

VICTOR REUTHER  
Gorki plant construction

tape 18A  
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Franklin **Roosevelt** in conversations with **Stalin**, learned of their interest in building an automobile industry, and Franklin Roosevelt turned to **Henry Ford**, who, you will recall, in **WW1** sent a peace ship to Europe. He believed he was going to help peace. So he had this emotional committment to peace, but he was a good businessman. And when Franklin Roosevelt said to Henry Ford: " Look, you've just finished making the Model A Ford. What do you do with all the tools and dyes that you stamp, use to stamp out those parts?" And Henry Ford says: " When we change models we destroy the old dyes." And he said: " Can you still make cars from those dyes? "Well, of course they're like new still". And he said: Why don't you sell them to the Soviet Union, it will be a good car for them to start with" because it was built high on the chasis and was great for their poor roads.

00: 14: 03: 17 So Henry Ford sent William Neudson, who later became president of General Motors, to Moscow to personally negotiate with Joseph Stalin, and they signed an agreement. The agreement provided for the sale of all these tools and dyes to the Soviet Union. It also involved bringing 350 young Soviet technicians to Detroit, to be trained in helping to set up the factory. The actual construction of the factory was handled by a Cleveland construction firm, they put up the physical buildings. And the Ford Motor Company was also asked, and this is interesting, to recruit a group of specialists who could go from Detroit to the Soviet Union and supervise the uncrating of the equipment and the laying out of the production lines, etc..

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17: 12: 08 And it was at that point that Walter and I began exploring the possibility of our going over and helping in getting that factory going.

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It was the fall of 1933, then that Walter and I took a train from Berlin after being stranded in Europe, those long months, and took the train through Poland into Moscow. And then another connecting train into the ancient city of ( ? ? ? ? ? grad), then already called Gorky after **Maxime Gorky**.

The auto plant under construction was situated some 15 or 20 kilometers downstream, down the Oka River from the center of Gorky. And it was in its early construction stages

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The work force was gathered from peasant villages along the Volga, with some peasants coming from as far away as Central Asia, Taskan, Samarkan, Bukarar. They were visibly of a different race and culture, and not at all accustomed to the bitter cold winters of ( ? ? ? ? grad). And the housing in the early months for the new work force, were nothing but tents on simple wood platforms, and living conditions were terribly primitive.

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I will never forget workers on the day shift coming out of the plant as I was going in on the second shift to work. And they noticed my cheeks were beginning to get discolored and were freezing, and I couldn't understand the language, so they took some snow and rubbed my cheeks. And I then knew what they were telling me, because when I got into the factory, there was no heat in the room, in the big tool room, where we worked. But I went into the heat tree where we tempered metal, and that was the only warm spot in the whole factory. And when my cheeks began to thaw out, I knew I had frozen them, and till this day, after these many long years, when I'm confronted with a cold blast of air, I feel it first in the cheeks. 00: 06: 56: 09 Working conditions were very primitive that first winter, we could only work in temperatures of well below zero, doing precision work, we could only work twenty minutes to a half an hour at a stretch, and we'd have to go into the heat tree department for a few minutes. That made it very questionable how precise our work would be.

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We had problems with things that should not have been a difficulty, but the Soviets were anxious to cut corners, to speed up the whole process of learning and to only do those things that contributed to the functioning of a given part you were making

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It was an incredible effort to industrialize a peasant population, a very short time. Culturally it was nothing short of a revolution to see people who had slept on top of an oven in a peasant house leave a peasant village where they hadn't seen anything more complicated than a wheel barrel or a pitchfork, come into a burgeoning industrial area that was one huge construction camp, move from open tent, tents into simple barrack structures and then be participants in building a new city. A city to house 60, 000 people, a city with which was heated, the whole city heated by the exhaust from the power plant of the factory. And the workers who were building, learning to build the automobiles, helped build the highrise apartment buildings. And some of the people were so primitive, those from Central Asia, that some who were moved directly into these early apartment buildings would build a wooden, a wood fire in the middle of the room. They didn't know it would burn the building down because they came from nomadic tribes, where they were accustomed to building a fire and cooking their own meal. The cultural gap was that great

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main meal each day was in the factory restaurant. It was probably the only meal the workers got. And it was a very spartan meal, we would have hot cereal, kasha, with a little fish oil on it, there was no butter; maybe some dried fish, almost never meat and no milk. Cause meat was highly rationed, it was potatoes, it was cabbage soup, it was a big chunk of black bread, and that black bread could be three weeks old and it would still be soft.

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I lost 30 pounds in the first three months. And I was a very slender young man at the time. But the factory restaurant was the center of

cultural life for these workers, they got a good meal there and the noon break was enough time where they could do a native dance and hear a little music from the accordion and the balalaika. And every department had their own little group of musicians. And one day a worker said to Walter, "I'm getting tired of going into the restaurant and eating out of a wooden bowl, with a wooden spoon like my grandparents used back in the village. Why can't we have American's spoons?" Fine, we elected a delegation and sent them to Moscow, there were no spoons available anywhere at any store to buy, and they came back discouraged and Walter said : " No problem, we have scrap metal left over from stamping out the parts of the car, we'll stay a little later each day for the next week and we'll build a dye and stamp out big soup spoons."

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We went into the restaurant the next day with a supply of spoons, they had a great celebration, it represented a cultural breakthrough. And they did dances and they sang, and there were banners made for the occasion

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00: 19: 36: 11 So we look forward the day after going back to the restaurant, not a single spoon was there, they all took them home. Then there was big argument about it, the party spokesman in the department, the trade union spokesman, the management spokesman all raised hell. " This is state property that you've been stealing, it's a disgrace" Well, maybe it was a disgrace, but how do you keep them from taking such a good thing home, when they never had it before. So they devised a very ingenious system. We ran off another supply, we knew we couldn't supply the whole Volga countryside, but we made enough for the department's cafeteria, the next day you went in and as you entered the cafeteria you were given a spoon and you surrendered your badge with your photograph on it.

And as you left the restaurant, the cafeteria you turned the spoon back and you got your badge back.

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20A.. 00: 00: 41: 12 The growth of these new modern industries within a rather primitive social structure.naturally brought some resistance to the discipline that participation in industry requires. The Soviets had a way of punishing and rewarding how different workers responded to their responsibilities, of showing up on time, doing quality work, etc.. You had a unique structure inside the factory, which is called a triangular organization, tri( ? ? ? ), representing the three major components of management. You had factory supervision, you had the communist party's official and the trade union representative in each department of the factory. And if they had difficulty with a worker and he required discipline, if he were a party member he would get discipline from the party official and functionary. If he's a member of the trade union, and he would have been, the trade union could have been a discipline enforcer. If he did poor work, if he did not achieve his set norm or quota of work, they might have a little burlap flag, made of the cheapest of cotton, on his workplace as a symbol of very bad quality. If you exceeded your quota, you were an ? ourdarnik? , you were a selected qualified workman who went beyond what was accepted. And you would have a little red flag with a hammer and sickle on it, as a symbol that you were an excellent worker, and your photograph would be put up on the board for all to see, that you were an outstanding worker that month.

If you were exceptionally good, the trade union would invite you to enjoy one of the vacation facilities available to the trade unions, down in the Crimea, or the Ukraine. And of course, if you were not a good worker, you wouldn't be invited to those kind of places.

00: 03: 23: 02 And there were also occasions when the workers would be asked to contribute voluntarily, work beyond that which was required of them in the factory. Perhaps it was summertime and the farmers in the surrounding area needed extra help to harvest the crops, because their sons and daughters had gone off to work in the factory. Well, a department might organize a (? ? nik), an outing in which people would volunteer to spend their free day helping to harvest the crop. And buses would meet them, and they would make a big picnic out of it. There would be special food made available which they couldn't normally get. And they'd have music and have native dancers too, at the end of it, and they would make it into a social event. A lot of work was done that way, even building streets into the new city. Planting trees, every tree in the new city was planted by volunteer labor. This was a way of rewarding those who were especially faithful, giving them that opportunity. It was also a way of stressing the importance of the whole factory to the total community.

00: 04: 59: 18 And I think this unique structure I referred to, which could be very oppressive at times, and it became that during the Stalin years. When there were suspicions of sabotage, and often excuses were used in order to penalize workers who hadn't really committed any crime. But if they made a statement that the party official considered was against the state's interest, they would just disappear without any formal trial.