MAKING WORKERS SOVIET

Power, Class, and Identity

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The Hidden Class: White-Collar Workers in the Soviet 1920s

On 22 June 1929, M. I. Kalinin gave one of the major speeches at the Eighth All-Union Congress of the Union of Soviet and Commercial Employees. Kalinin, later president of the Soviet Republic, was then the chairman of the Central Executive Committee of the USSR (a largely ceremonial post overshadowed by positions in the Sovnarkom or ministerial bureaucracy and by the Politburo and Secretariat of the Communist Party itself). One of Kalinin's major themes was the ongoing purge of state employees that had again turned upside down the world of white-collar employees. In June of 1929, Stalin's reheated class war was already in full swing. The five-year plan was under way, as was collectivization. The so-called Right Opposition (Bukharin, Tomsky, Rykov, and their allies among the technical intelligentsia and party cadres who supported a softer line toward the peasantry and so on) had already been routed from their not very deep trenches. For the union membership, purges were already the order of the day—the state against itself—another of a long series of antibureaucratic campaigns that dominated the discourse and political landscape of the 1920s (and indeed, in an even more virulent form, the 1930s as well).[1]

Kalinin, much to his credit, decried this "campaign" mode of reforming or transforming the bureaucracy. It was too destructive, he claimed, and usually got rid of the wrong people. Purging, he argued, should never be carried out on the basis of social origin (he understood well the masked quality of Soviet society and the utter lack of correspondence between social origin and political consciousness). Purges, understood in this case

[1] The campaign mode of the 1930s was legitimized and became a permanent feature of the political and social landscape during the 1920s. For a discussion of the power and varied meanings of what I term the discourse of antibureaucracy, see my "Anti-Bureaucratic Campaigns of the 1920's," to appear in a volume of Kennan Institute Conference papers on reform in tsarist and Soviet Russia, edited by Theodore Taranovski (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).

as a campaign mode of bureaucratic reform, should be carried out strictly on the basis of individual performance and competence. Kalinin appealed to the provincial union functionaries to purge only the "responsible" types. (Here he cited Stalin's dictum to go after the "big bureaucrat.") In Riazan, for example, he noted that 1500 employees had been dismissed, but not the real troublemakers. "It was wrong, as many now did, to think of purging as an honor. We need quality purges, purges that are permanent so that 75 percent of banished functionaries do not reappear in other Soviet positions." Purges require foresight and planning, he argued. In Tomsk, according to Kalinin, one thousand purged employees were replaced by blue-collar workers who had no qualifications to become office workers, bookkeepers, typists, or higher specialists.[2] This he said was a bad tendency, "mechanical affirmative action," and there were far too many reports of miserable workers in new white-collar posts. "In the Central Executive Committee, we only take in five workers, and then only if we can give them full support and a trial period to see how they like the new occupations." It was dangerous, he argued, to remove valuable production workers from the factories to give them less meaningful white-collar jobs. He called on his audience to think of the factory and its leadership and only remove blue collar workers very very carefully. "A valued person makes good money in the factory, so don't promote a metalworker into a typist, don't make them into bureaucratic paper pushers." He insisted that a policy promoting hundreds of thousands of blue-collar workers is not in touch with the issues, that a campaign mode of promotion will destroy thousands of lives.

For Kalinin, the preferred solution to the call for affirmative action was to promote white-collar workers themselves within the soviet and commercial apparatus. Why, he wondered, was there no commentary in the media about this kind of promotion to more responsible positions? (To answer his question: at that time to speak of white-collar workers instead of pure proletarians was not politically correct and the silence in the media was a reflection of the hidden nature of the white-collar "class.") Why, he wondered, is the press so negative toward the Soviet apparatus? He observed that in twelve years the white-collar workers had fulfilled enormous state tasks and created a huge cadre of selfless functionaries and called on these functionaries to defend themselves as a corporate body and a profession. He pointed out that the factory system had more former tsarist officials than the apparatus did and called for an end to the tyranny of the managers. He called on the members of the employees' union to raise their self-consciousness and professionalism and closed with a plea to the white-collar workers to acquire more of a corporate sense of them-

[2] All of the above taken from *Nasha gazeta*, 22 June 1929, p. 2.

selves, in short to stand up for their rights and status even as they helped to lead the way forward in the construction of the new socialist economy and state. He called the Soviet and commercial employees a proletarian army, proletarian in the material and popular sense (though not in terms of social origin), and urged them to give this proletarian army ideological content and working-class political and economic sense. The white-collar workers are not, as some would have it, an intelligentsia proletariat. They were raised on petty bourgeois values. Our job—the job of the union and the party—is to instruct them in proletarian interests, ethics, and way of life. This is possible, and this immersion of white-collar workers in proletarian society will strengthen the Soviet apparatus and insure the link of workers and peasants and the building of socialism.[3]

In the Soviet Union during the 1920s the white-collar workers, a group largely, but not exclusively peopled by employees, were a hidden class (although the term "class" is problematic), precisely because they were so closely identified with and identified themselves with the proletarian project, the idea of the proletariat or of a proletarian state that had come to dominate the discourse and politics of state building during the revolution. To call them a hidden class suggests that in some ways they were as important as the working "class," and reflects how they appeared under the rubric of employees (*sluzhashchie*) only to disappear from time to time back into the larger proletarian category . One would have to sift through the official rhetoric and documents quite carefully to unravel the white-collar thread from the whole proletarian cloth. They have also been "hidden" from our view by a conspiracy of silence. Largely ignored by historians of the Soviet period (Western and Soviet), by historians of the revolution in 1917, and by historians of late Imperial Russia alike, white-collar workers have generally been folded uncritically into the working class, or worse yet confused with the so-called bourgeois specialists, who had their own problematic history during the civil war and the 1920s.[4]

[3] Ibid.

[4] It is instructive that even the most recent attempts to map the social terrain of the 1920s pay scant attention to white-collar workers or to the key questions of occupations and layering. See, for example, Maureen Perrie and R. W. Davies, "The Social Context," in Davies, ed., *From Tsarism to the New Economic Policy: Continuity and Change in the Economy of the USSR* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1991), pp. 29–46. See also Catherine Merridale, *Moscow Politics and the Rise of Stalin: The Communist Party in the Capital, 1925–32* (New York, 1990). Merridale notes the large numbers of white-collar workers in the party, but focuses her analysis almost exclusively on "workers," thus lending credence to the regime's public front and the stale categories of decades of Soviet scholarship. Sheila Fitzpatrick offers some insight into the "objective" vs. subjective nature of class identity in the 1920s in her recent "The Problem of Class Identity in NEP Society," in Sheila Fitzpatrick, Alexander Rabinowitch and Richard Stites, eds., *Russia in the Era of NEP: Explorations in Soviet Society and Culture* (Bloomington, Ind., 1991), pp. 12–33. Fitzpatrick speaks of masked identities, but only from the point of view of *vlast'*, that is, she argues that state power (and by implication society as well), was interested in unmasking class aliens hiding behind acceptable occupations or false class identities. I argue here that the state was itself doing the masking with the assistance of social groups who found it expedient to adopt or adapt to acceptable social categories.

This research on white-collar workers grows out of earlier work on the role of the lower middle strata, a concept meant to include both white-collar workers and certain middle-level status groups and occupations, professionals, and intellectuals in the Russian revolution.[5]

The story of Soviet white-collar workers should not be viewed in isolation as a feature of the peculiar experience of a massive agrarian society (with a long history of bureaucracy) undergoing revolutionary transformation. Comparing the white-collar workers of the Soviet Union of the 1920s with their interwar counterparts in Europe is particularly useful for understanding the role of this sizeable and politically significant social group in the development of corporativist nondemocratic political systems—to include fascism.

Here the Italian case may be particularly instructive. The Italian historian Liugi Salvatorelli and the social theorist and Marxist activist Antonio Gramsci both observed and commented on the role of Italy's lower middle class in the articulation of corporativism during the 1920s.[6] Salvatorelli labeled the Italian middle classes "literate illiterates."[7] Members of this group could be found especially in bureaucratic offices, scholastic halls, and petty professional activities. Salvatorelli spoke to the culture of this group and noted that they possessed a "smattering" of grammatical and formulaic culture, but that they lacked the critical and synthetic abilities to use their knowledge to evaluate the contemporary political scene. Grasmci colorfully described them as "monkey people," and fascism as their latest "performance" in the theater of national political life. The monkey people, according to Gramsci, "supply daily news, they do not create history, they leave traces in the newspapers, they do not offer material to write books."[8] The Italian regime attempted to manage the problems of lower-middle-class social marginality by building a new mythology of corporativism that provided for membership in the new national society through participation in the "free" unions (*syndicati*). Such corporations provided metaphors for "framing and reinterpreting experience" and for channeling private initiative into the public sphere through the overarching presence of the fascist state. In the Italian model, one had to be a part of a collective (and subject to collective labor contracts for example) in order to be part of the nation. As in the Soviet case (as will be shown), white-collar workers and intelligentsia in general were

[5] On the intelligentsia (including some professionals) in 1917, see O. N. Znamenskii, *Intelligentsiia nakanune velikogo Oktiabria (fevral'–oktiabr' 1917 g.)* (Leningrad, 1988).

[6] The material that follows is drawn largely from Mabel Berezin, "Created Constituencies: The Italian Middle Classes and Fascism," in Rudy Koshar, ed., *Splintered Classes: Politics and the Lower Middle Classes in Interwar Europe* (New York, 1990), pp. 142–63.

[7] Ibid., p. 142.

[8] Ibid., p. 143.

to play the role of mediators in a new society that was to transcend the class struggle and indeed, the entire problem of class in industrializing societies. The goal was the manipulated expressions of solidarity among the various participants in production (an example would be collective labor contracts). The state would be the great unifier and "encourager" of private initiative, and the professionals and intellectuals were to assist production and be the guardians of the new collective morality.[9] Under this system, the fiction of class collaboration would replace the much-feared class conflict. Early Soviet society and Marxist ideology offered parallel possibilities.

Two aspects of Russian society need to be mentioned at the outset—layering and masking. The first refers to the tremendously rich variety of social and occupational groups that emerged in late tsarist Russia (at the turn of the century) and their enormous impact on the revolution of 1905 and especially on the two revolutions in 1917. The second refers to the conscious and unconscious efforts of the actors, theoreticians, and commentators of the time and of subsequent politicians and historians to mask this social reality by developing the sociologically crude and reductive, but politically effective discourse of a class struggle among workers, peasants, and the "bourgeoisie." In fact the conclusion one is tempted to draw after four months of archival work on the 1920s is that the more fragmented and layered that Soviet society became (a process that only increased in intensity with the October Revolution, the early attempt to abolish the market in War Communism, the onset of civil war, and so on), the more stridently it claimed an essentially proletarian nature. In short, the more important and larger the social and political role of non-blue-collar factory workers (and agrarian laborers), the greater the pressure for state power to act out its proletarian fantasies. The state sought social integration by articulating an affirmative proletarian universalism. One might say that the revolution had placed on the table both strict and broad interpretations of the composition of the proletariat. During the early and mid-1920s, the broad view prevailed, but economic failures (accompanied by parallel failures in social integration) later in the decade led to a reassertion of the narrow conception of class (and class war) and even more obsequious attempts of non-factory workers to fit into the proletarian model.

This is not to say that during the 1920s there was no body of workers that comprised a conscious, socially coherent, politically unified class in the Marxist sense, or that components of such a group did not identify with the regime or even defend its economic interests against authority.

[9] In a word strikingly resonant with the experience of tsarist Russia, this group was even termed the "Third Element" (ibid.).

Rather it is to note that the formation of such a coherent and conscious group was neither straightforward nor predictable, that its forms did not necessarily conform to either Marxist or non-Marxist theories of class. The process of class formation was full of contradictions that involved other "proletarians" who were not factory workers. It also involved a series of substitutions that derived from the elimination of the bourgeoisie and the market and their replacement by state power (itself a form of social power) in its varied and sometimes masked forms.[10] For the white-collar workers the proletarian agendas were mystifying challenges and threats. How after all could Taylorism be applied to office work, much less storming? Is one's loyalty to *vedomstvo* (home institution), union, class, or occupational group? Did the language of class and class conflict mask the ongoing struggles of all of these formations over the substance of power in the 1920s?

The Russian Revolution had a profound impact on social roles and identities.[11] This is hardly surprising since any revolution at least for a time throws open the realm of possibility to an entire spectrum of social groups previously limited by the structures of the old regime. The Russian Revolution offers another dimension to this problem, namely that of ideological masks. The Bolsheviks declared the revolution to have been made in the name of the proletariat. They even proclaimed a partnership between this proletariat and the peasantry, a holy union that was to persist as a cornerstone of party dogma, if not political reality, until the end of the 1920s.[12] The trouble is that neither social nor even political reality corresponded to the requirements of ideology. This should not be surprising. Russian society had been rapidly evolving since the mid-nineteenth century. In the two decades immediately prior to the February Revolution of 1917, new social groups and new occupations had emerged that did not correspond to the legal categories of the estate (*soslovie*) system. Factory workers, professionals, white-collar workers, and others had to be worked into the official estate categories.

We know that the working class was shattered during the civil war,

[10] The argument is similar to one made by Diane Koenker in her essay "Class Consciousness in a Socialist Society: Workers in the Printing Trades during NEP," in Fitzpatrick, Rabinowitch and Stites, *Russia in the Era of NEP*, pp. 34–57, which was first delivered at the National Seminar on the History of Twentieth-Century Russian and Soviet Society, Bloomington, Ind., 1986.

[11] See Leopold Haimson, "Civil War and the Problem of Social Identities in Early Twentieth Century Russia," in Diane Koenker, William G. Rosenberg, and Ronald G. Suny, eds., *Party, State and Society in the Russian Civil War: Explorations in Social History* (Bloomington, Ind., 1989), pp. 24–47. Also the articles by Sheila Fitzpatrick, "New Perspectives on the Civil War," and "The Legacy of the Civil War," pp. 3–24 and 385–98 in the same collection.

[12] See M. A. Molodtsygin, *Raboche-krest'ianskii soiuz 1918–1920* (Moscow, 1987).

though only recently have we seen that too much has been made of the deurbanization and declassing phenomena.[13] Workers in the industrial center managed to turn to other traditional sources and locations of class identity once the bourgeoisie was eliminated. How else, after all, was one to define a social identity when a major source of that identity was gone? The cities, as Brower shows, were full of survivors (*obyvateli*), a rather amorphous urban mass that in a time of unbelievable hardship dealt in the essential goods and services of day-to-day life.[14] During the 1920s the weighty presence of white-collar workers in the urban mass and indeed in the provincial towns and countryside as well is documented in the 1923 census of cities and towns and the All Union Census of 1926. These were the last relatively accurate and professional censuses carried out prior to the purges of the Central Statistical Administration (TsSU) in the late twenties. (The TsSU was itself a bastion of lower-middle-strata prerevolutionary professionals, zemstvo statisticians, and the like.)

In the countryside the white-collar worker emerged with new force as functionaries in the soviets and in the party and other state institutions, building on the structure of occupations already in place as a result of institution building in the decades leading to 1917 and the revolution itself. In the post-October civil war countryside a new, vast, and ever increasing group of peasants-turned-functionaries quickly took hold. In the words of Orlando Figes, the "rural official elite of the emergent party-state apparatus was formed as the village democracy of the peasant revolution disintegrated under the social pressures of the civil war."[15] Figes writes,

> The problem of governing the countryside after 1921 was in many ways more fundamental than it had been prior to 1917. The social autonomy and the economic power of the village communes had been greatly increased as a result of the revolution. The new state administrators in the VIKs and the village soviets were, unlike their predecessors under the Tsar, mainly drawn from the peasantry; they were for the most part, barely literate, inexperienced in government, poorly disciplined, and strongly inclined towards localism.[16]

The new functionaries were drawn from the marginal and landless elements of rural society and included, according to Figes, ex-servicemen,

[13] See the excellent articles on this by Daniel Brower and Diane Koenker in Koenker, Suny, and Rosenberg, *Party, State and Society*.

[14] See I. Gor'e, *Time of Troubles* (Princeton, N.J., 1988), for an account of the hardships as experienced by a member of the intelligentsia.

[15] Orlando Figes, *Peasant Russia, Civil War: The Volga Countryside in Revolution (1917–1921)* (Oxford, 1989), p. 355.

[16] Ibid., p. 245.

general laborers, craftsmen, migrants, rural youth, and women. White-collar work in the village and canton (*volost'*) centers helped to define a social and political division between the agrarian world of the communes and the rapidly growing party-state, which would come to represent the outside world and its projects of industrialization, education, and the like.[17]

Even the party opposition known as Democratic Centralists called attention to the nature of rural cadres in the soviets. T. V. Sapronov and V. V. Osinski, leaders of this movement, were wholly in favor of *ispolkom* power in provincial and rural soviets, but believed that the elected membership of these soviets consisted largely of antiproletarian, petty-bourgeois obyvateli. In a debate at the Seventh All-Russian Congress of Soviets in 1919, this Democratic Centralist charge was answered by the great defender of the white-collar workers, M. Kalinin. Kalinin argued for wide enlistment of the ordinary citizen as follows: "Some say, 'But you are enrolling the obyvateli?' What is the obyvatel'?—a person, standing on the petty bourgeois point of view, accustomed to living according to routine. We should tear these people out of their routines, we should shove them into soviet work. Can those who are alienated from the soviets really be enlisted in the larger goal of soviet construction? We must push the obyvatel' [philistine] mass forward."[18]

Even a cursory examination of the census materials shows the existence of a large white-collar social formation—a group that in numerical strength fully equalled or exceeded those who were categorized as workers.[19] Statistics reveal the urban population of the Russian empire to have been reduced by eight million (from 28.4 million to 20.1 million) or 30% during the years of war, revolution and civil war from 1913-1920.[20] Despite ongoing famine and pestilence, economic recovery was far enough

[17] See ibid. for figures on the social composition of *volosti*, district soviets, and executive committees (*ispolkomy*).

[18] Quoted in the stenographic *otchet* of the Seventh All-Russian Congress of Soviets (Moscow, 1920), p. 221. I am grateful to Lars Lih for the reference. Interestingly, both Sapronov (the Democratic Centralist) and the food supply official P. K. Kaganovich accused Kalinin of putting the soviets in the hands of obyvateli (vulgar urbanites) and *meshchane* (bourgeois), and of petty-bourgeois *raskhlabannost'* (literally, lack of discipline, disorganization brought on by a sort of weak sloppiness). See pp. 225–27 and 244.

[19] One of the few Western scholars to underscore the existence of large numbers of white-collar workers in the 1920s was William Chase in his pioneering study of the Moscow working class, *Workers, Society and the Soviet State: Labor and Life in Moscow, 1918–1929* (Urbana, Ill., 1987), pp. 121–29.

[20] V. B. Zhiromskaia, *Sovetskii gorod v 1921–1925gg.: Problemy sotsial'noi struktury* (Moscow, 1988), p. 44. All figures that follow are taken from Zhiromskaia's reproductions of 1923 and 1926 census materials.

along by 1923 to spur a population increase of 8.7%. The urban population had reached 22 million at the time of the 1923 census. In European Russia (exclusive of Siberia and Ukraine) the urban population numbered 11,194, 100 or 51.2% of the empire's total. The figures on social composition of the cities and towns of this region for 1923 and 1926 reveal almost an equal number of blue- and white-collar workers and a large number of other census categories that hid significant additional numbers of employees.[21]

	Blue collar	White collar
USSR, urban population	2,332,713 (25.3%)	2,231,116 (24.2%)
RSFSR	(26.0%)	(26.2%)
European Russia	(26.2%)	(26.9%)
Other urban social groups—USSR as a whole		
Free professions		78,976 (0.8%)
Enterprise owners (with hired labor)		39,435 (0.4%)
Enterprise owners (family labor, to include NEP women and men often from employee or shop background)		475,019 (5.1%)
Individuals engaged in economic activity (undefined)		942,717 (10.2%)
Family helpers of above		(8.5%)
Dependents of state and social institutions		746,307 (8.1%)
Unemployed		905,424 (9.8%)
Retired		110,682 (1.2%)
Declassed population (gentry, priests, bourgeoisie, and those indicating no source of income)		550,495 (6.0%)

Factory workers constituted a very small percentage of the urban population. Much more numerous were the white-collar workers in all their variants, many of whom were hidden in the other categories of the census. Not only were white-collar workers hidden in the census categories and in most official communications and analyses of "society," their presence was also downplayed in trade union membership statistics, which makes it easy to miss how they could be found in all sorts of enterprises and institutions in the Soviet state. One must look beyond the union in which they were segregated (the Union of Soviet and Commercial Employees) to all other unions (blue-collar and intelligentsia alike), because all these unions had significant white-collar memberships.

[21] The following is taken from V. B. Zhiromskaia's reproduction of 1923 and 1926 census materials in *Sovetskii gorod v 1921–1925 gg.: Problemy sotsial'noi struktury* (Moscow, 1988), p. 44.

In European Russia between 1923 and 1926, the period of Lenin's death and the great political struggles between Stalin and the Left and Joint Oppositions, the period of the Lenin Levy in the party (an early wave of affirmative action, intended to increase the numbers of workers from the bench in the proletarian's party), the absolute numbers of both factory workers and white-collar employees increased dramatically. In the central industrial region, for example, workers increased by 298,511 and employees by 190,527. In 1926, the workforce there included 43.8 percent factory workers and 30.4 percent employees. This represented a growth rate from 1923 to 1926 of 51 percent for the workers and 32.7 percent for employees. Similar figures exist for Leningrad and Karelia. In the central agricultural (black-earth) and middle Volga regions, employees were more numerous than factory workers. The black-earth factory workers numbered 69,687 in 1923 (15.9 percent) and 75,099 in 1926 (16.8 percent), whereas employees numbered 96,351 in 1923 (21.9 percent) and 102,633 (22.8 percent) in 1926. For the middle Volga region in 1923 there were 79,827 workers (19.4 percent) and in 1926, 89,064 (20.1 percent). White-collar employees numbered 102,607 in 1923 (24.9 percent) and 112,158 in 1926 (25.3 percent). Unemployment among blue- and white-collar workers ran at 8.4 and 6.4 percent, 11.3 and 7.2 percent for the central agricultural and middle Volga regions. Data for individual cities confirm the presence of large numbers of employees and others with no connection to factory life. In 1923, the Moscow region contained 31.1 percent workers and 26.5 percent employees, and in the city of Moscow, 26.6 percent of the population counted as workers and 27.4 percent as employees. In European Russia both the working class and the white-collar workers and employees grew dramatically. Industrial recovery and growth meant not just more workers, but more white-collar employees as well. This was a structural and ideological fact that stemmed from the state control of industry and the statization of the economy under War Communism and even under NEP. This may also be said of many categories of the urban intelligentsia, that is, the middle- and lower-middle-strata managers, engineers, and other professional groups (including education personnel), who in most instances were more highly educated and received comparatively large salaries. Using the census category of intelligentsia, we see in the USSR and European Russia the following urban totals: for the USSR as a whole, 424,861 (1923) and 544,184 (1926); for European Russia, 254,448 (1923) and 297,286 (1926). The census included (1) senior administrative and juridical; (2) senior technical, (3) senior medical, and (4) cultural and educational personnel (with categories 1 and 4 by far the largest with 75 percent of the total).

The Union of Soviet and Commercial Employees

Writing in 1929, the former Menshevik turned union activist M. Gegechkori, in a pamphlet designed to acquaint union rank and file with the benefits bestowed by membership, argued that the union card was the member's passport into the proletariat.[22] Gegechkori (who was soon to be purged) showed ironic foresight in his companion claim that all those outside the union were by definition the class enemy. The union was a mechanism by which a new ideology could be anchored firmly in society (as part of *obshchestvennost'*). By the mid-1920s, the Union of Soviet and Commercial Employees was the largest single trade union in the Soviet Union. It was a union with a history in the sense that it was comprised of occupational groups with histories of union activity going back to the turn of the century and both the 1905 and 1917 revolutions. The Bolshevik post-October drive to create large artificially unified "production" unions resulted in the merging of literally dozens of regional and occupational unions (shopkeepers, clerks, bookkeepers and commercial employees, zemstvo employees, government officials and the like) that had roots in either the prerevolutionary years or in 1917–18. The Bolsheviks had ridden white-collar support to important victories in a variety of grassroots institutions during the revolution, but there remained many non-Bolsheviks including neutrals, Mensheviks, and SRs in the vast white-collar army. The union on the eve of NEP was a mediator, an important institution that served to shape and control a large social force in ways that could never be accomplished by party, Komsomol, or vedomstvo (The first two were too elitist and the latter too limited in membership and hierarchical). The union brought together both commercial and bureaucratic employees (in the soviets and commissariats). At the end of the civil war and during the early NEP years, the union was the primary source of food, clothing, housing, and education as well as a wide range of cultural and recreational opportunities.

There were several important turning points for the union during the 1920s: the implementation of the New Economic Policy, the death of Lenin, the power struggles of the mid- and late 1920s, collectivization and industrialization and the beginnings of the new class war at the end of the twenties. It is instructive, for example, that in 1921 as NEP was declared, union leaders spoke of the need to shape a proletarian union out of the disparate social and occupational groups inherited from the lower-middle-strata revolutionary movement. They admitted in their executive sessions what rhetoric tried to hide, namely that not all by any means of

[22] M. Gegechkori, *Chto dolzhni znat' sovetskie i torgovye sluzhashchie o svoem souze* (Moscow, 1929).

their members were reconciled to the Revolution—and that NEP itself could work against adaptation to the revolution and construction of socialism. Union leaders noted a "psychological reaction" among white-collar workers to the advent of NEP, what they called an unhealthy and possibly quite dangerous tendency to "retreat," to "demobilize," to back away from production.[23] The union hastened to warn its members that NEP did not mean a change in mission, just in method. NEP remained a *proletarian* mission, with a proletarian goal, the economic reconstruction of the nation, and white-collar workers must strive to bring it into being even though the reappearance of private trade might result in the reappearance of exploitation. NEP, again according to Kalinin, was not just for production workers, but for office and shop personnel as well. It was clear to all that better wages and improvements in living standards depended on identification with the proletarian tasks (NEP). Union officials also commented on the swelling of the *apparat* during the civil war years, a situation that would be hard to rectify given the hidden social identities and agendas of so many individuals in the maelstrom of revolution. They also emphasized the potential freedoms of NEP—less regulation and less social leveling.

In September 1921, union leaders proclaimed the need to build the new socialist society by making NEP work, by helping the administration adjust to the new economic conditions. Radical *perestroika* was placed on the agenda, and this at first meant either deep staff cuts (staffs had indeed become bloated during the civil war) based on simple reductions to achieve economies or outright purges based on social and/or political criteria. In the early 1920s the union supported staff cuts. By 1924, the union began to advocate the fixing of tables of organization as a means of securing job permanence for its members. Fixed tables of organization would at least afford some protection against cost-cutting campaigns such as the Regime of Economy. This campaign mode of solving the "bureaucratic problem" would be extended to include rationalization (NOT),[24] the Regime of Economy, and transformation or revitalization of the (rural) soviets.[25]

The New Economic Policy brought special challenges, both in the workplace and in the larger society. The renaissance of a private sector called for a reassertion of the traditional union function of defending worker interests against employers. It was not just that capitalists, however petty, were once again doing business and therefore inevitably had to appear as

[23] *Golos rabotnika*, 1 September 1922.
[24] Nauchnaia Organizatsiia Truda.
[25] On these campaigns, see Davies, *From Tsarism to the New Economic Policy*; Orlovsky, "Anti-Bureaucratic Campaigns of the 1920's;" and Daniel Thorniley, *The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Rural Communist Party, 1927–39* (New York, 1988).

exploiters of wage labor. Union leaders considered managers in the state sector potential exploiters as well. The union again had to take up the fight for wages and benefits, better workplace conditions, workplace safety, and public health. It had to battle against administrative abuse as well as private-sector exploitation. In social terms, the Union had a massive cultural and educational mission. A wide array of skills were needed for the growing industrial economy, horizons had to be broadened, and thousands of people acculturated to life in the administrative archipelago of socialism. Even greater skills were needed to promote proletarianism, that is, to make sure that the white-collar constituency fit in to the emerging society, that its own already distinctive culture could blend in with that of blue-collar factory workers.

The Union of Soviet and Commercial Employees had approximately 570,000 members by 1921. By 1926 it would have about 1.2 million, but even then it would be a paper tiger. Commitment to the Bolshevik agenda was hardly a criterion for membership. The union had little money and a weak apparatus in the provinces and borderlands. Much of its energy in the first half of the 1920s went into building its organization and assuring its apparatus of operating funds. Its task was to become a union of "workers," of proletarians, which would be more difficult than for true blue-collar unions since it had members who did not necessarily produce anything, and "who only with difficulty had adjusted to or accepted the socialist revolution and who still fully did not understand its goals." Throughout the decade, the union was faced with the challenge of "drawing closer to the masses." In essence this meant the establishment of an effective factory- and office-level presence supported by local professional union activists. The union had to be capable of mobilizing its members (and indeed all employees) not only to insure support for union objectives, but also to head off embarrassing or politically damaging words or deeds that could be construed as unproletarian. This meant that it would have to seem open to the opinions and needs of its rank and file and at least promote an atmosphere or mythology of democracy in order to legitimize not only the union but the entire society-building enterprise of the proletarian state to its membership.

Union members came from all layers and occupations of the prerevolutionary white-collar and professional movements. A great number joined the movement in 1917. They helped build the unions, soviets, cooperatives, and an array of other "proletarian" institutions that helped bring the Bolsheviks to power.[26] Many others joined during the first two years of the civil war, when it was already clear that membership in the sanctioned organizations of the proletarian state was a safer and more

[26] See my forthcoming *Russia's Democratic Revolution*.

promising bet than indifference or opposition. Despite the influx of large numbers of new members during the revolution and civil war, the mid-1920s witnessed an even larger and more politically significant period of membership growth that involved younger postrevolutionary cadres new to the challenges of office work.

Maintenance of one large union was not just a product of post-October Bolshevik *gleichschaltung*. There was a degree of self-interest at work here among white-collar activists who had joined the party only recently, if at all. They knew that working within the framework of a single large "production" union, on a par with the other large production unions (metalworkers, printers, transport workers, textile workers) could best serve their career interests as well as the social and economic agendas of their diverse occupational groups. They had learned during the revolution and the civil war what it meant to scramble for scarce resources when divided into hundreds of weak occupational and regional unions. By nature, white-collar workers tended to a separatism that had to be controlled in the interests of all. Bank and financial employees for example, had always regarded themselves as a cut above the ordinary clerks and bookkeepers. To solidify its position in the new proletarian state, the union also had to grow, to absorb new categories of members, and new occupations. Union capital was its own growing labor force well dispersed in key institutions. Organized into a union this labor power could stand as a counterweight to the much distrusted economic managers (*khoziastvenniki*) and ministerial administrators. This, it was hoped, would mean a place at the table with the dominant production unions and the economic administration. It would remain to be seen, of course, whether the union could translate its influence into political clout with the party leadership. Thus the union was delighted to welcome into its ranks the so-called paramilitary personnel (OGPU, militia, prison staff, and the like). Other union concerns in the early NEP years were finances, the collection of dues, and cooperation with RKI and TsKK on rationalization schemes.[27] The message to the rank and file and to those outside the union alike was that white-collar workers were vital to the tasks at hand, economic reconstruction and rationalization, and that the union was the unifier of the "grandiose mass" in the ranks of the apparatus of the Soviet republic.

Another ubiquitous theme during the mid-1920s was democratization, which usually translated into the need to build an effective presence in the workplace through factory committees and other lower-level union organizations. For example, the union promoted the use of wall newspapers (*stengazety*) to raise the cultural level of members and to heighten

[27] Rabochaia-Krest'ianskaia Inspeksiia, or Rabkrin. Tsentral'naia Kontrol'naia Komissiia ([Party] Central Control Commission).

their participation and social consciousness (*aktivnost' i obshchestvennost'*).[28] The union recognized that in the local committees shop (*tsekh*) interests might prevail over the general interest of the mass. Stengazety would help the union identify activists to counter "shopism" and to further union policies. With the onset of a faster-paced economic reconstruction in 1924, the union no longer saw itself as a passive bystander in the formulation of economic policy. It claimed to be a player, a force to be reckoned with by the enterprise managers and higher-level (trust) officials.

The union would work hard to retain its constituent groups—since numbers meant power, both political and economic. There were moves during the mid-twenties to separate the commercial employees, but the union held fast. It was only in 1931 that the party, having already swept away the union leadership, dismantled the union itself by breaking it into three smaller unions representing its major constituent occupational categories (government, commercial, and financial employees).

The union performed the ritual of lamentations at Lenin's death, and it is easy to see how union activists might have sincerely considered him a true friend of the white-collar worker. Lenin, after all, had treated this group as a potential ally in 1917. He had understood that there could be no Soviet state without them. Lenin might have attacked bureaucracy and bureaucrats, but he was careful not to implicate employees as a class. They in turn would refer frequently throughout the 1920s to a letter he sent in November 1922 to the All-Union Congress of Trade Unions praising white-collar workers. Lenin asked them to join the crusade against bureaucracy and to work for simplification of the apparat. These became standard union campaign slogans throughout the 1920s.[29]

For union activists and rank and file alike, declining real wages seemed to be a more pressing issue than Lenin's untimely end (the union wanted stabilization of the *chervonets* ruble—the monetary unit adopted in 1922 as equivalent of ten gold rubbles—and monthly pay adjustments). In 1924, the union went on a campaign against overtime. There were many abuses by administration and economic managers—and these were emblazoned across the pages of the union press. Abuses of overtime, for example, allowed crafty economic managers to blackmail or otherwise harass employees to put in longer hours. The often unstated threat was that refusing overtime could mean dismissal. Furthermore, some higher-level white-collar workers saw overtime as an entitlement, a salary supplement equivalent to the piece rates earned by factory workers.[30] Labor turnover or instability (*tekuchest'*) was also was a problem, especially in

[28] *Golos rabotnika*, 15 January 1924.
[29] This was part of the sanctification of the discourse of antibureaucracy.
[30] *Golos rabotnika*, 15 January 1924.

the more skilled occupations. The notion of a free labor market went against state policy and union interests. High unemployment rates throughout the mid-1920s resulted in a variety of schemes to offer some financial aid and retraining to those out of work, and to shore up the labor exchanges.[31] Union leaders were concerned that managers were filling vacancies outside the labor-exchange framework, that is, by hiring new migrants from the provinces rather than from the ranks of local unemployed white-collar workers. For white-collar workers, NEP in practice sometimes meant the reappearance of the long-hated and festering workplace conditions of the decades leading up to 1917.[32] Long hours, lack of vacation or rest time, horrendous workplace and living conditions, low wages, patriarchal and authoritarian managers—all these reappeared during the "halcyon" days of NEP. There was a danger that employees would lose what they had won in the revolutions of 1917 and afterward—their sense of empowerment, their organizational strength, their sense of participation in the proletarian movement and its state, of being among the "ins" of the new society rather than the "outs." The union lustily joined the anti- NEP crusade of 1924–25, publishing articles and editorials with such titles as "Dirty Dealers of the NEP World" and "NEP Gangrene." The union and employees were in the forefront of the battle to defeat the market. The union urged the state and the state-sponsored cooperatives (and their employees) to take wholesale trade away from the private sector. They were also to assist in the rationalization and simplification of the commercial apparatus and in the various campaigns for quality in production and service alike.[33] The commercial sector was particularly nettlesome for the union because it was particularly prone to breakdown, corruption, inefficiency, and worker abuse.

There was also a need to differentiate the white-collar workers from the more highly educated specialists, who were usually in positions of authority over white-collar workers. Here the state and the union were in a bind. White-collar workers resented the higher wages paid to specialists. Yet the wage differentials had been sanctioned by Lenin himself. The economic organs (acting as an interest group) wished to maintain higher wages for specialists, some of whom were members of the Union of Soviet and Commercial Employees. Here the union argued that the state must gain a better handle on its human (i.e., specialist) resources via more accurate censuses and verifications of educational qualifications, skill levels, and actual work performed. The union also opposed *sovmestitel'stvo* or

[31] Unemployment among union members peaked in April 1927 at 278,000, up from 180,000 the previous October.
[32] These are well described in A. M. Gudvan, *Ocherki po istorii dvizheniia sluzhashchikh v Rossii*, part 1, *Do revoliutsii 1905 goda* (Moscow, 1925).
[33] *Golos rabotnika*, 15 January 1924.

the holding of more than one position.[14] Evidently, specialists received unfair advantages from management from the white-collar point of view.[15]

The union never lost an opportunity to attack market or "spontaneous" (*stikhinyi*) forces. These were the enemy of not only white-collar workers but also of the *smychka* or the necessary union of town and countryside, worker and peasant. These forces had spilled over into the apparatus and were a primary cause of bureaucratic dysfunction. As early as 1924, for example, the union press attacked the "petty bourgeois NEP spontaneity that has exploited the weaknesses in our apparatus."

Wages were always important. A review of wages in 1922–23 showed that the average wage for the entire union was up (by the end of 1923) 196.1 percent of the Gosplan index. There were, however, rather large differentials by sector. State Bank employees' wages were up 343.3 percent, for example, whereas militia wages had increased by only 71.2 percent.[16] The union was active in pushing for collective wage agreements, in part to promote white-collar interests, but also as a means of combating the ever present tendency to fragmentation. Such agreements furthermore, provided something of a raison d'etre for union officialdom, another means of asserting their legitimacy among the economic managers and state bureaucrats.

By 1927, the union was fully supporting the Stalin line in high politics without fully realizing what this might mean if the new militancy should trickle down to confront their own operations. Indeed, it had publicly attacked the Left and United Oppositions and Trotsky in particular in its press and in its congresses during the crucial years of the mid-1920s. And the party had responded with kind words at the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Party Congresses. Employees had come a long way, the party admitted, in their journey into the proletariat. But by 1927 there were ominous signs on the horizon. Once again the economic situation was deteriorating as was the well-being of white-collar workers. With some 213,000 unemployed and NEP legislation that permitted factory and office managers to hire ourside the labor exchanges, the rank and file had a new set of grievances. Union leaders noted the rise in peasant migrants to the cities and peasants in the countryside who were taking up posts in the village soviets and militia. This satisfied the leadership's desire to bring in fresh cadres, new recruits to the white-collar social formation. Yet it also raised a new round of cultural questions, including the most important question of how to turn these new cadres into proletarians.

[14] Ibid.

[15] The need for accurate counts of qualified personnel was a constant theme of the 1920s. And indeed many state and party institutions conducted censuses of engineers and other specialists. These included the Commissariat of Labor, Rabkrin, the various unions, and other institutions.

[16] *Golos rabotnika*, 31 January 1924. Wages for administrative employees in the soviets were up 148.2 percent, economic sector employees 209.1 percent, and cooperatives 217.7 percent.

Cultural Transformation

A wide range of issues fell under the rubric of culture. Union leaders were always concerned with the literacy and skill levels of old and new white-collar workers. The union's cultural work was carried on largely in employees' clubs. These were organized to provide something of the feeling of extended family as well as support in the form of child care, intellectual edification (lectures, courses, and the like), transmission of high culture (plays, music, literature), organization of group vacations, and sports. The union was very concerned with raising the cultural level of employees so that they might become *obshchestvenniki*, or politically conscious and active *participants* in the production process and union work and accepted members of the proletarian commonweal.[17] Sometimes the solutions proposed were naive. In the late 1920s, for example, the cultural department of the union organization for the province of Moscow issued a slender volume on the occasion of "book day." The goal was to help the member plan her or his winter reading, since "our 'mass' reader (ordinary clerks, typists, shop personnel, militia, and so on) still has not learned to read according to plan" (the appendix listed more serious books for more advanced readers in higher white-collar occupations).[18] For the masses, cultural officials placed a premium on what was striking and colorful as well as capable of capturing the interest of resistant readers. Similarly, in the mid-1920s the union exhorted its activist cadres to bring employees home to dinner to impress them with the culture of more advanced and conscious households. Education was a prime concern. Although it is true that the employees themselves had rather low levels of education, most often no more than several years of primary school, they had rather high aspirations for their children.[19] The trade union of white-collar workers was the main conduit of youth into institutions of higher education during the Soviet 1920s. The Soviet state turned primarily to the offspring of white and not blue-collar workers for this privilege, and

[17] At one point in 1929 a union leader equated the terms "bureaucrat" and *neobshchestvennik* (antisocial element).

[18] *Chto chitat' sovtorgsluzhashchemy* (Moscow, 1928).

[19] See the union congress registration cards (*ankety*) for delegates to the various Union of Soviet and Commercial Employees All-Union congresses for the 1920s in TsGAOR, f. 5468, op. 10.

the union had considerable influence in these admissions decisions.[40] During the 1923–24 academic year for example, 34.9 percent of the 53,400 students in higher technical institutes came from employee backgrounds as opposed to only 17.5 percent from worker backgrounds and 16 percent from peasant. Fully 30.8 percent of these students were drawn from the nebulous "other" category.[41] It is odd that despite all calls for "affirmative action" during the 1920s, the pattern of educational recruitment that gave preference to white-collar children was barely disturbed until the great turn at the end of the twenties. Still, access to higher education may be viewed as a good indicator of just how far the party-state was willing to go in joining the white- and blue-collar workers into a single proletariat. As in the case of wages and other benefits, education was a source of friction between the two social groups.

At issue at the Seventh All-Union Trade Union Congress was the destruction of the traditional commercial culture of the sales clerk. According to union activists, the marketplace role of the sales clerk as the essential helpmates of the consumer had been destroyed when they were transformed into bureaucrats (*chinovniki*) by the statization and elimination of the market on the one hand and the economics of extreme scarcity on the other. "Instead of being mediators between consumer and goods, and entering into the process of consumer choice, they are reduced

[40] In Moscow 1926 figures show that grades 7, 8, and 9 had 56.81, 68.54, and 68.02 percent of white-collar offspring among the student body with only 27.15, 17.50, and 18.61 percent coming from the "working class." In the entire Russian Republic (1926–27) the white-collar figures for the same grades were 40.5, 46.2, and 45.9 percent, for workers 21.5, 16.0, and 15.0 percent, for peasants 21.5, 18.3, and 19.6 percent (signifying the high degree of peasant mobility into the employee category), and "other" a very large 16.5, 19.5, and 19.5 percent, which indicates a great deal of masking. See TsGIA (RSFSR), f. 1575, op. 6, d. 244, l. 1, and *Narodnoe prosveshenie*, May 1929, pp. 71, 73, both quoted by Larry Holmes in his paper, "With Just Cause? Komsomol's Critique of Narkompros and School Policy, 1919–1928," presented at the annual AHA meeting, Chicago, 1991. The entire subject of education in the 1920s is treated masterfully in Larry E. Holmes, *The Kremlin and the Schoolhouse: Reforming Education in Soviet Russia, 1917–1931* (Bloomington, Ind., 1991). Important information on the social backgrounds of prerevolutionary students and their corporate characteristics is contained in Samuel D. Kassow, *Students, Professors and the State in Tsarist Russia* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1989). See also S. Zhaba, *Petrogradskoe studenchestvo v bor'be za svobodnuiu vysshuiu shkolu* (Paris, 1922), and T. I. Til', "Sotsial-demokratisheskoe dvizhenie molodozhi 1920-kh godov," in *Pamiat': Istoricheskii sbornik*, 3d ed. (Paris, 1980), pp. 165–283.

[41] Nicholas Lampert, *The Soviet Technical Intelligentsia and the Soviet State* (New York, 1979), p. 70. Lampert claims that most ITR personnel had employee backgrounds as did most chief engineers during the 1920s and on into the 1930s. On technical education in general and the question of social mobility, see Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Education and Social Mobility in the USSR 1921–1934* (Cambridge, 1979). In support of my view, Catherine Merridale has documented in her study of the Moscow Party organization the fact that *vydvizhenie* (she translates this as "promotion") was not working as planned during the early and mid 1920s. The numbers were small, the blue-collar workers resisted promotion, and the host institutions were inhospitable. Merridale, *Moscow Politics*, pp. 192–98.

to authorities in a bureaucratized distribution system. They can only say, yes we have it, no we don't. Either take it or get out—the customers stand in line and we have become bureaucrats." Many an old veteran of the long union movement bemoaned this reduction in status from *prikazshchik* (shop assistant) to *chinovnik* and the harsh working conditions of the state commercial enterprises and even of the co-ops of the 1920s.[42]

Another example would be the NOT movement and its utopian drive to rationalize Soviet institutions and bureaucratic practice.[43] Here the ideal was the assembly line, the mechanization and routinization of office work. But this was the assembly line in the Soviet context, with goals and means somewhat different from Henry Ford's automobile factories. One of NOT's chief theoreticians and propagandists, E. Rozmirovich, put it this way: "The goal of the party is to bring the masses into the state administration. This means workers and peasants. The peasants, especially, are culturally unfit and unsuited for office work. We will not try to alter their culture, rather we will eliminate by means of mechanization and routinization, the agency of human will in administrative work. At that point peasant culture will not stand in the way."[44] It won't matter any more.

Social Composition and the Power of Youth: A New Look at *Vydvizhenie*

The union's experience with the promotion of workers from the bench into white-collar jobs calls for another look at patterns of social development and social mobility in the 1920s, especially at what may be called "affirmative action" or what is sometimes termed "pushing up" or "promoting" (*vydvizhenie*). Western scholars first learned of this phenomenon through the pioneering work of Sheila Fitzpatrick. The white-collar experience requires some modifications in the argument that the Russian Revolution at least from 1917 to 1929 was in large part the story of the social mobility of workers (by implication largely blue-collar) from the workbench into administration. First, forced affirmative action (as opposed to recommended affirmative action, as opposed to the Lenin Levy and the lip service paid to Lenin's own idealized version of bringing the

[42] *Sed'moi s"ezd professional'nykh soiuzov SSSR (6–18 dekabria 1926 g.): Plenum i sektsii: Polnyi stenograficheskii otchet* (Moscow, 1927), p. 464.

[43] See Marc R. Beissinger, *Scientific Management, Socialist Discipline, and Soviet Power* (Cambridge, Mass., 1988), and E. A. Rees, *State Control in Soviet Russia: The Rise and Fall of the Workers' and Peasants' Inspectorate, 1920–34* (London, 1987).

[44] Taken from Rozmirovich's lead article in the first issue of *Tekhnika upravleniia* (Moscow, 1925).

masses into administration) was not the party's goal until the very end of the 1920s and even then the mission was poorly understood and even more poorly carried out. I take issue with the blue-collar to managerial class interpretation of the Russian Revolution, at least as applied to the 1920s. It misses the social dynamics because such a view adopts wholesale the categories of Soviet propaganda and historiography (the division of society into workers and peasants and employees). The revolutions of 1917 were plebeian revolutions, but the historiography has not been careful to define those plebeians. My material drawn from the union congress registration cards (*ankety*) of 1919–1930 and the other materials pertaining to the union central committee and congresses show a white-collar to white-collar mobility and a peasant to white-collar mobility that reproduced the structure of the earlier revolution of the lower middle strata from 1905 to 1917 (including white-collar domination of access to education) during the 1920s and the impermeability of the social borders between white- and blue-collar workers.[45] Factory workers did not want to become clerks and vice versa. There seems to have been little mobility for the rank and file white-collar employees upward into managerial ranks, though this certainly must have been possible for the relatively small numbers who took up the majority of spaces in the Soviet institutions of higher and technical education during the 1920s. The 1927 union congress is full of material (repeated again in 1929) about the failures of affirmative action through indifference, the hostility of managers and workers alike, sabotage on the office floor, lack of care in selecting prospects, and absolute lack of follow-up counseling and other forms of aid. There was however, a concerted effort by union activists to implement affirmative action for white-collar workers themselves. There were strong feelings that looking to workers from the bench was a big mistake when competent potential administrators could be found among the white-collar rank and file. As late as October 1931, the Commissariat of Labor (NKTrud) asked Sovnarkom to improve the economic and working conditions of the promoted. At issue were laws that took away certain worker entitlements from individuals who had been promoted and away from the bench for one year or more. NKTrud asked that such workers be guaranteed the supply rights of workers of the category from which they had been promoted. These workers were also to be allowed access to certain supply institutions reserved to the working class for as long as they remained in service in the apparatus.[46]

The union and the state had to fight the apolitical nature of the employees at all times. They didn't want to engage in cultural work or campaigns. Their excellent journal, *Golos rabotnika* (Voice of the Functionary) until 1926, and from 1926 on their daily newspaper, Nasha gazeta (Our newspaper) were miserably undersubscribed. *Nasha gazeta* had 120,000 subscribers; *Gudok*, the paper of the transportation union, had 480,000. Union leaders always feared being outflanked or overtaken by other institutions such as the Komsomol, with its own newspaper and capacity for high-profile, ideologically correct interventions in the murky waters of public opinion.

[45] Material taken from union congress records, TsGAOR, f. 5468, op. 10, d. 17, and especially, the *ankety* for 1921, 1927, and 1929.

[46] TsGAOR, f. 5515, op. 1, d. 278, l. 37.

By the mid twenties the ankety reveal a wholesale turnover in leading trade union personnel at all levels, but particularly in the provinces. The typical social profile of congress delegates, who were almost always union officeholders and activists, reveals that they were the offspring of white-collar families and had no more than an elementary education. Delegates to the Fifth All-Union Congress of the Union of Soviet and Commercial Employees in 1922, a group that might still be regarded as transitional, reflected the mixed prerevolutionary and revolutionary composition of union membership. Of the 219 delegates, 10 percent had been in the union (its antecedents) in 1905 with another 22.8 percent having joined in 1906–16 and 34.3 percent in 1917. The remaining 32.5 percent had come in between 1917 and 1921. A whopping 43 percent were active in union work before 1918. Sixty-three percent of the delegates claimed "individuals of mental labor" as their category of social origin with another 12.3 percent claiming the provenance of shop personnel. Only 18.3 percent claimed any hereditary connection to the world of physical labor.[47] The parents of the majority of these individuals were low-level clerks and functionaries. The majority of delegates themselves had no more than a primary education, and though almost 80 percent belonged to the Bolshevik Party, the vast majority of these had joined only after the October Revolution.

Only four years later, however, the pre-October cohort had all but disappeared. By 1926–27 these activists were almost exclusively the children of the October Revolution. That is, they were too young to have been in the events of 1917 and usually joined the union or the party in the early 1920s. Their ankety show educational and social profiles roughly similar to those of the 1922 cohort, though there are more instances of workers or worker offspring entering the white-collar work force. Yet the delegates comprise an entirely new group that reflected the regime's desire to integrate women and the nationalities. There was also an increase in the number of delegates with party or Komsomol membership. This mid-

[47] *Golos rabotnika*, 15 January 1923.

to late 1920s collection of union activists represented nothing less than a turn to youth and a turnover in union officialdom from the early twenties when there were still many white-collar activists and union members who had experienced the struggles of 1905 and 1917. In this sense the cultural revolution of 1928–31 had already taken place during the middle years of the decade, during the apogee of NEP, amid the obscure yet massive social group of white-collar workers. This youth culture in the union prevailed during the 1920s and apparently provided a large cohort of employees and union officials who would actively support Stalin's agenda. Still, the nature of their occupations, concerns, and workplace culture seems to have carried over from the earlier period. A summary of statistics for delegates to the union's 1927 congress revealed that only 29 percent of the delegates were party members (though another 9 percent were candidates and 8 percent belonged to the Komsomol). Thirty-seven percent of the delegates were between twenty and thirty (which means of course that at the time of the October Revolution they were between ten and twenty). Fifty-six percent of the delegates claimed an "employee" social origin (as compared to 18 percent who declared themselves to be workers) and, tellingly, only 34 percent were Russian. Jews and Tatars numbered 21 percent and 11 percent of the delegates respectively. A full 45 percent of the delegates had completed primary educations. Only 1 percent of these individuals had entered the union or its predecessors between 1905 and 1917. The figure for 1917 was 18 percent. Another 22 percent entered during the years 1918–20. The largest group of experienced union activists, 35 percent, had joined the union during the years of the New Economic Policy.[48] At the 1927 congress Figatner claimed that total union membership had reached 1,217,315, including 226,780 unemployed.[49] Figatner applauded the influx of new people and proclaimed the need to reach out to youth and "renew" the union even further through generational change. Figatner also made a point of answering the charge that the union harbored a public menace in the form of old chinovniki who had been hiding out in the state administration. He cited figures to show that by 1927 this was far from the case and that the union again had worked to channel youth into the Soviet bureaucracy.

The idea of the state against itself popularized by G. Rittersporn was already visible during the civil war, but certainly blossomed during NEP. One could see this in the competition among commissariats and the unique role of Rabkrin. But these were the kinds of conflicts that white-collar workers as a social group were able to transcend by playing on all sides of such conflicts. They were also present in all other trade unions

[48] TsGAOR, f. 5468, op. 10, d. 17.
[49] TsGAOR, f. 5468, op. 10, d. 17.

(including industrial ones and in such large organizations as the transport and education workers' unions). The 1920s spawned a fetishism of *uchet* or counting human resources, a need to identify and fix in place scarce human resources and a need to unmask illegitimate social categories. But this unmasking could not go too far, because all institutions as political players were implicated in the protection of their human capital. The Union of Soviet and Commercial Employees, for example, had its own section of specialists and economists as did all the other production unions. This dispersal of the professionals and specialists was to be sure part of a deliberate strategy on the part of the regime to divide this potentially nettlesome group and prevent the re-creation and growth of traditional professional unions and organizations. Numerous official institutions (TsSU, the party, the Commissariat of Labor, the VMBIT, and the like)[50] frequently attempted to count these specialists in the 1920s and early 1930s.

As further evidence of the state against itself, the party leadership launched a massive antibureaucratic campaign after 1926 linked to the Fifteenth Party Congress's resolution to rationalize economic planning.

White-Collar Workers and the Soviet Experience

The roots of both the highly stratified classical Soviet society organized by occupational niches and today's emerging civil society go back to the layered social order of the 1905–17 period that witnessed the creation of new occupational groups, including the free and proto-professions and the rising lower middle strata.[51] Occupation was unusually important in this layered social order between the revolutions.[52] Also unusual was the weakness in this society relative to Western societies of the connection of occupational groups and professionals to the means of production or the market as opposed to bureaucratic organizations as a source of status and power. In the West, capitalism created the office and the need for masses of white-collar workers (and rather rapidly the feminization of that kind

[50] VMBIT is the Russian acronym for All-Union Interagency Bureau of Engineers and Technical Personnel.
[51] See Moshe Lewin's brilliant analysis of the recent Soviet social pattern and its antecedents in *The Gorbachev Phenomenon* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1988).
[52] For a suggestive discussion of the importance of occupation in the context of Weimar Germany, see Thomas Childers, "The Social Language of Politics in Germany: The Sociology of Political Discourse in the Weimar Republic," *American Historical Review* 95 (April 1990): 331–58. See also Harold Perkin, *The Rise of Professional Society: England since 1880* (London, 1989). On the issue of gender and the feminization of clerical work in the United States, see Lisa M. Fine, *The Souls of the Skyscraper: Female Clerical Workers in Chicago, 1870–1930* (Philadelphia, 1990).

of work). In Russia, there was a deeply rooted white-collar presence in the traditional economic and political power structures. In Russia and especially in the Soviet Union, the bureaucracy and office created large-scale industrial and agricultural enterprises. The Russian culture of the "free professions" was also unusual. For the white-collar workers the revolutionary era 1905–30 began in ambiguity (in social identity) and ended with it in the so-called Stalin revolution of 1928–29. Along the way they were active participants (or determinants) in revolutionary state building. Their participation in the revolutionary process contained a paradox. On the one hand, as a social group they were fragmented and disunited, a variety of unions and groupings organized on occupational and regional lines. In many instances and from many perspectives they were even hidden from view by the language (discourse) of the revolution—as proletarians or as peasants. They could be bureaucrats even while speaking the language of antibureaucracy. They could be proletarians even while maintaining a distinct culture and competing with the factory proletariat for scarce resources, wages, and the like. And they could be peasants even if they had long since left the fields for service in the Red Army, cooperatives, or village offices. On the other hand their combined skills and activism gave them a collective weight, a capacity for social pressure. This can only be understood by disregarding traditional Soviet categories and studying their relations with the state, mediating institutions, and other social groups. White-collar workers claimed, "we come into contact with people, we are mediators, we don't work with objects or produce them, we have a higher cultural level, higher literacy rates. Yet we need to transform our mental laborers into members of the commonweal or social activists [*obshchestvenniki*]." The Union of Soviet and Commercial Employees thus brought together many of these individuals who came into direct contact with the population at the grassroots level. The members were among the chief mediators between the new proletarian state and its social constituencies and not producers in the sense of factory workers or peasants. To the extent that the marketplace was to be replaced by socialism, white-collar workers of all varieties could only experience growth in their mediating role and pressures toward institutionalizing those roles in bureaucratic frameworks. Commercial employees in the cooperatives and the growing state sector had every reason to wish to wrest commerce from the hands of the new NEP "bourgeoisie." NEP provided these employees with a new kind of exploiter in private enterprise—a new kind of social being to define themselves against—employers who reenacted the role of the hated shop owners of the 1905–17 period. It was much harder to focus on the state as exploiter as its bureaucratic anonymity presented the typical shop employee with a less clearly defined target (and after all, the state was ostensibly a "proletarian" state).

The history of organized white-collar labor in 1917 and as far back as the 1905 Revolution weighed heavily on the early Soviet experience of the white-collar workers. At those key historical conjunctures organized white-collar workers, including shop personnel, post and telegraph employees, railroad and pharmacy employees, and so on, were instrumental in the development of the larger working-class movement and in its political victories. Throughout the revolutionary era of 1905 to 1930, then, the alliance (troubled and ambiguous as it was) between blue- and white-collar workers (and other members of the lower middle strata) formed something of a second *smychka*, a little noticed, but potent union parallel to the more celebrated and troubled union of workers and peasants. Looked at another way, in its attempt to assimilate other social formations and become "universal," the proletarian state found it no easier to assimilate the white-collar workers so necessary to its existence than to absorb the numerous non-Russian nationalities into a new Soviet national identity.

Still, by the end of the 1920s white-collar workers had still not overcome even their own internal differences. Gegechkori's agitational pamphlet mentioned earlier reaffirms this point. He admitted that many had disputed the unification of commercial and soviet administrative employees in one union. Commercial employees had argued that they alone were the true proletarians, not the administrative types, no matter how low their position in the hierarchy. Gegechkori answered by invoking the production principle. For him, commerce was now part of the state structure and thus there was no contradiction. Gegechkori also pointed out that white-collar workers needed membership in a strong and large union if they were to enter the proletariat. This kind of ongoing white-collar fragmentation could only make more difficult the absorption of the entire white-collar group into a reconstituted proletariat. The union, he warned, was in danger of taking in "petty bourgeois" urban intellectuals, professionals, artisans, Nepmen, and the like, who understood that membership conferred proletarian status. He also pointed out that 500,000 union members of "peasant mentality" were fresh from the villages. Gegechkori warned that now above all was not the time for white-collar workers to adopt an apolitical stance (*apolitichnost'*).[53]

The experience of white-collar workers in the 1920s raises serious questions about our interpretations of NEP. For those who would otherwise idealize this period, the white-collar experience provides some bedrock of social reality (the life experiences of a significant number of people engaged in crucial occupations) against which we may measure the claims to viability for the NEP system. White-collar workers saw NEP was tem-

[53] All taken from Gegechkori's pamphlet published in Moscow, 1929.

porary, deeply threatening, and incapable of providing either the material security promised by the revolution or the status commensurate with the importance of occupational roles. The October Revolution did not end class conflict, and the proclamation of a proletarian society should not blind us to the fragmented and conflict-ridden social reality of the NEP period. For the white-collar rank and file, NEP brought unemployment, increasing marginality, uncertainty, and out of this uncertainty a constant pressure to prove one's loyalty to the proletariat and its agendas. NEP represented "spontaneity," the hated and feared forces of *stikhiia* as symbolized by the market. Consciousness and control were dominant themes of white-collar politics during the 1920s. All the antibureaucratic campaigning of the 1920s was a mask. There was a tremendous social pressure to increase bureaucracy since more bureaucracy really meant more security, status, and power for the employees, and for middle- and lower-level officials already in the state apparatus.[14] No wonder then about the appeal of the Stalin version of full employment with its great crusades and campaigns to industrialize and collectivize agriculture—all of them to be administered in "command-bureaucratic fashion," all requiring massive increases in clerical and commercial functionaries. The union materials of 1930 and 1931 reveal not just slavish devotion to the Stalin project, but also genuine faith in it, the sort of faith that Germany and the West had in those who promised them full employment in the wake of the Depression. Indeed, Stalin's recovery project preceded recovery in the West, which enabled the party-state apparatus to say, "Look what we provided for our employees when Western economies were still in shambles." During the 1920s public identification of white-collar workers and their organizations with the proletarian project (*zadachi*) diverted attention from many smaller class and occupational conflicts between white-collar and blue-collar workers over scarce resources, and between both groups and the specialists (technical intelligentsia and engineers) and the even more threatening economic managers (*khoziaistvenniki*). This latter conflict spilled over into an opposition between wage labor and ministerial bureaucrats in their role as employers.

The 1920s brought new challenges and new meanings to trade unionism. The trade union controversy in 1919–20 had resulted in a victory for Lenin's middle-ground approach both that avoided the democracy of the Workers' Opposition and Trotsky's vision of militarized labor. Lenin's thinking appears to have been similar to his naive ruminations on the

[14] This is the argument, from a somewhat different angle, in Don K. Rowney, *Transition to Technocracy: The Structural Origins of the Soviet Administrative State* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1989). Rowney sees a continuity in the takeover of the new Soviet apparatus by the technical intelligentsia and specialists and other lower-order types during the course of the early twentieth century.

nature of bureaucracy and the efficacy of popular control as a mechanism for overcoming bureaucratic dysfunctions. Lenin somehow believed that the large bureaucratic production unions could perform the functions of defending and educating workers within a noncapitalist framework. He believed that they could be both soviet and democratic, that they could be subject to party-state discipline and still avoid the dead hand of bureaucratization, that the stifling of spontaneity would still produce consciousness. When the dust settled, the unions were to act as educators and as protectors of labor against NEP private enterprise and even against the ministerial bureaucracy and industrial and commercial establishments. The unions provided access to education, to scarce goods, including food and clothing, to apartments to spots in vacation resorts and sanatoria, and to culture in the form of books, theater, music, and the rich life of the union clubs. In this the unions were taking over some of the traditional functions of the market, but more telling for the Russian context, the ministerial bureaucracy itself. This would be a major source of friction between the "state" and its constituent parts (once again, the state against itself) throughout the 1920s.

The unions were faced in the 1920s with the unprecedented challenge of maintaining and forging new links with their mass base. The fixation on mammoth production unions (even where such a concept was awkward at best as among white-collar, education, and medical workers, and so on) was related precisely to the fear of layering and disunity (the weakness of class) and social fragmentation in the emerging revolutionary society. The unions were to educate, to help conduct the Leninist cultural revolution in the mechanical anti-Bogdanov sense and to train the masses for low-level, low-status jobs in the new Soviet apparatus. How to promote the new way of life (*byt'*) was a problem, and the union mobilized grassroots field correspondents (*rabkory*) and used stengazety with the aim of "instilling social consciousness" and building a union apparatus that was intertwined with the lives of ordinary functionaries. Union leaders realized that paper pushing and formal contacts were not enough, though it was not clear just how the visits to activist households might move the agenda of cultural transformation forward. As shown earlier, the union was preoccupied with wage policy, antibureaucracy, and how to curb excesses and abuses rampant in the far-flung state and commercial institutions of Soviet Russia. In the case of white-collar workers this meant union responsiveness to large numbers of new white-collar youth, some of whom were drawn from peasant ranks, as had always been the case in the earlier decades of the twentieth century. How to fit the old white-collar culture into a new emerging proletarian culture when the former was being swamped with obyvateli and peasants and the latter was largely a myth was a great problem for the union. Resourcefulness

(*gibkost'*) was the order of the day, in 1921 as in 1929. Union leaders constantly spoke of the need for shrewdness and flexibility in linking white-collar interests to those of the proletarian state and the working class as a whole.[55]

The white-collar experience raises the issue of contamination of the working-class state and the possibility that such contamination resulted in a form of socialist corporativism. Since such a large and important percentage of the new Soviet state was white-collar and since the factory proletariat was small and in the process of reconstitution during the 1920s, social contamination of the proletarian state meant that a set of vital occupations were locked into place and their disparate social occupants organized as a substitute for class. White-collar positions were filled by increasing numbers of youth, women, the offspring of the previous generation of white-collar workers and peasants. These varied social groups could not overcome gender, status, ethnic, and national differences to live up to the pure proletarian ideal. Apart from the shop personnel, it seems that the Soviet case did not produce a feminization of clerical work, despite the influx of women into the apparatus. Office positions were too important a source of livelihood for males, and they would never recede from the office as happened in the United States, for example. As in the case of fascism, the state attempted to impose a universal set of social and cultural norms on diverse social groups and interests. The field of conflict was defined by cultural norms and enforced by the wielders of political power. The lower middle classes and intellectuals and professionals along with their associational monopolies (trade union syndicates, professional organizations, and the like) became the vital mediators and social cement of these universalizing utopias. White-collar workers were vital to this project in a double sense. They were the necessary nonproductive but facilitating mediators of industrial society and the modern bureaucratic state. They were also a large and potentially organizable political force that had to be moved in from the margins and made to coalesce with the dominant mythologies and cultural norms of the regime. This could take the form of attachment to class or to state as universal or to both. Society in this case was able to penetrate and take over the state and impose its own value system. This was a bureaucratic value system more than it was proletarian in any Marxist or even Leninist sense. From the beginning the vedomstvo or bureaucratic institution was paramount in the mobilization of social power. As was often the case in earlier Russian and Muscovite history, the dynamism of this kind of social formation inevitably shaped emerging blue-collar consciousness. Factory workers had to define themselves against bureaucrats rather than against

[55] TsGAOR, f. 5468, op 12, d. 2, l. 196.

the bourgeoisie. White-collar social power fought on several fronts during the 1920s—both for and against the bureaucracy of which they were a part. For example, antibureaucratic campaigns were a fixture of the 1920s. These attempts to mobilize public opinion (usually defined as mass opinion, or obshchestvennost') were meant to signal solidarity as much as fix the perennial bureaucratic problem. White-collar workers were arrayed on both sides of the issue as the problem and the cure. On the one hand, they had to defend themselves through the union against workplace abuses such as overtime (which undercut the eight hour day, which was regarded as one of the major triumphs of the February Revolution). On the other hand, they had to promote the regime of economy, which always meant cuts in permanent staff (the *shtat*). Ironically, the emergence of a full-blown *nomenklatura* system in 1925 was a form of protection for white-collar functionaries. It meant a fixing in place of social currency that had become debased during campaigns and an end to arbitrary reductions in staff. It was a means of controlling if not eliminating the bureaucratic wars of the 1920s which always produced white-collar casualties. By the same token, the union chose to fight constantly against what it regarded as a major problem during the twenties, that of labor mobility or turnover. Though one might argue that for all the uncertainties of the 1920s the white-collar workers did very well (in relation to other social groups), the campaign mode, the filling of the air with charges and countercharges, the rising public consciousness of at least the possibility if not reality of white-collar corruption, bureaucratic incompetence, blockage of desired political and economic initiatives, the attempt to mobilize a public opinion against the bureaucrat, whoever he or she may be—all of this left an indelible imprint on the emerging Soviet political consciousness, and all of it formed a convenient starting point for the antibureaucratic, quasi-populist campaigns of the 1930s (such as the purges). There was an irony here too in that the irrationality and pressure of the antibureaucratic campaigns only made employees less secure and more prone to accept the security offered by the Stalin program. In fact, it is not too far-fetched to see them as willing partners in the formulation of such a program.

Soviet history and the history of the Soviet working class run against the grain of historical language in that class formation and the proletariat were conceived of as the inevitable products of industrial or capitalist societies and market economies. The formation of a proletarian class was to have taken place in the crucible of capitalism. The social reality and ideal of a proletariat was meant to be defined in relation to market institutions. The Soviet case is different. As a result of the October Revolution and the antimarket ideologies and practices of War Communism, the proletariat indeed came to power (in the form of the Bolshevik Party and the

supporting institutions of plebeian democracy), but by the onset of NEP in 1921, no longer had a "bourgeoisie" or a "market" against which to define themselves. To be sure both existed in limited forms, but they were on the outside and never powerful enough to attain hegemony. So, the shattered working class of the civil war era had to reconstitute itself in a radically new historical context, surrounded and nurtured by a set of state economic and political institutions that acted as the primary employer of skilled white- and blue-collar labor. Enter the white-collar workers. Because of the revolutionary ideology of proletarianism and because of their own proletarian-oriented prerevolutionary history, and most of all because of their skills and their obvious importance to any industrial institutions, they had to become proletarian or part of a newly reconstituted proletariat. Yet what is equally important here (for the notion of class formation) is the structural component of the new state sector. The state sector under War Communism strove for its own brand of universalism, for the abolition of the market. This tendency did not disappear under NEP. It was not even muted. The trusts and Vesenkha (Supreme Council of the National Economy) could hardly be said to have represented private enterprise, and the same is more obviously true of the ministries. Thus from the beginning of the 1920s social and occupational groups could only be formed within this enlarged and growing state sector. Ambiguity resulted. The proletariat was forced to consider as a part of itself the white-collar workers and vice versa. Patterns of social development and consciousness were placed on rails. In other words a structure was set up during the revolution and civil war in which the working class, by virtue of its symbiotic relationship with employees, could only grow in tandem with a large social formation that fulfilled functions in commerce, industry, and administration that were at best mediative and at worst located in the camp of the new exploiters (bureaucrats, economic managers, and administrators). Social mobility came to be channeled along these rails, both during the 1920s and during the industrialization and collectivization drives. The result was a vast increase in blue-collar as opposed to white-collar workers (though they too increased exponentially). But raw numbers was not the whole story. The state-dominated "administrative command" economy was organized to provide for white-collar and administrative hegemony. The reformed proletariat was in the position of subordination to itself, or at least to competition from within, in the form of the white-collar component. Upwardly mobile peasants, migrants to the cities, and even blue-collar workers who were "pushed up" into managerial or lower white-collar ranks all filled out these social categories, which were essentially already in place at the end of the civil war.

State building and society went forward together during the early 1920s. But neither class formation nor state formation was a clean-cut affair. White-collar occupational groups showed a marked tendency to gravitate away from the union toward the more powerful and richer commissariats, economic units, and the like. The difficulties of organizing a single powerful white-collar union symbolized the difficulties this numerous and powerful group had in terms of coalescing as a class. Commercial and Soviet employees have very different agendas and profiles. Again, the excessive emphasis on class in Soviet history and in the history of the revolution may indicate the strength of layering, fragmentation, even an inability to unite and form classes-for-themselves except to defend themselves against *vlast'* (state power).

We return to June 1929 and the Eighth All-Union Congress of the Union of Soviet and Commercial Employees. Figatner delivered the keynote report for the union central committee. By this time Figatner was fighting for his job, a fight he was, of course, destined to lose. The party leadership had already found allies in the union who had identified Figatner with Tomsky and the Right Opposition. Still Figatner played out his role in the face of a hostile union audience. He opened his speech with the idea that the congress was meeting at an extraordinary time. "Before the working class," he argued, " stands great tasks—the *perestroika* of the entire economy, town and village, socialist competition, and the possibility of overtaking capitalism." According to Figatner, the sharpening class struggle required the union organization's most acute attention. Nepmen and kulaks were trying to use the state apparatus to subvert the proletarian tasks. Here Figatner had in mind the well-publicized examples of bureaucratic and clan corruption in Astrakhan and Smolensk. "Our union is responsible before the working class," he loudly proclaimed. But even at this stage as Stalin's revolution was already underway, we may still ask if the union and its members belonged to the working class. Figatner proclaimed the need for self-criticism as a part of the daily white-collar consciousness. The fabric of daily life was the proper place for consciousness raising and not the more and more frequent campaigns of the mid and late 1920s. After twelve years of class formation and reformation, of white-collar workers fitting in and helping to define both the proletarian state and society, it is strange to imagine the voice of Figatner in 1929 as he fearfully warned his audience of the danger of losing the proletarian connection and of turning into something "monstrous."[56] In defense of his own work (and that of his union central committee) Figatner argued that "we have issued the directives and tried to shepherd this work" to prepare employees for what amounted to an examination of their politics and consciousness. Catcalls and hostile speeches from the floor greeted this speech. Figatner was ousted, but the rank and file re-

[56] All quotations are from *Nasha gazeta*, June 1929.

mained—as did the new wave of union activists ready to step into the positions of the organizers of the 1920s. The union faced collectivization and industrialization with new energy—its representatives and members knowing that there might be the usual uncertainties of white-collar life, but potential benefits as well. This social formation was truly a bedrock of socialist construction.

The fate of the Union of Soviet and Commercial Employees at the end of the 1920s sheds some light on the triumph of the Stalin bloc. Part of its success derived from reformulating well-worn themes of the 1920s and by mobilizing social forces, including the white-collar workers, to stand with the proletariat against the class enemy—Nepmen, specialists, managers, bureaucrats, old intelligentsia, and the disenfranchised. In this sense there is something profoundly nonrevolutionary about the Great Turn at the end of the 1920s. State building was also the building of a society.

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Gábor T. Rittersporn

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From Working Class to Urban Laboring Mass: On Politics and Social Categories in the Formative Years of the Soviet System

Inquiring about the formation of a working class may easily expose the researcher to the charge of trying to construct a social category that, under the pressure of objective conditions, is supposed to become a self-conscious agent of a radical turn in the history of humanity.[1] After all, why else be curious precisely about the working class instead of studying nuns, philatelists, or smokers? On the other hand, if the material available at the moment of this writing permits at least some very general conclusions about the impact of objective conditions on workers in the formative years of the Soviet system, it is still insufficient to draw far-reaching conclusions about the implications of their self-understanding. These dilemmas and circumstances explain why, even though it always seems useful to insist that our research reports put forward but a few interim results of a work in progress, this precaution is far more than a stylistic convention in our case.

I hope to find a place for workers in the social hierarchy of the prewar USSR. Rather than take for granted that an understanding of the determinants of social stratification or class formation can be located in the division of labor, occupational categories, and the authority patterns they may imply, I will try to evaluate the impact of the period's historical circumstances and political factors on the structure of Soviet society. Because this approach leads me to the tentative conclusion that it is far-fetched to speak about a working class in the period under review, I will explore this question in terms of whether the behavioral patterns of workers that reveal a pattern of social tension and conflict bespeak a tendency of their development into a well-defined group with a degree of autonomy from the political system and with features clearly distinguishing them

[1] For an influential account of such an understanding of the proletarian condition, see Georg Lukács, *Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein* (Berlin, 1923), pp. 164–228.