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**THE TASKS OF THE  
WORKING CLASS  
IN MASTERING  
THE TECHNIQUE OF  
PRODUCTION**

**BY  
J. STALIN**



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## The Tasks of the Working Class.

[This is a speech delivered by Joseph Stalin on February 4, 1931, in Moscow, at the First All-Russian Conference of Workers in Socialist industry. The representatives of the Soviet industrial enterprises—working men and women from the factories, directors of enterprises, delegates from the Boards of Trusts and Combines—who attended the Conference discussed and decided upon a series of concrete measures necessary for the carrying out of the colossal tasks confronting Soviet industry during the third and decisive year of the Five Year Plan, in the course of which the laying of the foundation of a Socialist economy is being completed.]

Comrades, the work of your Conference is drawing to an end. You will soon be voting on the resolutions. I have no doubt that they will be carried unanimously. In your resolutions—I have some notion as to their contents—you will endorse the control figures<sup>1</sup> of industry for 1931 and pledge their realisation.

A Bolshevik's word is a serious word. The Bolsheviks are accustomed to keep their promises. What then does the pledge to realise the control figures for 1931 actually mean? *It means definitely to increase our total industrial output by 45 per cent.* A tremendous task. Moreover, it means that you not only promise to carry out our Piatiletka<sup>2</sup> in four years—this is a settled matter and needs no more resolutions—it means that in the basic, crucial branches of our industry, *you are actually undertaking to carry it out in three years.*

It is commendable that the Conference promises to carry out the plan for 1931, to carry out the Piatiletka in three years. But we have been taught by "bitter experience." We know that promises are not always kept. At the beginning of 1930 we had the promise to carry out that year's plan. At that time our industrial output was to be increased by 31-32

<sup>1</sup> Control Figures—figures drawn up on the basis of the general economic plan, and used as indices of the basic tasks of individual enterprises and branches of industry.

<sup>2</sup> The Five Year Plan of industrial and agricultural reconstruction.

per cent. That promise, however, was not fulfilled. As it turned out, our industrial production in the year 1930 was increased by only 25 per cent. The question arises whether the same thing will not recur this year. Our industrial managers and workers are now pledging themselves to increase the industrial output in 1931 by 45 per cent. However, what guarantee is there that the promise will be kept?

What is it that is required for the realisation of the control figures, for the 45 per cent. increase in production, for the completion of the Piatiletka in four years, and in the basic, the key industries in three years?

For this there are two pre-requisites.

First, there must be actual or, as we are wont to say, "objective" possibilities.

Second, there must be the willingness and the ability so to manage our enterprises as to transform those possibilities into living realities.

Did we have these "objective" possibilities for the complete carrying out of last year's plan? We certainly had. There are indisputable facts to prove it. Thus, during the months of March and April of last year there was a 31 per cent. increase in production as compared with the preceding year. Why was it then that we did not manage to carry out the plan for the whole year? What interfered? What was it that was lacking? What was lacking was the ability to utilise the existing possibilities. What was lacking was the ability properly to manage the shops, the factories, the mines.

The first pre-requisite was on hand: the "objective" possibilities for carrying out the plan. It was the second pre-requisite that was lacking to some degree: the ability to manage industry. And it was precisely for this reason that our plan was not carried out in full. Instead of 31-32 per cent. increase, we had only 25 per cent.

Of course, a 25 per cent. increase is no small matter. *There is not a capitalist country that could boast in 1930, or that can boast now, of such a jump in production.* In all the capitalist countries without exception production has been showing a sharp decline. Under such conditions, a 25 per cent. increase is a tremendous leap forward. But we could have achieved more, we had all the necessary "objective" conditions.

Now what guarantee have we that this year will not see a repetition of last year's mishap? What guarantee have we

that our plan will be completely carried out, that all the existing possibilities will be utilised as they ought to be utilised, that your promise will not remain to a certain extent a promise on paper?

In the history of states, in the history of countries, in the history of armies, there have been cases when in face of every possibility of achieving success and victory, there was failure and defeat; all of the possibilities having been wasted because the leaders were not aware of them, were not able to take advantage of them.

Have we all the possibilities essential for the realisation of the control figures for 1931?

Yes, we have all such possibilities. What do they consist of? What conditions are necessary for realising these possibilities?

Above all there must be sufficient natural resources in the country: iron, ore, coal, oil, grain, cotton. Do we have them? Certainly. We have more of these materials than any other country. Take, for instance, the Urals—it presents such a combination of wealth as cannot be found in any other country. Ore, coal, oil, grain—what don't you have in the Urals! Our country has everything, except perhaps rubber. Within a year or two, however, we shall also have rubber. From this point of view, from the point of view of natural wealth, we are very well provided for, we have more than necessary.

What else is needed?

A Government with the will and the power to utilise these vast natural resources for the benefit of the people. Have we such a Government? We have. True, our work in utilising the natural wealth does not always progress without friction among our workers. Last year, for instance, the Soviet Government had to wage somewhat of a battle over the question of forming a second coal and metal base,<sup>1</sup> without which we could make no further progress. But we have already surmounted these obstacles. And before long we shall have a second base.

What else is needed?

That our many millions of workers and peasants support the Government. Does our Government enjoy such support?

<sup>1</sup> The speaker refers to the giant Ural-Siberian industrial combination involving the Ural ore (Magnitogorsk) and the Kuznetz coal (Kuznetz Bas). Till now there was only one base in the South Ukraine.—Tr

Indeed, it does. *There is not another Government in the world that enjoys the support of its workers and peasants as does the Soviet Government.* I shall not dwell on the growth of Socialist competition,<sup>1</sup> to the development of shock brigades,<sup>2</sup> to the campaign on behalf of the workers' industrial and financial counter-plans.<sup>3</sup> All these facts are universally known; they clearly show the support which the Soviet Government finds in the vast masses of the population.

What else must we have to achieve and surpass the things suggested by the control figures for 1931?

We must have a system not only free of the incurable ailments of capitalism, but also offering tangible advantages over it. Crises, unemployment, waste, widespread poverty—these are the irremediable maladies of capitalism. Our system does not suffer from these ailments, for we have the power in our own hands, in the hands of the working class, for our economy is a planned economy, our accumulation of resources is planned and properly distributed through the various branches of our economy. *We are free of the incurable diseases of capitalism. Herein lies our distinction, herein is our overwhelming advantage.*

See what the capitalists are doing to get out of the crisis. They are reducing wages to a minimum. They are cutting prices of raw materials and food products to a minimum. Yet they refuse to reduce prices of manufactured products to any appreciable degree. They are trying, that is to say, to scramble out of the crisis at the expense of the great mass of consumers, at the expense of the workers, at the expense of the peasants, at the expense of the toilers of those countries which are producing raw materials and food. The capitalists are chopping off the branch that supports them. Instead of escaping the crisis, they are aggravating it, piling up new causes for a still more severe crisis.

Our advantage consists in that we know nothing of over-production crises, in that we have not, nor will have, millions of unemployed, in that we are free of anarchy in production, for ours is a planned economy. But this is not all. Ours is a

1 One of the new Socialist forms of labour evolved by the Soviet proletarian democracy. It is characterised by friendly rivalry among individual factories, plants, brigades, and workers in an effort best to carry out the required tasks.—Tr.

2 A socialised form of work, resulting from the labour enthusiasm of individual workers and of groups (brigades) of workers whose aim it is to overcome all difficulties and obstacles in carrying out the Five Year Plan in the shortest time possible and to infect their fellow workers by their enthusiasm and example.—Tr.

3 Enlarged financial and industrial plans, formed on the initiative of the rank and file workers themselves, emanating from below, from the work-benches, the craft-guilds the shops and the factories, and offered as a corrective to the plans evolved by the planning commissions above. On the basis of their own experience, moved by their labour enthusiasm, the workers correct the plans proposed by the commissions.—Tr.

country of the most concentrated industry. This means that *we can build our industry on the basis of the very best technique, thus attaining unprecedented productivity of labour, unheard of rates of accumulation.* Our weakness in the past resulted from the circumstance that our industry rested on a scattered, petty peasant economy. But that was the past. Things are different now. To-morrow, perhaps a year hence, our country will become the place of the largest scale agriculture in the world. Our Soviet farms,<sup>1</sup> our collective farms—and they are forms of large scale agriculture—have actually yielded this year one half of our marketable grain. And this means that our system, the Soviet system, offers such possibilities of rapid progress as are absolutely inconceivable in any bourgeois country.

What else must there be if we are to forge ahead with giant strides?

There must be a Party, united, solid, indivisible, to direct the efforts of the best elements of the working class toward one point, a Party sufficiently rich in experience not to funk in face of difficulties, a party that would pursue a correct, revolutionary, Bolshevik policy. Have we such a Party? We have. Is its policy correct? Certainly, for it has been definitely successful. This is admitted now by both friends and foes of the working class. Hear the notoriously “respectable” gentlemen, Fish in America, Churchill in England, Poincaré in France, rage and howl against our Party. Why all this fire and fury? Because the policy of our Party is sound, because it yields triumph upon triumph.

These, comrades, are the factors that facilitate the materialisation of the control figures for 1931, that make possible the completion of the Piatiletka in four years, and in the key industries even in three years.

Thus, the first pre-requisite for the carrying out of our plan—the “objective” possibilities—is satisfied.

Do we satisfy the second pre-requisite—the ability to utilise the possibilities.

In other words, are our shops, factories, and mines efficiently managed? Is everything there as it should be?

Unfortunately, things there are not as they should be. And as Bolsheviks we must admit it frankly and openly.

<sup>1</sup> Huge state-owned farms, “factories” of grain, meat, and other agricultural products, managed as industrial enterprises.—Tr.

What does it mean to manage industry? We do not always reveal a Bolshevik attitude in matters of industrial management. Not a few of us think that to manage means to sign papers. It is deplorable, but it is a fact. Occasionally one is reminded of Shchedrin's Pompadours.\* You remember, of course, how his lady Pompadour instructed the young Pompadour: Do not break your head over learning, do not delve too deeply into business, let others do it, it isn't your job—your job is to manage, to sign papers. We must confess, to our shame, that among us, among the Bolsheviks, there are not a few who do their managing by signing papers. But as regards delving into business, mastering technique, becoming real men of affairs—of this there is not the slightest suggestion.

How does it happen that we, the Bolsheviks, who have gone through three revolutions, who have emerged victorious from the ruthless civil war, who have solved the most difficult problem of creating an industry, who have turned the peasantry towards Socialism, how does it happen that when it comes to industrial management we are discomfited by a slip of paper?

The reason is that to sign a paper is easier than to manage an industry. Accordingly, many of our administrators have followed the line of least resistance. We, too, the centre, bear a share of the blame. About ten years ago the following principle was advanced: "Since the Communists have not yet fully grasped industrial technique, since they have still to learn economic management, it is well to let the old technicians and engineers, the specialists, carry on production, while you Communists do not interfere with technical matters, but, while not interfering, study technique, persevere in acquiring the science of industrial management so that later you, together with the loyal specialists, become true leaders of our industry, our real business administrators." Such was the principle. But what has actually happened? The second part of the formula was forgotten, for it is more difficult to study than to sign papers, while the first part of the formula has been vulgarised, non-interference having been interpreted as the negation of the need of acquiring industrial technique. The result has been muddle, harmful and dangerous muddle. And the sooner we remedy it, the better.

Experience itself has more than once warned us that not everything was well here. The Shakhty trial<sup>1</sup> was the first

\* M. K. Shchedrin was a Russian satirist of the latter part of the 19th century who railed at the habits and customs of serf-owning Russia. The Czarist administrators whom he burlesqued he called Pompadours.—Tr.

<sup>1</sup> The trial of wreckers in the coal industry. The first important case of this kind in the Soviet courts. The public trial took place in 1928.—Tr.

signal. The Shakhty trial revealed that both the Party organisations and the trade unions lacked revolutionary vigilance. It revealed that our industrial managers were monotonously backward technically, that certain old engineers and technicians, because of the absence of any control, were so much more easily being drawn into wrecking activities, particularly since they were being perpetually besieged "with offers" from our enemies abroad. The second signal was the "Industrial Party" trial.

Of course, at the bottom of all this sabotage is the class struggle. Of course, the class enemy ferociously resists the Socialist advance. Yet this in itself is not sufficient to account for the rank growth of sabotage.

How did it happen that sabotage has become so widespread? Whose fault is it? It is our fault. For had we handled the business of industrial management differently, had we begun to acquire technology much sooner, had we more frequently and intelligently taken part in the management of affairs, the wreckers could not have done so much damage.

We must become specialists ourselves. We must know our business, we must turn to the acquisition of technical knowledge—this is the behest of life itself. However, neither the first nor the second warning brought about the necessary change. It is time, high time, to turn our face to technology. *It is high time to cast aside the old slogan, the antiquated slogan of non-interference in technical matters; we must become specialists, business experts, we must ourselves become full-fledged managers of our affairs.*

It is frequently asked why we do not have one-man management.\* We do not and shall not have it, unless we master technique. Not until there are among us, among the Bolsheviks, a sufficient number of people well versed in the questions of technology, economics, and finance, shall we have genuine single command. We can write any number of resolutions, we can make any number of pledges, but unless we master the technique, the economics, and the finances of our shops, factories, and mines, the results will be nil, we will not have single command.

Our task therefore is to master technique, is to take the business into our own hands. This is the only possible guarantee that our plans will be carried out, that one-man management will be established.

\* The principle of one-man, as opposed to collective, management urged by Lenin in the early days of the revolution, and aiming at fixing correctly the rights and duties of the management and the responsibility for the conduct and work of the Socialist enterprise.—Tr.



Naturally, this is no easy matter. Yet it certainly can be achieved. Science, technical experience, information—all this can be acquired. If not to-day, then to-morrow. The main thing is to be possessed by a fervent Bolshevik desire to master technique, to master the science of production. If one wills passionately, one can achieve anything, one can overcome anything.

Occasionally the question is asked whether it might not be advisable to reduce our speed, to slow down a bit. This, comrades, is utterly impossible! We dare not reduce our rate of progress! On the contrary, *we must accelerate it as much as we can. We owe it to the workers and peasants of the U.S.S.R. We owe it to the working class of the world.*

To slow down means to fall behind. And the backward are beaten. But we refuse to be beaten. Yes, we refuse! The history of old Russia, incidentally, is a story of endless drubbings dealt to the backward. Thrashed by the Mongolian Khans. Thumped by the Turkish beys. Trowned by the Swedish feudal lords. Smitten by the Polish-Lithuanian "pans." Whipped by the Anglo-French capitalists. Beaten by the Japanese barons. Beaten by everyone for her backwardness—for her military backwardness, for her cultural backwardness, for her governmental backwardness, her industrial backwardness, her agricultural backwardness. She was thrashed because it was profitable, and because it could be done with impunity.

You will recall the words of our pre-revolutionary poet: "You are both, O Mother Russia, poor and rich, and strong and weak."\* All these gentlemen seem to have learnt by heart the words of our old poet. They would thrash her and mutter: "You are rich,"—so why not fatten ourselves at your expense? They would thrash her and reiterate: "You are poor, weak,"—so one can beat you and rob you with impunity. Such is the law of the exploiters—such is the law of capitalism, the law of the wolf—jump on the weak, on the backward. You are lagging behind, you are weak, therefore you are wrong, therefore you may be beaten and enslaved. You are powerful, therefore you are right, therefore you must be guarded against.

That is why we must no longer straggle behind.

In the past we did not and could not have a fatherland. But now that we have overthrown capitalism, now that we have a workers' government, we do have a fatherland, and we

\* Stalin is quoting from N. A. Nekrasov.—Tr.

will fight to maintain its independence. Surely, you do not want to see your Socialist fatherland beaten, robbed of its independence! Well, if you do not want this, you must proceed immediately to remove your country's backwardness, to develop a truly Bolshevik pace in building our Socialist economy. There is no other way. This is what Lenin meant when during the October days he said: "Either death, or we must catch up and outstrip the advanced capitalist countries."

We are fifty to a hundred years behind the advanced countries. We must cover this distance in ten years. Either we accomplish this or we shall be crushed.

Such are our obligations to the workers and peasants of the U.S.S.R.

There are, however, other still more serious and still more important obligations. I mean our obligations to the world proletariat. While these are of the same nature as the first, we regard them as higher. For the working class in the U.S.S.R. is a part of the working class of the world. We have achieved victory not only through the efforts of the working class of the U.S.S.R., but also through the support of the world proletariat. Without that support we would have been torn to shreds long ago. It is said that we are the shock brigade of the working class of the world. This is true. But this imposes on us obligations of the utmost gravity.

Why does the international proletariat support us, how have we earned this support? We have earned it by the fact that we were the first to fling ourselves into the battle against capitalism, that we were the first to establish a working class government, that we were the first to set out to build Socialism. We have merited it by the fact that we are working for a cause which if successful will change the face of the earth and will set free the entire working class.

And what is wanted for success? The elimination of our backwardness, the development of a mighty, Bolshevik rate of construction. Our forward pace must be such that upon beholding us, the working class of the entire world might exclaim: Here it is, our vanguard; here it is, our shock brigade; here it is, our workers' government; here it is, our fatherland. It does *the* work, our work—well, then, let us support it against the capitalists and fan the flames of the world revolution. Are we to justify the hopes of the world proletariat, are we to fulfil our obligations? We are, we must, or we shall bring down eternal disgrace upon ourselves.

Such are our duties, our domestic and international obligations.

They dictate a Bolshevick rate of development.

I cannot say that we have done nothing in the matter of industrial management. Indeed, we have; and a great deal at that. We have doubled our industrial production as compared with the pre-war level. We have achieved the biggest agricultural production in the world. But we might have done much more had we properly learned to manage production, learned its technique, learned its financial and economic aspects.

*In ten years at most we must cover the distance between us and the advanced capitalist countries. We have all the "objective" possibilities to do it. What we lack is the ability properly to utilise these possibilities. And this is up to us, only to us! It is high time that we learn to utilise these possibilities. It is high time to do away with the ruinous policy of non-interference in production. It is time to adopt another, a new policy, more in accord with the present period, the policy of mixing in everything. If you are a director of a factory, then take a hand in everything, master every detail, overlook nothing; learn, learn, and once more learn. The Bolshevicks must become masters of technique. It is time that the Bolshevicks themselves become specialists. In the period of reconstruction technology determines everything, and the business manager who is unwilling to study technology, who is averse to mastering technique, is a joke and not a manager.*

It is said that technique is difficult. Untrue! There are no fortresses that Bolshevicks cannot capture. We have solved a series of most formidable problems. We have overthrown capitalism. We have seized power. We have built up a mighty Socialist industry. We have turned the middle peasant toward Socialism. The most important part of our task of construction we have accomplished. Not much is left to do: to gain technique, to master science. And when this is achieved, our pace shall become such as we dare not even dream of at present. And this shall be done; for where there is a will there is a way!

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