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MOTIVATION FOR TEXTILE  
WORKERS IN SOVIET RUSSIA  
(1918-1929): A MICROANALYSIS  
OF ARCHIVAL DATA**

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**EVOLUTION OF LABOUR MOTIVATION FOR TEXTILE  
WORKERS IN SOVIET RUSSIA (1918-1929):  
A MICROANALYSIS OF ARCHIVAL DATA**<sup>2</sup>

This paper examines the main measures taken to stimulate textile workers during the years of “War Communism” and the New Economic Policy and identifies the dynamics of the roles of the main elements of the labour stimulation system (compensation, coercion, and commitment). We discover what stimuli proved to be the most efficient during “War Communism” and the New Economic Policy. We analyse whether there was succession in the industrial labour stimulation system in pre-revolutionary (1880-1914) and Soviet (1918-1929) Russia and how actively Soviet managers employed the best practices of the pre-revolutionary factory administration. This paper also analyses the question of new practices introduced in the changing political and socio-economic circumstances. This paper is mainly based on archival sources.

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## Introduction

During pre-revolutionary industrialization (the last third of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century), Russian industry had a system of labour stimulation. The 1917 Revolution led to deep changes in industrial labour relationships. The creation of factory committees and labour control bodies, the nationalization of enterprises, and the rise of new management bodies where workers took part, as well as the “red directors” period could not help but result in the re-examination of the system of labour stimulation and of the relationship with labour on the whole. Russian historiography boasts quite a number of works studying Russian industry and its separate branches in the first decade of the Soviet regime. The Bolshevik policy of labour stimulation as well as problems of discipline at the workplace has been understudied, too<sup>3</sup>. The authors analyzed the character and outcomes of decisions made by Communist Party leaders and economic bodies, as well as the changing role of trade unions. To understand current processes deeper, researchers studied such problems by taking certain enterprises from the textile (Tryokhgornaya Manufactory)<sup>4</sup> and metallurgical (Serp i Molot Plant)<sup>5</sup> industries as an example. Many of the publications mentioned above were written in the framework of a Russian-Dutch project called “The Evolution of Labour Motivation in Russian Industry from 1861-2000”. However, in the case of Tryokhgornaya Manufactory, the study did not cover the pre-revolutionary period. The work dedicated to Serp i Molot Plant, although studying the problems over a hundred-year period, focuses on a metallurgical enterprise. However, branch-specific differences (textiles and metal) greatly influenced the way the labour stimuli system was formed and developed. This current study analyses labour motivation issues in the first post-revolutionary decade on the basis of one of the Russian biggest textile enterprise, known as the “Krasnyi Perekop” Combine (before the Revolution and within the first post-revolutionary years it was known as Yaroslavskaya Bolshaya Manufactory, while from the end of 1920 it was known as Yaroslavskaya Spinning and Weaving Factory of the General Directorate of the Textile Industry of the Supreme Council of the National Economy, and from June 1922 it was known as the “Krasnyi Perekop” Combine). We have studied the system of labour stimuli and motivation

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<sup>3</sup> Sokolov A.K. Sovetskaya politika v oblasti motivatsii i stimulirovaniya truda (1917 – sredina 1930-h godov) // Ekonomicheskaya istoriya. Obozrenie. Vyp.4. M., 2000. S.39-80; Borodkin L.I., Safonova E.I. Gosudarstvennoe regulirovanie trudovykh otnosheniy v gody nepa: formirovanie sistemy motivatsii truda v promyshlennosti // Ekonomicheskaya istoriya. Obozrenie. Vyp.5. M., 2000. S.23-46; Ilyuhov A.A. Kak platili bolsheviki: Politika sovsckoy vlasti v sfere oplaty truda v 1917 - 1941 gg. M., 2010; Borisova L.V. Voennyi kommunizm: prinuzhdenie kak element hozyaystvennogo mehanizma. M., 2000.

<sup>4</sup> Borodkin L.I., Safonova E.I. «Trehgorka» na puti ot 1917 g. k nepu: evolyutsiya trudovykh otnosheniy // Ekonomicheskaya istoriya. Obozrenie. Vyp.9. M., 2003. S.59-73; Safonova E.I. Moskovskie tekstilschiki v gody nepa: kvalifikatsiya i differentsiatsiya v oplate truda // Ekonomicheskaya istoriya. Ezhegodnik. 2000. M.: ROSSPEN, 2001. S.389-419.

<sup>5</sup> Markevich A.M., Sokolov A.K. «Magnitka bliz Sadovogo koltsa»: Stimuly k rabote na Moskovskom zavode «Serp i molot», 1883-2001 gg. M.: ROSSPEN, 2005.

at Yaroslavskaia Bolshaya Manufactory in pre-revolutionary period rather well<sup>6</sup>. The current study is the next step for the period covering the years of “War Communism” and the New Economic Policy. Our goals were as follows: 1) To identify the main measures taken to stimulate textile workers in the years of “War Communism” and the New Economic Policy; 2) To identify the dynamics of the proportion of the main elements of the labour stimulation system, comprised of compensation, coercion, and commitment; 3) To find out what stimuli were the most efficient during “War Communism” and the New Economic Policy; and, 4) To find out whether there was succession in the industrial labour stimulation system in pre-revolutionary (1880-1910) and Soviet (1918-1929) Russia, as well as understand how actively Soviet managers employed the best practices of factory administration from tsarist Russia and what new practices they introduced in changing political and socio-economic circumstances. The answers to these questions, together with the earlier study of the pre-revolutionary period, will permit us to characterize the development of labour stimuli and motivation systems by using the example of one of the biggest textile enterprises in the country.

This study is based mainly on data from the State Archive of Yaroslavskaia Oblast, the Centre of Contemporary History Documentation of Yaroslavskaia Oblast, and the State Archive of the Russian Federation. These store the minutes of meetings, instructions, and documents of the Communist Party, and economic and trade union bodies of different levels. It also contains worker notices with complaints, requests, and claims addressed to managers; minutes of general meetings and conferences of manual workers and office workers; information summaries and reports about the inspections of the factory; conduct books; personal files of workers, etc. Moreover, we employed the minutes of the Politbureau’s meetings stored in the Russian State Archive of Social and Political History.

Before studying the above-stated issues, one must define terms. To date, labour economics has had a tradition of defining such terms as “motive” and “stimulus”. Motive is something important to a worker that makes him work in general or work with high quality or discipline. Stimulus is any measure taken by local bodies or employers to formulate worker motivation. Scholars of the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam, based on works by Charles Tilly and Chris Tilly, developed a classification of labour motives that has three groups of motives: 1) compensation (salary, bonuses, various benefits and forms of social service, etc.); 2) coercion (monetary and administrative types, including criminal responsibility); and, 3) commitment (related to a worker’s consciousness of the importance and value of his labour,

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<sup>6</sup> Borodkin L.I., Valetov T.Ya., Smirnova Yu.B., Shilnikova I.V. «Ne rublem edinyim»: Trudovye stimuly rabochih-tekstilschikov dorevolutsionnoy Rossii. M.: ROSSPEN, 2010.

patriotism, pride in his work results, etc.)<sup>7</sup>. Due to the proven universal character of this approach and its multiple uses in Western and Russian studies, we will utilize it in our research.

### **Problems of labor motivation in the years of “War Communism”**

In June 1918 Yaroslavskaia Bolshaya Manufactory was nationalized and an executive board of nine members was formed. Six of them were workers and three represented operating factory personnel. From 1918, due to a lack of cotton, the factory worked one shift four times a week. This led to layoffs, which continued in 1919 and the first half of 1920. An act of the Presidium of the Supreme Council of the National Economy, dated 1 June 1920, made Yaroslavskaia Spinning and Weaving Factory a part of a “striking force”, meaning that it had to rush an order for cotton sheeting and calico for the Red Army. At the same time the factory started to prepare for output expansion by reducing the number of idle equipment. A real increase in the number of working equipment and workers took place up to the middle of 1920s. The increase was greater when the situation with fuel, raw materials, and workforce was positive and less when some previous and new difficulties emerged. During the New Economic Policy period in 1922, “Krasnyi Perekop” was incorporated into a trust with Norskaya Manufactory, which had stood idle since 1918. This was a new expensive item because the working enterprise initially had to pay for heating and security of the idle enterprise and later for its start-up. Only in 1925 did “Krasnyi Perekop” finally achieve its pre-war production level. Whereas in February 1923 the factory counted 6,250 workers<sup>8</sup>, at the beginning of 1926 the number was 11,368, around 60% of which were female<sup>9</sup>.

The new board formed after the Revolution faced a number of problems. Many qualified workers were drafted during the Civil War and management often complained about the fact that the 60% growth in the number of workers was due to the employment of unqualified personnel. The regions that supplied the factory with cotton and oil were cut off for a while. Supplies of raw material often stopped. The factory had to change technology and use new types of fuel. The practice demonstrated that labour stimulation system demanded serious attention from management, as well, because the failure of the idea to expand output and preserve discipline due to the “creative incentive of workers” became clear immediately after the Revolution.

One of the key roles in the labour stimulation system has traditionally been material compensation, i.e., salary, bonuses, etc. Immediately after the 1917 February Revolution,

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<sup>7</sup> Tilly, Charles and Chris. *Work under Capitalism*. Oxford, 1998; J.Lucassen. *Work Incentives in Historical Perspective: Some Preliminary Remarks on Terminology's and Taxonomies* // *Sotsialnaia istoriia. Ezhegodnik*. 2000. M.:ROSSPEN, 2000; M. van der Linden. *Work Incentives in Russian Industry: Some Preliminary Suggestions* // *Sotsialnaia istoriia. Ezhegodnik*. 2000. M.:ROSSPEN, 2000.

<sup>8</sup> The Centre of Contemporary History Documentation of Yaroslavskaia Oblast' (TsDNI YaO). F.124, op.1, d.136, l.1.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* F.1, op.27, d.2245, l.1.

Yaroslavskaya Bolshaya Manufactory witnessed a struggle between the established committee of workers, which controlled the production process and defended the workers' interests and the factory administration and representatives of the board. The most topical issue was that of salary. Generally, the committee insisted on pay increases for certain categories and groups of workers, although this period is already characterized by attempts at equalization: Everyone must work equally and be paid equally. For instance, the minutes of the joint meeting of Yaroslavskaya Bolshaya Manufactory committee representatives and board representatives dated 21 June 1917 record a committee suggestion to shorten overtime work (and lower salary as a result) as this gives additional earnings to some workers while displeasing the rest.<sup>10</sup> In spring 1917 a new practice of union contracts as salary regulators was introduced and lasted to the end of 1918. This led to the development of wage scales stating definite labour categories used for paying salary. More qualified labour corresponded with a higher grade. The Yaroslavskaya Bolshaya Manufactory wages scale was approved by the Union of Textile Workers of Yaroslavskiy Industrial District. It had 36 rates with a difference between the lowest and the highest of 1.8 times until 1918 and 1.7 times thereafter<sup>11</sup>. Later, the difference in salary rates continued to decrease, thus reflecting the situation in the industry on the whole. As a result, "the end of the War Communism period witnessed a practical lack of difference in salaries of workers with different qualifications",<sup>12</sup> thus creating discontent and weakening the role of salary in the labour motivation system.

Gradually, directive salary regulation made its way in different industries. However, making constantly increasing nominal salary a real stimulus during "War Communism" was a hard task because it still could not keep up with price increases caused by inflation. The situation was made worse by growing commodity shortages (first of all in foodstuffs). This is why one of the features of that period was "salaries in kind", which size was weakly related to a worker's qualification, work time, and productivity. However, the managing board of Yaroslavskaya Bolshaya Manufactory tried to make salaries in kind a labour stimulus. The minutes from the bureau meeting at which the labour rate was set at the Yaroslavskaya Spinning and Weaving Factory, dated 26 June 1920, state, "Rewarding for labour intensity with foodstuffs, notwithstanding which ones, but being at the time much more valuable than a sum of money even of triple or quadruple rate, is sure to increase labour productivity, general congruity of enterprise work, and stop the turnover of necessary workers"<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> TsDNI YaO. F.713, op.1, d.3. l.19.

<sup>11</sup> GA YaO. F.R-104, op.1, d.9, l.135.

<sup>12</sup> Ilyuhov A.A. *Kak platili bolsheviki: Politika sovetskoy vlasti v sfere oplaty truda v 1917-1941 gg.* M.: ROSSPEN, 2010. S.19.

<sup>13</sup> TsDNI YaO. F.713, op.1, d.19, l.25.

In December 1920, the factory finally managed to introduce salaries in kind. Initially, the system was based on hours worked and degree of production in excess of stated norms, i.e. qualification was neglected.<sup>14</sup> Since such an approach caused discontent among workers as well as led to “deskilling”, in 1921 a new rule about “rewarding in kind” was adopted, according to which the size of wages in kind corresponded to worker qualification, days worked, and productivity<sup>15</sup>. At a delegate meeting of manual workers and office workers that took place on 24 August 1921, it was stated that such an approach could significantly raise worker income and his interest in work. The report by the rate setting bureau from August 1921 emphasized that productivity increased in periods when workers were provided with good wages in kind and vice versa.<sup>16</sup>

Thus, during the period of “War Communism”, salary consisted of money payments and wages in kind. This demanded a sharp increase of foodstuffs, including first and foremost bread. However, during the Civil War, because of a total collapse of industrial production and the failure of transportation, the enterprise’s managing board could not achieve regular supplies of workers with wages in kind (foodstuffs, in the first place). At a general meeting of the “Krasnyi Perekop” factory workers, dated 3 March 1921, at which they discussed the shutdown of some equipment, workers said, “If you give us bread, we’ll go to work, if not, we won’t go”<sup>17</sup>. In general, during the period of “War Communism”, salary less and less depended on qualifications and the results of labour, mainly turning into a social service when the factory management simply tried to support all the employees with a minimum quantity of products. Since such a situation was characteristic of many industrial enterprises, the country plunged into a “food dictatorship”. A so-called “campaign of workers to the country” was organized. In the second half of 1921 the “Krasnyi Perekop” factory sent 3 squads (60 people) and 1 druzhina (10 people) to collect taxes in kind (prodnalog)<sup>18</sup>.

In these difficult circumstances workers of “Krasnyi Perekop” tried to attract the attention of the new managing board to the methods of labour stimulation practiced before 1917. In particular, during the period of War communism, workers petitioned the board asking for a reward (memorable name tag or money) for 25 years of conscientious work, as had been done by previous employers, the Karzinkins. The enterprise’s managing board discussed this issue and it was emphasized that such a measure could stimulate workers. However, a positive decision was not made<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> TsDNI YaO. F.713, op.3, d.9, l.13.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. F.713, op.1, d.15, l.19.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. F.713, op.3, d.9, l.13.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. F.713, op.3, d.9, l.41.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. F.713, op.3, d.9, l.3.

<sup>19</sup> GA YaO. F.R-104, op.1, d.9, l.161.

From the beginning the new management concentrated on the problems of labour discipline. At a joint meeting at Yaroslavskaya Bolshaya Manufactory of representative of the worker committee and factory administration from 21 June 1917, a member of the factory committee noted that salary must be paid to workers not in barrack corridors, as was practiced, but at workplaces because many workers leave their work to get wages in barracks and did not return to their workplaces for a long time. The factory administration informed the factory committee that “the number of truancies had recently sharply increased” thus leading to equipment downtime (in the spinning-water department during this period about 25-35 water spinning frames stood idle). The most truant were young workers<sup>20</sup>.

A decrease of labour discipline during the spring and summer of 1917 was mentioned by workers themselves, when they addressed the factory committee to take measures and “influence” the truants to decrease equipment downtime. Frequent were cases of machine downtime for a couple of hours when the workers gathered together and discussed demands to the factory’s managing board mainly connected with pay rise and food support. From 19 September 1917 the factory stood idle for three days. Factory committee members tried to change the situation by persuading workers, explaining that workers must not be indifferent to “the downtime of machines, lowered factory output, and increased manufacturing costs”<sup>21</sup>. However, this problem was topical the next year, too.

After the creation of the factory committee, it had, besides food, sanitary and cultural boards, and a so-called investigation commission controlling labour discipline issues. However, the means it was of low influence.

The practice of “War Communism” demonstrated that coercion and violence become the main ways of labour stimulation when there is no opportunity to guarantee productive and disciplined labour with the help of material compensation and that methods of persuasion are not effective in circumstances of growing hunger and ruin,.

Documents state that in 1917-1918 the administration of Yaroslavskaya Bolshaya Manufactory factory committee and an investigation commission tried to ensure the stable (as far as possible in such circumstances) work of the enterprise and the abidance of workers to the rules of labour discipline, combining reprimands and punishment (or the threat of punishment).

In December 1918 saw the passage of the Code of Labour Laws, which clearly marked the government’s turn from persuasion to coercion and which grew as the situation in the country became more complicated. At the beginning of 1920 a special decree was adopted that introduced universal labour duty. A commission created at the Yaroslavskaya Spinning and

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<sup>20</sup> TsDNI YaO. F.713, op.1, d.3, l.20.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. F.713, op.1, d.3, l.22.



Weaving Factory in June 1920 to introduce labour duty dealt with the return of textile workers, many of whom were in the labour lists and received food but did not go to work. Such a situation was characteristic of the factory in the early post-revolutionary years, mainly after downtimes. When an absent worker was revealed, he was sent a notice on behalf of the board asking him to come and explain his absence. Some were “invited” through the militia and commandants. However, few of them came. That is why the labour commission temporarily forbade the food rationing from the factory stand to those who did not come by invitation. This measure was rather efficient and was later undertaken many times.<sup>22</sup>

Another problem the new managing board had to solve from the first days was the fight against embezzlement. Workers stole yarn, bobbins, gauzy fabric, cotton wool, calico, machine grease, tools, flour, i.e. – whatever one could sell or use at home. Besides direct theft, workers could get illegal income by using factory equipment or materials for their own purposes (for instance, females made or pieced clothes or shoes for themselves or their family members). The heyday of embezzlement at the factory in 1918-1920 was partially caused by an unclear position of the committee and the administration regarding the matter of punishment. On the one hand, they tried to fight against a growing number of thefts. On the other hand, when investigating cases of embezzlement and inflicting a punishment, the factory committee members understood the poor material state of workers and often did not judge harshly, trying to employ persuasion and the threat of punishment instead. The result was that by the beginning of 1920 embezzlement “had acquired a huge size and led to heavy losses of the enterprise”.

In such a situation, the managing board decided to create “non-productive monitoring staff” that carried out full-body searches of workers leaving the factory. The Rules of Internal Order for Manual Workers and Office Workers of Yaroslavskaia Spinning and Weaving Factory had the following clause: “To prevent thefts and insure the detention of thieves, workers are to be searched by special employees. During the search, workers must keep order and not make noise. The guilty will be punished according to the table as those violating internal factory order”<sup>23</sup>.

The searches turned inefficient and did not solve the problem of embezzlement. Some guards and inspectors, whose duty was to prevent thefts, “went halves”. In 1921 this led to the creation of “secret control of production process in factory buildings” by industrial militia<sup>24</sup>.

From March 1919, enterprises started to establish summary courts. On 4 June 1920 there was established the Comrades’ Summary Court at former Yaroslavskaia Bolshaya Manufactory, as well. Its first sessions raised an issue about the necessity to work out measures to combat

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<sup>22</sup> TsDNI YaO. F.713, op.1, d.15, l.123-124, 191-192.

<sup>23</sup> GA YaO. F.R-104, op.1, d.178, l.126.

growing truancy. A great number of truants forced management to hold “huge packages to provide for the operation of a certain number of machines”. Cases when workers refused to occupy places of truants increased in number, too. “This results in delays in correct material distribution and total breakdown of planned work”<sup>25</sup>. On 24 July 1920 members of the Comrade Summary Court decided to enforce the following penalties, depending on the number of trauancies:

- 1) One day of truancy – severe reprimand (if it is the first truancy), in the case of a repeat truancy, a worker could be deprived of food for a week or more;
- 2) 2-4 days of truancy – a worker had to work overtime several days for two hours (sometimes this overtime was paid for, sometimes not).

The above-mentioned Court meeting noted that there were few truants among office workers, but many of them were often late for work. Some of them had from 8 to 10 cases within 10 days. The Court decided that an office worker had to overwork an hour for each 10 minutes of coming late without any payment.

The minutes of Court meetings from July 1920 to March 1922 allow us to identify the most numerous cases of labour discipline violation and enforced penalties.

All the Court cases were grouped in the following way:

- 1) Absence at work (truancies, late comings, early leavings, etc.) for which the Court could enforce the following penalties:
  - unpaid overtimes;
  - work without truancy for 1-3months;
  - public works or compulsory labour;
  - dismissal.
- 2) Careless attitude to one’s work (abuse of office, work for oneself, outside matters, etc.) could lead to:
  - a reprimand or warning;
  - public service and compulsory labour.
- 3) Violation of internal rules (disobeying the administration, insulting executive officers, refusal to work, “disorganizing behaviour”, etc.) as a rule led to:
  - a reprimand or warning;
  - public service and compulsory labour.
- 4) Theft led to:
  - a reprimand or warning (rarely);

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<sup>24</sup> TsDNI YaO. F.713, op.3, d.10, l.10-11.

<sup>25</sup> GA YaO. F.R-104, op.1, d.159, l.16.

- a decrease or deprivation of bonus;
- public service and compulsory labour;
- “concentration camp confinement”;
- dismissal.

All instances of theft (and attempts to steal) were divided into 5 groups, depending on the quality and quantity of stolen goods, their repeated character, and other factors. The Court grouped a guilty person and enforced a penalty based on that group. For instance, a monthly bonus in kind for those in the first group was lowered by 100% (i.e. they did not get it), the second group – by 80%, the third one – by 60%, the fourth – by 40% and the fifth – by 20%<sup>26</sup>.

Any type of violation could result in downgrading a worker’s status, thus leading to a lower salary.

Reprimand was mainly reserved for those workers who performed a deed for the first time. When reprimanding, the disciplinary court usually employed the threat of more severe punishment if violation continued, usually recommending a definite penalty.

In general, the minutes of Court meetings and testimonies of the factory administration allow us to conclude that the number of truancies and thefts gradually decreased throughout 1921. These were violations with the most severe penalties. For a period from 5 June to 12 December 1921, 21.8% of workers found guilty of theft were dismissed. Among truants this rate is 20.1%<sup>27</sup> (One must note that acts of dismissal were displayed so that any worker could see them<sup>28</sup>). Reprimands and warnings were nearly inefficient.

Since the establishment of the Comrade Summary Court laid the foundation for more severe penalties for truancies and since the administration became stricter, workers found a new opportunity to be absent. While in 1920 there were 37% of absences on average, 21% of workers were on sick leaves<sup>29</sup>.

Data collected by the managing board’s order for January-April 1921 show a big share of workers being on sick leave (Tab.1).

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<sup>26</sup> TsDNI YaO. F.713, op.1, d.23, l.45.

<sup>27</sup> TsDNI YaO. F.1737, op.36, d.14, l.162, 163.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. F.713, op.1, d.30, l.363.

<sup>29</sup> GA YaO. F.R-104, op.1, d.285, l.92.

**Tab. 1. Data on the number of workers of Yaroslavskaia Spinning and Weaving Factory, who were absent from work. 1921.**

Month	The share of workers who were absent (%)	Including		
		Reasonable excuse		Unreasonable excuse (%)
		Sickness (%)	Permission of the factory administration (%)	
January	32	23.6	4.1	5.3
February	36	25.6	2.7	7.7
March	41	30.7	3.5	6.8
April	41	34.8	3.3	2.9

Source: GA YaO. F.R-104, op.1, d.159, l. 17.

Such a big share can be explained, on the one hand, by the growing number of diseases caused by a general lack of food and clothes. On the other hand, the managing board of factories noted a worker's clear wish to take a sick leave at the first opportunity<sup>30</sup> and thus to preserve salary and get a chance to do housework, side work, etc.

The analysis showed that the majority of those on sick leave were working household owners who had a house and cattle and took sick leaves to do house work. At this, "The social insurance office pays without any difficulties and this must be regulated to avoid spending insurance sums and eliminate damage to the enterprise caused at present". It was also noted that such a situation harmed workers (they bear losses), "who work honestly because the truancies of working household owners decreased productivity and, consequently, income"<sup>31</sup>.

In connection with this, in autumn 1921, upon the initiative of the factory committee, a "bureau of inspectors" was established in the hospital, which had to "control the patients paid by the social insurance office". In October 1921, at the factory committee meeting, the factory's head A.S. Sinyavin noted that the total number of workers was 5,000, but the real figure of those coming to the factory is 3,739, i.e. "over 1,000 people are on social insurance and act the maggot"<sup>32</sup>. In December 1921 at a general meeting of workers it was noted that the establishment of an inspection bureau had positive results: before its establishment "there were 1,160 people on social insurance, while currently their number is 253"<sup>33</sup>.

On 20 October 1921, the Plenum of the Committee of Manual Workers and Office Workers discussed "the right to take sick leaves to care for non-working ill children". A doctor of the factory hospital explained that there were a lot of ill children and all of them could not be placed in the hospital due to the lack of rooms. A mother could not leave her child alone and go

<sup>30</sup> GA YaO. F.R-104, op.1, d.159, l.17-18.

<sup>31</sup> TsDNI YaO. F.713, op.3, d.15, l.8.

<sup>32</sup> TsDNI YaO. F.713, op.3, d.7, l.11; F.1737, op.36, d.10, l.26.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. F.1737, op.2, d.10, l.3.

to work, which was why she was given sick leave. The head of the factory committee disagreed, saying that the check had demonstrated that many children “were healthy, and ran and jumped” while their mothers still stayed at home (some for 2-3 months). Meeting participants decided that sick leaves for those taking care of ill children could be paid for only three days (according to the instructions of the Healthcare Service). After this period, payment stopped and a “document giving the right to stay home from work” was issued. The issue of sick leaves related to a child’s disease “must be under strict control of the inspection bureau at the hospital. The bureau must check workers staying at home as well”<sup>34</sup>.

The measures taken were fruitful. While in 1921 about 25% of workers were on sick leave every month, in 1922 the share fell to 12%<sup>35</sup> and in 1923 to 3.65%. However, in comparison with the pre-revolutionary period the figure was still quite big. In 1913 the average monthly share was 1.8%, i.e. two times lower than in 1923.

It is likely that the decreased number of workers on sick leave in 1922-1923 was connected not only with the enhanced control and tough measures of the managing board. The crisis of “War Communism” was the basis for transition to the New Economic Policy. In that situation, further coercion measures were impossible. Financial labour incentives were brought to the fore.

### **Problems of labor motivation in the NEP period**

A decree from the Council of People’s Commissars, dated 10 November 1921, introduced a new payment system that demanded the inclusion of all types of provisions in salary and the “creation of material and money funds depending on output”<sup>36</sup>. This meant that salary depended on the work of the whole enterprise, not the number of workers. The main emphasis was laid on productivity, which was to increase by means of mechanization, rationalization, and intensification of labour.

From 1922 Yaroslavskaya factory became a self-financing enterprise. The practice of concluding union contracts came back, which, besides production quotas and the amount of salary, had clauses about internal order rules, life conditions for females and minors, work hours, and workday schedule. Moreover contracts had clauses about protection of labour, labour disputes, and social protection.

A report of a district party organization noted that the situation at “Krasnyi Perekop” had demonstrated a significant positive change throughout 1922: Labour productivity had decreased and the “conditions of the manufacturing process had become better. Workers became interested in their labour, which resulted in decreased truancies. Activists of party trade union organizations

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<sup>34</sup> TsDNI YaO. F.713, op.3, d.7, l.9; F.1737, op.36, d.10, l.57.

<sup>35</sup> GA YaO. F.R-104, op.1, d.285, l.92-93.

taught workers the correspondence between labour productivity and better living standards. Throughout 1923, the managing board often emphasized the decreased number of labour and production discipline violations and a general stabilization of the situation.

However, even in that period many “Krasnyi Perekop” workers were dissatisfied with their salary. Among them were workers doing the simplest, unskilled work, as well as office workers. This becomes clear from many notices of workers to the labour-rate setting bureau and the managing board asking to raise the payment rate. The arguments were: 1) increased amount of work due to factory expansion and the introduction of new equipment; and, 2) an unfair situation when workers with similar duties received different salaries or when the salary ratio of workers of different occupations (and qualification) was broken.

It is of interest that many workers use such terms as “interest”, “stimulus”, and “motive” in their notices trying to persuade factory management to raise their payment grade or the amount of bonuses. For instance, the workers of a diesel team wrote: “It is out of the question that a worker interested in his work, who knows that his labour is valued not in word but indeed, will be eager to do his work”.<sup>37</sup> One more fact must be noted. In their notices, workers often compare their life from before 1917 to that after 1917 and the comparison is always against the Bolsheviks.

A review of production quotas that began in 1924 as well as the introduction of task-rate systems caused a decrease in income of many workers and consequently led to discontent. The 1925 summary of population sentiments states: “The production quotas recently introduced at “Krasnyi Perekop” textile factory irritate workers and cause discussions that these quotas will enslave them more than under tsarizm. Workers handed in collective petitions stating incorrect quotas for task work and demanding a decrease of rates. Around 200 workers signed such petitions. In private talks they say that the situation requires a strike”<sup>38</sup>.

In spite of the fact that during the new economic policy both labour productivity and pay did increase, these two processes were not combined efficiently. For instance, from October 1924 to September 1925 “Krasnyi Perekop” had the following indices: 1) spinning: pay rise is 41%, while productivity growth is 7%; and, 2) weaving: pay rise is 36%, while productivity growth is 9%<sup>39</sup>. In the first half of 1926-1927 in comparison with 1925-1926, this gap diminishes: 1) spinning: pay rise equals 16.2%, productivity growth is 5%; 2) weaving: pay rise

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<sup>36</sup> Sokolov A.K. Sovetskaya politika v oblasti motivatsii i stimulirovaniya truda. S.51.

<sup>37</sup> TsDNI. YaO. F.713, op.1, d.37, l.151.

<sup>38</sup> «Sovershenno sekretno»: Lubyanka – Stalinu o polozhenii v strane (1922-1934). T.3. Ch.1. 1925 g. M., 2002. S.51.

<sup>39</sup> TsDNI YaO. F.124, op.1, d.231, l.59.

is 10.6%, and productivity growth is 10.3%<sup>40</sup>. In 1926 the factory managed to reach pre-war productivity levels.

Archival data show a gradual improvement of worker living standards, especially if we take into account the fact that from 1 March 1924 only 10% of salary, according to an act of the Council for Labour and Defence, was to be paid in sovznaks, while the rest was to be paid in hard currency.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, in comparison with the “War Communism” period, salary became more differentiated depending on a worker’s qualifications. The difference between the lowest and highest rates was 6 times in 1923 and 8 times in 1924<sup>42</sup>.

However, “Krasnyi Perekop” workers continued to complain and demand higher salaries. One reason was the faster growth of prices for foodstuffs in comparison with pay rise. Moreover, workers did not often feel real pay rises because most income was spent to compensate what had been lost during the Civil War and “War Communism”. This did not allow them to feel improvement in their lives. Based on consumer budget statistics, Sokolov writes, “The 1920s were a time of ‘feeding’, after which the growth of material wants was inevitable”<sup>43</sup>. In December 1925, “at a general meeting, workers demanded a 7% pay rise, pointing at 4.5 million-ruble profit received by the factory thanks to increased labour productivity. Smirnov, the head of the Guberniya Council of Textile Workers, and workers that were party members all supported this demand. Sinyavin, the factory head, objected saying that the profit must be used for industrial purposes. Mechanic Pankov opposed him saying, “In Moscow, Dzerzhinskiy explained that all profit from industry must be divided among workers and it is necessary to move from words to deeds”<sup>44</sup>. The government discussed the issue of workers’ participation in the profit of state enterprises. The Political Bureau of the Central Committee, at its meeting dated 6 November 1925, made the following decision: 1) the Central Committee is totally against the idea that workers participate in profits; 2) the Central Committee accepts only such forms of collective participation of workers in profits that have been in practice already for 2 years, namely, allocations of a known share from the profit of state enterprises to improve the extra-occupational life of workers (house building, etc.)”<sup>45</sup>.

In 1925 the party set its course for industrialization, thus raising the question of sources to accomplish this. Besides the agrarian sector, the government hoped to get money from “the economy regime campaign”, which, among other issues, supposed a cut of production costs. The result was a reduction of working groups, which led to increased labour intensity as well as the

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid. F.124, op.1, d.338, l.27.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. F.713, op.3, d.37, l.163.

<sup>42</sup> TsDNI YaO. F.124, op.1, d.136, l.18; GA YaO. F.R-104, op.1, d.178, l.26.

<sup>43</sup> Sokolov A.K. Sovetskaya politika v oblasti motivatsii i stimulirovaniya truda. S.55.

<sup>44</sup> «Sovershenno sekretno»: Lubyanka – Stalinu o polozhenii v strane (1922-1934 gg.). T.3. Ch.2. 1925 g. M., 2002. S.735.

<sup>45</sup> RGASPI. F.17, op.163, d.516, l.8.

introduction of a three-shift seven-hour workday (instead of eight hours and two shifts). When union contracts were concluded, a new principle began to dominate that of pulling up low-paid working groups and categories to higher paid ones by redistributing the money of “levelling funds” in favour of those who got less. “Krasnyi Perekop” had such a case when 1927 union contract was concluded, which irritated over 3.5 workers and led to short term downtime of machines in different shops. In spite of this, a new contract was signed. As a result, the salary of many workers in the first months of 1927 lowered in comparison with the previous period. A second wave of discontent and equipment downtime followed<sup>46</sup>.

Notwithstanding the increasing role of salary as an important means of labour motivation during the New Economic Policy period, managers still practiced coercion measures to solve labour and production discipline problems. The managing board of “Krasnyi Perekop” in 1923-1924 often noted that the number of truancies still exceeded pre-war levels. For instance, the sample for the weaving department covering 6 months (from September 1923 to March 1924) showed that during that period 151 workers (8.2% of the total number in the department) was truant for 698 days, which means 4.6 per person. The number of their truancies fluctuated from 3 to 21 days. At that, the head of the new factory noted, “Workers with 6 or more truancies demonstrate higher level of defects”<sup>47</sup>. In general, the percentage of truancies in this period exceeded 1913 levels by 1.6 times (8% in 1923 in comparison with 5% in 1913).

In April 1924 a meeting of a factory party organization stated, “At present the issue of labour discipline is one of the main manufacturing problems – a matter of life and death demanding immediate action... So far we have many cases of labour discipline violations: refusal to work, violations of internal rules, drinking, a casual attitude to work, ... which can be seen by the example of spoiled goods, etc.”<sup>48</sup>

At the extended meeting of the factory’s managing board and representatives of the factory committee, the rate and disputes commission, the female department, and the labour department dated 20 March 1924 and devoted completely to issues of labour discipline, the following provision was adopted: “To combat the most severe systematic truancies with chronic character, the factory committee shall take measure of moral pressure. At the same time, the managing board shall immediately identify all workers who have been truant for the last 3 months starting 1 January and take measures of administrative pressure up to dismissal, coordinating its actions with the factory committee and the rate and disputes commission”. In practice, such “coordination of actions” did not happen all the time.

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<sup>46</sup> TsDNI YaO. F.124, op.1, d.338, l.4-9.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. l.92 (ob).

<sup>48</sup> TsDNI YaO. F.1, op.27, d.1520, l.38.



As a result, during the New Economic Policy period the managing board did not succeed in lowering the share of truants. Moreover, the share grew at the beginning. In the 1923-1924 economic year, the share of workers with such a violation was 7.61%, in 1924-1925 the share was 8.64%, in 1925-1926 it was 9.07%, and in 1926-1927 it lowered to 7.63%<sup>49</sup>.

In spite of the control over tardiness and enforced penalties, this type of disciplinary infraction was quite widespread among both manual workers and office workers of the Yaroslavskaya Spinning and Weaving Factory. Tardiness exceeding 15 minutes was registered by job foremen at the factory entrance and timekeepers in departments. Over the course of a month, minutes turned into hours of truant work time. The given table covers new factory data for the period from August 1923 to February 1924 (Tab. 2).

**Tab. 2. Data on worker delays at the “Krasnyi Perekop” Manufacture, 1923-1924.**

	Total time of delays	Number of cases	The number of workers
<u>1923</u>			
August	50 h. 15 min.	102	86
September	83 h. 50 min.	163	145
October	83 h. 35 min.	174	136
November	89 h. 15 min.	205	175
December	90 h. 15 min.	217	185
<u>1924</u>			
January	93 h. 30 min.	215	192
February	109 h. 5 min.	293	149
Total	599 h. 45 min.	1369	1168

Source: GA YaO. F.R-104, op.1, d.285, l.93.

The most undisciplined group of workers were teenagers and young people up to 24 years old. They more often violated work rules, expressed discontent, left their machines during a shift, refused to do a given task, and were rude to representatives of administrative staff. Here are some cases registered in the sources.

In December 1921, the head of a new factory, K.V. Moreev, reported to the Comrade Summary Court the following: “Shaidakhova, an apprentice of the weaving department who has already been taught for 5 months (with constant breaks), is unable to work. She is always late for work. Witnesses are her teacher Kiseleva and timekeeper Alekseev. I ask you to fire her”<sup>50</sup>.

On 28 January 1922, Moreev wrote that he had noticed weaving department apprentice Alexander Svistunov during a work shift, who, “instead of taking classes, is constantly loitering about. To examine the case in the Comrade Summary Court, this is confirmed by a foreman and a teaching weaver”<sup>51</sup>.

<sup>49</sup> GA YaO. F.R-104, op.1, d.436, l.136.

<sup>50</sup> GA YaO. F.R-104, op.1, d.211, l.1(ob).

<sup>51</sup> Ibid. JI.11(ob).

On 3 March 1922 the foreman of the weaving department S.K. Vinogradov addressed the head of the new factory with a “sincere request to remove female apprentice R.P. Tsyplenkova who does not work at all, loiters about, hides in closets for a long time, says that she is not afraid of anyone, does not want to work, and swears. Her productivity is very low.” Then a list of witnesses follows<sup>52</sup>.

On the same day, 3 March 1922, a foreman of the weaving department A.N. Rovnov declared: “I am tired of working with an apprentice who constantly behaves outrageously. For example, he has put tobacco in his female colleague’s shuttle and as a result she nearly suffocated when she tried to blow in a thread”<sup>53</sup>.

The situation with teenagers became worse after the introduction of control over observation of the 8% “reservation for the young”, when it became difficult to fire teenagers violating the rules. In 1924 there was a case when a foreman of the weaving department asked to remove teenagers from work places to provide decent work conditions for the rest of the workers. The administration had to interfere. The teenagers were asked to follow the rules and the issue was softened. However, it did not influence the situation in general.

The heads of both old and new factories often noted that they did not have any efficient measures except talks, but they were ineffective.

The extended meeting of the managing board, dated 20 March 1924, “stated the fact of decreasing labour discipline among factory workers, especially teenagers and young people” and decided that it was “necessary to do the following:

- For the purpose of maintaining total factory discipline, to demand detailed and steady fulfillment of all the workers, teenagers included, and all their duties according to the rules of the general factory order. For those violating factory discipline to take measures up to dismissal.
- To impose general supervision over teenagers and young people who do not have qualifications and need help from instructors, foremen, and technical administrative staff insuring proper control and supervision for this purpose.
- For the purpose of training teenagers to be qualified to consider as a necessity their rational use by training at definite machines.”

The managing board paid so much attention to this problem as well because in 1923-1925 many qualified and experienced workers, who had been working at the factory even before 1917, started to retire and receive social welfare. Often they could not be replaced with equally qualified workers, which had a negative impact on factory work.

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<sup>52</sup> GA YaO. F.R-104, op.1, d.211, l.26(ob).

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

Another problem often noted in the first half of the 1920s was drinking, which grasped even the young and females and led to other violations of labour and production discipline. To combat drinking, attempts were made to combine measures of moral pressure and character-building, as well as administrative measures. It was suggested to form special groups and clubs. The department for culture organized talks and lectures with the topic “Drunkenness: Its Harm and Consequences”.

The open meeting of party members and candidates at the mechanical plant of Yaroslavskaya Spinning and Weaving Factory, dated 13 January 1924, made a decision to periodically organize political and public drunkenness trials, boycotts, and to write the names of the guilty on the “blackboard”. Moreover, those found drunk from that date forward could get a mark in either a trade union or a party card, or have a reprimand written in their personal file. The measures of last resort were to lower the payment rate from the highest to the lowest rate, or to dismiss the individual for a certain period of time.

In the summer months of 1924, the number of “drunk” cases decreased. This was mainly due to the fact that all bars were closed in production districts. However, this immediately caused another problem. Workers bought sugar and yeast and made samogonka. As a result, the Plenum participants of the second city district committee for the RKP (b) decided to address the Guberniya Committee to issue an act limiting the sales of yeast and sugar by cooperative and other organizations before the holidays<sup>54</sup>. The same meeting noted that long breaks in work caused by holidays “intensify drinking, which is why breaks for holidays will be now no more than two days”. However, all these measures did not bear much fruit. The top party leaders (the Political Bureau) discussing this issue in January 1926 also could not offer any other measures to combat drunkenness among workers, except cultural and educational events and various forms of punishment<sup>55</sup>.

As a result, the attempts of factory managing board – made under the instructions of central and local authorities – to introduce efficient labour stimulation could not boast long-term results. In the years of “War communism”, this was mainly explained by the general situation in the country: depreciation of the ruble, lack of foodstuffs, and goods of prime necessity. At that, a pay rise did not lead to labour productivity or to an increase in the population’s living standards. Salaries in kind led to a worker’s desire to stay at work, but not to produce more because productivity often did not influence the amount of payment. During the New Economic Policy period, salary became a real labour stimulus, but this did not last long. Forced measures were

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<sup>54</sup> TsDNI YaO. F.124, op.1, d.187, l.75(ob).

<sup>55</sup> RGASPI. F.17, op.163, d.540, l.28.

taken by the managing board of the enterprise throughout the whole period of study. This was firstly to maintain a desired level of production disciplines. They were very important, especially in circumstances when opportunities for material compensation were limited. However, in this sphere we can find only short-term effects. One of the reasons here is that the managing board, the factory committee, the rate and disputes commission, and other bodies often did not coordinate their actions with each other, thus introducing additional dissension in the manufacturing process and relations with workers. Thus, for instance, using punishment as a means of establishing order had been utilized by the managing board by 1926, but it had not worked out a unified system of penalties and workers with similar violations could be subject to different types of punishment. Such a practice, on the one hand, clearly diminished the efficiency of the penalty enforced and, on the other hand, caused additional discontent among workers. As it has been demonstrated in this work, the role of the three elements of the labour simulation system (compensation, coercion, and commitment) underwent serious changes throughout the decade being studied.

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