3 ⇦ STALIN'S FIVE-YEAR PLANS

With NEP abandoned, the last traces of capitalism disappeared as all industries were placed under state ownership. The Five-Year Plans were intended to bring about an economic miracle by transforming the Soviet Union into an advanced, industrialised socialist state in ten years. Five-Year Plans were based on forward planning which set production targets five years in advance and then followed a programme requiring an all out effort in order to achieve them. Each factory was set predetermined quotas – minimum amounts that had to be produced each year over a five-year period. Each year the quota was increased. Each man and woman was set a 'norm' – the amount they were expected to produce each week. The scheme was backed by a system of rewards and punishments. Workers who exceeded their norms became entitled to additional pay, extra allowances of food and even improved housing whilst those who failed forfeited some of the pay and food to which they were normally entitled. The OGPU was always at hand to deal with slackers and any that complained. Gosplan, the abbreviation for Gosudarstvenny Planovy Komitet, the State Planning Committee, was responsible for supervising all aspects of the Plans. Based in Moscow, Gosplan employed half a million officials whose job it was to set targets

for every factory, works and mine and then check that the targets set were being achieved. Although workers were being forced to work extremely long hours for limited rewards, the majority entered into the task of modernising their country with enthusiasm. John Scott, an American, witnessed these events at first hand (this extract is from his book *Behind the Urals: An American Worker in Russia's City of Steel*)

> The hard life and sacrifices of industrialisation were consciously and enthusiastically accepted by the majority of workers. They had their noses to the grindstone, but they knew that it was for themselves, for a future with dignity and freedom for all workers. Strange as it may appear, the forced labour was a source not only of privation but also of heroism ... Soviet youth found heroism in working in factories and on construction sites ...

A *The First Five-Year Plan, 1928–33*

The Party adopted Stalin's First Five-Year Plan in 1928. It called for the rapid industrialisation of the country with the greatest emphasis to be placed on the development of heavy industry. The Plan aimed to build new steel works, dams to provide hydro-electric power, factories to make machine tools and tractors as well as expand into new areas of production – chemicals, motor vehicles, synthetic rubber, artificial fibres and electrical goods. It was intended to raise coal output from 35 million tonnes to 150 million tonnes annually and bring about significant increases in the production of iron and steel and in the generation of electricity. Overall, Stalin was looking for an expansion of over three hundred per cent in heavy industry! This would require the building of many new factories as well as the construction of new housing estates for the workers and thousands of kilometres of additional roads, railways and canals. Fear of a future war led Stalin to locate the new industries well inland and far from his country's frontiers. East of the Urals, they would be out of the reach of any invading armies. With the resources of the country being geared to the production of capital rather than consumer goods, in the short term the workers would gain little material benefit for their efforts and their living standards deteriorated. The regimented workers, many of them unskilled and only recently arrived from the countryside, endured appalling conditions. In the factories and mines, scant regard was given to safety regulations and the health of the workers. Piece-work, payment according to how much a worker produced rather than the number of hours he worked, was introduced as was a seven day working week with Sunday no longer considered a rest day. Continually pressurized to an even greater effort, workers were subjected to morale boosting speeches, advertisements and slogans. In *Stalin and Stalinism*, Alan Wood comments on the vocabulary of war used by Party propagandists to promote the Plan – they 'trumpeted of "industrial fronts", "shock troops", "storming fortresses", "creating bastions" and

rooting out the enemy.' Factories displayed their latest production figures and challenged workers to improve on them. As the stamina of the workers began to suffer, for some, the strain became intolerable. Absenteeism, lateness and idleness were considered crimes and those found guilty lost their jobs and consequently their pay and factory housing. Those who complained were accused of being troublesome Mensheviks and sent to the gulags in Siberia. Industrial espionage merited the death penalty and there were instances when foreign specialists and engineers were accused of deliberately hindering production and were put on trial. Some factory managers who had failed to produce their quota were shot. In some factories, part of the workforce consisted of slave labour. Largely made up of peasants who had opposed collectivisation, they endured appalling conditions. In *I Was a Soviet Worker*, Andrew Smith, an American who worked in a factory in Moscow, recalled:

> The room contained approximately 500 narrow beds, covered with mattresses filled with straw or dried leaves. There were no pillows or blankets ... Some had no beds and slept on the floor or in wooden boxes. In some cases, beds were used by one shift during the day and by others at night. There were no screens or walls to give any privacy ... There were no closets or wardrobes because each one owned only the clothing on his back.

In other regions, workers froze to death living in tents in sub-zero temperatures or perished from starvation because food supplies failed to reach them. From the safety of his place in exile, Trotsky scathingly wrote the following (which appears in his book *The Revolution Betrayed*, 1929):

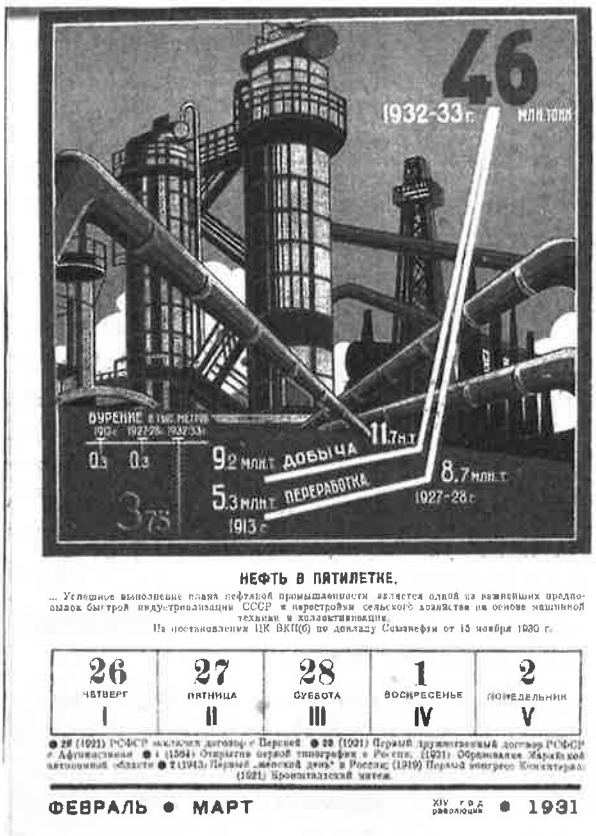
> 'State ownership of the means of production does not turn manure into gold and does not surround with a halo of sanctity the sweat-shop system, which wears out the greatest of all productive forces – man. As to the preparation for the change from socialism to communism that will begin at the exactly opposite end – not with the introduction of piece work payment, but its abolition as a relic of barbarism.'

In 1931, there were some who pleaded for a slowing down of the stampede towards industrialisation. Stalin's response was – 'No, comrades, the pace must not be slackened! On the contrary, we must quicken it as much as is within our powers and possibilities. This is dictated by our obligations to the workers and peasants of the USSR ... To slacken the pace would mean to lag behind and those who lag behind are beaten ...'. The unrealistic quotas set meant that not all targets were reached yet, in spite of errors and shortcomings resulting from dislocation and bad planning, the First Five-Year Plan was responsible for many noteworthy achievements. Among the 1500 new enterprises set up were some quite massive in their scale. These included industrial

complexes at Dneproges, Magnitogorsk and Kutnetsk, a machine factory and chemical works in the Urals, impressive tractor factories at Chelyabinsk, Kharkov and Stalingrad and car factories in Moscow and Sormovo. The first stage of the Moscow underground was started with its impressive marble walls and chandelier-lit platforms. Canals were also built which connected Moscow with the River Volga and the White Sea with the Baltic Sea. In 1933, Stalin proudly told the people that the First Five-Year Plan had been completed in four years and that it was now time to start on the second stage of his programme of industrialisation. Although it is known that some factory managers produced inflated production figures and that those supplied by the Soviet government were unreliable, it should be remembered that these achievements came at a time when the capitalist countries were suffering the effects of a worldwide slump and mass unemployment.

KEY ISSUE

The impact of the Five-Year Planning on workers.



PICTURE 24

Soviet propaganda: the achievements of the First Five-Year Plan

PICTURE 25

Soviet propaganda. A top-hatted capitalist ridicules the plan in 1928 and later winces when faced by its achievements

B *The Second Five-Year Plan, 1933–8*

The planners had more realistic expectations when they set the quotas for the Second Five-Year Plan. With lower production figures demanded, the Second Plan was able to proceed more smoothly and build on the achievements of the First. There was an impressive increase in the manufacture of machinery and this made the Soviet Union less dependent on the import of foreign products. Levels of production of coal and electricity also continued to improve but the performance of the oil and textile industries was disappointing. Although promises of better living and working conditions were not fulfilled and life of the workers and their families remained grim, there were some marginal improvements. There was a small increase in the amount of consumer goods produced and food became more readily available. Early in 1935, bread rationing came to an end and, later in the year, the rationing of other foodstuffs – meat, fats, sugar and potatoes – was abandoned. Even so, Russian housewives often joined lengthy queues only to find all the available stock quickly sold out. With the emergence of Hitler and the Nazis in Germany in 1933, Stalin recognised a need to place greater emphasis on

TABLE 54 *Estimates of the extent to which the aims of the Five-Year Plans were fulfilled (From* Stalinist Planning for Economic Growth, 1933–52 *by E. Zaleski, 1980.)*

	First Five-Year Plan (1928–32)	*Second Five-Year Plan (1933–7)*	*Fourth Five-Year Plan (1946–50)*
National income			
Official Soviet estimate (1926–7 prices)	91.5	96.1	118.9
Jasny estimate (1926–7 'real' prices)	70.2	66.5	
Bergson estimate			89.9
Nutter estimate			84.1
Industrial production			
Official Soviet estimate (1926–7 prices)	100.7	103.0	116.9
Jasny estimate	69.9	81.2	
Nutter estimate	59.7	93.1	83.8
Kaplan and Moorsteen estimate	65.3	75.7	94.9
Official Soviet estimate, producer goods (1926–7 prices)	127.6	121.3	127.5
Official Soviet estimate, consumer goods (1926–7 prices)	80.5	85.4	95.7
Agricultural production			
Official Soviet estimates (1926–7 prices)	57.8	62.6–76.9	89.9
Jasny estimate	49.6	76.7	
Nutter estimate	50.7	69.0	76.4
Johnson and Kahan estimates	52.4	66.1–69.0	79.4

defence and during the period 1933 to 1938 the production of armaments trebled. A feature of the Second Five-Year Plan was the emergence of Stakhanovism.

The figures provided in Table 55 allow you to compare the official Soviet estimates with those of the Western economists Jasny, Bergson, Nutter, Kaplan, Moorsteen, Johnson and Kahan.

See page 287.

1. *How do the official soviet estimates compare with those of the Western economists?*
2. *In which areas are there major differences between the official Soviet estimates and the estimates of the Western economists?*
3. *Do the Soviet industrial or agricultural estimates appear to be closest to those of the West?*
4. *Which of the Western economists appears to be (i) closest to and (ii) furthest from the official Soviet estimates?*
5. *Suggest some reasons for the discrepancies between the Soviet and Western estimates.*

SOME ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE FIVE-YEAR PLANS

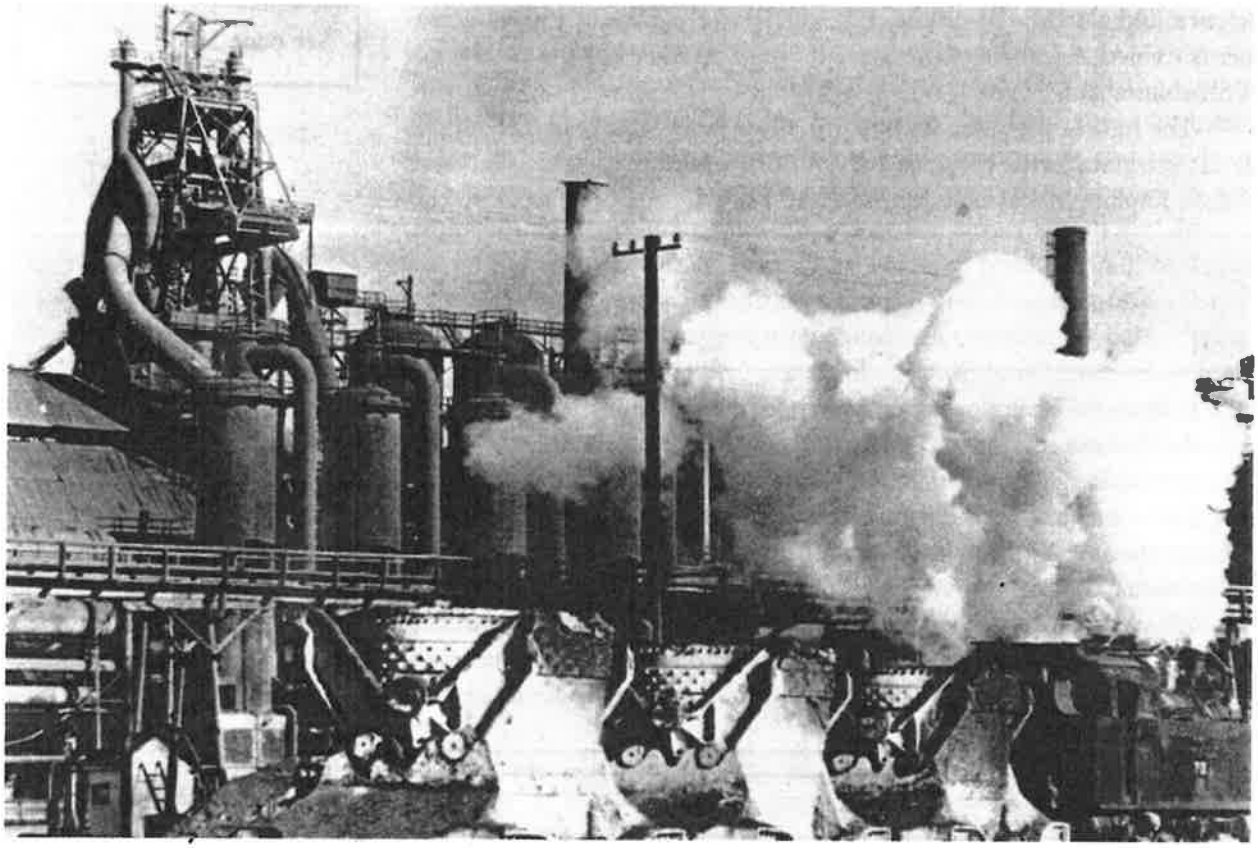
Agricultural

The creation of some 250 000 collective farms or *kolkhozee* which were eventually able to support the growing population of the industrial regions.

Industrial

Rapid growth that, by 1940, allowed the Soviet Union to rival and, in some cases even overtake, Europe's major industrial powers. Foremost amongst these achievements were:

Heavy industry	
Chelisbinsk	A major tractor manufacturing centre.
Gorky	A major motor vehicle producing centre.
Magnitogorsk	A metallurgical complex built during the period 1929–31 on the River Ural in south-western Siberia. Close to rich iron-ore deposits it became a leading centre for the manufacture of steel and a symbol of Soviet industrial growth.
Novosibirsk	The administrative centre of Siberia that developed into a major industrial city specialising in the manufacture of machine tools.



PICTURE 26 *Magnitogorsk. An industrial centre founded in 1929, it contained the largest steel plant in the Soviet Union*

Stalingrad	Previously known as Tsaritsyn, this city on the River Volga became one of the Soviet Union's major industrial centres specialising in the manufacture of tractors, river vessels, iron and steel products and chemicals.
Stalino	Situated in a coalfield in the Donetz Basin, apart from its industries the town became the centre of an important railway network.
Transport	
Belomar canal	Built to connect the White Sea to the Baltic Sea.
Moscow	The construction of the Moscow underground or Metro. Under the supervision of Lazar Kaganovich, a workforce of 75 000 completed the first line in 1935. The complete network was finally opened in 1954. It was to become a showpiece of Soviet achievement.
Moscow–Donetz Railway	Important railway link connecting the capital with the Ukraine.

Moscow–Volga canal	Completed a waterway that connected the Baltic Sea with the Black Sea.
Trans-Siberian Railway	Although originally constructed between 1891 and 1914, during the Second Five-Year Plan, the 7000 km of track were modernised
Hydro-electric power	
Dneprostroi dam	Impressive dam built across the River Dneiper.

PROFILE

ALEKSEI STAKHANOV AND STAKHANOVISM

Aleksei Stakhanov worked in the coalmines in the Donbass region. On 30–31 August 1935, as a result of a superhuman effort and the use of his intelligence to use new methods to increase his productivity, he managed to extract 102 tonnes of coal in one six-hour shift. In doing so, he achieved an output of 14 times his expected norm. Acclaimed by the Party for his achievement, he won fame and his example was used to motivate others through the encouragement of 'socialist competition'. Workers formed 'Shock brigades' and attempted to achieve equally remarkable production figures as Stakhanov. The young miner, together with other workers who had won similar distinctions, became known as Stakhanovites. They were given extra pay, free holidays and a chance to visit the Kremlin and receive the honour of either the Order of Lenin or Hero of Soviet Labour from the hand of Stalin, himself. Their achievements increased the pressure on other workers and, as a result, this elitist group attracted the resentment of others who were jealous of their achievements and their privileges. They were shunned, attacked and some, so it is claimed, even murdered. Some even doubt if Stakhanov really existed and suggest that he was an artificially created figure used to tour factories and assume the status of a workers' idol. For the record, another miner, Nikita Isotov, later claimed to have mined over twice as much as Stakhanov in a single shift!

See Picture 27 on page 288.

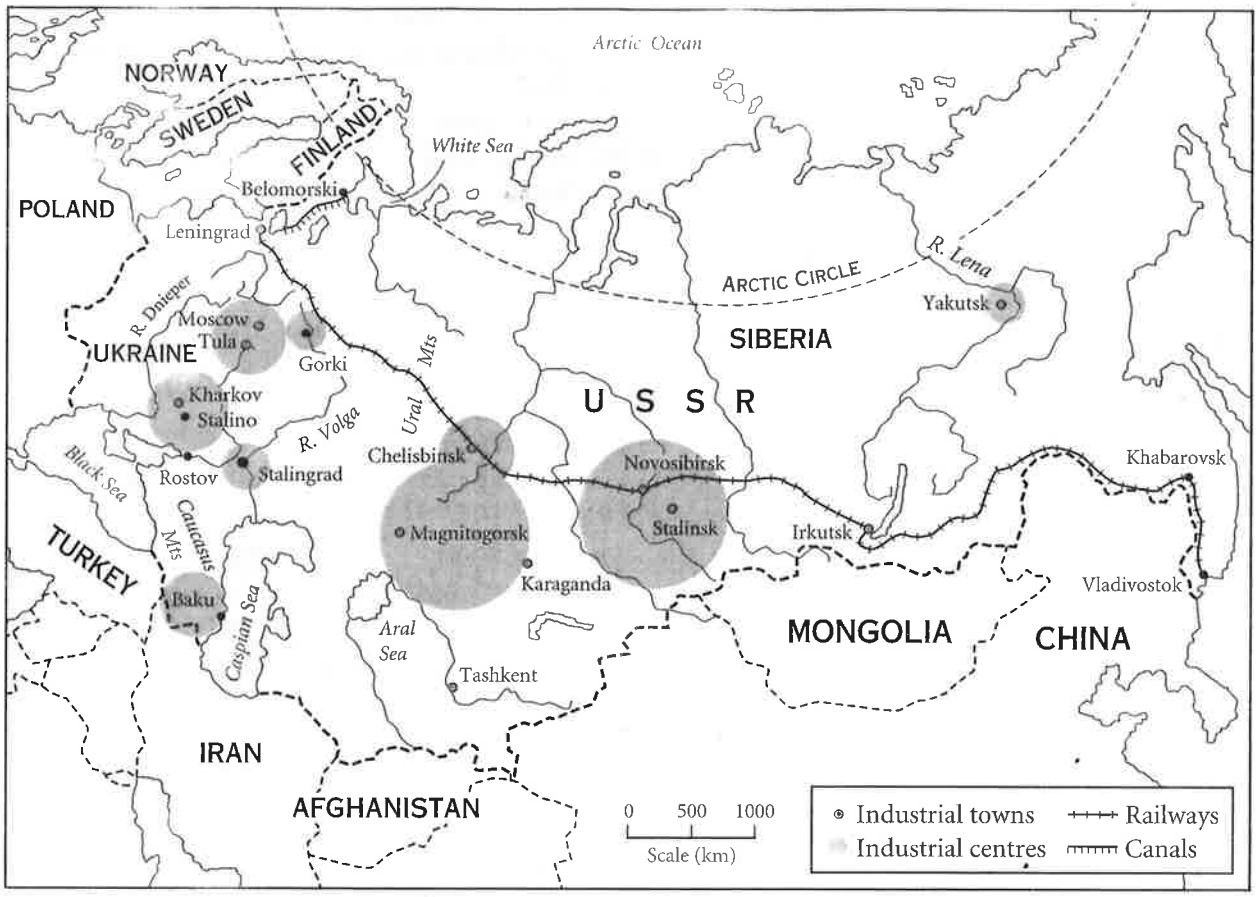
C *The Third Five-Year Plan, 1938–42*

Stalin's Third Five-Year Plan, approved at the Eighteenth Party Conference, started in 1938. The threat of war created the need to urgently develop the country's military potential and this meant that the production of armaments became the main priority. Plans to produce more consumer goods had to be abandoned and once again workers were pressurised to produce more. In June 1941, after only three years, the Third Five-Year Plan was interrupted by the German invasion of the Soviet Union and the country's involvement in the World War II.

PICTURE 27
The legendary Aleksei Stakhanov

4 FIVE-YEAR PLANS – A SUCCESS OR FAILURE?

Soviet claims and statistics relating to the Five-Year Plans lost credibility because they were influenced by the needs of propaganda and by the inflated returns provided by Gosplan. Yet, even though we know that the Plans often failed to reach their targets and were affected by confusion, waste and inefficiency, there is no doubt that Stalin's industrialisation of the Soviet Union was a remarkable achievement. During a period in which rapid economic growth (see below) transformed the country into a modern industrial state, the population of the Soviet Union increased from 147 million to 170 million. In 1926, just 17% of the Russian people lived in towns; by 1939, this had risen to 33%. Stalin had changed the face of the Soviet Union. It was now a country of factories, iron and steel works, hydro-electric dams and much improved systems of transport and communications. By 1940 the USSR had overtaken Britain in iron and steel production and was within reach of Germany. The Russian people, themselves without foreign loans or investment, had financed all. It was true that hundreds of foreign technicians had been employed but an expansion in technical education meant that the country was now able to produce its own skilled workers. But then, against such progress there is the human cost to be considered. If the success of the Five-Year Plans is to be measured against any immediate increase in the prosperity of the Russian people then they were a resounding failure. On the other hand it might be argued that millions had died and the people forced to



MAP 13 *Expansion of Soviet industry and communications*

endure hard labour, shortages, reduced living standards and the loss of their personal liberties in order to create a better life for future generations of Russians.

TABLE 55 *Five-Year Plans and industrial growth in the Soviet Union*

	1900	*1928*	*1932*	*1938*
Coal	20	34	63	130 m. tonnes
Iron and steel	3	8	12	31 m. tonnes
Oil	4	12	22	31 m. tonnes
Electricity	0	1000	5000	11 000 m. watts

In *Stalin's Economic Policy* (1986) Malcolm Falkus writes:

> The Russian government was able to perform an economic miracle during the 1930's which, to the outside world, appeared scarcely credible. The country had been transformed from a backward, predominantly agricultural society to a major industrial power. The secret of success lay partly in the supreme power of the state so that it was able to translate into reality its dream of an industrialised society.

But partly also the government met an enthusiastic response from the mass of the Russian factory workers and, after the turmoil of collectivisation, from millions of agricultural workers. Lack of skill and equipment was made good by hard work and reduced living standards. That the Soviet government was able to inspire this response is perhaps a better measure of the success of the plans than any number of cold statistical tables.

5 ⤻ STRUCTURED AND ESSAY QUESTIONS

A *This section consists of questions that might be useful for discussion (or writing answers) as a way of expanding on the chapter and testing understanding of it.*

1. Why did the Bolsheviks consider the peasants, particularly the kulaks, to be politically unreliable?
2. To what extent might collectivisation have allowed Soviet agriculture to benefit from the 'economies of scale'?
3. In what ways did a *kolkhoz* differ from a *sovkhoz*?
4. What did Stalin mean when, in 1930, he excused over zealous Party officials by claiming that they had become 'dizzy with success'?
5. What was the purpose of Mechanical and Tractor Stations (MTS) and how did they operate?
6. In what ways do 'capital goods' differ from 'consumer goods'?
7. What did the authorities hope to achieve by promoting the image of people such as Aleksei Stakhanov?

B *Essay questions.*

1. 'The human cost far outweighed the benefits'. Is this a fair assessment of Stalin's programme of collectivisation?
2. To what extent might the achievements of the Five-Year Plans be considered an economic miracle?
3. With what justification might it be claimed that during the 1930s Russian men and women made huge sacrifices in order to 'create a better life for future generations'?