said to cast Bolshevik identity as well as metal, sparking the “metamorphosis” of the self to a pristine “diamond,” through the “heat” of self-analysis and the “pressure” of the competitive proletarian atmosphere.<sup>164</sup> For many Stakhanovites, who initially hailed from the village, conversion to Marxism-Leninism began with an induction into the working class. Conversion, almost necessarily, occurred in factories and mines – temples of the proletarian spirit.

One Stakhanovite metalworker, Ivan Gudov, states plainly, “I was born a second time” at the workbench.<sup>165</sup> In his autobiography, Gudov recalls his first encounter with large-scale industry, as a teenager, which changed the direction of his life forever. Marveling at the Sobinskaia Textile Factory, in which he “saw a new life, here where people live with a wide range of interests,” Gudov resolved never again to return to the countryside.<sup>166</sup> The day of Gudov’s arrival at his future

“birthplace” – the Ordzhonikidze Factory in Moscow, where he established his milling machine records – was indelible in the worker’s memory: “On a hot summer day, not yet August 1934, I arrived at the factory...now the moment had come, where I needed to choose my trade, where I needed to define, once



“Ivan Gudov produces 9050% of the norm!”  
L. Zil’bershtein, “9050% normy daet Ivan Gudov,” 1939, Poster.

<sup>163</sup> Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*, 218.

<sup>164</sup> Hellbeck, *Revolution on My Mind*, 234.

<sup>165</sup> Gudov, *Put’ stakhanovtisa*, 46.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

and for all, my place in life.”<sup>167</sup> Liberated from his old, “backwards” life, Gudov became firmly convinced of the Marxist view that “if you work honestly and remain loyal to your country...a new world will open before your eyes.”<sup>168</sup>

Alexander Busygin – the first Stakhanovite to emerge in the automobile industry – had, similar to Gudov, never left the countryside before he turned twenty-two.<sup>169</sup> Busygin, from a family of fourteen, remembers “from childhood one feeling only – the feeling of hunger,” and was eager to leave the arduous conditions of his hometown.<sup>170</sup> When the kolkhoz project in Busygin’s village failed, “news that a giant factory in Gorky was being constructed” gleamed alluringly, calling the future Stakhanovite forward. In a leap of faith, Busygin deserted the countryside to welcome his rebirth, determined to “give happiness a try.”<sup>171</sup> For Busygin, joining the proletariat separated his former life of poverty, outside the purview of Soviet control, from new prospects for the future, reified by the development of Soviet industry and its undergirding worker-oriented ideology. Vouching that “I will never forget my first days on the construction site,” Busygin continued, years later, to hold dear his initial conversion to the Soviet proletariat.<sup>172</sup>

Not all Stakhanovites were as quick to abandon their old rural life for a new industrial one. Some, like the Orthodox saint Augustine, wavered in approaching their ultimate epiphany. Stakhanov himself, for instance, confessed that “it was difficult to tear myself away from the countryside.”<sup>173</sup> Born into a poor family, Stakhanov was sent to work for a landowning peasant when he was nine years old, but was never able to accumulate the means to buy decent clothes or

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<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>169</sup> Busygin, *Zhizn’ moia i moikh družei*, 11.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>173</sup> Stakhanov, *Rasskaz*, 14.

even sew a pair of shoes.<sup>174</sup> In spite of these onerous living conditions, Stakhanov remained attached to the village he had never left, hesitating to depart from his relatives. In the end, Stakhanov's conversion upon entering the Central-Irmino mine in the Donbass proved, nonetheless, as total as those of the less tentative converts. "On the second day, descending into the mine, I already felt at home [*uzhe byl svoim chelovekom*]," confirmed Stakhanov, expressing an immediate sense of belonging to the working class – and the Soviet "proletarian dictatorship" – into which he had been initiated.<sup>175</sup>

Further Christian motifs, such as baptism and judgment, appended other workers' conversion to industrial labor. Nikita Izotov - the hero of the forerunner Izotovite movement to Stakhanovism, whose eventual 640 ton record towered above Stakhanov's initial 102 tons of coal – referred to his first shift at the mine as his "baptism" [*kreshcheniia*].<sup>176</sup> Weaver Stakhanovite "Miss U.S.S.R." Dusya Vinogradova, on the other hand, described a fateful judgment – as if awaiting the verdict of Saint Peter – at the moment of her conversion. In her autobiography, Vinogradova narrates her first visit to a textile factory in the third grade. When the teachers proceed to sort the students into trades, Vinogradova, intent on becoming a weaver, realized that her fate as a Soviet worker was being decided. "After our examinations, they began the selection – some [students] were sent to the spinners, others to the weavers – I was incredibly anxious... My cheeks even burned with agitation when the head administrator picked up the list..."<sup>177</sup> The final decision that Vinogradova should enroll in the weavers' course was, sanctified by higher judgment, all the more euphoric. Vinogradova, already an enthusiast of her new profession, could not contain her

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<sup>174</sup> Ibid., 11-14.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>176</sup> Gershberg, *Rabota u nas takaia*, 328; Nikita Izotov, *Moia zhizn', moia rabota* (Khar'kov: Ukrain'skii robitnik, 1934), 45.

<sup>177</sup> Dusya Vinogradova, *Tekstil'shchiki*, 6.

happiness, “rushed home in high spirits to tell her mother about her [future] work” and, according to her autobiography, remained forevermore loyal to the Soviet order.<sup>178</sup>

The conversion experience, moreover, was not limited to the first instances of exposure to one’s trade. Stakhanovites also describe conversion-like transformations upon establishing each of their successive records. Conversion, in this way, was not a single occurrence, but – as Slezkine suggests of Soviet conversions in general – an experience that can and “must be staged over and over again.”<sup>179</sup> Success in production validated the Stakhanovites’ original rebirth, as the “new world” of industrial potential recurringly unfurled “before their eyes.” Nikolai Smetanin – the shoemaker Stakhanovite who produced 1400 pairs of shoes in a single shift – describes the day of his first record as “a historic day in my life,” demarking an irreversible departure from standard to extraordinary production.<sup>180</sup> Dusya Vinogradova similarly reports the magical atmosphere of the shift in which she first attended simultaneously to 216 Northrop electric looms. Along with her “sister in labor” Maria Vinogradova, Dusya sent a celebration telegram to Stalin “that we had kept our promise, which we gave him at the Stakhanovite conference in Moscow. This was one of the happiest days of my life. My long-standing dream had come true.”<sup>181</sup> By reliving their initial conversion, the Stakhanovites continued to sharpen the political faith that they had adopted.

### **Catechism**

One prerequisite for “correct” faith in Marxism-Leninism was adequate study; each new devotee to the religion of labor was required to master both technology and Party catechism. Catechism – defined in the Orthodox context as “clarification of the basis positions in the Christian

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<sup>178</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>179</sup> Yuri Slezkine, “Lives as Tales,” in Fitzpatrick and Slezkine, *In the Shadow of Revolution*, 24.

<sup>180</sup> N. Smetanin, *Who Directs Soviet Industry* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1939), 21.

<sup>181</sup> Gershberg, *Rabota u nas takaia*, 354; Vinogradova, *Tekstil'shchiki*, 13.

creed” – was a familiar concept to believers in the pre-Soviet era.<sup>182</sup> At least in theory, it was obligatory for Christians to read Scripture and the works of Church fathers, or at least to understand the content of their beliefs.<sup>183</sup> Marxism-Leninism, despite its anti-Christian position, developed its own catechism of beliefs. On occasion, invocations of “catechism” were explicit; one pamphlet circulated by the Party before the Revolution of 1917, for instance, was entitled “Worker’s Catechism” [*Katekhizis rabochago*].<sup>184</sup> While references to “catechism” were usually more obscure, the principle remained: Soviet citizens – and especially the devout Stakhanovites – were obliged to study Marxism-Leninism, without which they would not become fully “conscious” of their faith.<sup>185</sup>

Study had, in fact, long been sacred in Soviet ideology, since studiousness was a central element in the cult image of Lenin.<sup>186</sup> Lenin Corners – replacing the icon corners of the past – proliferated in museums, libraries, workers’ clubs, and schools, intending to “inspire children to study hard (as did little Volodia Ulianov).”<sup>187</sup> Beyond the academic environment, Lenin also encouraged study in more practical spheres, including political organization and labor development. Study, Lenin maintained, was the critical mechanism which alone enabled

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<sup>182</sup> Voskoboinikov, *Entsiklopedicheskii pravoslavnyi slovar'*, 299. See also Ignatius Moschake, *The Catechism of the Orthodox Eastern Church* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1894), 9.

<sup>183</sup> Bradbury, *The Russian Orthodox Church*, 73; *The Catechism of the Orthodox, Catholic, Eastern Church* (San Francisco: The Murdock Press, 1901), 12.

<sup>184</sup> The “Worker’s Catechism” was arranged in the traditional question-answer format of the Catholic catechism and concluded with a list of “I believe” [*ia veruiiu*] affirmations palpably patterned on the Orthodox creed [*simvol very*]. The first of these affirmations reads, “I believe in the complete liberation of workers with the help of the unions of all workers.” I. Kerchiker, *Katekhizis rabochago* (Rostov na Donu: K svetu, 1908), 16.

<sup>185</sup> People’s Commissar of Enlightenment Anatoly Lunacharsky proposed that education – and especially familiarity with the works of Marx, Engels, and Lenin – would allow citizens to become properly “conscious.” David Hoffmann, *Stalinist Values*, 52; Joseph Stalin, “Rech’ I. V. Stalina na vtorom vsesoiuznom s’ezde sovetov 26 ianvaria 1924 goda,” *Pravda*, 30 January 1924.

<sup>186</sup> Tumarkin, *Lenin Lives!*, 130.

<sup>187</sup> Tumarkin, *Lenin Lives!*, 223.

improvement; in a 1923 *Pravda* article, Lenin famously prescribed, “first – to study, second – to study, and third – to study.”<sup>188</sup>

If the Stakhanovites were to be religious icons, they must follow Lenin’s commandments. In Stakhanov’s own words, at an annual memorial service for Lenin, “we, the miners of the Donbass, are fulfilling the precepts [*zavety*] of Lenin!”<sup>189</sup> Stakhanov’s word choice, notably, is steeped in religious character – *zavet* is not only the word for the Covenant of Moses, but also comprises the Russian names for “Old Testament” [*Vetkhii zavet*] and “New Testament” [*Novyi zavet*].<sup>190</sup> In order to uphold their “Covenant” with the founder of the Soviet Union, the Stakhanovites were obliged to become sedulous students.

For many, studies began not in the classroom, but in the factory or on the field. Industrial and agricultural technology developed in the Soviet Union, it was proclaimed, exhibited the superiority of Soviet ideology; in order to understand the Marxist-Leninist faith, it was necessary to master this new, distinctly socialist knowledge. Stakhanovites often referred to their practical training as their “school” or “university,” in direct or indirect reference to the Soviet writer Maxim Gorky’s “universities” of life experience. Maria Demchenko, the celebratory beet farmer, affirmed that “everyone has his ‘universities’...One of my first ‘university’ classrooms was the hut-laboratory, where I learned the basics of husbandry.”<sup>191</sup> The *Stakhanovets* journal similarly articulated that “Stakhanovite five-day shifts [*piatidnevniki*] and ten-day shifts [*dekady*] are

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<sup>188</sup> V. I. Lenin, “Luchshe men’she, da luchshe,” *Pravda*, 4 March 1923.

<sup>189</sup> Stakhanov, *Rasskaz*, 111.

<sup>190</sup> The “Covenant of Lenin” was not Stakhanov’s original phrase, but a circulated motif in Soviet rhetoric. See, for example, Stalin’s speech at the Second All-Union Party Conference in 1924, in which he proclaimed, “We swear to you, comrade Lenin, that we will fulfill your commandments [*zapoved’*] with honor!” and Stalin’s newspaper article “Workers and Peasants, Remember and Fulfill the Covenant [*Zavet*] of Lenin!” Joseph Stalin, “Rech’ I. V. Stalina na vtorom vsesoiuznom s’ezde sovetov”; Joseph Stalin, “Rabotnitsy i krest’ianki, pomnite i vpolniaite zavety Il’icha!,” *Rabotnitsa*, 5 January 1924.

<sup>191</sup> Mariia Demchenko, *Poliubi zemliu*, 160.



schools, where workers, engineers, and Stakhanovites fully learn to master productive potential.”<sup>192</sup>

Studies also inevitably involved traditional academics, but in many cases, education began with literacy. Literacy campaigns had swept across the Soviet Union since its establishment, in a desperate attempt to extinguish the 70% illiteracy rate on the eve of the Russian Revolution.<sup>193</sup> Many Stakhanovites, however, who had been too impoverished to attend school as children, remained illiterate in the mid-1930s.<sup>194</sup> The dire need to educate Stakhanovites was exposed by Konstantin Petrov, the Party chief of the Central-Irmino (Stakhanov’s) mine and the organizer of Stakhanov’s initial record. “We face the fact that [the Stakhanovite] Konchedadov was so illiterate that he could not even sign his name. Many of our comrades cannot read books, do not understand anything in the newspapers. That is why we have created a special school...teaching Russian, math, geography. We even have a special hour for Stakhanovite techniques...”<sup>195</sup> Petrov’s initiative developed into one of many “Stakhanovite schools,” which became highly regarded in the Soviet Union, and even favorably appraised by western historians.<sup>196</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> I. L. Kabakov, “Vse sily ural’skikh bol’shevikov na vypolnenie ukazanii tov. Stalina,” *Stakhanovets*, no. 8 (1936): 4.

<sup>193</sup> Stephen Kotkin, *Stalin: Paradoxes of Power, 1878-1928* (New York: Penguin Press, 2014), 65-67.

<sup>194</sup> Historian David Hoffmann estimates that in 1929, more than half of the rural population – to which most of the Stakhanovites originally belonged – remained illiterate; David Hoffmann, *Stalinist Values*, 44. According to historian Michael David-Fox, literacy campaigns remained the main focus of the Soviet Cultural Revolution in the 1930s. Michael David-Fox, *Crossing Borders: Modernity, Ideology, and Culture in Russia and the Soviet Union* (Pittsburgh: The University of Pittsburgh Press, 2015), 127. Incredibly, as a result of literacy campaigns, historians estimate that around 87 percent of the Soviet population by 1939 was both literate and numerate. Service, *Stalin*, 308.

<sup>195</sup> GARF f.R5451, o.19, d.16, l. 48.

<sup>196</sup> Stakhanovite schools were recognized in the Great Soviet Encyclopedia as instructing “the best skills for operating machines and the best techniques for increasing production.” S.I. Vavilov et al., “Stakhanovskie shkoly,” in *Bol’shaia sovetskaia entsiklopediia* (Moscow: OGIZ SSSR, 1947), 787. Historian E.A. Rees substantiates that technical and research institutions, along with the technical press, flourished under the Stakhanovite campaign. E. A. Rees, *Stalinism and Soviet Rail Transport, 1928-41* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1995), 218. Lewis Siegelbaum, furthermore, judges the “Stakhanovite schools” to be “the most successful aspect of Stakhanovism.” Siegelbaum, *Stakhanovism*, 127.

One beneficiary of the Stakhanovite schools was Alexander Busygin, the automobile-producing hero of Gorky factory, who confessed at the First All-Union Conference of Stakhanovites that “I am, in fact, barely literate. I had never read a book before, and only recently, two months ago I read my first book – short stories of Pushkin. I enjoyed it, but to be honest, reading remains very difficult for me.”<sup>197</sup> For manual workers like Busygin, who were accustomed to “visible, concrete goals that could be resolved by hand,” study presented an entirely new array of challenges.<sup>198</sup> Equipped with academic experience at the local Stakhanovite schools, Busygin expanded his opportunities for further study, and was eventually accepted to the Industrial Academy in Moscow.<sup>199</sup>

Ivan Gudov, the famed milling machine operator, whose “hands were [similarly] accustomed to labor since an early age,” also divulged the “tremendous difficulty it took me to read a book.”<sup>200</sup> Notwithstanding uncertainty and unfamiliarity with academic work, study eventually shone as an ultimatum. “Before my eyes glistened the future: a good profession, salary, life, work in the factory collective, new interests. The road to all of that, however, lay through rigorous study.”<sup>201</sup> In the end, Gudov’s “rigorous study” enabled him to become an instructor of Stakhanovite methods and, like Busygin, enroll in the prestigious Industrial Academy.<sup>202</sup>

Becoming literate in the Soviet Union, however, involved more than learning the Cyrillic alphabet and elementary mathematics; literacy campaigns were, on the orders of Lenin, infused with Marxist-Leninist ideology, in order to stimulate political consciousness.<sup>203</sup> Not only were

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<sup>197</sup> Aleksandr Busygin, *Moia zhizn', moia rabota* (Moscow: Partizdat TsK VKP(b), 1935), 12.

<sup>198</sup> Busygin, *Zhizn' moia i moikh družei*, 66.

<sup>199</sup> Stakhanov, *Rasskaz*, 163.

<sup>200</sup> Gudov, *Put' stakhanovtša*, 16.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>202</sup> Stakhanov, *Rasskaz*, 163.

<sup>203</sup> V. I. Lenin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 5th ed., vol. 42 (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1970), 161; David Hoffmann, *Stalinist Values*, 44. A 1928 decree resolved that the sole purpose of literature was education in

Stakhanovites to learn the platform of the Communist Party, but they were also to understand the “significance of [their] records” and the “enormous international importance of the Stakhanovite movement.”<sup>204</sup> Having imbibed the historically-oriented language of Marx and Hegel, Gudov asserts that “our Stakhanovites understand their historical mission well. That is why they study with such hunger, and strive with such perseverance to master technique.”<sup>205</sup> It was apparent that the Stakhanovites perceived their importance as symbols.<sup>206</sup> Stakhanov, boasting that the coal output from the Donbass had increased by 80% from 1935 to 1936, declared at a reception for Stakhanovites hosted by Ordzhonikidze that “we are undeniably heroes.”<sup>207</sup>

The world-historical role of the Stakhanovites – besides mastering Soviet technology – was to signify the autonomy of the working class. Under socialism, when the proletariat worked “for itself,” instead of answering to capitalist employers, the will could not be heteronomous – instead, “the will of the people was the sacred law.”<sup>208</sup> Since the Stakhanovites were the premier representatives of the proletariat, it was “the word of the Stakhanovites [that] was law,” compounding the symbolic weight of the Stakhanovite icons.<sup>209</sup>

The privilege of study – comprising both technologically advanced production methods and the historical importance thereof – was not, however, restricted to the most “devout” of Soviet

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communism. Anita Pisch, “The Rise of the Stalin Personality Cult,” in *The Personality Cult of Stalin in Soviet Posters, 1929–1953, Archetypes, Inventions and Fabrications* (ANU Press, 2016), 87–190, 89.

<sup>204</sup> As Gudov recounts, Ordzhonikidze “explained to us the significance of our records. – If you continue to work like that at the workbench – he said – achieving higher production, then it will supply us with the means to build houses, clubs, hospitals, so that people will be able to live even better.” Gudov, *Put’ stakhanovtisa*, 35; Zaslavskii, “Chudesna nashei strany,” 4.

<sup>205</sup> Gudov, *Put’ stakhanovtisa*, 130.

<sup>206</sup> The historical importance of the Stakhanovites’ records was, however, not self-evident, and was revealed only by the Party. Gudov confesses that, after a speech by Stalin, “I deeply understood the meaning of my record, the meaning of all of our records and achievements, the meaning that none of us Stakhanovite-pioneers had considered.” Gudov, *Put’ stakhanovtisa*, 123.

<sup>207</sup> RGASPI f.85, o.29, d.133, l. 1.

<sup>208</sup> Gudov, *Put’ stakhanovtisa*, 94.

<sup>209</sup> Stakhanov, *Rasskaz*, 67.

citizens; the opportunity to fulfill the sacred commandments of Lenin was universal. At least in theory, every worker had an equal opportunity to acquire an education, and moreover, that of an engineer. Stakhanovite autobiographies, therefore, were to inspire other workers to emulate the Stakhanovites' example.<sup>210</sup> The options for study, moreover, were boundless: Dusya Vinogradova, the leading weaver-Stakhanovite, observes, "it is difficult to find a person who does not study. Both young and old study hard, whether in school, in various study circles, in industrial courses sponsored by the government or labor unions. And none of them even cost the worker a cent."<sup>211</sup> Study – and especially the precepts of Marxism-Leninism – thus offered the Soviet labor force a common, accessible means to perfect their industrial technique and a catechism to illuminate their personal faith.

### **Demonstrations of Faith**

Perfection, however, would remain unattainable until the coming of communism. Marx had promised that the trajectory of history would transcend from capitalism – and its daily, recurring cycle of exploitation – to communism, which would be governed instead by unchecked and indomitable progress.<sup>212</sup> While Stalin triumphantly declared in 1936 that the Soviet Union had achieved socialism, the final transformation of society had yet to come, and the Stakhanovites, in the meantime, remained outside the gates of communism.<sup>213</sup> No single record, no matter how outstanding, could cleanse a Stakhanovite of the "original sin derived from the primeval division

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<sup>210</sup> See, for example, Smetanin, *Who Directs Soviet Industry*, 10.

<sup>211</sup> Vinogradova, *Tekstil'shchiki*, 26.

<sup>212</sup> References to circular versus linear conceptions of time are inspired by Yuri Slezkine's discussion of eternal return and teleological history, in the context of early religions. Slezkine contrasts the cyclical understanding of time in ancient Greek and East Asian religions – characterized by a daily renewed struggle with chaos – with the monotheistic view of linear history, which was expected to culminate in the last judgment and end of the world. Yuri Slezkine, *The House of Government*, 76.

<sup>213</sup> Stalin, *Sochineniia*, 14:141.

of labor and perpetuated through class exploitation”; the truly devout worker would need to establish ever higher industrial records in order to demonstrate his faith.<sup>214</sup> The impossibility of attaining perfection, however, was a familiar concept to Soviet workers who had been raised on the Orthodox tradition. Through sanctification – the Church had promised – the faithful could draw ever closer to God, but never reach final perfection.<sup>215</sup> In a similar vein, even though Soviet socialism may have broken the capitalist cycle of eternal return, the Stakhanovites were still confined eternally – or, at least until the final coming of communism – to approach, but never completely to achieve, Bolshevik virtue.

In the years predating the Stakhanovite movement, astounding records were attributed exclusively to scientific advancements and industrial technique. Workers, it was suggested, were not physically heroic in their own right, but were instead beneficiaries of higher Soviet technology. Nikita Izotov, Stakhanov’s predecessor, credited his success entirely to the superiority of socialist industry: “People say that Izotov is strong, Izotov is tough, and that is why he works so well. Nonsense! It’s not about strength. Strength alone will get you nowhere...I am successful because I have mastered the technique of my trade.”<sup>216</sup>

Technical maturity was – as in the Izotovite movement – understood to be a precondition of the Stakhanovites’ records.<sup>217</sup> There was, however, another factor that enabled these records to be precisely “miraculous”: faith in the Soviet Union. As one biographer of Stakhanovites suggests, “the firm conviction of the Soviet working class that every step towards raising labor efficiency means an improvement in the living conditions of the whole working class, the whole people, the whole country” – in a word, conviction in the Marxist-Leninist civil paradigm – enabled the daily

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<sup>214</sup> Slezkine, *The House of Government*, 405.

<sup>215</sup> Ignatius Moschake, *The Catechism of the Orthodox Eastern Church*, 33.

<sup>216</sup> Nikita Izotov, *Moia zhizn’, moia rabota*, 62.

<sup>217</sup> Stalin, *Sochineniia*, 14:80.

perseverance and results of Stakhanovite labor.<sup>218</sup> Stakhanovites, in fact, were characterized as “the faithful” – “believing in the [communist] future” or “deeply believing [*gluboko veruiushchie*] in the strength and power of the Stakhanovite movement” – in contradistinction to “those of little faith” [*maloveriy*] who “could not accept the fact that the Stakhanovites have torn down and continue to tear down the old traditions and norms.”<sup>219</sup>

Faith, by generating sentimental attachment, provided one way for Stakhanovite workers to connect to the Soviet state. Nikolai Smetanin, explaining his shoemaking success, echoes Izotov’s denial of physical talent. “Many believe that it is only possible to produce higher industrial output through physical exertion. No, comrades, this is not true.”<sup>220</sup> Instead, Smetanin reveals the emotional and psychological conditions facilitating Stakhanovite production: “I love my factory, I love my country, I love my work – and that is why I can produce even greater output!”<sup>221</sup> Bolshevik faith, like its Orthodox counterpart – where “faith without works is dead” – evidently required outward expression.<sup>222</sup> Since faith fueled industrial accomplishments, it was, in particular, production records that were proper demonstrations of faith for the Stakhanovites.

As in Christianity, the Stakhanovites’ faith was dependent on the will. Unlike in Christianity, however, the power of achievement, along with the will, belonged to the worker.<sup>223</sup>

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<sup>218</sup> Friedrich, *Miss U.S.S.R.*, 40.

<sup>219</sup> *Stakhanovsko-busyginskoe dvizhenie*, 229; Gudov, *Put' stakhanovtza*, 50. See also Krivonos, *Moi metody raboty*, 24.

<sup>220</sup> “Rech’ tov. Smetanina” in *Pervoe vsesoiuznoe soveshchanie rabochikh i robotnits - stakhanovtsev*, 156.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>222</sup> James 2:26 CARS. In the Orthodox tradition, belief was said to effect immediate and automatic demonstrations of faith including, most prominently, verbal confession and regular church attendance. *The Catechism of the Orthodox, Catholic, Eastern Church*, 18; Bradbury, *The Russian Orthodox Church*, 46, 52.

<sup>223</sup> That the “power of achievement” belonged to the proletariat was endorsed officially by Stalin, who famously declared that, “There are no castles in the world that the working class – that the Bolsheviks – cannot storm. It suffices to have the will [*zhelanie*] to master technical knowledge and to be equipped with perseverance and Bolshevik patience.” I.V. Stalin, “O rabotakh aprel’skogo ob’edinennogo plenuma TsK i TsKK: doklad na sobranii aktiva moskovskoi organizatsii VKP(b),” in *Sochineniia* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel’stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1949), 11: 27–64. References to “power of achievement” (*potestas*) versus the will (*volutas*) stem from Augustinian theology. See Chapter 5 in Augustine, *City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson (London: Penguin Classics, 2004).

Alexander Busygin, the legendary automobile mechanic, vouches that “it is enough for the working person to will, and all barriers will fall. If he knows that the country’s economic interests depend upon him, then he will forget about all fatigue and all norms, and he will accomplish whatever is necessary.”<sup>224</sup> Peter Krivonos similarly identifies “unlimited will” [*bezgranichnoe zhelanie*] as the means to increase railway transport velocity, while Gudov succinctly exclaims, “If the Party orders, then we will fulfill!”<sup>225</sup> Faith in the Party remained crucial, but the Stakhanovites had overturned the Christian precept that “man proposes, God disposes.”<sup>226</sup> The will of the “living” worker was instead sufficient to effect industrial miracles.

Not only were Stakhanovite records discharges of “right faith,” but they were also, conversely, a source of spiritual energy. Despite the extended effort of maintaining supra-human production rates, Stakhanovites like Busygin report returning home “fresher and less tired” on days with high yields.<sup>227</sup> “Good work makes you less tired than poor work,” explained Busygin. “The smoother and more intense the work, the better for your health.”<sup>228</sup> Dusya “Miss U.S.S.R.” Vinogradova recounts a similar rejuvenation. Her biographer claims that, after the night shift at the textile mill from 2 AM to 9 AM, “Dusya does not even lie down after work. Work for her is a pleasure which neither weakens nor tires her.”<sup>229</sup> Stakhanov himself, in comparable fashion, reported to *Pravda* journalists that immediately following his first record, “I felt no fatigue and was ready to drill the rock face again, if there was any wood left. But there was nothing left to drill with.”<sup>230</sup>

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<sup>224</sup> A. Busygin, *Sversheniia*, 29.

<sup>225</sup> Krivonos, *Moi metody raboty*, 15; Gudov, *Put’ stakhanovtza*, 64.

<sup>226</sup> F. Komelovich, *Antireligioznaia propaganda v sovremennykh usloviakh*, 38.

<sup>227</sup> V.S. Bogushevskii, ed., *Stalinskoe plemia stakhanovtsev*, 21. In this quote, Busygin answers Georgy Pyatak, the Deputy Commissar of Heavy Industry, who asked if Busygin was ever exhausted after a record-breaking shift in the factory.

<sup>228</sup> Busygin, *Moia zhizn’, moia rabota*, 11.

<sup>229</sup> Friedrich, *Miss U.S.S.R.*, 27.

<sup>230</sup> Stakhanov, *Rasskaz*, 30.

As hyper-productive work recharged, instead of drained, workers' resolve, each new spark of industrial success rekindled the wildfire of Stakhanovite "recordmania." This perpetual positive feedback loop of faith and demonstrations reflected the Orthodox belief that "by works is faith perfected."<sup>231</sup> In one way, Stakhanovite labor was a "contagious disease," in the sense that workers engaged in "socialist competition" with one another, each provoking the optimal performance of the others.<sup>232</sup> The entire Stakhanovite movement was, after all, a response to Stakhanov's original feat. Many Stakhanovites recognized the news of Stakhanov's 30 August record as the immediate inspiration for their own accomplishments. Busygin, the first Stakhanovite to be created in Stakhanov's image, recalled receiving word of Stakhanov's production in the Donbass and ordering everyone in the factory to "drop everything and start working like Bolsheviks."<sup>233</sup> Alexei Stakhanov's example soon spread beyond coal mining and metallurgical production, sweeping into agriculture, forestry, aviation, and even book stores.<sup>234</sup> A worker at the Second Shaposhnikov Book Factory, for instance, attests that upon reading about Stakhanov's record in the newspaper, "I immediately understood the meaning of the Stakhanovite movement. After that I told the work crew that we need to transition to Stakhanovite methods," while another representative swears that "book sellers are seizing the initiative of Central-Irmino miners and will fulfill our socialist obligation with honor!"<sup>235</sup>

The "socialist obligation" of Stakhanovites involved, however, more than simply passing the initiative of Stakhanovite production to other workers. Demonstrations of faith, through outstanding performance in the workplace, were to be renewed perpetually, powered by the energy

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<sup>231</sup> Bradbury, *The Russian Orthodox Church*, 94.

<sup>232</sup> "Work in the blooming mill was a contagious disease," in the words of one Magnitogorsk worker. Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*, 209.

<sup>233</sup> Busygin, *Zhizn' moia i moikh družei*, 22.

<sup>234</sup> See the speech of People's Commissar of Forest Industries Lobov in *Pervoe vsesoyuznoe soveshchanie rabochikh i rabotnits - stakhanovtsev*, 129.

<sup>235</sup> GARF f.R5451, o.19, d.40, l.73; GARF f.R5452, o.31, d.308, l.5.



and motivation generated by previous Stakhanovite shifts. Stakhanov's record on the night of 30/31 August 1935, for which he hewed 102 tons of coal under a norm of 6-7 tons, was shattered less than two weeks later, by Stakhanov himself – this time, on 9 September, with 175 tons of coal. Within another ten days, on 19 September, Stakhanov surpassed his legacy yet again with an output of 227 tons in a standard six-hour shift.<sup>236</sup> Years later, Stakhanov remained in the never-ending cycle of establishing records. On 5 March 1937, he hewed 321 tons of coal in a shortened four-hour shift, which he dedicated to the recently departed “People's Commissar of Stakhanovites” Ordzhonikidze.<sup>237</sup>

Stakhanovite status was not a single feat, but a state of being. Mechanic Ivan Gudov similarly outlines an entire sequence of records in his autobiography, commencing from his initiation into the Stakhanovite tribe on 13 September 1935, when he managed to operate a milling machine at 410% the norm speed.<sup>238</sup> Shortly thereafter, Gudov reached 650% of the newly increased norm, and by November 1935, he was simultaneously operating 13 triangular milling cutters.<sup>239</sup> While each record may have inched quantitatively toward communist perfection, complete virtue was only ever approached, and new records remained to be established.

### **Proselytism**

To accelerate the approach to communism, and to legitimize the Stakhanovite movement as a mass phenomenon, new converts were needed. A small group of Stakhanovites, even equipped with Krivonos's “unlimited will,” could not alone establish the communist telos on earth; only the participation of society at large could overcome the asymptotic limits of socialist production. In

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<sup>236</sup> Stakhanov, *Moi metod*, 8.

<sup>237</sup> Stakhanov, *Rasskaz*, 129.

<sup>238</sup> Gudov, *Put' stakhanovtza*, 28-29.

<sup>239</sup> *Ibid.*, 57, 61.

the words of Ordzhonikidze, “What good will it do, if Stakhanov alone drills, and the rest just watch him? If we are going to succeed, we need everyone to work [like Stakhanov].”<sup>240</sup> In order to achieve greater miracles, therefore, it was necessary to proselytize. Just as Jesus instructed his disciples to “go out to the people and make of them my students, baptize them as a sign of unity with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and teach them to fulfill all that I have commanded,” the Stakhanovites were tasked with recruiting the Soviet masses to the Stakhanovite tribe.<sup>241</sup>

The Stakhanovite tribe was, at least officially, open to any worker dedicated to the Marxist-Leninist paradigm.<sup>242</sup> Although the Stakhanovites were showered with “enormous international importance,” they were also understood to be fundamentally replaceable. Particular Stakhanovites of acclaim were represented as possessing no inherent, distinguishing talent or predisposition that enabled them, instead of their coworkers, to achieve production records. Molotov, for instance, announced at the First Conference of Stakhanovite Workers that “any worker can become a Stakhanovite.”<sup>243</sup> Stakhanov himself shrugged off his initial record, explaining that “any experienced miner, familiar with the technology of his trade,” could have achieved it.<sup>244</sup> Stakhanovite status was, in theory, also equally accessible to women and national minorities, as it

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<sup>240</sup> Gershberg, *Rabota u nas takaia*, 366.

<sup>241</sup> Matt. 28:19-20 CARS. While Orthodox Christianity is not renowned for its proselytism, Orthodox missionaries have conducted large-scale efforts to convert pagans and Muslims in the Russian Empire. In the 1860s, for instance, the Orthodox missionary Il-minskii organized native instructors to disseminate Christianity in non-Russian languages. Werth, Paul W, “Orthodoxy as Ascription (and Beyond): Religious Identity in the Edges of the Orthodox Community, 1740-1917,” in Valerie Kivelson and Robert Greene, eds., *Orthodox Russia: Belief and Practice Under the Tsars* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), 246-7; Bradbury, *The Russian Orthodox Church*, 73, 168.

<sup>242</sup> Western historians have often been cautious to accept Stakhanovism’s claim to inclusivity. Lewis Siegelbaum, for instance, judges that the opportunity to work on special Stakhanovite shifts with “elaborate preparations” was not available to all workers: young, male, semi-literate, and semi-skilled workers were preferred. Stakhanovites themselves were classified in a hierarchy distinguishing between ordinary and outstanding Stakhanovites. Siegelbaum concludes that “Stakhanovism represented another nail in the coffin of equality among workers.” Siegelbaum, *Stakhanovism* 170-179, 194.

<sup>243</sup> Molotov, “O stakhanovskom dvizheniiem” in *Pervoe vsesoyuznoe soveshchanie rabochikh i robotnits - stakhanovtsev*, 37.

<sup>244</sup> Stakhanov, *Rasskaz*, 33.

was awarded on the sole criterion of productivity.<sup>245</sup> Anyone, in other words, was a potential convert for Stakhanovism.

Between establishing successive records of their own, the Stakhanovites were expected to become teachers of technique and preachers of Marxism-Leninism. “A Stakhanovite,” according to the journal *Stakhanovets*, “was not only someone who worked well, but who also organized others to work well.”<sup>246</sup> In the Orthodox tradition, spiritual teachers were venerated for their role in guiding their students toward right faith and final salvation.<sup>247</sup> Teachers in the Soviet context were understood to possess similar “life-creating roles,” and the Stakhanovites, in particular, were responsible for awakening the proletariat to its world-historical character.<sup>248</sup>

Stakhanov, for one, was appointed to be an instructor of the “Kadiev Coal” trust soon after his initial record. In order to disseminate accelerated drilling methods across the Central-Irmino mine, Stakhanov was tasked with supervising and advising less competent workers.<sup>249</sup> “I watched how each of five miners was drilling. It came to my attention, that almost all of them were working incorrectly,” reported Stakhanov. “I explained to each worker how I myself work, that is, how I

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<sup>245</sup> Vinogradova proclaims that “women and men receive equal pay for equal work,” and reports that “349 women in the Soviet Union have been rewarded with the highest honor of our country – the Order of Lenin.” Vinogradova, *Tekstil'shchiki*. 19, 27. Armenian and Bashkir Stakhanovites relate their rise to Stakhanovite status in Fitzpatrick and Slezkine, *In the Shadow of Revolution*, 335-338. While rhetoric of women’s liberation abounded, historians debate the actual extent of women’s inclusion in the Stakhanovite movement. Mary Buckley suggests that Stakhanovism “challenged traditional gender hierarchies in the village,” offering peasant women opportunities to become celebrated heroes of labor. Sheila Fitzpatrick, on the other hand, reveals that the opposition faced by female Stakhanovites – from shaming to physical violence – often outweighed the benefits of “liberated” work. Mary Buckley, “Was Rural Stakhanovism a Movement?,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 51, no. 2 (1999): 299–314; Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Stalin's Peasants: Resistance and Survival in the Russian Village after Collectivization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 12-13, 142.

<sup>246</sup> Ivan Gudov, “Arifmetika vysokoi proizvoditel'nosti,” *Stakhanovets*, no. 1 (1936): 24.

<sup>247</sup> Bradbury, *The Russian Orthodox Church*, 76. Historian Barbara Walker argues a “powerful teacher cult” among Russian intelligentsia dated back to the nineteenth century. Teachers were considered to guide students in developing not only as professionals, but also as individuals, inculcating self-discipline and a sense of identity. According to Walker, the cult of teachers continued into the Soviet era, during which it became increasingly dependent on the patronage of the state. Barbara Walker, “Iosif Stalin, ‘Our Teacher Dear,’: Mentorship, Social Transformation, and the Russian Intelligentsia Personality Cult” in Klaus Heller and Jan Plamper, *Personality Cults in Stalinism – Personenkulte im Stalinismus* (Göttingen, V&R Unipress GmbH, 2004), 46-47, 52-55.

<sup>248</sup> Hellbeck, *Revolution on My Mind*, 264.

<sup>249</sup> Stakhanov, *Rasskaz*, 87.

prepare my instrument, precisely how and where I start cutting the coal bed.”<sup>250</sup> At the 1936 All-Donbass Miners’ Conference, Stakhanov proposed that other leading Stakhanovites follow his example and serve as instructors. Concretely, Stakhanov suggested that each “master,” or miner who hewed at least twice the norm amount of coal, would be responsible for converting five other workers to Stakhanovite methods, each of whom was expected to double his current output.<sup>251</sup>

It thus became expected for Stakhanovites to become teachers and leaders of their brigades. Smetanin, the shoemaker Stakhanovite, was credited with “organizing the entire workforce” and ensuring that each member was responsible for satisfactory fulfillment of his assigned task.<sup>252</sup> Busygin also realized that his own performance was insufficient to transform Soviet industry. “By an old habit,” admitted Busygin, “I supposed that, as a mechanic, I was responsible only for my own work...But that was wrong. I am not just a mechanic anymore, but a leader of my crew.”<sup>253</sup> Joining the proselytism effort, Busygin began to instruct, advise, and guide the other laborers in his team. Stepping back to watch the labor force set to work, synchronized “like a single person,” Busygin reported feeling “literally like a conductor of an orchestra.”<sup>254</sup>

Stakhanovites like Smetanin and Busygin were not only teaching the superior techniques of their trades to their colleagues, but were also enlightening their coworkers to the potential of faith in the Marxist-Leninist paradigm. Pasha Angelina, the tractor-driving Stakhanovite, reasoned that “the Party raised and educated [*vospitala*] me, and I learned from the Party how [in turn] to educate the youth.”<sup>255</sup> For Angelina, her own work and “faith” in the Party were not an end, but a means to promote hyper-productive tractor driving among others; unsated by personal

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<sup>250</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>251</sup> Gershberg, *Stakhanov i Stakhanovtsy*, 138.

<sup>252</sup> L. Iu. Kaminsky, R. N. Popov, and G. Z. Matskin, *Peretiazhchik Nikolai Smetanin* (Leningrad-Moscow: Gizleprom, 1935), 22).

<sup>253</sup> Busygin, *Zhizn’ moia i moikh družei*, 20.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>255</sup> P. Angelina, *O samom glavnom*, 25.

achievements alone, Angelina resolved to organize an entire high-performing tractor brigade of women.<sup>256</sup>

Ivan Gudov also recounts his role as a teacher in the Ordzhonikidze Factory. In particular, Gudov narrates how the student-teacher relationship with his mentor, Klava Kruglushina, eventually reversed. Although Kruglushina was acclaimed as one of the Stakhanovites of the factory, Gudov began to notice that she “lacked a critical view. She never criticized what was printed on the diagrams, as if it were sacred to her.”<sup>257</sup> Besides correcting his mentor’s technical approach, Gudov introduced her to the “correct” relationship of the worker to labor. “We, Stakhanovites, do not stop outside the doors of the temple [*khram*] of science – we go inside,” explained Gudov.<sup>258</sup> By engaging critically with the technology of their trade, the Stakhanovites exhibited the scientifically-oriented view that Marx prescribed and exemplified the worker-intellectual that he had envisioned. It was not any particular formula or method that was sacred – those could all be revised through “normal science” – but only paradigmatic faith in the communist future.

Proselytism – of both technique and the faith that fueled the “perpetual motion” of the Stakhanovites’ records – strove to reach mass proportions, so that there would be “not one sector of industry, not one factory, where Stakhanovite-Busyginite methods do not achieve victory after

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<sup>256</sup> Angelina, *O samom glavnom*, 13. Angelina expressly addresses the role of “faith” in the Party, in achieving both agricultural records and victory in the Second World War. Among other instances, she conveys, “My faith and the faith of the entire country was not in vain [...] Stalin led our country to victory, and, believe me, saved [even] Americans from acquaintance with Hitler’s ‘new order.’” Angelina, *O samom glavnom*, 46.

<sup>257</sup> Gudov, *Put’ stakhanovtisa*, 25.

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

victory.”<sup>259</sup> Far from an “aristocracy of labor,” the Stakhanovite movement was instead projected to be a “powerful movement of all Soviet people,” accumulating the authority of a mass religion.<sup>260</sup>

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The Stakhanovite movement was at once an effort to increase industrial production and to offer quasi-religious symbols to a populace yearning for higher meaning. The biographies prepared under Ordzhonikidze’s direction appealed to the experience of “devout” Stakhanovites through the familiar Christian journey of conversion, catechism, “practice” of faith, and proselytism, in an intentional or unintentional attempt to attract the believers who had predominantly comprised the population of the Russian Empire.

Stakhanovite status was of unprecedented historical importance, but it was also accessible to any faithful and hard-working Soviet citizen. The Stakhanovite autobiographies, in this way, were imitable; they were lanterns guiding the Soviet masses along the untrodden path to the communist paradise of the future. Even if the present cycle of industrial records seemed endless, beet farmer Stakhanovite Maria Demchenko reassured, “heaven [*rai*] we have yet to create. We will work, we will study, and we will have everything.”<sup>261</sup>

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<sup>259</sup> A. A. Zhdanov, “Nashi partiinye organizatsii dolzhny eshche bol’she zanimat’sia politicheskim vospitaniem nashikh kadrov,” in *Pervoe vsesoyuznoe soveshchanie rabochikh i robotnits - stakhanovtsev*, 114.

<sup>260</sup> *Stakhanovskoe dvizhenie* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo "Znamia udarnika," 1935), 3. Historian Donald Filtzer suggests that the Stakhanovites constituted a new “labor aristocracy,” while Siegelbaum argues that “an aristocracy comprising upward of 25 percent of all industrial workers is no aristocracy at all.” Donald A. Filtzer, *Soviet Workers and Stalinist Industrialization: The Formation of Modern Soviet Production Relations, 1928-1941* (Dover, New Hampshire: Pluto Press, 1986), 9; Siegelbaum, *Stakhanovism*, 168.

<sup>261</sup> Demchenko, *Kak poluchit' ne menea 500 tsentnerov sakharnoi svekly s gektara*, 16. The Stakhanovites, notably, were to represent and experience a taste of the communist “heaven” that was to be created. Despite the Soviet state’s continued struggle with material shortages into the mid-1930s, the Stakhanovites were rewarded with apartments, automobiles, luxury services, and greater access to consumer goods; this unequal distribution of wealth was justified, however, as an indication of the abundance that was to become universal, once communism had been established.

## Part IV

### Icons Eclipsed: The Fall of the Stakhanovite Movement in Soviet Ideology

In 1935, the creation of the Stakhanovite movement offered workers a chance to be “born a second time” as “deep believers” in the communist future, demonstrating their faith by “creating miracles in [their] everyday workplaces.”<sup>262</sup> The Stakhanovites quickly ascended to iconic status, personifying the limitless industrial potential of the Soviet Union. In 1936, the species of New Soviet Men represented by the Stakhanovites was “growing, spreading, and gaining strength,” heralding an entirely new social order founded on the Marxist-Leninist paradigm.<sup>263</sup> Already encompassing, by one historian’s estimate, over 25 percent of the Soviet industrial workforce by mid-1936, the “Stakhanovite tribe” seemed to expand at a supernatural pace.<sup>264</sup>

And suddenly, in 1937, the sacred overtones of the Stakhanovite movement vanished. Just when they had become accustomed to ecstatic panegyrics and extended applause, the former Soviet worker-icons were left disoriented in the “marked silence [that] fell over the Stakhanovite movement.”<sup>265</sup> As the Stakhanovite movement had been created as an ideological – or even religious – movement, so too was the Stakhanovites’ fall from the grace of the Party an ideological event. Hyper-productive workers continued to wield superior Soviet technology, establish vertiginous records, and harbor unconditional faith in communism, but many Stakhanovites began

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<sup>262</sup> Gudov, *Put’ stakhanovtse*, 46, 50; GARF f. R5451, o.19, d.240, l.29ob.

<sup>263</sup> V. M. Molotov, “O stakhanovskom dvizhenii i kul’turnosti rabocheho klassa” in *Pervoe vsesoyuznoe soveshchanie rabochikh i rabotnits - stakhanovtsev*, 36.

<sup>264</sup> Siegelbaum, *Stakhanovism*, 168; Alexei Stakhanov, *The Stakhanov Movement*, 19. Siegelbaum tracks the percentage of workers considered Stakhanovites in Moscow across the twenty-two largest industries: “November 1, 1935 – 6.0; January 1, 1936 – 18.9; February 1, 1936 – 26.1; March 1, 1936 – 27.7; April 1, 1936 – 29.7. Siegelbaum, *Stakhanovism*, 156. In some cases, Stakhanovites comprised even higher percentages of workers. Stephen Kotkin, for instance, reports that over half of the steel plant work force in Magnitogorsk was considered “Stakhanovite” by December 1936. Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*, 213.

<sup>265</sup> I. Gudov, “Chto stalo so stakhanovskim dvizheniem,” *Stakhanovets*, no. 8 (1937): 8.

to realize that the Party had “forgotten about all the rapture and a record remained just a record.”<sup>266</sup> The religious sentiments that had charged the Stakhanovite movement were, however, not destroyed, but transferred – perpetuated by another, rising development within the Marxist-Leninist civil paradigm.

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One of the first publications to acknowledge the “Fall” of the Stakhanovites was, surprisingly, the *Stakhanovets* journal – the same journal once heralded as the means to “multiply the ranks of Stakhanovites.”<sup>267</sup> The August 1937 issue of *Stakhanovets* contained a startling article: “What Happened to the Stakhanovite Movement?” by Ivan Gudov – the milling machine operator determined not to “stop outside the doors of the temple of science [but to] go inside.”<sup>268</sup> Confronting the uncomfortable question in the article’s title, which was regrettably “heard more and more often,” Gudov laments that “some people are inclined to say that the Stakhanovites ‘went out of fashion’ [*moda konchilas*’], [while] others try to find another, more meaningful explanation. The fact remains,” resigns Gudov, “everything that we were rightly proud of in the factory, all the achievements in labor organization, without warning came to naught [*soshli na-net*].”<sup>269</sup> Not only did Gudov mourn the irretrievably fading “splendor” of the Stakhanovites, but also accused his superiors – who insisted that workers meet “norms but not records” – of “wanting to liquidate the

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<sup>266</sup> Ibid.

<sup>267</sup> *Stakhanovets*, no. 1 (1936): 16.

<sup>268</sup> Gudov, *Put’ stakhanovtsa*, 87; Gudov, “Chto stalo so stakhanovskim dvizheniem,” 8.

<sup>269</sup> Gudov, “Chto stalo so stakhanovskim dvizheniem,” 8. Gudov’s expression, perhaps not coincidentally, recalls a similar phrase used by Ordzhonikidze – “Bolsheviks do not chase after fashion [*za modoi ne goniatsia*] – to distinguish socialist laborers from capitalists. The invocation of this metaphor may serve as a subtle accusation, that the Party leaders of that time were dishonoring the principles and vision of the recently departed Ordzhonikidze. G.K. Ordzhonikidze, *Izobrazhnye stat’i i rechi 1911-1937* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel’stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1939), 514.



Stakhanovite movement.”<sup>270</sup> The problem, Gudov posited, was with the leadership of the factory and the Party, and not with the workers, who remained faithful but lacked the material conditions to demonstrate their faith.

The *Stakhanovets* issue exhibiting Gudov’s plaintive exposition, in fact, resonated with complaints of Stakhanovites across the country, confused and frustrated by the abrupt decline in support for their production. Sharply juxtaposed with the triumphant tone of previous issues of *Stakhanovets*, articles in August 1937 were entitled, for instance, “What is Preventing Metropolitan Machinists from Working Like Stakhanovites?” and “Negligence or Sabotage?”<sup>271</sup> In an “Open Letter from Stakhanovites of the Liubertskii Factory,” six Stakhanovite workers complain of the “unbelievably boring and unsanitary conditions” in their factory, imploring the redaction of the *Stakhanovets* journal “to help uncover who is responsible for all of this disorder.”<sup>272</sup> Besides curtailed financial support for Stakhanovite shifts in factories and mines, the publicity surrounding the movement plummeted. Official newspapers mentioned Stakhanovite achievements increasingly rarely, and no further All-Union Conferences of Stakhanovites were organized after the “First” All-Union Conference of Stakhanovite Workers in November 1935. By the end of the 1930s, it seemed as if the “powerful movement of all Soviet people” had been entirely forgotten; Stalin’s speech at the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in 1939 carried no mention of the Stakhanovites, and the *Stakhanovets* journal published no further issues after June 1940.<sup>273</sup>

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<sup>270</sup> Gudov, “Chto stalo so stakhanovskim dvizheniem,” 7.

<sup>271</sup> “Chto meshaet mashinistam metropolitena rabotat’ po-stakhanovski,” *Stakhanovets* no. 8 (1937): 11; “Bespechnost’ ili verditel’stvo,” *Stakhanovets* no. 8 (1937): 20-21.

<sup>272</sup> “Otkrytoe pis’mo stakhanovtsev Liubertskogo zavoda,” *Stakhanovets*, no. 8 (1937): 29.

<sup>273</sup> Vladimir Shlapentokh, “The Stakhanovite Movement: Changing Perceptions over Fifty Years,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 23, no. 2 (1988): 259–276, 269.

## Sudden Death: How the Stakhanovites Disappeared from the Marxist-Leninist Civil Paradigm

How could the Stakhanovites – “prototypes of men of the future” who were “immeasurably important” – suddenly “go out of fashion”?<sup>274</sup> Western historians have traditionally explained Stakhanovism’s disappearance by reasoning that the movement was simply unsustainable. Donald Filtzer, for one, argues that the special, prepared conditions for record-breaking Stakhanovite shifts were impossible to maintain indefinitely, or even at length. In analyzing production figures before, during, and after the ephemeral wave of Stakhanovism, Filtzer concludes that in most cases, Stakhanovite work was actually counter-productive; the “artificially high pitch” of Stakhanovite tempo, according to Filtzer, induced unnecessary accidents, violated proportionality, and damaged the quality of industrial products.<sup>275</sup> Other western historians have delivered mixed appraisals of Stakhanovism’s success, but ultimately support Filtzer’s conclusion that the Stakhanovite movement failed to generate significant or lasting economic growth, sealing its fate as a moribund episode in Soviet industrialization.<sup>276</sup>

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<sup>274</sup> This characterization of the Stakhanovites is from A.A. Zhdanov, *Itogi dekabr'skogo plenuma TsK VKP(b)*, 7.

<sup>275</sup> Donald A. Filtzer, *Soviet Workers and Stalinist Industrialization*, 192-4.

<sup>276</sup> Davies and Khlevnyuk acknowledge that Soviet industry expanded significantly in the 1930s, but conclude that these successes cannot be attributed to Stakhanovism. Ultimately, they report, “the average quarterly rate of increase in productivity was approximately the same in the 12 months following Stakhanov’s feat as in the 12 months preceding it.” While accepting that the Stakhanovite movement “undoubtedly led to significant improvements in various industrial practices,” they suggest that the destructive aspects of Stakhanovism – and notably its tendency to catalyze accidents – counteracted many of its positive contributions to Soviet industry. Davies and Khlevnyuk, “Stakhanovism and the Soviet Economy,” 894. On the other hand, Soviet and Russian historians such as N. B. Lebedeva have attested that Stakhanovites indeed “caused unprecedented growth in industrial production,” citing that production in the Second Five Year Plan (1933-7) increased by 82%, compared to a projected 63% increase. Nina Borisovna Lebedeva, *Stakhanovskoe dvizhenie: traditsii i preemstvennost'* (Leningrad: Lenizdat, 1985), 19, 27. More recently, Valerii Voitovich likewise claims that Stakhanovite work was crucial in overfulfilling production plans. Voitovich, tracing the development of Soviet industry with a particular focus on the Udmurt Republic in central Russia, shows that some areas of industry in the Udmurt Republic grew by a factor of five over a two-year period encompassing the Stakhanovite movement. Valerii Iurevich Voitovich, *Stakhanovskoe dvizhenie: put' k sotsial'no-ekonomicheskomu razvitiu Rossii na materialakh Udmurtskoi Respubliki* (Izhevsk: Izdatel'sky tsentr “Udmurtskiy universitet,” 2017), 110-113. Soviet and Russian historians often consider the Stakhanovite movement in the broader scheme of Soviet industrialization, i.e. as evolving into future industrialization efforts, without directly confronting the disappearance of the 1935-1936 “Stakhanovite” heroes from Soviet rhetoric.

Stakhanovism, however, was more than an economic movement – it strove to capture the sublimity of religious sentiment and offer workers an intimate, faith-based liaison with the Party. As Ordzhonikidze reminded attendees of an All-Union People’s Commissariat of Heavy Industry Conference, “we’re not talking about [numbers], but about grand perspectives.”<sup>277</sup> If the Stakhanovite movement was, as the “People’s Commissar of Stakhanovites” suggests, an ideological phenomenon before it was a productivity campaign, then Stakhanovism’s economic failure is insufficient to explain its precipitous decline. Even if workers fell short of delivering the production “miracles” that had been promised, the Stakhanovite movement could have been sustained, had Party officials continued to consider it ideologically advantageous.<sup>278</sup> Why, then, did the Stakhanovite movement in 1937 cease to attract the sympathy of upper Party echelons?

The most crucial factor in the Stakhanovites’ fall from official sponsorship was likely the sudden death (attributed in 1937 to a heart attack, but clarified at the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956 to have been a suicide) of the “inspirator and organizer of the Stakhanovite movement,” the People’s Commissar of Heavy Industry Sergo Ordzhonikidze.<sup>279</sup> Just as “it was common knowledge that Ordzhonikidze was behind the [Stakhanovite] movement,” so too did his absence define the Stakhanovites’ future neglect.<sup>280</sup> The death of Ordzhonikidze on the night of 18 February 1937 – although perhaps predictable from the perspective of the Politburo – was for the Stakhanovites, in the words of one worker, “so sudden and unexpected, like a bolt of lightning

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<sup>277</sup> RGASPI f.85, o.29, d.119, l.246, 251.

<sup>278</sup> Ideological motivations have frequently outweighed economic consequences in determining Soviet policy. In the case of the 1932-33 “Holodomor” famine, for instance, even economic ruin and the deaths of 5-7 million peasants was not enough to dissuade leaders from collectivization policy.

<sup>279</sup> B.M. Pashin, *Rabotat’ tak, kak uchil Sergo*, 24. Many historians recognize Ordzhonikidze as the principal architect behind the Stakhanovite movement, yet do not explicitly attribute the decline of Stakhanovism to the Commissar’s death in 1937. Concerning the suicide of Ordzhonikidze, Lewis Siegelbaum comments only, “it would appear that the death of Ordzhonikidze removed a major obstacle to the unleashing of the NKVD against industrial cadres whom Sergo had been able to protect.” These cadres, however, were comprised of managers, engineers, and technicians; Stakhanovites, on the other hand, fared favorably in the Great Purges of 1937-1938. Siegelbaum, *Stakhanovism*, 251.

<sup>280</sup> Oleg Vital’evich Khlevniuk, *In Stalin’s Shadow*, 78.

across a clear sky, that cut and shook me to the depths of my soul.”<sup>281</sup> Even before their work suffered from the absence of the “People’s Commissar of Stakhanovites,” the Stakhanovites, “the sons of our dear Sergo,” expressed “great personal grief” over the passing of their “father” figure who had “turned around their fate.”<sup>282</sup> Alexander Busygin of Gorky Automobile Factory – the “conductor of the orchestra” of his work crew and a proponent of strenuous work to maintain good health – attempted to express the dimensions of his sorrow on the occasion of Ordzhonikidze’s death. Comparing the passing of the Commissar with those of his close relatives, Busygin confided, “I remember the day of my father’s death – the feeling of irrevocable loss was horrible. It was painful to bury my children, my brothers and sisters. But there has never been a day in my life more painful than 19 February 1937.”<sup>283</sup>

After the initial stage of “personal grief,” the Stakhanovites’ work likewise began to suffer from the repercussions of Ordzhonikidze’s death. Following Gudov’s daring example, Busygin, two months later, published the article “Leaving the Factory To Study...” in *Stakhanovets*. In stark contrast to the care of “our true friend” Ordzhonikidze, the negligence of the current factory administration, Busygin charges, had forced the leading automobile Stakhanovite to “bid farewell to the factory, to the [other] metalworkers, to [my] hammers.”<sup>284</sup> When “the factory managers apparently got tired of dealing with Stakhanovites and stopped helping them altogether,” Busygin resolved to take refuge in study at the Industrial Academy in Moscow.<sup>285</sup> His superiors’ negligence, however, was not inexplicable to Busygin, as it had been to Gudov. “Before, Comrade Ordzhonikidze was interested in our lives, our welfare, everything that concerned us,” contrasts

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<sup>281</sup> Paskhin, *Rabotat’ tak, kak uchil Sergo*, 22.

<sup>282</sup> Stakhanov, *Rasskaz*, 128; *Narkom stakhanovtsev*, 30.

<sup>283</sup> Busygin, *Zhizn’ moia i moikh družei*, 41.

<sup>284</sup> A. Busygin, “Uezzhaia s zavoda na uchebu...,” 9.

<sup>285</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

Busygin to the present: “Now we have no connections with anyone in the People’s Commissariat, and the Commissariat shows no interest in Stakhanovites. Forget the Commissariat – the Party doesn’t even care about us!”<sup>286</sup> In Busygin’s eyes, it was clear that Ordzhonikidze’s absence catalyzed the Stakhanovites’ fall from iconic status.

### **In Memory of Sergo: Flickers of Productivity**

While the Stakhanovites appeared to have been abruptly disconnected from ideological sponsorship in February 1937, the economic decline of the Stakhanovite movement was more gradual. As the *udarniki* and *otlichniki* of previous industrialization campaigns had achieved productivity records of Stakhanovite magnitude but were not yet sacralized as Soviet icons, so too did laborers establish records after 1937, albeit without the staggering, quasi-religious enthusiasm of Stakhanovism. The death of the “best friend of the Stakhanovites,” in other words, did not immediately extinguish the fire of industrial productivity campaigns. It did, however, critically dampen the support of the Central Committee, without which the specially-prepared Stakhanovite shifts could not survive. If hyper-productive initiatives had ever been part of a “civil” paradigm, workers’ accounts suggest that in 1937, they had become a matter of personal loyalty – to Sergo Ordzhonikidze’s memory.

On the event of Ordzhonikidze’s passing, officials in the Politburo and members of Ordzhonikidze’s family received thousands of condolences from workers across the country.<sup>287</sup> Amidst abundant expressions of grief, Stakhanovites pledged to “honor the memory of Ordzhonikidze.”<sup>288</sup> The Stakhanovites reasoned, in particular, that the “best monument” to the

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<sup>286</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>287</sup> See, for instance, *Narkom Stakhanovtsev*; Paskhin, *Rabotat’ tak, kak uchil Sergo*; RGASPI f. 85, o.1, d.113.

<sup>288</sup> B.M. Paskhin, *Rabotat’ tak, kak uchil Sergo*, 24

fallen Commissar was “even better work.”<sup>289</sup> “We promise over your grave to work like you taught us,” vowed one Stakhanovite, while another swore, “I will prove with my work that Sergo will live forever.”<sup>290</sup> After achieving his own “memorial” record of 321 tons of coal in a four-hour shift – 23 times the norm – on 5 March 1937, Stakhanov and his fellow Donbass miners disseminated an appeal to coal and metal workers across the Soviet Union, proposing “to keep vigil [*stat’ na vakhtu*] for Sergo Ordzhonikidze” by further increasing industrial output and initiating a new wave of proselytism, recruiting workers to the Stakhanovite faith in Ordzhonikidze’s honor “[*nachat’ ordzhonikidzevskii prizyv*].”<sup>291</sup>

Personal vows to pay tribute to Ordzhonikidze’s memory thus sustained flickers, however faint, of the former “recordmania” wildfire. Intentions to accelerate fulfillment of yearly production quotas, for instance, were announced at the first few anniversaries of Stakhanov’s August 1935 record.<sup>292</sup> According to one *Pravda* journalist observer, Stakhanov “continued to occupy himself with the question: ‘How to produce more coal?’” frequented the mine daily, and organized lessons for other miners during the years of the Second World War.<sup>293</sup> Some sources attest that Stakhanovite initiatives endured into the mid-1940s, although hyper-productive industrial workers were referred to as “200-percenters” [*dvukhsotniki*] or “300-percenters” [*trekhsotniki*], having shed the sheen of “Stakhanovite” status.<sup>294</sup> Stakhanovite schools also

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<sup>289</sup> “Obrashchenie stakhanovtsev, udarnikov i khoziaistvennikov ugol’noi i metallurgicheskoi promyshlennosti Donbassa ko vsem rabochim i rabotnitsam, inzheneram, tekhnikom i khoziaistvennikam ugol’noi i metallurgicheskoi promyshlennosti Sovetskogo Soiuza,” *Stakhanovets* no.3 (1937): 1; Paskhin, *Rabotat’ tak, kak uchil Sergo*, 24.

<sup>290</sup> *Narkom Stakhanovtsev*, 29.

<sup>291</sup> Stakhanov, *Rasskaz*, 129.

<sup>292</sup> One conference of bookselling Stakhanovites, held in Moscow on 25 August 1935, proclaimed a new campaign of Stakhanovite labor to commemorate the fourth anniversary of Stakhanov’s mining record. GARF f.R5452, o.31, d.308, l.1-5.

<sup>293</sup> Gershberg, *Stakhanov i stakhanovtsy*, 154-156.

<sup>294</sup> R Nechepurenko, *Stakhanovtsy voennogo vremeni* (Moscow: Profizdat, 1942), 35. One of the most famous “Stakhanovites” of the Second World War was Illarion Yankin, a pneumatic driller from the Urals who in 1943 had fulfilled four yearly quotas by autumn. S.I. Vavilov et al., “Stakhanovskoe dvizhenie,” in *Bol’shaia sovetskaia entsiklopediia* (Moscow: OGIZ SSSR, 1947), 796; Yankin, *Notes of a Stakhanovite*.

survived in the 1940s, but lack of funding and support from trade unions limited their effectiveness.<sup>295</sup> References to the Stakhanovites remained in circulation into the 1940s, although their iconic status of 1935-1936 never returned.<sup>296</sup>

### **Total Eclipse: Why the Stakhanovites Disappeared from the Marxist-Leninist Civil Paradigm**

Even after the loss of its principal sponsor, the Stakhanovite movement may have survived, had it found patronage elsewhere in the Party elite. Had the Stakhanovites elicited the approval of Stalin, in particular, the sanction of the General Secretary may have been sufficient to fuel the cult of industrial achievement. Stalin, however, displayed no interest in maintaining the Stakhanovite movement.

Stalin's neglect of the Stakhanovite movement is perhaps most apparently evinced by the one-directional mail correspondence between Stakhanov and Stalin in the 1940s. Roughly a week after Victory Day in the Second World War, Stakhanov, the former national hero, wrote to Stalin revealing "shameful" living conditions and entreating the General Secretary to grant him a functional automobile for work.<sup>297</sup> Stakhanov's next letter continued his petition, beginning that

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<sup>295</sup> "If only the administration and trade union organizations took a serious interest in the Stakhanovite schools...then we would have long since eliminated organizational defects that are hampering the success of the Stakhanovite schools," reports one article in *Stakhanovets*, signed by nine Stakhanovite school activists. A. Shteinberg et al., "Stakhanovskie Shkoly," *Stakhanovets* no.5 (1940): 24.

<sup>296</sup> Vladimir Shlapentokh conducted a study of the quantity and content of references to "Stakhanovism" in the years following the Second World War. In analyzing subsequent editions of the Great Soviet Encyclopedia, Shlapentokh found that the entry for "Stakhanovites" spanned eleven columns in 1947, waned to three columns in 1957, and further diminished to only two columns in 1976. Vladimir Shlapentokh, "The Stakhanovite Movement: Changing Perceptions over Fifty Years," 263; Siegelbaum, *Stakhanovism*, 271, 304. The appellation "Stakhanovite" in the 1940s became a reference to highly-performing individuals in other professions besides heavy industry, such as in the military. Competitive snipers in the Second World War who "overfulfilled" their quota for killing Nazi soldiers were, for instance, referred to as "Stakhanovites of the front." Brandon M. Schechter, *The Stuff of Soldiers: A History of the Red Army in World War II Through Objects* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2019), 163. See also *Klim Voroshilov: Peredacha dlia detei starshego shkol'nogo vozrasta* (Moscow: Glavnaia redaktsiia VRK, 1937), 16.

<sup>297</sup> RGASPI f.558, o.11, d.891, l.127-128.

“it will soon be two years since the time that I wrote you, and I still have not received a car,” all the while appealing to “your affectionate [*chutkoe*] relationship to my family.”<sup>298</sup> Three years later, Stalin received another letter from Stakhanov, this time protesting the injustice that “I manage somehow to feed my family, but I have no way to clothe myself and my family... I am often invited to receptions at the consulates of other democratic countries, but I am forced to decline, and solely because neither I nor my wife have the proper attire.”<sup>299</sup> There is no evidence that Stalin responded to Stakhanov’s pleas.

Why did the Stakhanovite icons fail to capture the sympathy of the General Secretary after 1937? One hypothesis maintains that the Stakhanovite movement was initially concocted to bolster Stalin’s still unstable authority with industrial achievements, comprising “one of the most important means for legitimizing the rule of Stalin.”<sup>300</sup> According to this hypothesis, it was only in the Great Terror of 1937 – in which Stalin’s political opponents were gradually purged and the Soviet leader’s power finally consolidated – that Stalin felt secure enough “gradually to downgrade the significance of the Stakhanovites.”<sup>301</sup>

While the heroes of the Stakhanovite movement certainly lacked Stalin’s critical support after 1937, it remains unclear that Stakhanovism ever enjoyed Stalin’s favor. In contrast to the exhaustive efforts of Kaganovich, Pyatakov, and especially Ordzhonikidze to kindle the fire of “recordmania,” Stalin appears at best to have passively approved of the movement. Although

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<sup>298</sup> RGASPI f.558, o.11, d.896, l.105.

<sup>299</sup> RGASPI f.558, o.11, d.899, l.100.

<sup>300</sup> Vladimir Shlapentokh, “The Stakhanovite Movement,” 268. Sheila Fitzpatrick similarly conjectures that Stakhanovite conferences were instrumental in shaping the iconography of Stalin’s fomenting cult of personality. According to Fitzpatrick, these “industrial” conferences provided “an occasion for rhetoric, not substantive discussion.” Supporting this view, Victor Kravchenko – a defector from the Soviet Union to the United States – judged the Stakhanovite conferences to be inauthentic, as the speeches of Party officials were palpably prepared and rehearsed. Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Stalin’s Peasants*, 275-276; Victor Kravchenko, *I Chose Freedom: The Personal and Political Life of a Soviet Official* (New York: C. Scribner’s Sons, 1946), 189.

<sup>301</sup> Shlapentokh, “The Stakhanovite Movement,” 269.



rhetoric occasionally credited Stalin as the organizer of the Stakhanovite movement, Stalin's promotion of the Stakhanovites beyond a ceremonial level remains unsubstantiated.<sup>302</sup> In the initial hunt "to find new people in the working class and make heroes out of them," Ordzhonikidze and Kaganovich announced unprecedented labor feats in ecstatic telegrams – to which Stalin, in fact, appears to have made no response.<sup>303</sup>

There is, moreover, evidence that Stalin may have competed with – or even opposed – the Stakhanovite icons. The cult of heavy industry was expanding rapidly in the mid-to-late 1930s, not least because of the proclaimed "historical mission" of the Stakhanovites.<sup>304</sup> As the "most important [*pervymi*] people in the USSR," the Stakhanovites' portraits were paraded through Red Square and posted alongside those of Party and government leaders in the windows of Moscow shops.<sup>305</sup> From Stalin's perspective, the Stakhanovites may have even become too important. While Stakhanov once protested that "our ['Stakhanovite'] movement should really [instead] be called 'Stalinist,' since the working class, moving along the Stalinist path to master technology, gave birth to my record and the records of my comrades," Ordzhonikidze insisted that it was indeed Stakhanov – and not Stalin – whom the Soviet people were rightly worshiping.<sup>306</sup> In his speech at the First All-Union Conference of Stakhanovite Workers in Industry and Transport, Ordzhonikidze countered, "Yesterday when one of the attendees cheered: 'Long live Comrade Stalin, the first Stakhanovite,' – the entire room stood up. You see, it turns out that it is not Stakhanov who is a Stalinist but Stalin who is a Stakhanovite. That's how highly workers exalt the title

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<sup>302</sup> For rhetoric crediting Stalin as the organizer of the Stakhanovite movement, see for instance Ia. M. Shagal, "Organizator stakhanovskikh pobed," in *Narkom stakhanovetsev*, 55.

<sup>303</sup> The first quote is from Semen Gershberg, *Rabota u nas takaia*, 320. Telegram correspondence between Kaganovich and Stalin, and between Ordzhonikidze and Stalin, at the inception of the Stakhanovite movement is discussed in Davies and Khlevnyuk, "Stakhanovism and the Soviet Economy," 879.

<sup>304</sup> Gudov, *Put' stakhanovtza*, 131.

<sup>305</sup> S. Ordzhonikidze, *Stakhanovskoe dvizhenie*, 30; Gershberg, *Rabota u nas takaia*, 360.

<sup>306</sup> Stakhanov, *Rasskaz*, 50.

‘Stakhanovite.’”<sup>307</sup> With such remarks, Ordzhonikidze appeared determined to remind Stalin that heavy industry was reaching dizzying ideological heights.

Within the growing cult of heavy industry also emerged a cult around Sergo Ordzhonikidze. As an “Old Bolshevik” who had closely collaborated with Lenin in organizing the Revolution of 1917, Ordzhonikidze commanded immense authority among Party officials as well as ordinary workers.<sup>308</sup> Along with his personal connection to Lenin, Ordzhonikidze starred as a principal architect behind the Soviet Union’s industrial success; his “immense semi-autonomous fiefdom in heavy industry” overflowed with devoted workers, managers, engineers, and officials.<sup>309</sup> By some estimates, Ordzhonikidze “was more accessible, and in many quarters more genuinely popular, than Stalin.”<sup>310</sup> One historian thus surmises that the People’s Commissar of Heavy Industry could have used his authority to challenge the policies of Stalin and other Politburo members.<sup>311</sup> Ordzhonikidze’s untiring efforts to exalt the Stakhanovites to religious prominence may have, in this regard, comprised one venture to check Stalin’s power. By channeling the enthusiasm and reverence of Orthodox religious sentiment into the Stakhanovite movement, Ordzhonikidze may have hoped to divert adulation from Stalin’s expanding cult of personality.

The General Secretary, furthermore, lingered in an unstable position in the years preceding 1937. Stalin’s power in the early 1930s was far from unquestionable, and he even confronted

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<sup>307</sup> Ordzhonikidze, *Stakhanovskoe dvizhenie*, 30.

<sup>308</sup> Ordzhonikidze, for instance was in charge of organizing the “Prague” 6<sup>th</sup> All-Russian Conference of the Social-Democratic Labor Party – from which the Bolshevik Party branched off – in 1912. Robert Service, *Stalin: A Biography* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 82.

<sup>309</sup> Kotkin, *Stalin: Waiting for Hitler, 1929-1941* (New York: Penguin Books, 2017), 550.

<sup>310</sup> *Ibid.*, 326.

<sup>311</sup> Kotkin writes, “[Ordzhonikidze] possessed colossal authority, having worked closely with Lenin, beginning before the revolution, with service as a courier between the European emigration and Russia, and for years supervising heavy industry, the regime’s crowning achievement. He *could have tried* to use this standing to force a showdown at the plenum over fabricated wrecking charges. But even had he done so, only collective action could have succeeded...” Kotkin, *Stalin: Waiting for Hitler, 1929-1941*, 385.

occasional resistance from other members of the Politburo.<sup>312</sup> Revealingly, Stalin's appellations in the first half of the 1930s remained familiar, conveying a rough equality between members of the Politburo; Stalin was described as an "older brother" or "best friend" with whom disagreement was not only tolerated but even expected.<sup>313</sup>

The meteoric rise of heavy industry – championed by Ordzhonikidze and crowned by the Stakhanovite icons – may have exacerbated the insecurity of Stalin's position. The 1930s as a whole, in fact, witnessed an acute straining of relations between the General Secretary and the Commissariat of Heavy Industry. As early as 1931, Stalin began to suggest that Ordzhonikidze's "indispensable deputy" Georgy Pyatakov "might easily stray from the Bolshevik path, as [it seems that] Bolshevik laws are not categorical for [him]."<sup>314</sup> Relations between Stalin and Ordzhonikidze, in particular, appear to have rapidly deteriorated in the mid-1930s.<sup>315</sup> On one occasion, when Ordzhonikidze attempted to impede a denunciation of heavy industry managers by Andrei Vyshinsky, the Procurator General of the Soviet Union, Stalin accused Ordzhonikidze of "antiparty" proclivities.<sup>316</sup> In a letter to Kaganovich, Stalin foreshadowed, "Comrade Ord[zhonikidze] is continuing to conduct himself badly. He does not realize that his behavior objectively serves to undermine our leading group ... Why doesn't he see that he'll have no support

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<sup>312</sup> For example, in 1930, Molotov, outspokenly supported by Ordzhonikidze, opposed Stalin's appointment as Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars (effectively, the head of government), on the pretext that the additional position would interfere with his responsibilities as General Secretary of the Party. Benno Ennker, "The Stalin Cult, Bolshevik Rule and Kremlin Interaction in the 1930s," in Balazs Apor et al., *The Leader Cult in Communist Dictatorships: Stalin and the Eastern Bloc* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 86-87.

<sup>313</sup> Benno Ennker, "The Stalin Cult," 93.

<sup>314</sup> RGASPI f.558, o.11, d.779, l.1.

<sup>315</sup> Historian Sheila Fitzpatrick characterizes the relationship between these two Party officials as follows: "Ordzhonikidze had long annoyed Stalin by his habit of vigorously defending any of his subordinates who fell under NKVD suspicion, and in 1936 this was happening increasingly often." Oleg Khlevniuk similarly suggests that tensions between Stalin and Ordzhonikidze especially exacerbated in late 1936, months before the latter's suicide. Sheila Fitzpatrick, *On Stalin's Team*, 78; Khlevniuk, *In Stalin's Shadow*, 90.

<sup>316</sup> Kotkin, *Stalin: Waiting for Hitler*, 136, 141. Benno Ennker, "Struggling for Stalin's Soul: The Leader Cult and the Balance of Social Power in Stalin's Inner Circle," in Klaus Heller and Jan Plamper, *Personality Cults in Stalinism*, 188-189.

from our side if he takes this path?"<sup>317</sup> In his turn, Ordzhonikidze, in the words of one witness, "argued that Stalin's excessive cruelty was causing a split in the party and was leading the country into a dead end."<sup>318</sup>

Fomenting tension between Stalin and the Commissariat of Heavy Industry neared its climax in September 1936, when Deputy Commissar Pyatakov was arrested.<sup>319</sup> In January 1937, Pyatakov was tried by the Supreme Court of the Soviet Union, in which he was found guilty, among other charges, of "leading criminal, anti-Soviet, clandestine, treasonous, and terrorist acts, aimed at undermining the military power of the Soviet Union, accelerating military invasion of the Soviet Union, collusion with international aggressors Germany and Japan in seizing territory and dismembering the Soviet Union, overthrowing Soviet power and installing capitalism and bourgeois power in the Soviet Union."<sup>320</sup> Pyatakov was executed on 30 January 1937, immediately after his trial. Only a few weeks later, Ordzhonikidze committed suicide. Historians opine that behind Ordzhonikidze's suicide lurked threats of a fate similar to that of his deputy.<sup>321</sup>

As the cult of heavy industry crumbled, the cult of Stalin began to rise. The first traces of Stalin's cult were perceivable in 1929, on the occasion of the leader's fiftieth birthday, although

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<sup>317</sup> Ennker, "The Stalin Cult," 92.

<sup>318</sup> Khlevniuk, *In Stalin's Shadow*, 90. In Fitzpatrick's account, Ordzhonikidze felt increasingly threatened, betrayed, and "furious" after the sequential arrests of his elder brother, his friend Avel Enukidze, and finally his "indispensable deputy" Pyatakov. Fitzpatrick, *On Stalin's Team*, 78, 120. Kotkin also details Ordzhonikidze's rage at his brother's arrest: "In October 1936, Stalin had Orjonikidze's elder brother Papaliya arrested, a first for a relative of a sitting politburo member. Orjonikidze demanded to see his brother...Orjonikidze understood that it was not Beria but Stalin who was behind the incarceration." Kotkin, *Waiting for Hitler*, 348.

<sup>319</sup> RGASPI f.558, o.11, d.779, l.106.

<sup>320</sup> *Protseess antisovetskogo trotskistskogo tsentra, 23-30 ianvaria 1937 g.* (Moscow: Iuridicheskoe izdatel'stvo, 1937), 21. Throughout the course of the trial, Pyatakov confessed to encouraging German fascists to invade the Soviet Union, as well as "directly" preparing the "Parallel Center" of Trotskyites to assassinate Stalin and Kaganovich. *Protseess antisovetskogo trotskistskogo tsentra*, 46-48. Historians mostly concur that the charges in the "Anti-Soviet Trotskyite Center Trial" of January 1937 were fabricated, and the confessions of the defendants elicited by torture.

<sup>321</sup> Sheila Fitzpatrick, *On Stalin's Team*, 121. The afternoon of February 17 – the last in Ordzhonikidze's life – was apparently marked by an extended "shouting match over the telephone with Stalin, with profanities in Russian and Georgian. The NKVD had been searching Orjonikidze's apartment, an obvious provocation." Kotkin, *Stalin: Waiting for Hitler*, 384.

this “first wave of panegyrics” was “largely episodic.”<sup>322</sup> Historians debate the precise point at which Stalin’s cult crystallized, but most estimate that it was neither stable nor substantive before 1936.<sup>323</sup> Collective decision-making, in any case, characterized the Politburo until 1937.<sup>324</sup> When opposition from the Commissariat of Heavy Industry had been eliminated, however, Stalin’s neglect of the Stakhanovite movement not only stunted the threatening growth of Ordzhonikidze’s sector, but may have also, by redirecting the sacred currents of the Stakhanovite movement, aggrandized Stalin’s own cult.<sup>325</sup>

Many features of the Stalin cult, pooling from the same Marxist-Leninist source, map directly onto the iconography of the Stakhanovite movement. Religious expressions that had once described the Stakhanovites were siphoned by the cult of Stalin, whose figure became a “point of reference for the whole belief system” of Marxism-Leninism.<sup>326</sup> The minor “miracles” of the Stakhanovites were displaced by the “great miracles” ascribed to Stalin.<sup>327</sup> The Soviet leader, “like eternal fire,” commanded reverence and sublimity, which had, in inchoate form, belonged to the Stakhanovites.<sup>328</sup> As historian Lewis Siegelbaum notices, the “cult of the individual hero” that

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<sup>322</sup> Anita Pisch, *The Personality Cult of Stalin in Soviet Posters*, 87–190, 117, 139; Ennker, “The Stalin Cult,” 84–85.

<sup>323</sup> Historian Catriona Kelly estimates that the Stalin cult’s “first climax” comprised the years 1936–39, while Sarah Davies suggests that the “apogee” of the cult was achieved only “in the years after 1936–37.” According to Davies, the Stalin cult had definitively been consolidated by 1939; if in 1934 Stalin erased his name from the draft slogan “banner of Marx-Engels-Lenin-Stalin,” in 1939, he endorsed its inclusion. Anita Pisch delimits the final stage of the Stalin cult to encompass the period 1936–53, during which time Stalin began to be described in “superhuman terms.” Sarah Davies, “The ‘Cult’ of the Vozhd’: Representations in Letters, 1934–1941,” *Russian History* 24, no. 1/2 (1997): 131–47, 134; Sarah Davies, “Stalin and the Making of the Leader Cult in the 1930s,” in Balazs Apor et al., *The Leader Cult in Communist Dictatorships*, 39–40; Catriona Kelly, “Grandpa Lenin and Uncle Stalin: Soviet Leader Cult for Litter Children” in Balazs Apor et al., *The Leader Cult in Communist Dictatorships*, 109; Pisch, *The Personality Cult of Stalin in Soviet Posters*, 142.

<sup>324</sup> E. A. Rees, “Leader Cults: Varieties, Preconditions and Functions,” in Balazs Apor et al., *The Leader Cult in Communist Dictatorships*, 9.

<sup>325</sup> Stalin was quick to dismantle the “immense semi-autonomous fiefdom” that Ordzhonikidze had constructed in heavy industry. Shortly after Ordzhonikidze’s death, Stalin divided the Commissariat of Heavy Industry into various specialized economic commissariats; these sectors were even further divided in 1939, diminishing the influence of each of their commissars. Kotkin, *Stalin: Waiting for Hitler*, 550, 606.

<sup>326</sup> Rees, “Leader Cults,” 7.

<sup>327</sup> A. Vinogradova, “Rech’ tov. A. Vinogradovoi,” *Pravda*, Nov. 17, 1935, p.5.

<sup>328</sup> The comparison of Stalin to eternal fire appears in the poem: Dzhambul, “Moia rodina” in *Pesni o Staline* (Alma-Ata: Soiuz sovetskikh pisatelei Kazakhstana, 1936), 16.

characterized the Stakhanovite movement reached its zenith in the cult of Stalin.<sup>329</sup> Still entrenched in the religion of labor, Stalin was christened in proletarian tropes such as “machinist of the locomotive of revolution” and the “architect” of Soviet society.<sup>330</sup>

In contrast to the Stakhanovites – who demonstrated their faith in communism through physically exacting cycles of ever-higher industrial production records – Stalin’s cult reshaped the meaning of faith in the Marxist-Leninist civil paradigm. In a Soviet “Reformation,” inner devotion to Stalin, rather than outward manifestations of faith, became a sufficient criterion of salvation.<sup>331</sup> Happiness, moreover, was no longer actively achieved through daily strain at the workbench, but passively received, cascading from Stalin’s often metaphorical presence.<sup>332</sup>

While adoration of Stalin may have induced a shift from active to passive faith in the Marxist-Leninist paradigm, the cult of Stalin retained many of the sacred roles that the Stakhanovites had previously exemplified. Stalin, for one, came to embody the Marxist-Leninist trope of the hyper-productive worker. An “indefatigable reader” with a daily norm of five hundred pages, Stalin received and edited decrees, intelligence reports, interrogation protocols, newspaper articles, plays, speeches.<sup>333</sup> As the aviation marshal Golovanov recalls, “Stalin’s whole life, or at least that part of it which I had been able to observe in the course of several years, consisted of work. Wherever he was – at home, in the office, or on vacation – work, work, and work.

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<sup>329</sup> Siegelbaum, *Stakhanovism*, 225.

<sup>330</sup> *Stakhanovsko-busyinskoe dvizhenie*, 118; Yuri Slezkine, *The House of Government*, 333-334.

<sup>331</sup> Ennker, “The Stalin Cult,” 93. Grigory Zinoviev – Chairman of the Communist International, a member of the “tripartite” Soviet leadership after the death of Lenin, and sentenced to execution in the 1936 Trial of the Sixteen – identifies that his mistake in securing salvation was “because we were unable to properly submit to the Party, merge with it completely, become imbued with the same feelings of absolute acceptance toward Stalin that the Party and the whole country have become imbued with...” Slezkine, *The House of Government*, 716. Zinoviev, in short, could be “justified by faith alone,” and his hesitancy to commit himself wholeheartedly to Stalin resulted in his dismissal from the Party and early death. The Stakhanovite movement, in contrast, seemed to be governed by the principle that “key to salvation lay in the sphere of production.” Slezkine, *The House of Government*, 620.

<sup>332</sup> One poem attesting to the Soviet people’s passive reception of happiness through faith in Stalin declaims, “With the name of Stalin, happiness came! / With the name of Stalin, the steppe came into bloom! [S imenem Stalina radost’ prishla! / S imenem Stalina step’ zatsvetla!]” Dzhambul, “Moia rodina,” 13.

<sup>333</sup> Fitzpatrick, *On Stalin’s Team*, 106; Kotkin, *Stalin: Waiting for Hitler*, 303.

Everywhere and always work.”<sup>334</sup> Like Lenin, he was diagnosed with “neurasthenia” from overwork.<sup>335</sup>

Stalin also adopted the “life-creating role” of the Stakhanovite teachers.<sup>336</sup> Hailed as “our teacher dear,” Stalin was a mentor not only to his associates in the Party-state apparatus, but to the entire country, guiding the Soviet Union to modernity.<sup>337</sup> Children especially were encouraged to admire Stalin as a role model and – under the slogan “Thank You Stalin for a Happy Childhood” – to inculcate in their “backwards” parents their unconditional faith in the Soviet leader.<sup>338</sup>

Stalin moreover acquired the teacher-student duality of the Stakhanovite icons. Both the Stakhanovites and the *Vozhd'* were represented, in particular, as students of Lenin, whose cult comprised one of the first forms of “alternative” Soviet religiosity to replace traditional beliefs. Lenin’s “deification” thus served as the bedrock for both the Stakhanovite cult of productivity and the Stalin cult of personality; while Stakhanov and his followers vowed to uphold “the Covenant [*zavet*] of Lenin,” Stalin became Lenin’s “truest disciple.”<sup>339</sup> By his sixtieth birthday in 1939, Stalin’s canonization in the Marxist-Leninist paradigm was complete; the “hyphenate cult of Lenin-Stalin” had emerged, and Stalin was pronounced “the Lenin of today.”<sup>340</sup>

While there is no record of Stalin’s direct persecution of Stakhanovites, his neglect to sponsor the movement ensured its disappearance from the Soviet civil paradigm. Traces of the Stakhanovite movement were no longer publicly blazoned as signs of a miraculous new order, but lived on instead through personal fidelity to the memory of their creator, Ordzhonikidze. The sense

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<sup>334</sup> Nikolai Starikov, *Stalin: Vspominaem vmeste* (Moscow: Piter, 2013), 36-37.

<sup>335</sup> Kotkin, *Stalin: Waiting for Hitler*, 47.

<sup>336</sup> Hellbeck, *Revolution on My Mind*, 264.

<sup>337</sup> Walker, “Iosif Stalin,” 45, 59; Ennker, “The Stalin Cult,” 90.

<sup>338</sup> Pisch, *The Personality Cult of Stalin in Soviet Posters*, 119; Kelly, “Grandpa Lenin and Uncle Stalin,” 108.

<sup>339</sup> Stakhanov, *Rasskaz*, 111; Pisch, *The Personality Cult of Stalin in Soviet Posters*, 140.

<sup>340</sup> Robert C. Tucker, “The Rise of Stalin’s Personality Cult,” *The American Historical Review* 84, no. 2 (1979): 347–66, 364; Tumarkin, *Lenin Lives!*, 252.

of the sacred that had imbued the Stakhanovite movement was, however, not lost; the Stalin cult of personality perpetuated, in greater dimensions, the supernatural sublimity that the Stakhanovites had once symbolized. As the one, true heir of Lenin, Stalin eclipsed the ideological significance of Lenin's proletarian disciples and came to embody their roles in more extreme proportions. The Stakhanovite icons of Leninism, in a word, had prefigured – but could not coexist with – Stalin as “Lenin incarnate.”<sup>341</sup>

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Among the multitudinous visions of the New Man that emerged in the early twentieth century, Stakhanovism was distinguished by its roots in Marxist-Leninist ideology. The heart of the Marxist-Leninist civil paradigm, in particular, was work – the principal means not only to transform industry, but also to forge the souls of the New Proletariat. Powerfully, if ephemerally, the Stakhanovite movement reflected the dream that human nature would be purified, revolutionized, and exalted through hyper-productive labor. Through the ritual of labor could the Stakhanovites participate in the legacy of Lenin, reify the prophecies of Marx, demonstrate and rejuvenate their faith in Bolshevik ideology, and become both world-historical individuals and sacred icons. The Stakhanovites, in exchange for spiritually intensive and physically exhaustive shifts at the workplace, were to become immortal.

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<sup>341</sup> Tumarkin, *Lenin Lives!*, 253.



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