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Section 2

PRIMARY SOURCE

The Need for Progress

Speech by Joseph Stalin

Joseph Stalin (1879–1953) ruled the Communist Party in the Soviet Union from 1928 until his death. One of his aims as the Soviet premiere was to tap the country's vast economic potential. His economic plans achieved success but at an immense human cost. Historians estimate that he caused the deaths of between 8 and 13 million people. In this speech in 1931, he invoked Russian nationalism in an attempt to motivate a group of industrial managers.

About ten years ago a slogan was issued: "Since Communists do not yet properly understand the technique of production, since they have yet to learn the art of management, let the old technicians and engineers—the experts—carry on production, and you, Communists, do not interfere with the technique of the business; but, while not interfering, study technique, study the art of management tirelessly, in order later on, together with the experts who are loyal to us, to become true managers of production, true masters of the business." Such was the slogan. But what actually happened? The second part of this formula was cast aside, for it is harder to study than to sign papers; and the first part of the formula was vulgarised: non-interference was interpreted to mean refraining from studying the technique of production. The result has been nonsense, harmful and dangerous nonsense, which the sooner we discard the better. . . .

It is time, high time that we turned towards technique. . . .

This, of course, is no easy matter; but it can certainly be accomplished. Science, technical experience, knowledge, are all things that can be acquired. We may not have them today, but tomorrow we shall. The main thing is to have the passionate Bolshevik desire to master technique, to master the science of production. . . .

You remember the words of the pre-revolutionary poet: "You are poor and abundant, mighty and impotent, Mother Russia." Those gentlemen were quite familiar with the verses of the old poet. They beat her, saying: "You are abundant," so one can enrich oneself at your expense. They beat her, saying: "You are poor and impotent," so you can be beaten and plundered with impunity. Such is the law of the exploiters—to beat the backward and the

weak. It is the jungle law of capitalism. You are backward, you are weak—therefore you are wrong; hence you can be beaten and enslaved. You are mighty—therefore you are right; hence we must be wary of you.

That is why we must no longer lag behind.

In the past we had no fatherland, nor could we have had one. But now that we have overthrown capitalism and power is in our hands, in the hands of the people, we have a fatherland, and we will uphold its independence. Do you want our socialist fatherland to be beaten and to lose its independence? If you do not want this, you must put an end to its backwardness in the shortest possible time and develop a genuine Bolshevik tempo in building up its socialist economy. There is no other way. That is why Lenin said on the eve of the October Revolution: "Either perish, or overtake and outstrip the advanced capitalist countries."

We are fifty or a hundred years behind the advanced countries. We must make good this distance in ten years. Either we do it, or we shall go under. . . .

from J. V. Stalin, Works, Vol. XIII (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1955), 38–51, 43–44. Reprinted in Peter N. Stearns, ed., Documents in World History (New York: Harper Collins, 1988), 128–129.

Discussion Questions

1. **Recognizing Facts and Details** What is the meaning of the slogan in the beginning of the speech?
2. **Drawing Conclusions** How does Stalin define "the jungle law of capitalism?"
3. **Inferring Main Idea** How does Stalin attempt to motivate the industrial managers in this speech?