

“Underground Cathedrals:  
Moscow’s Struggle for a Subterranean Masterpiece”

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## Introduction

On May 14, 1935, Stalin delivered his first live radio broadcast. To thunderous applause, he commemorated the official opening of Moscow's first metro line. He gave special thanks to the subterranean workers of the Moscow Metrostroi, praising them for their contribution to the completion of the line. He awarded the Moscow *Komsomol* with the Order of Lenin for building "the best metro in the world." Three weeks before, the Metrostroi Office had already begun distributing tickets to Muscovites—some 50,000 people every day. The tickets became a statement of cultural development, and citizens without tickets were socially behind the times. This steady flow of passengers did not diminish the official opening of the Moscow Metro. On May 15, 1935, 370,000 people attended the official inauguration of the metro. The day was like a holiday, and people wore their best clothes on their first ride on the metro. Half a million participants marched in a parade on Nverskaya Boulevard and proudly marched in front of the Moscow City Council Building. The city of Moscow was enraptured with the underground.<sup>1</sup>

The Western world looked on with perplexity at the Soviet reaction to the metro. After all, the Moscow Metro was some fifty years overdue by Europe's timetable. Some Westerners in Moscow thought that the money could have been better spent on improving housing and that it was unneeded extravagance.<sup>2</sup> Besides this minority negative opinion, however, the opening of the metro celebrated the Soviet people in ways that other massive building projects could not. Make no mistake, the completion of the first line was a logistical miracle. The Moscow Metro was mythical in the minds of the Soviet people. It was something unearthly, and only a few years

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<sup>1</sup> William K. Wolf. *Russia's revolutionary underground: the construction of the Moscow subway, 1931-35*. (PhD diss, Ohio State University, 1994), 323-326.

<sup>2</sup> Wolf. *Russia's revolutionary underground*, 327.

earlier had it been unimaginable. The metro symbolized victory in the fight to establish socialism. It promoted the narrative of the government solving the issues caused by industrialization in urban centers. It changed the perceptions of what was and was not feasible for the Soviet Union to accomplish. The Moscow Metro was not simply another government project. For those who worked on it, it engendered personal attachment because it was the individual's way to participate in building the future. Because of this personal connection, the public was just as absorbed in the fight to complete the metro as was the Bolshevik Party and Soviet Government. The Moscow Metro symbolized both the individual's and the state's fight to build socialism.

The Soviet Government rallied the people of Moscow to go to great lengths in order to complete the metro. However, at the project's inception, the people of Moscow loathed it. How did the government shift people's perceptions of the project's meaning and desired results in Soviet Russia? How did the government kindle the citizenry's enthusiasm? The Soviet government spurred a reversal in opinion by the time the Moscow Metrostroi Project was completed. What narrative did the Soviet government infuse within the metro that resonated so effectively with the Soviet people?

Considering the magnitude of the Moscow Metrostroi Project, one would think there would be ample scholarship on the subject. Surprisingly, there has been next to no scholarship on the Moscow Metrostroi Project. It would be unthinkable to write a book overviewing subterranean subways without a section on the Moscow Metro. However, these books are about the technical aspect of building the metro and not its ideological significance within the Soviet Union. The closest Western academia has ever come to a thorough examination of the metro is William K. Wolf's, PhD, dissertation *Russia's Revolution Underground: The Construction of the*

*Moscow Subway, 1931-35*.<sup>3</sup> His dissertation chronicles the project in its entirety from the time the Tsarist regime considered the project to the opening of the first line. Dr. Wolf's dissertation is more factual than analytical, however, leaving the gap in academia unpalatably large. Timothy J. Colton's epic of Moscow: *Moscow Governing the Socialist Metropolis* does include a section on the Moscow Metrostroi Project, but this section is brief and lacks in-depth analysis.<sup>4</sup> Dobrenko and Naiman's book *The Landscape of Stalinism* offers an analysis of the discourse of metro during the 1930s. It pertains to the entire decade of the 1930s and provides integral understanding of the sensory experience within the metro.<sup>5</sup> Other important sources pertaining to Moscow or urbanism during this time such as Richard Stites's *Revolutionary Dreams*, or Gleason, Kenez, and Stites's *Bolshevik Culture*, tend to agree that the Soviet Union was moving toward hyper-urbanism and city planning that would bring the Soviet Union on par with the capitalist world.<sup>6</sup> Other than these works cited above, I could find no other work on the Moscow Metrostroi.

The lack of ample scholarship on the metro necessitates that scholars look almost entirely to primary sources; this is what I have done. The sources defending the assertions I will make in this paper are largely derived from Russian newspapers published during the time of the Moscow Metrostroi Project. I have also found memoirs by key figures on the project that provide insight

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<sup>3</sup> Wolf, *Russia's revolutionary underground*. Entire.

<sup>4</sup> Timothy J. Colton, *Moscow : Governing the Socialist Metropolis*. Russian Research Center Studies ; 88. Cambridge, Mass. (Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1995). Entire.

<sup>5</sup> E. A. Dobrenko, Eric Naiman, and American Council of Learned Societies. *The Landscape of Stalinism : The Art and Ideology of Soviet Space*. Studies in Modernity and National Identity. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2003), Entire.

<sup>6</sup> Richard Stites. *Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989). Entire  
Gleason, Abbott. Kenez, Peter, and Stites, Richard. *Bolshevik Culture: Experiment and Order in the Russian Revolution*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985. Entire.

as well. This does mean that what I have seen is strongly steeped in party ideology. However, this is not a disadvantage considering that I will be analyzing the ideology behind the metro.

There are many different narratives surrounding the Moscow Metro. There is a narrative of technological development and independence from foreign specialists, of conquering space, of conquering public opinion, of inciting the populous to vigorous work, and of innovation. But there is also a narrative of building socialism. In this paper, I will unfold this narrative. The Moscow Metrostroi Project told the condensed story of what the Soviet Union was moving towards during the First Five Year Plan: socialism. It told of the hardship, sacrifice, and triumph of building socialism and promised a future in which all problems of hyper-urbanization would be overcome. Then, the Soviet people would live in a technologically advanced urban socialist utopia. In short, the Moscow Metro invited the individual to participate in building socialism and provided a glimpse into the socialist future of the Soviet Union.

### **Why A Metro?**

Moscow's population had been growing ever since the civil war.<sup>7</sup> The congestion in the city center was horrendous. Muscovites had a four-hour commute to and from work on average. The city added more trams in an effort to alleviate the over-packed public transportation system, but this only made the congestion worse. At the same time that the city center was in a perpetual traffic jam, the outskirts of the city were completely devoid of any public transportation. The center and the periphery were completely disconnected, only increasing worker commutes. Tram or bus accidents were steadily increasing in the late twenties.<sup>8</sup> The Tsarist government had suggested a metro multiple times starting in 1902, but plans never went beyond the drawing

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<sup>7</sup> Wolf, *Russia's revolutionary underground*, 18.

<sup>8</sup> Wolf, *Russia's revolutionary underground*, 27-30.

board. The USSR first suggested a metro in 1924, and the city created a subway department that drafted metro plans to build the subway within the next five years in 1925.<sup>9</sup> On November 2, 1928, an announcement appeared in *Pravda* declaring the city's decision to build a metro through the heart of the congested center.<sup>10</sup> One would think that overwhelming approval would follow. It did not. Moscow cried out in protest against the metro.

The battle of the metro was about practicality and power. Many in the city felt that the congestion problem was minor in comparison to the housing crisis. An editorial in *Pravda* likened building a metro in Moscow to buying a silk hat for a man without trousers.<sup>11</sup> Exactly how much of the population opposed the project is impossible to determine, as all opposition was expressed in various newspapers controlled by political factions. Thus, the debate on the metro was a political one under the veil of representing the people's will. During the late 1920s, Moscow was under two forms of authority: the Moscow Committee and the local administrative committees. Stalin actively consolidated his authority within the Moscow Committee and eventually gained control over the entirety of Moscow in the late twenties.<sup>12</sup> When a member of the Moscow City Presidium announced the metro, it sparked an argument over who had the authority to make such a decision. There were numerous articles discussing the metro's pros and cons.<sup>13</sup> Much of the debate was in the *Worker's and Peasants Inspectorate*, a newspaper commonly known as *Rabkrin* and that was firmly controlled by Stalin.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Wolf, *Russia's revolutionary underground*, 20.

<sup>10</sup> *Pravda*, November 10, 1928, 6.

<sup>11</sup> Wolf, *Russia's revolutionary underground*, 20.

<sup>12</sup> Colton, *Moscow*, 175-177.

<sup>13</sup> *Pravda*, November 2, 1928, 2.

<sup>14</sup> Wolf, *Russia's revolutionary underground*, 21.

In the end, the Moscow Presidium succumbed to the pressure. They would not build a metro before consulting the workers. They attempted to claim that they had not decided to build it in the first place, but were simply trying to open the discourse on the subject. This was a lie. The article in *Pravda* announcing the change was as minimalistic and to the point as possible; it communicated just how much the government wanted to sweep the controversial issue under the rug.<sup>15</sup> Ultimately, the project was too politically controversial to continue.

When the question of a metro was raised again in 1931, it centered on the debated topic of urbanism within socialism. Following the Civil War, the Soviet Union had an ongoing debate over anti-urbanism and urbanism. At the heart of the debate was how to build socialism. The anti-urbanists believed that cities were the root of all social ills and that small centers of 80,000 inhabitants, connected by high-speed railways, would produce healthier, more productive individuals.<sup>16</sup> Much of this stemmed from a belief that at the heart of all cities was capitalism, which meant that cities were incompatible with socialism and should be obliterated. The anti-urbanists were not trying to create a rural society, but instead trying to disperse the population throughout all arable land. During the 1920s, the anti-urbanists enjoyed favor among a number of Moscow organs. They could publish works without problems and enjoyed somewhat high popularity.<sup>17</sup>

The city may have decided against the metro, but the congestion issue only increased. Because of the First Five Year Plan, Moscow's population increased by almost a million people.

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<sup>15</sup> *Pravda*, December 1, 1928, 5.

<sup>16</sup> Abbott Gleason. Kenez, Peter, and Stites, Richard. *Bolshevik Culture : Experiment and Order in the Russian Revolution*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 180.

<sup>17</sup> Sheila Fitzpatrick. *Cultural Revolution in Russia, 1928-1931*. (Columbia University. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977), 225.

In 1930, the city had 1,644 trams and 2,603,000 riders per day, or 1,583 riders per tram.<sup>18</sup>

No matter what the city did, the congestion worsened. Moscow could not add any more vehicles in the streets. It was evident that the only solution would be to expand below.

In the mid- to late twenties, Soviet leaders began to disregard anti-urbanism. The precise opposite of what the anti-urbanist had postulated in the early twentieth century concerning population shifts came true: peasants began to try and better their lives within cities, not small villages.<sup>19</sup> As populations soared in cities, city organs must have been perplexed, considering what anti-urbanists had told them. The metro project coincided with the beginning of the end for anti-urbanism within the Soviet Union. As the First Five Year Plan started, it became evident that the government decided to build socialism along with urbanism. The metro debate began afresh in 1931 through a series of articles that attacked the anti-urbanist and defended the metro's socialist character. The anti-urbanists were on the defensive immediately. They saw no reason to build a metro within a densely populated center that they believed would be abandoned. This is how much of the discourse pertaining to the debate of the metro continued. The anti-urbanists claimed the metro was un-socialist, while the urbanists saw it as necessary for progress towards socialism.<sup>20</sup> For a few months, the public watched a battle of words carry on under a slightly different pretense than it had in 1928. Both sides were unilaterally silenced when Stalin declared the metro would be built in June 1931. His reasoning behind the decision has unfortunately been lost. Some scholars have postulated it was defense related, but the metro's military usefulness was only realized after the project switched to deep tunneling later. We can speculate the decision

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<sup>18</sup> Colton, *Moscow*, 174.

<sup>19</sup> Fitzpatrick, *Cultural Revolution in Russia*, 236.

<sup>20</sup> Wolf, *Russia's revolutionary underground*, 35-39.



had much to do with Stalin's plan to hyper-industrialize the Soviet Union.<sup>21</sup> Anti-urbanism or urbanism no longer mattered. Moscow would build a metro.

### **Battle to Build the Metro**

The Soviet Union was in no situation to build a metro. The project surpassed its original price tag of 55 million rubles and took 800 million rubles to complete.<sup>22</sup> The project's biggest challenge, which plagued it from its beginning, was the fact that practically no one in Russia had ever worked on building a metro. There was one key issue with employing the most promising candidate, an engineer named S. N. Rozanov with experience building the Paris Metro: he was in prison for economic sabotage.<sup>23</sup> A few other engineers may have briefly worked on metros in the West or seen a metro, but no others had the necessary experience. To make matters worse, the Soviet Union was no longer willing to pay to import technicians.<sup>24</sup> Eventually, Rozanov had to be released in order to help, and miners such as Nikita Khrushchev were also employed to supervise the digging.<sup>25</sup> Clearly, the project suffered from a technical deficiency from the beginning.

Lazar Kaganovich managed the project. In many ways, the metro was more important to his public image than it was for Stalin. Kaganovich was mentioned more times in newspaper articles about the metro than Stalin was. A speech he gave in 1934 to the Metrostroi shock workers was transcribed into a tract of sorts titled *The Construction of the Subway and the plan for the City of Moscow*. This, in many ways, act as his memoirs during this period of construction.

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<sup>21</sup> Wolf, *Russia's revolutionary underground*, 40.

<sup>22</sup> Wolf, *Russia's revolutionary underground*, 41.

<sup>23</sup> Wolf, *Russia's revolutionary underground*, 56.

<sup>24</sup> Wolf, *Russia's revolutionary underground*, 57.

<sup>25</sup> Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev. editors, Crankshaw, Edward, and Talbott, Strobe. *Khrushchev Remembers*. 1st Ed. ed. (Boston: Little, Brown and, 1970), 64-65.

During the first phase of construction, according to Kaganovich, the only work done was “preparation and organization.” Initially, he admitted the project was a mess.<sup>26</sup> Kaganovich was certainly right. During this time, construction of the metro was plagued by multiple problematic disagreements between technicians who had no notion of what they were doing. To make matters worse, finding labor was incredibly difficult. The Moscow Metro had few incentives for workers, such as quality lodging. The project was operating with less than half of the labor it needed.<sup>27</sup> It was, as Timothy Colton described, “A tunneler’s nightmare...”<sup>28</sup> The project began with shallow, open cut shafts. This augmented difficulties because Moscow’s soil had qualities similar to moist quicksand. Makovskii, an engineer, suggested deep tunneling. Finally, after much debate, it was agreed to begin deep tunneling.<sup>29</sup> The second stage of construction was actually the first time construction began with a purpose. It was in 1933-1934 that the bulk of the work was completed on the metro. During the final leg of construction, the metro was ablaze with frantic work to finish it before the opening. The city pushed back the date a few months when it realized that the metro would not be finished. It was further pushed back by Stalin, who wanted the craftsmanship to be cleaned up before the Soviet Union opened the “best metro in the world.”<sup>30</sup>

Even with all these difficulties and setbacks, the Moscow Metro opened just six months later than planned. The metro had thirteen stations, each unique in its own way. It showcased cathedral-like stations, covered in marble and lighted by chandeliers suspended almost two

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<sup>26</sup> L.M. Kaganovich, *Construction of the Subway and the Plan of the City of Moscow*. (Soviet Union: Co-operative Publishing Society of Foreign Workers, 1934), 6.

<sup>27</sup> Wolf, *Russia's revolutionary underground*, 61-62.

<sup>28</sup> Colton, *Moscow*, 255.

<sup>29</sup> Khrushchev, *Khrushchev Remembers*, 68.

<sup>30</sup> Wolf, *Russia's revolutionary underground*, 321-322.

stories above the floor. It achieved the effect of fooling the passenger into thinking they were in a cathedral instead of a sunken train.<sup>31</sup> Despite the setbacks, the metro was at least an ideological success.

## **Symbolic Nature of the Metro**

The metro was not simply built to alleviate congestion. It was the embodiment of the ideals of the time, of the First Five Year Plan, and of building socialism within the Soviet Union. Building the first metro in Russia in Moscow was not an arbitrary decision. Moscow would become one of the greatest cities in the world. It was to embody the socialist future through renewal, a renewal that would be achieved through the expulsion of the emblems of the past. This philosophy doomed cathedrals like Christ the Redeemer and countless others to make room for new Soviet projects.<sup>32</sup> Kaganovich stated during his speech in 1934 that “the construction of the first section of the subway, and the projected plan of the second section of the subway, to a great extent predetermined the fate of the plan for the further development and construction of the city of Moscow.”<sup>33</sup> This justified the metro project’s destruction of countless buildings that changed the face of Moscow and made way for new, Soviet architecture.<sup>34</sup> The metro embodied the coming change of Moscow. Moscow would transform into a new system of urban living—one in which technology remedied all problems caused by hyper-urbanism.<sup>35</sup> It would be the first city to build socialism. *Komsomolskaya Pravda* explained it as follows: “We undertook a

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<sup>31</sup> Dobrenko, Naiman, *The Landscape of Stalinism*, 264

<sup>32</sup> Colton, *Moscow*, 262-265.

<sup>33</sup> Kaganovich, *Construction of the Subway and the Plan of the City of Moscow*, 37.

<sup>34</sup> *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, May 12, 1935, 4.

<sup>35</sup> Colton, *Moscow*, 245,

big re-planning of Moscow, we decided to change the haggard face of the city, and we already presented Moscow with one more small change, a Metro!”<sup>36</sup> Moscow was old and resembled the Tsarist age too much to be a socialist city. Additions like the metro moved it closer to its vanguard status for all future Soviet cities and tilled the ground for other new projects. Kaganovich felt Moscow was “catching up” to the capitalist cities in technology and was an “urban laboratory” for determining how best to build socialist urbanism.<sup>37</sup> Hyper-industrialization ideally was not simply for industry alone; it was also to affect the Soviet people’s everyday lives for the better. Considering the massive shoe deprivation during the First Five Year Plan, however, the system was obviously not balanced. The civilizing effect of technology had to be harnessed by and for the new Soviet, socialist future.

The “cult of the machine” infatuated The Soviet Union during the 1920s. Hyper-urbanism and the corresponding belief that proletarian society could only exist within a culture of the machine and the factory affected policy greatly starting in the late 1920s.<sup>38</sup> The Soviet Union believed that machines and modernization led the way to a new civilization. According to Richard Stites, “City planning and the design of future living space requires a mentality and an imagination closely resembling the concoction of science fiction and utopia.”<sup>39</sup> Stites perfectly summarizes in this quote how the cult of the machine manifested itself within city planning. It became more than utility—it was ideological. The distribution of space among the needs of life and manufacturing had to reflect both mechanization and utopia. Both sections of

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<sup>36</sup> *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, May 12, 1935, 4.

<sup>37</sup> Colton, *Moscow*, 253-54.

<sup>38</sup> Stites. *Revolutionary Dreams*, 149

<sup>39</sup> Stites. *Revolutionary Dreams*, 190.

life had to reflect their union on equal mechanized terms. But they also had to have an element that enchanted the people, much in the way science fiction does. When Moscow built a metro, the utility of it was not only to reduce commutes. It was also ideological education. The Metro was neither underground or above ground, it was never day or nor night; it was the metro.<sup>40</sup> The one absolute of the metro was its owner: no one. The metro was a collective space of beauty, built by the ingenuity of Soviet technicians without foreign help.<sup>41</sup> It was a socialist space. The Soviet Union still feared that urban landscapes were too capitalistic and crushed the soul of the proletariat, but the metro enlightened the individual of what the collective could achieve in an urban landscape. It offered a narrative of the possibilities of the socialist future that they could build devoid of capitalistic technology and over which all Soviet People had ownership.

When recruited for the management of the metro Nikita Khrushchev said that, “We thought the metro as something supernatural.”<sup>42</sup> Khrushchev spoke briefly about his work on the metro in his memoirs *Khrushchev Remembers*. He believed that the metro went beyond the comprehension of the average Soviet citizen. As he put it, “I think it’s probably easier to contemplate space flight today than it was for us to contemplate the construction of the Moscow Metro in the early 1930’s.”<sup>43</sup> He elaborated on this incomprehensibility by describing how the project handled escalators. When switching to deep tunneling was suggested, the fear of the depth of the stairs that would be necessary for a deep metro lay at the heart of the argument of objecting parties. The logical solution was escalators. However, even Khrushchev admitted he

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<sup>40</sup> Dobrenko, Naiman, *The Landscape of Stalinism*, 266.

<sup>41</sup> Dobrenko, Naiman, *The Landscape of Stalinism*, 267.

<sup>42</sup> Khrushchev, *Khrushchev Remembers*, 64.

<sup>43</sup> Khrushchev, *Khrushchev Remembers*, 64.

had to ask what an escalator was when he first heard the word.<sup>44</sup> They could not import escalators, nor technicians to build them at this time. It was not allowed, nor could the country afford it. Pavel Roter suggested elevators as an option as well, and the Soviets knew how to build elevators.<sup>45</sup> In the end, escalators won the battle. Why? The metro would push the Soviets to their utmost ingenuity; it tested the capabilities of the Soviet Union. This project required leaders to ignite in each builder an esoteric understanding of the project, which led to the development of an emotional bond between the worker and his work. Escalators embodied the mythological, utilitarian, ideological goal of the metro perfectly, and neither Stalin nor any other leader in Moscow could have failed to understand escalators' ideological significance in their fight to build socialism.

### **A Test Tube**

The First Five Year Plan placed massive industrialization in the public eye through the news as well. Projects like Magnitogorsk were away in the Urals, hundreds of miles from Moscow. Although building projects were constantly mentioned in media, the signature projects were distant from urban areas. Factories in Moscow increased on a massive scale during the plan, but seeing factories was not the same as experiencing industrialization spring from the void as it did in the Urals. However, the metro project was literally under people's feet. The shafts were before their eyes, and the disruption to their lives was great. I believe that the Moscow Metro impressed upon the individual sensory realities of the building of socialism.

The metro project was not supposed to upset the lives of Muscovites: it failed this goal spectacularly. The Metro disrupted pedestrian and vehicle traffic from the start. The worksites

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<sup>44</sup> Khrushchev, *Khrushchev Remembers*, 69.

<sup>45</sup> Khrushchev, *Khrushchev Remembers*, 68.

were ugly, dirty, and surrounded by mounds of disrupted earth. Many of the conditions created by the metro were similar to those of Magnitogorsk.<sup>46</sup> What was different was the reaction of the people. There were entire articles in *Komsomolskaya Pravda* complaining about specialized clothing and the administration that failed to produce and distribute them. This criticism went far for the Soviet Union. The same article stated that “Metrostroi management should in their turn become interested in the work of the metro-supply organization, which is more occupied with red tape, than procuring working uniforms.”<sup>47</sup> This article speaks to the idea associated with the metro that people had a right to speak of the issues of building socialism and a right to hold management accountable. The living conditions in the barracks were repeatedly criticized for being deplorable. A report that appeared in *Komsomolskaya Pravda* reported that,

138 barracks were checked and there wasn’t a single room without parasites. Bachelors, working families, young men, young women, and children frequently live in one room. There is a total lack of cultural services, which puts the workers, especially the young people, on the nasty path to drunkenness and gambling.<sup>48</sup>

The criticism did not stop here; there was an entire article dedicated to describing the vermin infestation.<sup>49</sup> Each article articulated that the quality of life did not match the quality of work that the builders performed. The fact that printed criticism appeared and that party names appeared is telling of what the metro represented to the public: the problems of massive industrialization and their opportunity to overcome them. It was not simply the party’s opportunity to fix them, but the

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<sup>46</sup> John Scott. *Behind the Urals, an American Worker in Russia's City of Steel*. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1942), Entire.

<sup>47</sup> *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, September 15, 1933, 2.

<sup>48</sup> *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, June 1, 1934, 3.

<sup>49</sup> *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, June 1, 1934. 3.

people's as well. As much as these problems were the city's responsibility, they were also the workers' responsibility. One of the first volunteers stated that,

Our shaft number 12, a Komsomol shaft, is already well known in all of Moscow as one of the best, though we had quite a few shortages in the shaft especially at the beginning of the mobilization of the first volunteer brigades. There were also social problems that started in the barracks like theft: the result was great instability. During the recruitment of new Komsomol members, our shaft will need to pay special attention to the conditions of life in the barracks.<sup>50</sup>

This builder saw his own success and felt it his responsibility to help see issues fixed. The workers could see some of the effects of building socialism. The workers took on the responsibility of the project. It was not simply a state project. The Moscow metro gave the Soviet people a place in building socialism.

Finding materials in the Soviet Union for any project was difficult. For the Metro, the problem presented itself as another obstacle the workers had to overcome. Wood beams supported the ceiling within the shafts, and the metro project became unacceptably unsafe without access to lumber.<sup>51</sup> Management sent the workers to get wood themselves and began a campaign to have supplies shipped to the metro. A determined article in *Komsomolskaya Pravda* appeared saying, "The disgraceful logging work at Arkhangelsk hampers work in the shafts. The constant lack of lumber delays sinking the shafts and concreting... 200 Komsomol members, the best shock workers, traveled to Arkhangelsk. They will work on the logging in Arkhangelsk before the shipping campaign is over."<sup>52</sup> In the end, these metro workers cut 190,000 meters of wood.<sup>53</sup> The metro project could not be hindered even by other less efficient sectors of the Soviet

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<sup>50</sup> *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, September 23, 1933, 2.

<sup>51</sup> Wolf, *Russia's revolutionary underground*, 204-203.

<sup>52</sup> *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, March 5, 1935, 4.

<sup>53</sup> *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, March 5, 1935, 4.



Union. Not only would the workers remedy their problems, but in record time as well. Even the obstacles within the Five Year Plan could be overcome by the workers. In reality, most of the lumber did not find its way to Moscow. Other projects commandeered it through bribery.<sup>54</sup> However, the statement had already been made that there was nothing that could not be overcome.

It is interesting to note how foreigners reacted to Moscow's attempts to pioneer its own field. Foreigners pondered why they were not being consulted. From 1933-1934, it seems foreigners were entirely pessimistic about the Soviet Union's ability to complete the metro.<sup>55</sup> Although they had no issues with praising the enthusiasm of the metro workers, foreigners did not attribute advanced technical knowledge to them.<sup>56</sup> As the project improved slowly, foreigners began to criticize less and even praised the project in late 1934. The idea that the metro could be built without foreign help was a victory. In reality, there was some dubious consultation with representatives of German and English firms who thought they were in Moscow to negotiate contracts, but in reality were figuratively interrogated for technical information. Such was the case with how the Soviets built escalators.<sup>57</sup> Still, it was important to send the message that the Soviet Union could be independent of paying for foreign technicians. Their own innovation was capable of completing the project. As

*Komsomolskaya Pravda*, put it, "We decided to manage without foreign help... but with our own

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<sup>54</sup> Wolf, *Russia's revolutionary underground*, 212.

<sup>55</sup> *Moscow Daily News*, April 6, 1934. 4.

<sup>56</sup> *Moscow Daily News*, December 10, 1933, 3. May 27, 1933, 3.

<sup>57</sup> Wolf, *Russia's revolutionary underground*, 314-315.

engineers, our own shock workers—the *komsomoltsy* [Communist Youth League] decided to build the metro.”<sup>58</sup> The metro was a micro-Five Year Plan in and of itself. The Metrostroi Project conquered industrialization before the eyes of Muscovites and instilled a tangible experience of what the Soviet people were doing: building socialism.

### **Giving Control to the People**

Labor shortages began to seriously affect building the metro in 1933. The recruitment process in 1932 had not produced the desired 18,000 workers, but only 10,000. In early 1933 the Metrostroi leadership decided to recruit from the Communist Youth League, or *komsomoltsy*. Although they lacked technical knowledge, *komsomoltsy* were relatively easy to recruit or mobilize and where they lacked technical training they espoused youthful enthusiasm.<sup>59</sup> *Komsomoltsy* working in the administration of the Metrostroi took over a shaft in early 1933 in an effort to provide an example for other shafts to emulate. The shaft quickly began to exceed its quota, but it did not spur better work in other shafts.<sup>60</sup> In April 1933, *Komsomolskaya Pravda* announced the mobilization of 1,000 new *Komsomol* workers for the metro.<sup>61</sup> Again in June an additional 2,000 workers were mobilized.<sup>62</sup> The addition of *Komsomol* labor transformed the discourse used to incite enthusiasm in the new workers. It transformed the project from a state project to a “project of the people.”

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<sup>58</sup> *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, May 14, 1935, 3.

<sup>59</sup> Wolf, *Russia's revolutionary underground*, 120.

<sup>60</sup> Wolf, *Russia's revolutionary underground*, 119-120.

<sup>61</sup> *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, April 11, 1933, 4.

<sup>62</sup> Wolf, *Russia's revolutionary underground*, 120.

The fact that the komsomoltsy had little technical experience and were more accustomed to factory work than mining presented both a problem and an opportunity. A new technical department opened at the Moscow Institute of Engineers. Incoming komsomoltsy went either directly to the shafts and trained there or went to the workers' school of 1,000 students.<sup>63</sup> Metrostroi management knew that, "With this mass of people, we will need to work long and hard; we need to reeducate them, to transform them into conscious builders."<sup>64</sup> It was not simply their technical education, but their socialist consciousness as well that had to be excited. Media about Metrostroi workers always stressed that people came to the metro as inept youths and became indispensable workers, as exemplified in the following:

When the first wave of 2,000 of komsomoltsy volunteers arrived at the metro, many wondered whether we should let them work in the shafts. You see, yesterday they worked on buttons and lace. The young workers proved themselves though, in 2-3 weeks they became the nucleus of the metro.<sup>65</sup>

Komsomol workers became not just technicians, but the heart of the metro. The rhetoric stipulated that Metrostroi was a disaster. Therefore, the Metrostroi leadership were giving komsomoltsy access to education, allowing them to assume ownership and build the metro.<sup>66</sup> People ceased to be cogs in an inanimate machine: the metro project became the embodiment of building socialism and building *socialists*. The project made, "The Komsomol collective and all the young workers [grow] politically, in technical skill, and culturally."<sup>67</sup> The metro was no longer the innovation of the state, but the innovation of remaking people and the people's

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<sup>63</sup> *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, August 29, 1933, 1.

<sup>64</sup> *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, September 23, 1933, 2.

<sup>65</sup> *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, May 14, 1935, 3.

<sup>66</sup> *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, August 29, 1933, 1.

<sup>67</sup> *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, May 15, 1935, 3.

innovation thereafter. As Vlas Chubar put it in *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, “We changed the nature of remaking people, we created the world’s masterpieces...”<sup>68</sup> The metro exemplified building socialism so that it was envied, and how that process remade the individual as well.

Work on the metro went through a metamorphosis. The builder began to connect on a personal level with his work. The metro was as much a test of the worker as of the First Five Year Plan. The results on the metro theoretically proved the benefits of Gastev’s theories on the worker’s place within hyper-urbanism and the cult of the machine. He postulated that the worker was a “sentient, creative part of the productive process who behaves like a seasoned, conscious, and well trained warrior.”<sup>69</sup> This philosophy directed labor on the metro. The propaganda pushed the builder in the shaft to become a part of the collective building project of socialism.<sup>70</sup> The quality of his work judged his quality and his Soviet consciousness, meaning that the ability to understand the significance of his work reflected his communist cultural enlightenment.

Metrostroi leadership gave the komsomoltsy a degree of control over the metro. Although it was in some ways a false sense of control, as key decisions were made by the top managers, it was not in other ways. Elements, such as operating the shield and waterproofing, took technical skills that few workers knew prior to coming to the metro.<sup>71</sup> Details were not only espoused as the most important aspect of work, but genuinely just as important as the decision for deep tunneling. A leaky metro, especially with Moscow’s moist soil, would be a

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<sup>68</sup> *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, May 15, 1935, 3.

<sup>69</sup> Stites. *Revolutionary Dreams*, 153.

<sup>70</sup> Kaganovich, *Construction of the Subway and the Plan of the City of Moscow*, 25.

<sup>71</sup> *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, May 15, 1935, 3.

dangerous metro.<sup>72</sup> The very nature of the work demanded a force that understood how important their contribution was because. Minutely regulating the work of thousands was impossible, especially considering that there was only a handful of technicians who actually had more technical knowledge than the average worker. Metrostroi leadership had to inspire the worker to be a sentient element within the system. The project became an extension of the individual. It is my analysis that by investing personal attachment to work, the Moscow Metro invited people to connect with the plan for building socialism within the Soviet Union.

The end product had to reflect the work of the people, and, more importantly, their emotional commitment to a communist future. The plans for the metro were not in workers' hands, but the leadership undoubtedly understood that the metro was no longer simply an example of the Soviet Union's hyper-industrialization or Moscow's status as a vanguard city: it was about the individual building socialism. It was in the hardest areas that "...the komcomolsky showed exemplary work."<sup>73</sup> If a portion of the komcomolsky workers had not been so enthusiastic about their work and had not risen to the technical demand placed on them, the metro may not have been completed anywhere near its projected date. The end result for all was something that could be celebrated for centuries: it would preserve the workers who had built it precisely for a socialist future. The benefits of the socialist future being built now could be had in the present.

## **Conclusion**

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<sup>72</sup> Wolf, *Russia's revolutionary underground*, 90.

<sup>73</sup> *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, May 15, 1935, 3.

The Moscow Metro opened to thunderous applause, but the project still continues today. Moscow built a plethora of beautiful tunnels, but the first line is arguably the best. The Moscow Metro is considered one of the ideal construction projects of the Stalinist Era.<sup>74</sup> Moscow had to be modern and a city on a hill for the rest of the nation. It had to set the example of the socialist future. By building the metro, Moscow proved it could be just as modern and technologically advanced as the capitalist world as well as a humane landscape where the passenger came first over profits and utility.<sup>75</sup>

The First Five Year Plan brought the semi-distant, socialist future to the present and showcased the grand technical capabilities of it. No longer were the elements of the future that affected everyday life purely imaginative. They were here now, in every magazine and in cinemas.<sup>76</sup> The issues of the First Five Year Plan could be overcome. By acknowledging the problems in the barracks, the city showed what they would fix later. This would be exemplified when Kaganovich would enter and fix workers' problems.

In the construction of the metro, the worker ceased to be a chess piece of the state and became a skilled laborer influencing his own future and the future of others. Work became a personal extension of the individual. Likewise, the product became such as well. The metro became the distant socialist future brought to the present.

The metro would not alleviate congestion for years after its opening; the first line was too small and the problem too great. It would not affect the lives of most citizens for years to come.

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<sup>74</sup> Dobrenko, Naiman, *The Landscape of Stalinism*, 273.

<sup>75</sup> *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, May 14, 1935, 3.

<sup>76</sup> *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, May 12, 1935, 4.

It cost more to ride than most could afford.<sup>77</sup> Although we cannot know how widespread the feeling of endearment to their work was among the metro workers, the evidence that exists indicates it was not a feeling in the minority. The ideological platform of the state to mobilize people was excellent. The Moscow Metro presented the city dwellers with the task of implementing the First Five Year Plan and building socialism. This included facing problems, disruptions, and poor living conditions. All of these came to Moscow as it assumed its vanguard status. The metro made the heroic alleviation of these issues dependent on the individual. The individual became the hero who would make the future better. The individual became the engineer of the socialist future, which the individual accomplished by working in the collective. The worker must build socialism, not the state. Philosophies of the future became personal. The metro gave the individual an esoteric understanding of what socialism would require and what it required of him. The Soviet government allowed the Moscow Metro to be the individual's narrative of building socialism.

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<sup>77</sup> Wolf, *Russia's revolutionary underground*, 331-332.

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