

# Survival Repertoires of Soviet Urban Households in War and Peace, 1914-39<sup>1</sup>

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This paper analyses the role of the household as a unit for the pooling and redistribution of resources among the urban population of the Soviet Union during the inter-war period. It is believed that such a perspective is essential to enhance our understanding of the ways in which the population confronted the challenges posed by the unprecedented demographic, social and economic upheaval of this period, witnessing, successively, a World War, a Revolution, a Civil War, and a state-led crash industrialisation campaign. Studies of living standards, wages, and employment usually focus on the individual, in spite of the fact that many of these individuals are embedded in the larger unit of the family or the household, which codetermines the parameters within which individuals make their decisions, and influences the outcome of these decisions. Data on employment, wages, property and income reveal little about living standards until we know how these resources were combined and recombined at the level of the household.

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Tracing the reconstitution of the household in the aftermath of the demographic shock incurred during the World War and Civil War of 1914-22, the paper argues that the household played a crucial role in mitigating the effect of the most important social evil associated with the post-war reconstruction of the NEP years - widespread unemployment. In the face of unemployment the household functioned as a framework for the redistribution of the income generated from scarce jobs among the generations and the sexes. During the industrialisation drive of the 1930s, to the contrary, the income-pooling function of the household provided an important buffer against the downward pressure on living standards exerted by the erosion of real wage levels, principally through an increase in labour participation rates and an adaptation of the division of labour within the household.

The household is defined in this paper as a production and consumption unit which can consist of a single person or several persons who (1) reside together and pool at least part of their income to form a common budget or (2) reside separately but are engaged in regular transfers of goods, services, and income.<sup>2</sup> Usually, but not necessarily so, the members of a household will be related by kin. This definition is slightly different from the Laslett-Hammel definition most commonly used in historical research, which uses co-residence as the tantamount criterion in identifying households.<sup>3</sup> We use a slightly different definition for two reasons. In the first place a strict adherence to the criterion of co-residence would make it imperative to treat Soviet communal apartments, in which several families shared a kitchen and toilet facilities, as a single household, which simply makes no sense in view of the specific characteristics of this form of co-residence. The second reason has to do with the high levels of mobility in twentieth-century Russia and the Soviet Union, both rural-urban and urban-urban. Migration rarely involves the immediate transfer of entire households - usually the men move first and once successfully settled, brings over the rest of the household. In the process households are usually split between two localities for some length of time, but do keep a common budget. In this case, strict adherence to the criterion of co-residence would mean excluding entities which are households to all ends and purposes, even if it is generally impossible to identify them in population statistics.

## War and Peace

As of late, historiography has become more appreciative of the fact that the First World War and the Civil War were not so much two essentially separate, if causally linked, wars, but rather part of a series of successive armed conflicts which held the area of much of the pre-war Tsarist empire in its grip over almost eight-year period, from 1914 to 1922.<sup>4</sup> What has so far received less attention than it deserves is the tremendous impact of this “continuum of crisis” on the societies involved, both during the wars and in their immediate aftermath, but also in a longer time-frame. In terms of the issues this paper is dealing with, the wars of 1914-22 had two major consequences.

To start with, the wars practically reversed the process of urbanisation which had

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2 This definition was worked out in the framework of the research project “Work, Income and the State in Russia and the Soviet Union, 1900-2000”, courtesy of Sergey Afontsev, Gijs Kessler, Andrei Markevich, Victoria Tyazhel’nikova, Timur Valetov.

3 Peter Laslett and Richard Wall (eds), *Household and Family in Past Time* (Cambridge, 1974), pp. 24-5; E. A. Hammel and Peter Laslett, “Comparing Household Structure over Time and between Cultures”, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 16 (1974), pp. 73-109, p. 76

4 Peter Holquist, *Making war, forging revolution : Russia's continuum of crisis, 1914-1921* (Cambridge, Mass, 2002)

accompanied Russian industrialisation of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Between 1917 and 1920 the urban population of the European part of the Russian union-republic as a whole declined by a third, while Petrograd lost 71 per cent of its population, Moscow 45 percent and the towns and urban settlements of the Central Industrial Region 28 percent.<sup>5</sup> This was not so much due to mortality, although war, epidemics and starvation did take their toll, but rather to a return to the countryside of the millions of peasants which had been working in industry.

Due to legal and fiscal barriers to separation from the land commune or *obshchina*, the material difficulties associated with maintaining an entire household in the urban environment, and the necessity to arrange for a social safety net in case of disability or old age, the transition from a rural to an urban existence had been particularly drawn-out in Russia.<sup>6</sup> A sizeable share of the urban and industrial workforce were solitary peasants who were part of households split between village and town, or who had conserved very close ties to the rural world. As the urban industrial economy collapsed under the impact of war and revolution, these peasants en masse returned home, thus proving the value of the ties they had maintained to the land. With the recovery of industry during the NEP-period urbanisation resumed its course.<sup>7</sup>

Of a much longer-lasting impact was the demographic shock related to the war. The total number of excess deaths during the period 1914-22 amounted to an estimated sixteen million, killed in military action or a victim of epidemics, famine, and terror.<sup>8</sup> The effect of these human losses on the demographic make-up of the urban population was twofold. In the first place it created a large number of broken households, which led to high rates of remarriage during the 1920s.<sup>9</sup> Secondly, and more fundamentally, the war reversed the gender balance, both among the urban population as a whole and within the household population. Figure 1 plots the available data for the censuses of 1897, 1923, 1926 and 1939:

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5 Eugene M. Kulischer, *Europe on the Move. War and Population Changes, 1917-47* (New York, 1948), pp. 57-8

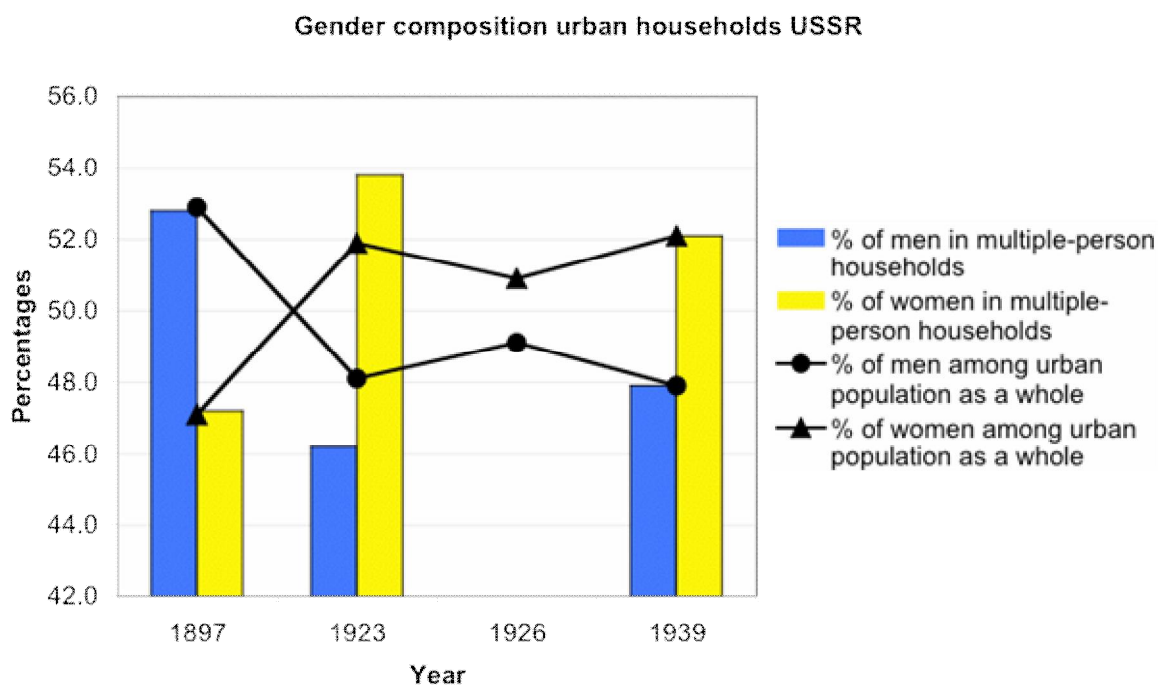
6 N. Gimmler, "K kharakteristike rossiiskogo proletariata", *Sovremennik*, 4 (1913), pp. 321-330; Robert E. Johnson, *Peasant and Proletarian. The Working Class of Moscow in the late 19th Century* (New Brunswick, 1979); Jeffrey Burds, *Peasant Dreams and Market Politics. Labor Migration and the Russian Village, 1861-1905* (Pittsburgh, 1998)

7 R. W. Davies, M. Harrison and S. G. Wheatcroft (eds), *The Economic Transformation of the Soviet Union, 1913-1945* (Cambridge, 1994), p. 65

8 Davies, Harrison and Wheatcroft (eds), *Economic Transformation*, pp. 57-58

9 M. Kaplun, "Brachnost' naseleniya RSFSR", *Statisticheskoe obozrenie*, 7 (1929), pp. 90-96

Figure 1 - Gender composition urban households USSR, 1897-1939



Source: Calculated from: *Pervaya vseobshchaya perepis' naseleniya Rossiiskoi imperii 1897 goda* (St. Peterburg, 1905); *Itogi Vsesoyuznoi gorodskoi perepisi 1923 g.* (Moskva, Izd. TsSU SSSR, 1924), Chast' IV, pp. 52-3; *Vsesoyuznaya perepis' naseleniya 1926 g.* (Moskva, TsSU SSSR, 1928-1935), Vol. 55, pp. 60; Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv ekonomiki (RGAE), f. 1562, op. 336, d. 586, ll. 6-9.

The gender composition of the urban population in 1897, the first and only population census held in the empire, is typical for a migrant society. Men outnumbered women by a considerable margin, both among the population as a whole and among the household population. At the time of the first soviet census of 1923 this had reverted into the opposite; women outnumbered men, both among the household population and the population at large. The return of male peasant migrants and the loss of male life in armed conflict had produced a surplus of women among the urban population. As we have demonstrated elsewhere, this surplus was perpetuated through the remainder of the twentieth century by a combination of new waves of excess mortality among men and systematically higher male mortality rates in “normal” times.<sup>10</sup>

The existence of this surplus of women was an important factor in determining patterns of family formation and household structure, not, as one would expect, in the form of the presence of a substantial contingent of single mothers and solitary women, but, in the form of a marked tendency to form three-generational, so-called extended family households. This

10 Sergey Afontsev *et al.*, "Urban Households in Russia and the Soviet Union, 1900-2000. Size, structure and composition", *Paper presented at the Conference 'Family and Household in Urban east and South-East Europe'*, Graz, 18-20 May 2006

involved a complex interplay of factors, among which, apart from the distortion of the gender balance, Soviet revolutionary family policy and housing shortages played a major role.

A decree of 19 December 1917 had legalised divorce at the request of one or both of the spouses without regard to the reasons, and this was incorporated into a new family code of 27 April 1918.<sup>11</sup> Meant to liberate women from patriarchal oppression inside the marriage these laws did in fact more to liberate men from the obligations that came with marriage. As Wendy Goldman has shown, divorce was the scourge of Soviet women during the 1920s and 1930s, as men would wander from one wife to the other, often abandoning women after the birth of children without paying alimony.<sup>12</sup> The shortage of men after the wars was the key factor in determining this outcome for the simple reason that it provided men with better opportunities for remarriage than women. With the many broken households remarriage was a natural sequel to the war. Divorce added in, however, to produce a virtual reshuffling of urban households during the 1920s. Of all newly weds in 1927 only 7.1% of the men and 8.37% of the women were widowers and widows, while 20.2 and 17.3% respectively were divorcées. In Leningrad and Moscow, of the different combinations involving one or two partners that had been married before, the most common occurrence were marriages between two divorced persons, followed by marriages between a widow and a widower, and between a divorced man and a widow. All other combinations occurred much less frequently. The two capital cities were obviously much more progressive in this respect, though, than the rest of the country. For the urban population of the RSFSR as a whole, marriages between a widow and a widower were the most common occurrence, but nevertheless marriages between divorcées followed close suit.<sup>13</sup>

Although meaning misery for many of the women involved, this reshuffling of households also served to transfer the economic impact of the shortage of men to a section of the female population where it could do less harm. The loss of male life was unevenly distributed over the generations and concentrated in the younger age-groups. What appears to have happened is that older men filled this gap, divorcing their wives, and using the occasion to marry much younger women. As war-widows remarried, the original “surplus” of women was transferred to the older generations. Although for all age-groups widows were more numerous than widowers, the difference increased with age far beyond the discrepancy in marriage rates between the sexes in these age-cohorts which can be found in any society. Of the female population between fifty and 60 years of age, in 1923 44.1% were widows, and 45.3% in 1926, as compared to 8.9% of men in the same age-cohort in 1923 and 6.7% in 1926. For those over sixty years of age the percentage of widows even rises to 68.8% in 1923 and 71.6% in 1926, with the respective figures for the male population of the same age-cohort being 22.9 and 22.4% respectively.<sup>14</sup>

This transfer of the “surplus” on the marriage market to the older age-groups softened the economic impact of the gender imbalance on the female population because the elderly single women it produced would not, as a rule, constitute separate households, but would rather co-

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11 John N. Hazard, *Law and social change in the U.S.S.R* (Toronto, 1953), pp. 246-7; H. Kent Geiger, *The Family in Soviet Russia* (Cambridge, Mass., 1968), pp. 49-50

12 Wendy Z. Goldman, *Soviet Family Policy and Social Life, 1917-1936* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 48-57, 248-249.

13 M. Kaplun, "Brachnost' naseleniya RSFSR", *Statisticheskoe obozrenie*, 7 (1929), pp. 91-92

14 Calculated by author from: *Itogi Vsesoyuznoi gorodskoi perepisi 1923 g.* (Moskva, 1924), Chast' III, pp. 410-425; *Vsesoyuznaya perepis' naseleniya 1926 g.* (Moskva, 1928-1935), Vol. 51, pp. 2-4.

reside with their adult children in three-generational extended family households.<sup>15</sup> This arrangement helped soften the impact of enforced spinsterhood in a society where employment was scarce and women relied predominantly on the male members of the household for their livelihood. The fact that these women were single obviously facilitated their absorption into three-generational households. Housing shortages were severe in the 1920s. Civil construction had virtually come to a standstill after 1914, while lack of maintenance and war had depleted the existing housing stock. Although the expropriation of the mansions of the rich relieved some of the pressure, nevertheless by 1926 an urban population which had reached the pre-war level had to be fitted into a housing stock which was much smaller. As a result, almost a quarter of the urban population in 1926 lived in apartments with on average more than five persons per room, which should be classified as extremely overcrowded conditions. The average floor space per urban inhabitant was 5.85 square metres.<sup>16</sup>

### **Work, Income and the Household**

What was the role of the household in the ways in which the urban population provided itself with the means of existence in the mixed economy of the NEP-era Soviet Union? Two sets of data are available which can shed some light on this issue. The most comprehensive data are contained in the 1926 population census turnouts, which most thoroughly chart the complex ways in which households and individuals combined different forms of work to provide themselves with the means of existence. Direct data on the composition of household income and the contribution made to this income by the various members of the household are available in the form of budget surveys, but unfortunately only for households of workers and white-collar workers, thus excluding the self-employed. For the purpose of this paper the budget-survey for 1925 has been used, because of its closest proximity to the population census.

The tables 1 and 2 plot the data on the sources of income of urban men and women from the 1926 census:

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15 Using census data we have reconstructed patterns of household structure for the urban population of the RSFSR for the period 1923-2002. For an analysis and discussion of these data, cf. Sergey A. Afontsev *et al.*, *Urban Households in Russia and the Soviet Union, 1900-2000. Size, Structure and Composition*, IISH Research Paper 44 (Amsterdam, 2005) (<http://www.iisg.nl/publications/respap44.pdf>)

16 *Perepis' naseleniya 1926 g.*, Vol. 54, p. 25

Table 1 - Sources of Income Urban Population USSR, 1926 - Men

	Age			
	0-15	16-59	60+	All ages
<i>Employed</i>	0.8	52.0	22.1	34.2
<i>Self-employed</i>	2.5	21.2	32.3	15.7
free professions	0.0	0.5	1.1	0.4
employers	0.0	0.9	1.3	0.6
entrepreneurs employing only family labour and members of production co-operatives ( <i>artely</i> )	0.0	6.3	13.8	4.6
entrepreneurs working alone	0.1	9.5	14.8	6.7
family labour	2.4	4.1	1.3	3.4
<i>Unknown/No profession</i>	2.4	6.6	18.9	5.8
<b>Total gainfully employed</b>	<b>5.7</b>	<b>79.9</b>	<b>73.2</b>	<b>55.7</b>
<b>Not gainfully employed, self-supporting or maintained by the state</b>	<b>94.3</b>	<b>20.1</b>	<b>26.8</b>	<b>44.3</b>
unemployed	0.1	6.1	3.0	4.0
military	0.0	6.9	0.0	4.4
<b>Total urban population</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Calculated by author from *Vsesoyuznaya perepis' naseleniya 1926 g.* (Moskva, 1928-1935), Vol. 34, pp. 9-13.

Table 2 – Sources of Income Urban Population USSR, 1926 – Women

	Age			
	0-15	16-54	55+	All ages
<i>Employed</i>	1.1	22.3	5.0	14.0
<i>Self-employed</i>	1.9	9.4	8.5	7.0
free professions	0.0	0.2	0.2	0.1
employers	0.0	0.1	0.2	0.1
entrepreneurs employing only family labour and members of production co-operatives ( <i>artely</i> )	0.0	0.8	1.6	0.6
entrepreneurs working alone	0.0	2.3	3.0	1.7
family labour	1.9	5.9	3.6	4.4
<i>Unknown/No profession</i>	1.9	4.1	16.1	4.6
<b>Total gainfully employed</b>	<b>5.0</b>	<b>35.8</b>	<b>29.6</b>	<b>25.6</b>
<b>Not gainfully employed, self-supporting or maintained by the state</b>	<b>95.0</b>	<b>64.2</b>	<b>70.4</b>	<b>74.4</b>
unemployed	0.1	4.6	0.6	2.8
military	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
<b>Total urban population</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Calculated by author from *Vsesoyuznaya perepis' naseleniya 1926 g.* (Moskva, 1928-1935), Vol. 34, pp. 9-13.

The tables distinguish between the gainfully employed and those who were maintained by others or the state, or, more rarely, self-supporting. The gainfully employed are further subdivided into employed and self-employed labour. Data have been calculated for all three age-groups, respectively children of up to sixteen years of age, the population in the age of economic activity, and the elderly. The definition of the age of economic activity used is the one adhered to in later Soviets statistics, when pension legislation allowed men to retire at 60 years of age and women at 55 years of age. With no such universal pension system being in place in 1926, this is a concession to the requirements of comparability over time within the larger framework the research for this paper has been conducted in.<sup>17</sup>

On the whole, slightly more than half of the male population, and about one quarter of the female population provided in their own means of existence. Accordingly, 44.3% of all men and 74.7% of all women were maintained by these working relatives, or by the state. This included almost all children - only about five percent of both boys and girls under the age of fifteen were gainfully employed. As far as the population over fifteen is concerned there do not appear to be significant differences in rates of labour participation between those of working age and the elderly, which would confirm expectations given that no pension system existed yet in those years. An interesting difference does show up, though, in terms of the type of gainful employment chosen. Both elderly men and women exhibit a definite preference for self-employment over employment, with 32.3% of men over sixty years of age falling into this category as against a share of 22.1% for employment. Among women, the corresponding figures are 8.5% and 5.0% respectively. This strongly suggests that the opportunities provided by the NEP to engage in small-scale manufacturing and crafts and trades were used primarily by those who had been engaged in these activities already before the revolution, whereas the younger generations tended to choose paid employment.

Of those who were not gainfully employed, the two most important categories which were maintained by the state are highlighted in the table - the unemployed, and, among men, the military, together accounting for 8.4% of men and 2.8% of women. Other contingents maintained by the state were the seriously handicapped, the mentally ill and some other categories, all accounting for negligible shares of the total population. In other words, the overwhelming part of the non-working population were maintained by their relatives. Who were these relatives and in what mutual relationships were the working and the non-working part of the population locked together within the framework of the household?

Table 3 provides insight into the balance between the gainfully employed and the dependent within urban households:

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17 *Work, Income and the State in Russia and the Soviet Union, 1900-2000*, carried out under the auspices of the International Institute of Social History and funded by the Friends of the International Institute of Social History. (<http://www.iisg.nl/research/ussr.php>).

*Table 3 – Labour Participation Rates and Source of Income Head of Household, 1926, urban population USSR*

Source of income head of household	Two-person households			Three-person households				Households of all sizes			
	Working members:			Working members:				Working members			
	One	Two	Total	One	Two	Three	Total	Two	Three	One or >3	Total
Employment	83.8	16.2	100.0	80.1	18.4	1.6	100.0	17.2	3.9	78.9	100.0
Self-employment	77.3	22.7	100.0	68.8	23.0	8.1	100.0	19.1	14.1	66.7	100.0
Self-supporting or maintained by the state	98.0	2.0	100.0	98.2	1.5	0.3	100.0	1.7	0.4	97.8	100.0
All heads of household	84.9	15.1	100.0	79.7	17.5	2.8	100.0	16.4	6.4	77.2	100.0

Source: Calculated by author from *Vsesoyuznaya perepis' naseleniya 1926 g.* (Moskva, 1928-1935), Vol. 55, pp. 60-61.

The table distinguishes between two-person households, three-person households and all households taken together. This has to do with the idiosyncrasies of the source used to compile this table, which only distinguishes households with two and three economically active members, making it impossible, for example, to calculate the number of four-person households with one economically active member, as you cannot separate them from the four-person households with four economically active members. For two and three person households a precise calculation is possible however. The overwhelming part of them contained only one economically active member - 84.9% of two-person households and 79.7% of three-person households. Households with two economically active members accounted for 15.1% of two-person households and 17.5% of three-person households, whereas households with three working members accounted for a negligible 2.8% of households of this size.

For all households taken together, strictly speaking the households which did not have two or three economically active members could contain either one or more than three economically active members, but in practice we can assume the number of households with four or more economically active members to have been quite limited, considering the modest overall percentage of households with more than two economically active members (6.4%). Indeed, it seems reasonable to assume that the census-takers did not specifically distinguish households with more than three economically active members because of their relative insignificance. Such households would have had to be pretty large households, given the fact that the relative weight of children in such households would also have been higher. Really large households were not very common at this time – households of over six persons accounted for in-all 17% of multiple-person households, including those with three or less economically active members already accounted for in table 7.<sup>18</sup> Consequently, it seems justified to assume that few of the 77.2% of households with one or three plus members would have contained three plus economically active members. In other words, about three quarters of all households contained only one economically active person – the breadwinner

18 Calculated by author from: *Perepis' naseleniya 1926 g.*, Vol. 55, pp. 60-63

or head of household – and thus lived on only one income. Most often this was a wage income — 64.5% of breadwinners were employed, whereas only 25.8% were self-employed, and a final 9.7% were maintained by the state.<sup>19</sup>

Notwithstanding the relative insignificance of the number of households counting two or more gainfully employed persons during the 1920s, they appear to have occupied a specific niche in urban society. As I have shown elsewhere, such households were much better represented among households with a self-employed breadwinner than among other households, with on average 33.3% of all households with a self-employed breadwinner having two or more working members, as against 22.8% for all households.<sup>20</sup> The larger the households get, the more striking the difference between those with a self-employed breadwinner and the others in terms of the number of family members earning an income. The distribution of households with a self-employed breadwinner tilted towards the larger households, whereas the larger part of households headed by an unemployed/self-supporting breadwinner tended to be small households.

A picture emerges of a distinct minority type of household characterised by an above average family-size, a high labour participation rate among household members and a self-employed head of household. These were small-scale family based economic units, partly artisan workshops and partly peasant households living within the city boundaries. Further data show that the members of such households usually participated in the economic activity of the head of household. In households with a self-employed breadwinner 64.3% of other economically active members of the household were self-employed as well, almost exclusively moreover as family labour assisting the head of household.

Thus, the choice for self-employment appears to have been determined above all by the opportunities for such forms of economic activity at the level of the own household; in families with an employed head of household only 10.5% of the other working household members were self-employed. What is more, budget-survey data suggest that in such households the economic benefits to be derived from self-employed economic activities were rather modest. Table 4 provides a detailed breakdown of the structure of income of households headed by blue- and white collar workers for the month of November 1925.

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19 Calculated by author from: *Perepis' naseleniya 1926 g.*, Vol. 55, pp. 158-9.

20 For a more elaborate version of the same argument and a discussion of the data cf. Gijs Kessler, "Work and the Household in the Inter-War Soviet Union", *Continuity and Change*, 2005, 20(3), pp. 409-442

Table 4 – Household budgets November 1925, percentage of total revenues per household<sup>21</sup>

	Workers	White-collar workers
Main employment	81.7	80.8
breadwinner	71.2	74.5
other members	10.4	6.3
Secondary employment	0.6	3.0
breadwinner	0.3	2.3
other members	0.4	0.7
Self-employment	2.8	1.3
agriculture	2.3	0.5
trade	0.0	0.0
breadwinner	0.0	0.0
other members	0.0	0.0
crafts	0.5	0.7
breadwinner	0.2	0.2
other members	0.3	0.6
Transfers from state and social organisations	4.9	1.1
Transfers from other households	0.7	1.0
Credit	5.1	7.9
Savings & Stockpiles	3.2	3.6
Other	1.0	1.3
letting	0.4	0.3
boarders	0.1	0.2
Total	100.0	100.0

Transfers from state = all benefits except for grants

Credit = credit from mutual aid funds, from private persons and from retail outlets

Savings & Stockpiles = savings, pawning, sales of goods and foodstuffs from stockpiles, returned debts, withdrawn savings

Other = Letting, boarders, grants, other, unidentified

As we can see, self-employed economic activities in these households contributed a mere 2.8% of household income in blue-collar workers' households and only 1.3% in white-collar workers households. Their importance was even outstripped by credit and the depletion of savings and stockpiles, which accounted for 5.1% and 3.2% of total income in workers' households and 7.9% and 3.6% in white collar workers' households. Paid employment provided the bulk of household income, both for workers and white-collar workers, accounting for 81.7% and 80.8% respectively. By far the largest part of these revenues were provided by the main breadwinner of the household, with wages and salaries of other members of the household contributing only 10.4% of the household budget among workers and as low as 6.3% among white-collar workers as against 71.2% and 74.5% for heads of household respectively. This corroborates our finding above that only about one quarter of all urban households at this time had more than one economically active member.

Summarising our findings from this investigation of the census and budget-survey data, two things can be said about the economic functions of the urban household in the mid-1920s. In the first place the household was overwhelmingly a unit of consumption rather than of production. The archetypical artisan household, simultaneously a unit of production and consumption, was a disappearing social phenomenon in the 1920s, largely a left-over from

21 TsSU SSSR. Sektor statistiki truda. Sektsiya obshchei statistiki, op. cit. *Byudzhety rabochikh i sluzhashchikh* (1929b), pp. 226-227, 234-235, 464-465, 472-473

the past, and apparently of little attraction to the younger generations. At the same time, though, the household functioned as the most important framework for the redistribution of income between the working and the non-working part of the population, and therewith, between the sexes and the generations. In the absence of any sort of welfare state in these early post-revolutionary decades this made the household an extremely important institution. For the larger part of the urban population it was kinship rather than work which determined levels of material well-being, something which badly fitted with Bolshevik notions regarding the importance of work as the foundation of socialist citizenship

### **Women and Work, 1926-39**

One of the immediate effects of Stalin's crash industrialisation strategy which was implemented from 1926 on and accelerated in 1929, was a sharp drop in living standards. Real wages tumbled and acute shortages sprang up of virtually all consumer goods and services.<sup>22</sup> Contrary to the Civil War years outright starvation was avoided in the urban centres, but particularly during the First Five Year Plan the population faced considerable material hardship. In order to offset the downward pressure on income households significantly increased their involvement in hired labour.

Table 5 presents data on the composition of household income for workers' families between 1932 and 1940. These data are derived from the year-round budget survey for a sample of urban households carried out by the Central Administration for Economic Accounting of the Soviet Union, later Central Statistical Administration, from 1928 on.<sup>23</sup> Unfortunately, the data for the years 1929-31 have been kept very incompletely, but the data for 1932-40 adequately render the main trends.

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22 On trends in real wages cf. Solomon Schwarz, *Labor in the Soviet Union* (New York, 1952), pp. 132-145. On shortages: Elena Osokina, *Za fasadom "stalinskogo izobiliya". Raspredelenie i rynek v snabzhenii naseleniya v gody industrializatsii, 1927-1941* (Moscow, 1998)

23 During the 1920s a similar survey existed, but data were gathered only for one month per year, usually November. The data from the surveys of the 1920s were published in: TsSU SSSR. Sektor statistiki truda. Sektsiya obshchei statistiki, *Byudzhety rabochikh i sluzhashchikh* Vyp. 1 - Byudzhety rabochei sem'i v 1922-27 gg. Tekst (Moskva, 1929); TsSU SSSR. Sektor statistiki truda. Sektsiya obshchei statistiki, *Byudzhety rabochikh i sluzhashchikh* Vyp. 2 - Byudzhety rabochikh i sluzhashchikh v dekabre 1922 g. Tablitsy (Moskva, 1929); TsSU SSSR. Sektor statistiki truda. Sektsiya obshchei statistiki, *Byudzhety rabochikh i sluzhashchikh* Vyp. 3 - 1. Byudzhety rabochikh v noyabre 1923 g. 2. Byudzhety rabochikh v noyabre-dekabre 1924 g. 3. Byudzhety rabochikh v noyabre 1925 g. 4. Byudzhety sluzhashchikh v noyabre 1925 g. Tablitsy (Moskva, 1929). In 1928 the Central Statistical Administration decided to switch to year-round surveys, cf. RGAE, f. 1562, op. 15, d. 581, l. 89

Table 5 - Workers' household budgets 1932-40. Percentage of total income per household<sup>24</sup>

	1932	1933	1934	1935	1936	1937	1938	1939	1940
Main employment	83.1	81.6	87.3	88.2	89.0	87.3	87.7	89.2	87.9
wage breadwinner		69.5	72.5	72.3	73.3	72.0	72.2	67.3	65.6
wages other members		12.1	13.1	14.7	14.6	14.5	15.1	18.2	18.3
bonuses, gifts, transfers		0.0	1.6	1.1	1.1	0.8	0.4	3.8	4.1
Secondary employment	2.6	3.5	0.6	0.7	0.5	0.5	0.7	0.4	0.4
Self-employment		0.0	1.9	1.5	1.4	1.5	1.6	0.5	1.8
Transfers from state and social organisations	1.8	2.1	2.5	3.1	2.3	3.7	4.0	3.1	3.0
Transfers from other households		0.0	1.3	1.4	1.5	1.8	1.5	1.9	1.9
Savings & Stockpiles	5.4	7.1	4.2	2.6	1.5	1.1	1.2	1.5	2.3
Other	7.0	5.7	2.3	2.6	3.8	4.1	3.3	3.3	2.5
letting	0.0	0.0	0.7	0.6	0.5	0.5	0.4	0.4	0.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

The increase in labour participation rates is reflected in the rising share of wages earned by other members of the household than the breadwinner, from 12.1% in 1932 to 18.3% in 1940. This was the main factor accounting for the growth of the share of wages in household income as a whole. In comparison: in the budget survey of November 1925 this percentage had been 10.4% (Cf. table 4).

The changes in patterns of gainful employment among the household population were reflected a general increase in labour participation rates in society, both for men and for women, but most spectacularly so for women. The tables six and seven group the data on the sources of income from the 1939 population census in a comparable way to the 1926 data from the tables 1 and 2:

24 Self-employment = remuneration for work received from private persons + sale of produce from subsidiary agriculture.

Transfer from state and social organisations = social insurance benefits + family allowances and pensions.

Transfer from other households = other revenues in cash received from private persons.

Savings & Stockpiles = dividends and other payments derived from the possession of state obligations, insurance payments + sales of items not produced in subsidiary agriculture + withdrawn from savings-account.

Calculated by author from: RGAE, f. 1562, op. 15, d. 1119, l. 17

Table 6 – Sources of Income Urban Population USSR, 1939 - Men

	Age			
	0-15	16-59	60+	All ages
<i>Employed</i>	1.2	81.6	53.4	54.2
<i>Self-employed</i>	0.2	8.0	12.2	5.6
Co-operated artisans	0.1	3.1	4.3	2.2
Individual artisans	0.0	0.7	2.4	0.5
Kolkhoz-members	0.1	4.1	4.5	2.8
Peasants	0.0	0.2	1.0	0.1
<b>Total gainfully employed</b>	<b>1.4</b>	<b>89.6</b>	<b>65.7</b>	<b>59.8</b>
<b>Not gainfully employed, self-supporting or maintained by the state</b>	<b>98.6</b>	<b>9.6</b>	<b>33.2</b>	<b>39.6</b>
<b>Other</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.7</b>	<b>1.2</b>	<b>0.5</b>
<b>Total urban population</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Calculated by author from RGAE, f. 1562, op. 336, d. 797, ll. 18-75

Table 7 – Sources of Income Urban Population USSR, 1939 – Women

	Age			
	0-15	16-54	55+	All ages
<i>Employed</i>	1.0	49.7	12.3	31.5
<i>Self-employed</i>	0.1	4.1	3.5	2.8
Co-operated artisans	0.0	2.0	0.8	1.3
Individual artisans	0.0	0.1	0.3	0.1
Kolkhoz-members	0.1	1.9	1.9	1.3
Peasants	0.0	0.1	0.5	0.1
<b>Total gainfully employed</b>	<b>1.1</b>	<b>53.8</b>	<b>15.8</b>	<b>34.3</b>
<b>Not gainfully employed, self-supporting or maintained by the state</b>	<b>98.8</b>	<b>45.9</b>	<b>83.2</b>	<b>65.4</b>
<b>Other</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.3</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>0.2</b>
<b>Total urban population</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Calculated by author from RGAE, f. 1562, op. 336, d. 797, ll. 18-75

The single most important trend over the period 1926-39 was the increase of the share of the urban population that was gainfully employed, from 55.7% to 59.8% for men and from 25.6% to 34.3% for women. Although the figures for both men and women show the same trend, the change was most pronounced for women. The industrialisation of the 1930s was accompanied by a concerted state campaign to break down existing social inhibitions to female employment and increase women's involvement in paid employment.<sup>25</sup> Both among

<sup>25</sup> On the drive to increase female labour participation, see Wendy Z. Goldman, *Women at the Gates. Gender and Industry in Stalin's Russia* (Cambridge, 2002)

men and among women the increase in labour participation rates was driven entirely by increased involvement in waged employment, which increased from 34.2% of all urban males to 54.2% and more than doubled for women, from 14.0% in 1926 to 31.5% in 1939. At the same time, self-employment, targeted by the state from the late 1920s on, shrivelled away, declining from 15.7% to 5.6% among males, and from 7.0% to 2.8% among women.

Turning to the different age-groups, the picture becomes more diversified. Among men the increase of waged employment involved all age-groups, including children under 16 years of age, although the main increases fell on the population of working-age, and, particularly, the elderly, where employment more than doubled from 22.1% in 1926 to 53.4% in 1939. The corollary to this over-all increase of employment was a general decline of self-employment, again for all age-groups. Together, this resulted in an increase in gainful employment among men of working-age and a decrease of labour participation among the elderly and the young, who had been most actively involved in self-employment in 1926. Among women the increase of the share of waged employment involved only the population of working-age and the elderly, and slightly declined among girls under sixteen years of age from 1.1% in 1926 to 1.0% in 1939. Just as among men, self-employment lost importance among all age groups, and together this resulted in an increase in labour participation rates among women of working-age and a decrease among the young and the elderly. As far as the young are concerned this is no doubt related above all to the expansion of the education system in the course of the 1930s, reflected in a general increase of literacy rates for the population of 9 to 49 years of age between the censuses.<sup>26</sup> For the trends among the elderly no immediate explanation presents itself.

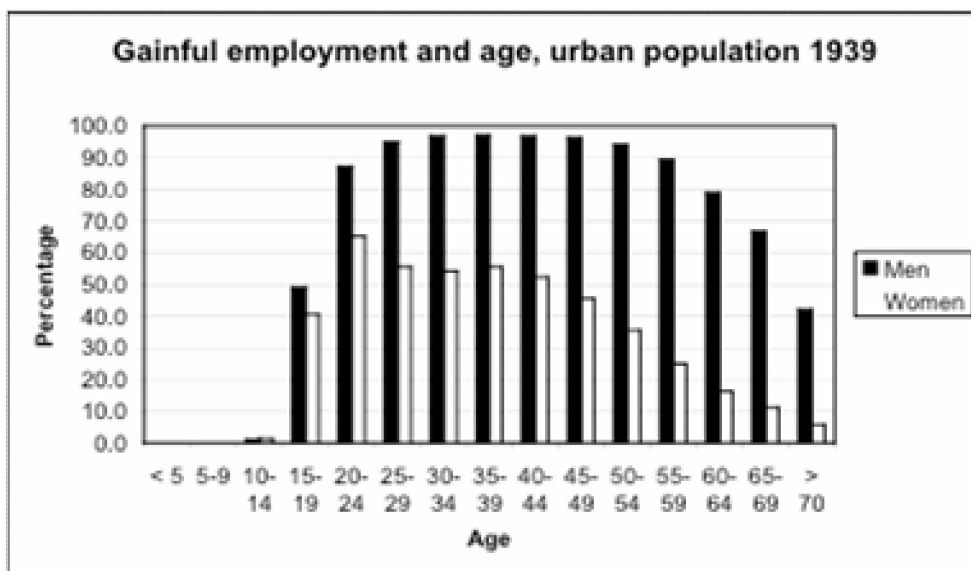
The most important difference between men and women, except for the general lower levels of labour participation among women, had to do with patterns of gainful employment among the elderly. As we saw above, self-employment in the 1920s had been above all the domain of the elderly generations. In 1939 self-employment, although on the decline, still accounted for 12.2% of the male population over sixty years of age, as against 8.0% of those between 15 and 60 six years of age. Among women, to the contrary, the population of working-age was best represented among the self-employed in 1939, accounting for 4.1% as compared to 3.5% among women over fifty-four years of age. Had the same age-criteria been used for grouping the male and female population, this effect would no doubt have been even stronger. Together with the much lower levels of paid employment among this age-group as compared to men, this suggests elderly women tended to focus on household work and domestic labour, abandoning gainful employment.

A more detailed breakdown of the 1939 data according to age and sex provides an approximation of the life-cycle dimensions of employment patterns and the division of labour between the generations within households. These data have been rendered graphically in the Figures 2 and 3:

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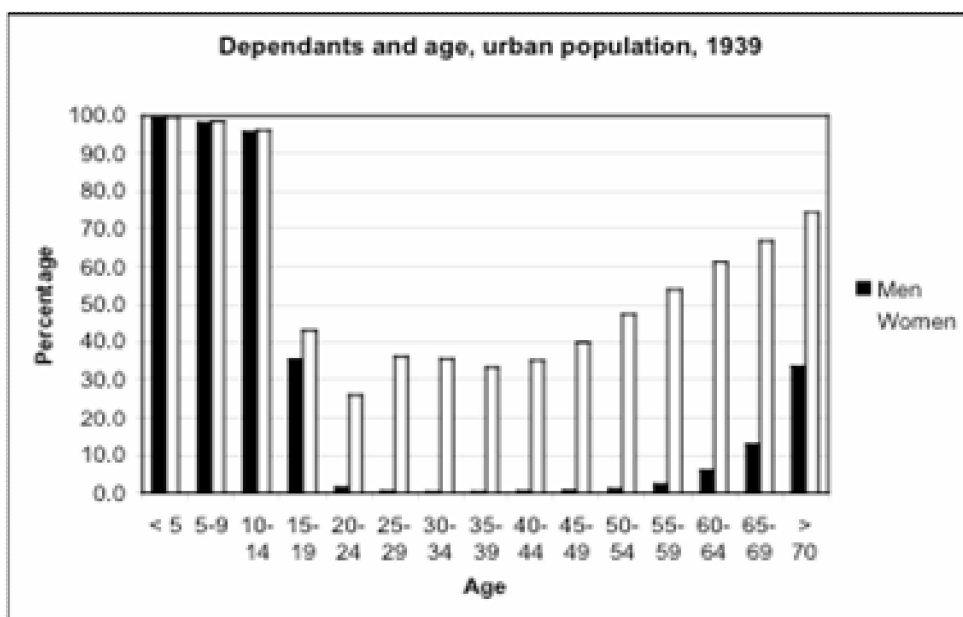
<sup>26</sup> Literacy rates among the urban population of both sexes between 9 and 49 years of age increased from 85 per cent in 1926 to 94.9 per cent in 1939. See *Naselenie Rossii za 100 let (1897-1997)* (Moskva, 1998), p. 69

Figure 2 – Gainful employment and age, urban population 1939.



Calculated from:  
 RGAE, f. 1562, op. 336, d. 797, ll. 24, 27-30, 56, 59-62

Figure 3 – Dependants and age, urban population, 1939



Calculated from: RGAE, f. 1562, op. 336, d. 797, ll. 37-44, 69-76

The charts display the percentages of men and women from each age-group who derived their income from respectively gainful employment and support by the breadwinner of the household. As we can see in Figure 2, men started working in their late teens; almost fifty percent of men aged between 15 and 19 were gainfully employed. By 25 years of age men are almost universally gainfully employed and labour participation rates began to drop below 90% only from 55 years of age. Even among men over seventy years of age more than 40%

were gainfully employed, which reflects the absence of a system of pensions and compulsory retirement in this period. Women show much lower labour participation rates at all ages, climbing from just over 40% among the 15-19 year old to a peak of 65% for the age-group 20-24, gradually decreasing thereafter and falling below the 50% line for those older than 45. The decline in labour participation rates for women around 25 years of age should most likely be ascribed to the effects of marriage and childbirth, which cause some of the women who had been working at a younger age to withdraw from the labour market. Women married in their late teens and early twenties – by 24 years of age the majority were married and by 29 years of age had this increased to about three quarters. Childbirth also was highest between ages 19 to 25, declining afterwards.<sup>27</sup>

Figure 2 shows the reverse side of these patterns of employment. Between 20 and 54 years of age the percentage of non-working male dependants is almost zero, slowly rising to a high of 33% for those over 70 years of age. The data for women quite distinctly reveal their passage from the care of their parents to that of their husbands and ultimately to that of their children. Between 14 and 24 years of age the number of women being maintained by others gradually decreased as they started to earn their own living and became independent of their parents. It rose again between 25 and 30 by which time they married and started raising a family, slightly decreased again between 30 and 40 and began to rise from 44 on as their children started to contribute to household income, making it less imperative for older women to work. In old age, finally, women passed into the care of their children.

Summarizing, male and female life cycles looked something like this. Men would start working from 15 years of age on and remain working as long as they physically could. Women, on the other hand, would enter the labour market when they were young, partly withdraw from it when marrying and raising children, re-enter at a later age when they had the not infrequent misfortune to be left alone in the care of a child or in case the men did not bring in enough income to support the family, and leave the labour market as soon as their children were old enough to become the main breadwinners of the household.

Crucial in determining the differences in employment patterns among men and women was the unequal division of labour in household work. Table 8 provides an overview of the use of time by the different members of the household. These data are derived from a 1936 time-budget survey among households of factory workers carried out by the Central Administration for Economic Accounting, the same organisation which carried out the income-budget surveys we used earlier on.

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27 Yu. A. Polyakov and V. B. Zhiromskaya (eds), *Naselenie Rossii v XX veke. Istoricheskie ocherki* T. 1. 1900-1939 gg. (Moskva, 2000), p. 185; V. B. Zhiromskaya, *Demograficheskaya istoriya Rossii v 1930-e gody. Vzgl'yad v neizvestnoe*. (Moskva, 2001), p. 20.

Table 8 - Time budget of factory workers and their families, USSR, 1936 (hours per week)

	Male breadwinners	Female breadwinners	Other working members of the household (male)	Other working members of the household (female)	Housewives
Work	48.4	46.8	46.3	46.1	10.5
Household work	7.3	31.5	5.4	31.9	62.4
Travel & shopping	9.5	10.5	8.1	9.8	10.9
Personal care & physical needs	15.1	13.6	14.8	13.7	12.9
Self-study	12.8	5.3	12.2	5.4	2.4
Social & political work	3.6	2.5	1.6	1.3	0.4
Sports, leisure & rest	71.4	60.3	79.8	61.9	68.8
Other	0.3	0.1	0.2	0.0	0.2

Source:

Calculated by author from RGAE, f. 1562, op. 15, d. 913, ll. 1, 1ob, 2, 2ob, 29, 29ob, 40, 40ob, 51, 51ob; d. 914, ll. 12, 12ob, 17, 17ob.

The table clearly reveals the infamous “double burden” of employment and household work Soviet women came to face in the twentieth century. Although working almost equal hours to men, they made four to six times the hours of men in household work, with 31.5 hours per week for female breadwinners as against 7.3 for male breadwinners, and 31.9 hours against 5.4 for secondary working members of the household.

Working women’s double burden naturally enhanced the value of domestic arrangements like the extended family household. Apart from the fact that co-resident non-employed female relatives could take some of the burden of household work off working women’s shoulders, they also played an important role in childcare, given the insufficiency of facilities offered in this sphere by the state. One of the respondents in the Harvard Refugee Interview Project with former Soviet citizens, when interviewed in the late 1940s, described the advantages of having his mother-in-law live with him in the following words:

“She helped my wife in the home and in looking after our daughter. If I had not had her, I would have had to have a servant. (...) So you see, my mother-in-law was necessary. She cooked and helped clean up...”<sup>28</sup>

Such arrangements offered important comparative advantages, because it allowed the family members in the age of economic activity to concentrate on bringing in income, whereas the older generations would keep the household running. Due to rampant migration, however, it was an option that was open not to all, for the simple reason that, in the short run, rural-urban as well as urban-urban migration tended to disperse the generations. On the basis of the 1939 census turnouts the share of extended households can be estimated at 14-16% of all urban households, which is a noticeable decline from the 20% of 1926.<sup>29</sup>

This finding sheds a new light on the differences in patterns of gainful employment

28 Kent H. Geiger, “The Urban Slavic Family and the Soviet System”, n.d., unpublished report Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System, Russian Research Center, Harvard University, p. 40

29 Afontsev *et al.*, *Urban Households in Russia*, p. 33

between elderly men and women which we observed when analysing the data presented in the figures two and three. Because of the surplus of women extended households would usually consist of an elderly mother plus a married child and a third generation of one or more grandchildren, rather than of an elderly couple plus a married child. Consequently, a much larger percent of the elderly women in the figures two and three would belong to an extended family household than among the men in the same age-groups. Because they were cared for and maintained by their children, these women would be concentrating on household work rather than paid labour. Elderly men, on the other hand, were almost universally married, which meant they would not as a rule be living together with their married children. Consequently, they would most likely be the breadwinner of the household, and therefore gainfully employed until an advanced age.

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This paper has adopted a household perspective to approach the social and economic history of the inter-war Soviet Union. It has revealed two important functions of the household. In the first place the household formed a social safety net which mollified the impact of the demographic and economic consequences of the wars of 1914-22 on society, even as the institution of the household itself was weakened by an ill-conceived revolutionary family-policy implemented by the soviet state. With the onset of industrialisation after 1926 the household becomes even more important because it offered a way of achieving economies of scale by pooling two incomes which compensated at least to some degree the deep drop in living standards which accompanied Stalin's Great Leap Forward. This compensatory mechanism helps explain why the Bolshevik leadership could get away with investing as little as it did in the development of a social infrastructure, and as much as it did in the development of heavy industry, without causing more widespread poverty and social unrest.