

SOCIUM · SFB 1342

# WorkingPapers No. 28

Andreas Heinrich

## **The Generosity of Social Welfare Programmes in the Soviet Union: A Comprehensive Overview**

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SOCIUM SFB 1342 WorkingPapers, 28

Bremen: SOCIUM, SFB 1342, 2025



SOCIUM Forschungszentrum Ungleichheit und Sozialpolitik /  
Research Center on Inequality and Social Policy  
SFB 1342 Globale Entwicklungsdynamiken von Sozialpolitik /  
CRC 1342 Global Dynamics of Social Policy

Postadresse / Postaddress:

Postfach 33 04 40, D - 28334 Bremen

Websites:

<https://www.socium.uni-bremen.de>

<https://www.socialpolicydynamics.de>

[DOI <https://doi.org/10.26092/elib/3605>]

[ISSN (Print) 2629-5733]

[ISSN (Online) 2629-5741]

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## ABSTRACT

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This working paper presents an overview of the gradual development of the Soviet welfare system from the October Revolution of 1917 to the country's dissolution in 1991. It examines all major social welfare programmes in the Soviet Union and their generosity – understood as the combination of their inclusiveness and the scope of benefits they offered. It provides the reader with a comprehensive and detailed picture of the development of these programmes over time covering the right to income maintenance (i.e., old-age, disability and survivor pensions, unemployment, sickness and maternity benefits, and child allowances), benefits aiming to raise living and cultural standards (i.e., healthcare and education), and so-called 'hidden social welfare benefits' in the form of price subsidies for consumer goods and services, such as food, housing, etc.

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## ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

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Das Arbeitspapier präsentiert einen Überblick über die allmähliche Entwicklung des sowjetischen Wohlfahrtssystems von der Oktoberrevolution 1917 bis zum Zusammenbruch der Sowjetunion 1991. Es untersucht alle wichtigen Sozialprogramme der Sowjetunion auf ihre Generosität, verstanden als Kombination aus ihrer Inklusivität und ihres Leistungsumfangs. Der Leser erhält ein umfassendes und detailliertes Bild der Entwicklung der einzelnen Programme, wobei sowohl Programme zur Einkommenssicherung (d.h. Alters-, Invaliden- und Hinterbliebenenrente, Arbeitslosengeld, Krankengeld, Mutterschaftsgeld und Kindergeld), als auch Unterstützungen zur Erhöhung des Lebensstandards (d.h. Bildungswesen und Gesundheitsversorgung) und sogenannte „versteckte Sozialleistungen“ in Form von Preissubventionen für Konsumgüter, wie z. B. Lebensmittel, und Dienstleistungen, inklusive Wohngeld.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

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FYP = Five-Year Plan

GNP = Gross National Product

IMF = International Monetary Fund

m<sup>2</sup> = Square metre

RSFSR = Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic

USSR = Union of Socialist Soviet Republics

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## 0 TECHNICAL NOTES

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### 0.1 Transliteration

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Russian terms and names are transliterated using the Library of Congress Transliteration Style for Russian.<sup>1</sup>

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### 0.2 Soviet Union

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The Soviet Union – officially the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics – was technically established only in December 1922, at the end of the Russian civil war. However, for reasons of simplicity this working paper refers also for the period (October) 1917–1922 to the ‘Soviet Union’, instead of to ‘Soviet Russia’ or ‘areas under Bolshevik control’.

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### 0.3 Change from the Julian to the Gregorian calendar

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The Gregorian calendar was implemented in Russia on 14 February 1918 by eliminating 13 days from that calendar year; Wednesday, 31 January 1918, was thus followed by Thursday, 14 February 1918. Thus, the October Revolution itself, once converted, had taken place on 7 November 1917, instead of 25 October according to the Julian cal-

endar. Whenever applicable, this working paper gives both the Julian and the Gregorian date.

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### 0.4 Currency reforms in the Soviet Union

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When comparing the scope of benefits, it is important to note that the Soviet rouble, introduced in 1922, experienced several re-denominations. The first, in 1924, replaced all previously issued currencies; further re-denominations followed in 1947 and 1961, each devaluing the rouble by a ratio of 10:1.

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### 0.5 Average wages and pensions

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To give the reader an idea about the importance and value of the social benefits described in this working paper, some estimates of average wages and pensions in the Soviet Union are presented. However, the reader should use these figures only for orientation purposes, rather than taking them too literally: the available data on wages in Soviet industry (especially after World War II) are so sparse and unsatisfactory ‘that scholars have understandably avoided the subject like the plague’ (Schroeder, 1966, p. 303).

The socialist doctrine of equal pay for equal work implied the existence of a single skill grade for each occupation, measuring the proper skills needed for the performance of specific occupational functions, from which a wage rate could be derived (McAuley, 1979, p. 186). Consequently, in the Soviet Union existed a formal system of job classification under which workers – ‘persons directly involved in production, or in closely associated processes’ (Matthews, 1986, p. 30) – were paid on the basis of an officially defined wage rate for a specific job. All jobs in a given branch of industry were further differentiated into ‘qualification grades’, ranging in number from three to eight depending on the relative skill levels involved; for instance, non-ferrous metallurgy and machine building had eight grades, while drivers had only a three-grade scheme. Each qualification grade had its corresponding wage rate (Matthews,

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<sup>1</sup> See <https://www.bowdoin.edu/russian/pdf/russian-transliteration.pdf>.

**Table 1.** Average monthly wages in selected branches, 1940–1985 (in roubles)

|                  | 1940 | 1960 | 1965  | 1970  | 1975  | 1980  | 1985  |
|------------------|------|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| National Average | 33.1 | 80.6 | 96.5  | 122.0 | 145.8 | 168.9 | 190.1 |
| Industry         | 34.1 | 91.6 | 104.2 | 133.3 | 162.2 | 185.4 | 210.6 |
| Construction     | 36.3 | 93.0 | 111.9 | 149.9 | 176.8 | 202.3 | 236.6 |
| Agriculture      | 23.3 | 55.2 | 75.0  | 101.0 | 126.8 | 149.2 | 182.1 |

Source: Ohtsu, 1989, p. 110.

1986, p. 30). The ‘wage rate for each grade [was] established on the basis of a set of coefficients relating the rates for the various grades to that established for the lowest paying grade. Reflecting the spread of skill requirements, wider scales [were] used in heavy industry, such as metallurgy, and narrower ones in light manufacturing activities, such as textiles’ (Schroeder, 1966, p. 304). Thus, the Soviet wage structure, including wage-related welfare benefits, was differentiated according to qualification/skill grades (Rimlinger, 1971, p. 323).

The wage differentials between the basic wage rates of the lowest and highest qualification grades were narrower under the leadership of Nikita Khrushchev (1956–1964) and broader under his successor, Leonid Brezhnev (Matthews, 1986, p. 31). The basic wage rates were usually ‘supplemented by incentive bonuses, adjusted to

attract workers into otherwise unpopular jobs, or encourage effort’ (Matthews, 1986, p. 30).

Salaried employees – who included ‘all non-worker and non-peasant occupations, from menial service staff through office workers to middle-grade technicians and high-grade specialists’ (Matthews, 1986, p. 31) – were ‘paid monthly salaries in accordance with centrally established schedules that [varied] widely by branch of industry’; these basic salaries were supplemented by ‘bonuses related to achievements for the shop or plant as a whole’ (Schroeder, 1966, p. 304). While salaried employees in low-grade jobs usually had only two pay rates, junior and senior, the ‘salaries of high-grade specialists [were] much more differentiated, varying not only by seniority, but also by the size of the enterprise or organisation’ (Matthews, 1986, p. 31).

Collective farmers were paid in cash and in kind, but ‘only *after* harvesting, and *after* the farm

**Table 2.** Average monthly pensions, 1975–1988 (in roubles)

|                         | 1975 | 1980 | 1985 | 1987 | 1988 |
|-------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|
| <b>State Sector</b>     |      |      |      |      |      |
| Overall Average         | 55.0 | 63.8 | 78.7 | 83.7 | 86.3 |
| Old-Age                 | 62.7 | 71.6 | 87.2 | 91.7 | 93.9 |
| Work-Related Disability | 49.7 | 52.7 | 57.6 | 59.7 | 60.8 |
| General Disability      | 45.2 | 53.4 | 64.4 | 68.2 | 70.2 |
| Survivor                | 35.9 | 39.1 | 46.3 | 48.0 | 48.8 |
| <b>Collective Farms</b> |      |      |      |      |      |
| Overall Average         | 25.1 | 35.2 | 47.0 | 53.1 | 54.3 |
| Old-Age                 | 25.1 | 35.2 | 47.2 | 53.4 | 54.5 |
| Work-Related Disability | 27.8 | 34.6 | 40.6 | 45.3 | 46.8 |
| General Disability      | 25.2 | 36.6 | 48.5 | 56.3 | 57.4 |
| Survivor                | 25.1 | 31.3 | 38.7 | 41.1 | 41.9 |

Source: IMF et al., 1991c, p. 211.

had met all other financial commitments. Most [collective farmers] were heavily dependent on the produce from their small private plots to stay alive. [Starting in] the mid-fifties the system of payment [was] gradually brought closer to that of the industrial (and particularly state farm) pattern', featuring a six-step pay scale (depending on the skills involved) supplemented by production bonuses (Matthews, 1986, pp. 31–32, quote 31, italics in the original).

Despite the established system of job classification any 'particular job may be difficult to define, and different rates of pay [could] be set for one and the same thing at adjacent enterprises', resulting in significant distortions in the wage system (Matthews, 1986, p. 30). Table 1 provides some estimations of the average monthly wages in selected branches.

Regarding the income maintenance of persons who had left the workforce, Table 2 provides some information about the average monthly pensions in the late Soviet Union.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

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This working paper presents an overview of the major social welfare programmes in the Soviet Union and their generosity – understood as the combination of their inclusiveness and the scope of benefits they offered. The working paper is thereby intentionally descriptive in order to present the reader a comprehensive and detailed picture of the development of these programmes over time. While some older overviews exist (e.g., George & Manning, 1980; McAuley, 1979; Rimlinger, 1971), they lack the focus on the programmes' generosity and are often fragmentary in their description and/or make it difficult to follow the chronology of the programmes' development. The limited Soviet literature on the subject is ideologically tainted and does not provide a detailed analysis of the development of these social welfare programmes (see, e.g., Kozlov, 1981; Tchkova & Zakhrov, 1988).

Social welfare systems can be differentiated by 'the extent to which the rights to protection are

granted as a matter of status – either to all citizens or to specific status groups – and the extent to which the rights have to be earned in a contractual manner' (Rimlinger, 1971, p. 253). The Soviet welfare system distinguished between, on the one hand, broadly defined social security (*sotsial'noe obespechenie*), available to all citizens and encompassing all social welfare programmes in the country that aimed to raise living and cultural standards, such as healthcare and education (also including so-called 'hidden social welfare benefits' in the form of price subsidies for consumer goods, such as food, and services, including housing, public transport, utilities, etc.); and on the other hand, the more narrowly defined social insurance (*sotsial'noe strakhovanie*), composed only of welfare benefits, such as old-age, disability and survivor pensions, unemployment, sickness and maternity benefits, and child allowances, which arose out of an employment relationship. This second group of benefits were granted directly by the state and were 'financed wholly or in part by wage-related contributions from enterprises and other establishments' (Rimlinger, 1961, p. 399).<sup>1</sup> The absence of contributions into social insurance funds by the wage-earners themselves made the contractual element in the Soviet social insurance system rather weak (Rimlinger, 1971, p. 253); thus, the term 'income maintenance' seems more appropriate.

After the revolution in October 1917, the new Bolshevik government quickly introduced (mostly for the first time) state-funded social services in the areas of old-age pension, healthcare, education, etc., which were based on their utopian ideals. This meant a major expansion and an increasing generosity of social policies. However, it took many social programmes decades to include the majority of intended beneficiaries because these *de jure* entitlements, if and when actually implemented, were at first limited to a select few (for the specific modes of and motivations for welfare policy development in the Soviet Union, see Heinrich, 2025). To analyse the generosity of these programmes, 'the rules of entitlement and the way

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<sup>1</sup> 'The obligation to pay contributions rests entirely on enterprises, but unlike the situation in many countries, the failure to pay does not jeopardize the right to benefits' (Rimlinger, 1971, p. 254).

that those have changed' are analysed in the following (McAuley, 1979, p. 283).

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## 1.1 Starting point: Social protection before 1917

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Already the Tsarist Empire had social legislation for industrial workers, 'although the laws on the books did not always achieve practical significance' (Rimlinger, 1971, p. 249). The Employers' Liability Act of 1866 introduced free medical care for work-related accidents and some paid basic medical services in case of illness for certain factory workers (Gorshkov, 2006, p. 143; Roosa, 1975, p. 127, fn. 9). It was, however, never consistently enforced, and factory owners rejected the law's 'validity [...] as a permanent and generally applicable requirement that employers provide medical treatment for their workers'; they insisted that it was designed 'only as a temporary measure, to assist in fighting a cholera epidemic' (Roosa, 1975, p. 137 fn. 43). The 1866 law 'was extended to apply to mines and to metallurgical establishments' in 1892 (Rimlinger, 1971, p. 252).

In the 1880s, a series of fairly extensive factory laws was introduced to improve especially the working conditions of women and minors. The law of 1882 prohibited the employment of children under the age of twelve, limited the working day to eight hours for workers aged twelve to fourteen, and established a system of periodic factory inspections charged with the task of enforcing the new factory laws (Giffin, 1966, pp. 641–642). A second law of 1884 'extended the system of factory inspection and made provisions for the education of child workers'. The third law of 1885 prohibited night work in textile mills for women and workers under the age of seventeen; this prohibition was later extended to a number of other industries (Giffin, 1966, p. 641).

The most important and comprehensive of these factory laws, though, was the so-called 'First Russian Labour Code' of 3 June 1886, as it restricted 'the area within which employers had been ruling with unchecked arbitrariness'. It defined the terms and procedures under which workers could be hired and discharged, stipulated that every work-

er be given a special pay-book (which served as the equivalent of a written labour contract), established the basic rules for the internal order of the factory, and regulated wage payments (i.e., payments at least once a month and in cash) as well as the permissible extent of fines and other deductions from wages (Giffin, 1975, p. 93; quote Rimlinger, 1960, p. 238). The law made it illegal 'for the employer to make deductions from the worker's pay for medical aid, lighting of the workshops, and use of tools' (Rimlinger, 1960, p. 238), and 'applied to workers of both sexes and of all ages, except for those employed in private mining works and in establishments owned by the State' (Giffin, 1975, p. 93).

The law of 1897 further regulated working hours, establishing an eleven-and-a-half-hour day for 'adults of both sexes, with restrictions on night work for women and on the labor of children and minors. It did not, however, impose any limits on overtime work or on the working of two shifts in succession, both of which were widely practiced' (Roosa, 1975, p. 127, fn. 9).

In 1903, a law regarding industrial accidents 'established the employers' full responsibility for industrial accidents, including both medical treatment and the provision of financial assistance to incapacitated workers' (Roosa, 1975, p. 127, fn. 9). This was followed by the Health and Accident Act of 23 June 1912, which 'provided for cash benefits in case of work-connected accidents, general illness, maternity, and death. Unfortunately, its coverage was still restricted to under one fourth of the labor force. The financing of work-connected accident benefits was entirely at the expense of employers, although employers and employees shared the cost of the other benefits' (Rimlinger, 1971, pp. 249–250, quote 250).

Overall, until 1917, the inclusiveness of the social security schemes in Imperial Russia were rather selective; they covered – to various degrees – mostly state employees,<sup>2</sup> the military and workers in large factories. While old-age pension programmes, for example, existed only for govern-

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2 However, 'the Russian government had many employees, since it owned many large enterprises, including the railroads' (Rimlinger, 1971, p. 249).

ment employees (Rimlinger, 1971, p. 249), other labour laws explicitly excluded state employees, such as the 1886 'Labour Code'. The significance of this labour legislation, however, 'lies in the establishment of precedents and in pioneer efforts in group medical care. [...] [T]he Soviet regime did not have to start from scratch. Rather, it continued and amplified, while at the same time it modified and adapted, a pattern which had existed in Russia for more than half a century' (Rimlinger, 1971, p. 252).

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## 1.2 Socialist welfare ideology

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Ideas and concepts of social welfare are deeply rooted in the history of socialism in Russia (Rimlinger, 1961, pp. 398–399). According to Karl Marx, after the abolition of capitalism, social welfare would immediately gain priority and more resources would be devoted to health and welfare services (Deacon, 1983, pp. 19–20, 34–35).

The existing welfare provisions in Imperial Russia were considered by Bolshevik leaders as backward and exploitative due to 'firstly, a lack of a centralised medical service because each tsarist Ministry had its own medical division which competed with various religious, philanthropic and public organisations; secondly, the fact that health and welfare provision was unevenly distributed, and finally, welfare was provided by dedicated *zemstvo* [organs of rural self-government] and other staff but they were over-stretched and poorly funded' (Williams, 2006, pp. 207–208, quote 208, italics added).

In 1912, while forming a separate political party, leader of the Bolshevik movement Vladimir Lenin developed principles for a socialist social security system, which were – by Western standards at the time – rather conventional: The system should provide assistance in all cases of incapacity (such as old age, accidents, illness, death of the breadwinner) as well as unemployment, maternity and birth benefits; it should cover all wage-earners and their families; the benefits should equal their earnings, and be completely financed by employers and the state; and uniform insurance companies should be managed by the insured workers

themselves<sup>3</sup> (George & Manning, 1980, p. 33; Lenin, 1977, p. 476). Lenin was rather restrictive regarding the risks and the population groups which should be covered. Only wage-earners and their families were to be insured, while the vast majority of the population in Russia, who were either farmers working for themselves or self-employed artisans in the towns, were left out. The main criterion for his idea of social security coverage was working for an employer (George & Manning, 1980, pp. 33–34). 'Lacking from Lenin's principles was any recognition that the social security system would play a part in dealing with low incomes from work, and among families with children. Also lacking was any mention of what would happen to all those who, for one reason or another, fell through the insurance net' (George & Manning, 1980, pp. 34–35).

A more radical bill proposing near-universal coverage, the major exceptions being capitalists and landowners, and a comprehensive list of insured risks was presented to the Russian Duma by the Bolsheviks in 1914. However, the bill differed from Lenin's 1912 principles in that old age was omitted as a separate risk. Instead, it set the retirement age at 50 years, thereafter entitling a worker to a disability pension (which, at the time, covered old-age income maintenance). Among the proposed benefits was free healthcare for all covered individuals, as well as institutionalised care for all beneficiaries above the retirement age, as well as for children and orphans. The scope of benefits and pensions was set equal to the individual's earnings (George & Manning, 1980, pp. 33, 36; Porket, 1989, p. 209, note 2; Rimlinger, 1971, pp. 257–258, 289).

The Bolsheviks chose the 'institutional' approach to social welfare instead of the hitherto prevailing 'residual' approach, which entailed sporadic activities in case of an emergency. The institutional approach to social welfare, however, 'envisaged welfare as an ongoing, comprehensive social institution whose major function was to prevent social breakdown and, secondarily, to

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3 Lenin's approach to workers' participation became more cautious after the revolution (George & Manning, 1980, p. 34).

make help available as a right for those who were qualified, without waiting for destitution to set in, if a breakdown occurred after all'. The Bolsheviks considered the struggle to institutionalise social welfare as part of a larger class struggle (Madison, 1964, p. 191).

After the revolution of October 1917, the Bolsheviks constructed an ideal concept of fundamental social rights for Soviet citizens to economic security (for more on social rights, see Towe, 1967; Newton, 2022). Stipulated as reciprocal rights and obligations of the state and its citizens, a 'duty to work' was enshrined in all the Soviet constitutions (Sychenko, 2013, p. 8), while the right to income maintenance was first granted in the 1936 constitution. Beginning in 1918, this concept of social rights had 'structured the theoretical edifice of political life', but did not contribute to the people's practical experience of life before the 1950s (Smith, 2012, p. 385; see also Newton, 2022, p. 144). Thus, the Soviet constitutions of 1918, 1924, and 1936 offered 'a token aspiration for future development, while pretending that this aspiration was current reality' in order to improve the regime's legitimacy (Smith, 2012, p. 388).<sup>4</sup>

Thus, social rights became 'encoded into Soviet ideology and into the party's sense of identity' (Smith, 2012, p. 395), what Newton (2022, p. 144) calls 'social welfare imaginary'. The right to income maintenance, along with the right and duty to work, became fundamental principles of socialism (Rimlinger, 1971, pp. 254–255). In practice, this meant 'to put the duty to work before other social considerations, such as protection of

family life by keeping a mother in the home rather than in the factory' (Rimlinger, 1962, p. 56).

In contrast to Western systems of government, in the socialist system the state was at the centre of the proletarian law and was considered supreme, while the individual citizen was given only limited protections (Towe, 1967, p. 1264). Due to the absence of worker contributions to the social insurance funds and of any forms of contractual commitment, the government was left with 'great freedom to manipulate the system in the "common interest"' (Rimlinger, 1971, p. 256). As a consequence, social welfare programmes 'became a weapon in the hands of the ruling party to strengthen its control over the working population. Benefits, eligibility conditions, and administrative procedures were tailored to suit the objectives of those in power' (Rimlinger, 1971, p. 245). For the benefit of a centrally directed economy, for instance, the social welfare system was used to penalise irregular work habits (Rimlinger, 1962, p. 53).

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### 1.3 Social structure, class struggle, and inclusiveness

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In order to examine the inclusiveness of the specific pieces of Soviet social legislation, which was graded according to social status groups, a brief presentation of the social structure at the beginning of the October Revolution and the formative years of the Soviet Union is in order.

The revolution of 1917 took place in a deeply rural society, in which around 82% of the population still lived in the countryside. The Bolsheviks estimated that by 1913 wage labourers amounted to 14.6% of the total population, while 'exploitative classes' (i.e., capitalists, landowners, merchants, and rich farmers, so-called 'kulaks') made up 16.3%. As Table 3 indicates, the majority of the population with 66.7% were small- and middle-sized farmers, and/or workers in the cottage industry (Selunskaya, 1987, pp. 11, 81).

Marxist theory required that society exhibit 'proper' social classes,<sup>5</sup> which existed in only

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4 From their enunciation, these social rights were defined as collective state guarantees and, since the 1936 constitution, as being predicated on the universal basis of citizenship. They were not recognised as justiciable individual claims, but rather as 'a specific set of public institutions and processes [...] for the provision and protection of the citizenry (or at least its toiling majority)' (Newton, 2022, pp. 142, 152–153, quote 142). As concrete collective social measures, they established 'an integrated social system designed to protect, support, nurture and develop the human capacities' of its citizenry, although the concept became operationalised only in the mature Soviet welfare system of the 1950s (Newton, 2022, pp. 143, 152, quote 143, italics in the original).

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5 Class can be defined as 'a social and economic group at its roots differentiated by its 'relationship to the means



a rudimentary way in Russian society of the time (Fitzpatrick, 1993, p. 745). According to the Bolsheviks' 'dialectics of class conflict', a society had to have a ruling class and its potential challenger. While the proletariat was propelled into the position of the new ruling class through the October Revolution and the subsequent civil war, these events led simultaneously 'to a breakdown of industry and flight from the cities that [...] temporarily wiped out the Russian industrial working class as a coherent social group'. Furthermore, the old ruling class as potential challenger had been overthrown and disempowered (Fitzpatrick, 1993, pp. 749–750, quote 749).

In an attempt to create the required class structure and establish their new socialist order, the Bolsheviks established from 1917 to 1936 the 'dictatorship of the proletariat', during which they started to reinvent and ascribe class identities. This resulted in class conflict and a social polarisation between the 'working class' and elements of the old order and the bourgeoisie (such as aristocrats, capitalist entrepreneurs, landowners, clerics), the so-called 'class enemies' (Fitzpatrick, 1993, p. 745; Lane, 1982, pp. 9–10). For their social engineering the Bolsheviks used discriminatory legislation based upon social origin: they resorted to 'ideologically motivated pro-worker discrimination' to secure the support of those segments of the populace upon whom Soviet power – according to Marxist theory – depended and, thus, consolidate their authority (Kimerling, 1982, p. 24). In the process of shaping their new, socialist society, the Bolsheviks stripped members of the old order and the bourgeoisie of their citizen's rights (Lane, 1982, p. 10). As a consequence, they were also excluded from the social security system (or later given only limited access).<sup>6</sup>

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of production' with a common political interest against other classes' (Lane, 1982, p. 3).

- 6 The *lishentsy*, the disenfranchised, who lost their civil rights and social benefits 'included those who employed hired labor to extract profit; persons living on nonlaboring income such as interest from capital investments or returns from property; private traders; commercial middlemen; monks and clerics; employees and agents of former police, corps of gendarmes or *Okhrana* [i.e., secret police]; members of the ruling house; the mentally ill, the insane, and persons under guardianship; and

An exception was made for members of the technical and administrative strata due to their importance for governing a state; even though many members of these strata had previously belonged to the bourgeoisie, the Bolsheviks assumed that they had not necessarily owned the means of production, and, consequently, there would be no antagonistic relationship toward the proletariat. Thus, members of the technical and administrative strata were 'declassed' in a process of social levelling and made to work for the socialist state. This resulted in the loss of their pre-revolution privileges and salaries (Lane, 1982, pp. 11, 46).

During the 'dictatorship of the proletariat', the Bolsheviks grossly oversimplified and divided the Soviet population into two major 'fraternal' classes: the working class (i.e., proletariat), composed of industrial and agricultural workers in state enterprises/farms<sup>7</sup> (*sovkhozniki*), and the socialist peasantry, comprised of what would become collective farmers (*kolkhozniki*). Members of those two classes were considered as being 'equal in rights' within the new socialist society (Dobson, 1977, p. 298; Inkeles, 1950, p. 465).

As Marxist theory considered the working class socially more advanced, it was 'destined to take the lead in building a communist society' (Lane, 1982, p. 36). However, it made up only 14.8% of the total Soviet population in 1924 (even when taken together with salaried employees), down from 17.0% in 1913; it reached its pre-war level again only in 1928, when it reached 17.6% (Vorozheikin & Senyavskii, 1977, p. 21).

The Bolsheviks had difficulties categorising the peasantry in class terms; they distinguished between 'poor farmers' (*bedniaki*), considered to be of semi-proletarian status, and 'middle farmers' (*seredniaki*), while 'rich farmers' (*kulaki*) were regarded as proto-capitalists and 'class enemies' (Fitzpatrick, 1993, p. 751). In 1917, the Bolsheviks considered 65% of the rural population to be poor farmers and 20% middle farmers, while 15% were considered to be kulaks. However, the rural

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persons convicted for crimes of greed and depravity' (Kimerling, 1982, p. 30, italics added).

- 7 State farms were considered agricultural factories; thus, their employees were regarded as agricultural workers with fixed wages (Lane, 1982, p. 37).

Table 3. Russian/Soviet class structure, 1913–1980 (in % of the total population)

|                                            | 1913 | 1924 | 1928 | 1939  | 1940 | 1958 | 1960 | 1965 | 1970 | 1975 | 1977 | 1979 | 1980 |
|--------------------------------------------|------|------|------|-------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Working Class                              | —    | —    | —    | —     | 27.5 | 46.6 | 51.5 | 55.2 | 56.6 | 59.8 | 60.3 | 60.8 | 61.2 |
| Workers and Employees                      | 17.0 | 14.8 | 17.6 | 50.2  | —    | —    | —    | —    | —    | —    | —    | —    | —    |
| of whom workers                            | 14.6 | 10.4 | 12.4 | 33.5  | —    | —    | —    | —    | —    | —    | —    | —    | —    |
| Employees (non-specialists)                | 2.4  | 4.4  | 5.2  | 16.7  | 13.2 | 11.6 | 11.5 | 12.5 | 11.8 | 8.2  | 7.3  | 7.3  | 5.9  |
| Intelligentsia                             | N/A  | N/A  | N/A  | N/A   | 3.3  | 9.3  | 10.4 | 12.5 | 15.7 | 19.4 | 20.8 | 21.2 | 22.7 |
| Collective Farmers                         | —    | 1.3* | 2.9* | 47.2* | 40.3 | 30.4 | 26.2 | 19.5 | 15.5 | 12.4 | 11.4 | 10.6 | 10.0 |
| Independent Farmers and Cottage Workers    | 66.7 | 75.4 | 74.9 | 2.6   | 12.5 | 0.2  | 0.2  | 0.1  | —    | —    | —    | —    | —    |
| Bourgeoisie, Landowners, Merchants, Kulaks | 16.3 | 8.5  | 4.6  | —     | —    | —    | —    | —    | —    | —    | —    | —    | —    |

\* Collective farmers and cooperative cottage workers.

Sources: Vorozheikin &amp; Senyavskii, 1977, pp. 21, 76; Senyavskii, 1982, pp. 343–346; own calculations.



class structure changed significantly by the second half of the 1920s: the majority of 62.7% of the rural population were by that point considered middle farmers and small producers, while 11.3% were considered proletarian farm workers, 22.1% small farmers/semi-proletarians, and 3.9% kulaks (Arutyunyan, 1970, p. 21; Selunskaya, 1987, pp. 14, 104).

Despite being 'equal in rights', the Bolsheviks considered the socialist peasantry a class of 'worker-owners' whose production was in co-operative (and not state) ownership; as a result, they allegedly did not share the socialist objectives of the proletariat, who were considered 'wage-workers'. Consequently, the peasantry was considered by the Bolsheviks 'as not being fully emancipated from the fetters of the capitalist mode of production' (Lane, 1982, p. 38) and it was – for a long time – deemed unsuitable for inclusion in an income maintenance system (Lewin, 1985b, p. 193; Madison, 1964, p. 195). In the early years of the Soviet Union, the same discriminatory reasoning applied to the self-employed (i.e., artisans, shopkeepers); eventually, these groups were pushed out of existence.

Similarly, salaried employees (*sluzhashchie*) did not fit neatly in the new class system because the Bolsheviks were distrustful towards them and 'too anxious about the class purity of the proletariat and the validity of their own proletarian credentials' to incorporate them into the working class (Fitzpatrick, 1993, p. 751). Consequently, salaried employees were given a separate, distinctly non-proletarian class status until the mid-1930s (Fitzpatrick, 1993, p. 752); however, they were included in the income maintenance system, even though their scope of benefits was reduced in comparison to members of the working class (i.e., wage-earners).<sup>8</sup>

8 However, this did not find representation in the first Soviet national population census, which was conducted in 1926: 'Its basic socioeconomic categories were wage and salary earners (proletariat), on the one hand, and "proprietors" [private employers] (*khoziaeva*), urban and rural, on the other. In the latter group, which included the entire peasantry as well as urban artisans and businessmen, those employing hired labor [...] were rigorously differentiated from those working alone or with the assistance of family members' (Fitzpatrick, 1993,

Moreover, the leading role and the hopes vested in the working class 'gave way more and more frequently, after the revolution, to a discourse on the vulnerability of the proletariat to the influence of the petite bourgeoisie and especially of the peasantry, even though this latter group was supposedly an ally' (Lewin, 1985b, pp. 193–194). The Bolsheviks always feared a conflict with the peasantry, which in their mind could have led to a counter-revolution (Lewin, 1985b, p. 193).

As the Bolsheviks had 'to create a socio-economic base which would secure their rule' (Lane, 1982, p. 13), a second phase of the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' started in 1926 which 'included the obliteration of what were regarded as the remaining bourgeois state, the smallholding peasantry, and the creation of a large working class and a "communist" intelligentsia' (Lane, 1982, p. 13).

At the beginning of the collectivisation of Soviet agriculture in 1929, only 3.9% of farm households had been collectivised; by 1938, the percentage of collectivised households had increased to 93.5% (Lane, 1982, p. 14). The percentage of collective farmers among farmers as a whole increased from 2.9% to 47.2% between 1928 and 1939, while that of independent farmers declined from 74.9% to 2.6%. Wage-earners and salaried employees increased their share from 17.6% to 50.2% of the Soviet population over that same period, while the bourgeoisie, landowner, and merchant classes ceased to exist. Consequently, the working class became the dominant class by 1939 (Lane, 1982, p. 15; Vorozheikin & Senyavskii, 1977, p. 21).

Overall, the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' – using sanctions and terror as a mechanism to ensure conformity – 'made the conditions in which a proletariat was created' (Lane, 1982, p. 26). As the sanction mechanism 'was directed against those who were thought to be sympathetic to the dispossessed classes', the resulting inequality in the Soviet society was of a political nature (Lane, 1982, p. 32, quote 16).

With the beginning of the 1930s, the fight against 'class enemies' died down. 'In reaction to

pp. 754–755, italics added).

its excesses, the institutional structures of class discrimination were largely dismantled in the period 1931–36' (Fitzpatrick, 1993, p. 757).<sup>9</sup> Eventually, in 1936, the authorities 'proclaimed the achievement of a "classless society"' (Kimerling, 1982, p. 27) with three major social groups: workers, collective farmers, and intelligentsia. This last category 'was the merging of the old "employees" category with both the intelligentsia and the Communist administrative elite to form a single white-collar conglomerate called "the Soviet intelligentsia"' (Fitzpatrick, 1993, p. 766).

Regarding the inclusiveness of the income maintenance system, the Soviet legislation, which developed an ever-lengthening list of detailed criteria for the assessment of general eligibility and benefit/provision level granted for social programmes, differentiated the working class into specific groups of beneficiaries: wage-earners (industrial workers, agricultural workers); further strata of the working class with fewer privileges, including seasonal/temporary workers and journeymen; and salaried employees, which were at first a separated category, but since 1936–37 treated equally to wage-earners. Further smaller groups associated with the working class were students, and the urban and rural poor.

## 1.4 Administration of social welfare

The workplace became the key access point to welfare benefits, including social security and healthcare, within the Soviet welfare system (Deacon, 2000, p. 147).<sup>10</sup> Social protection was only

guaranteed for a person in full-time formal employment which 'operated primarily through the "work collective", with general and individual social policy schemes being decided at the central level, by the Communist Party through branch ministries and state committees, which passed on resource allocations to enterprises to be dispersed by trade union officials, and to a certain extent enterprise managers' (Standing, 1996, p. 227). Furthermore, a growing system of factory-based ambulances and polyclinics began to replace regional hospitals; factory-based insurance organs administered their services thereby enshrining the privileged and separate medical treatment of industrial workers (Ewing, 1990, pp. 83, 91). Thus, the actual entitlement was based on one's position and employment duration in the enterprise (Standing, 1996, p. 228). 'Workers gained welfare rights (which under Josef Stalin were entirely theoretical) as a result of their employment. Their employer dispensed many of the welfare benefits to which they were entitled. Industrial enterprises owned not just factories, but apartment blocks, theatres, workers' clubs, hospitals and schools' (Smith, 2015, p. 601).<sup>11</sup>

The civil war left the working class in 1921 decimated and weak. Many had left the cities for the countryside; thus, not being able to control and manage the factories due to their absence, work-

and craftsmen was carried out through their producers' co-operatives and their mutual insurance schemes (International Labour Review, 1947, pp. 272–273).

- 11 It was in the Soviet 'company town' (i.e., urban settlements dominated by one large enterprise, also being the main provider of citizens' social welfare) where the link between the city and welfare provision manifested itself in its most extreme form. The company town 'was an urban environment in which work, domesticity, social services and leisure were precisely connected under the auspices of an all-embracing welfare system. Company towns ranged from whole cities of little more than a single employer, such as Magnitogorsk, with its gargantuan steel works in the Urals, to metropolitan districts, [...] to the small-scale, so-called workers' settlements that existed across the USSR, built around, say, a timber combine or a railway junction' (Smith, 2015, p. 601; see also e.g., Kotkin, 1998; Siegelbaum, 2008). Comparable to company towns, there were also large-scale urban settlements in the (immediate) vicinity of prison camps (Smith, 2015, p. 601; see also e.g., Barenberg, 2014).

9 'The decline of genuine concern about class was also manifest in the abrupt collapse of social statistics, a major research industry in the 1920s – particularly the disappearance of the formerly ubiquitous tables showing the class breakdown of every imaginable population and institution' (Fitzpatrick, 1993, p. 764).

10 The social welfare of collective farmers was administered by special mutual aid funds which were established by the individual collective farms. These funds were financed by contributions from the management of the individual farm and supervised by the Ministry of Social Welfare of the respective Soviet republic. Sickness, old-age and invalidity benefits were paid partly in cash and partly in kind. The social insurance of artisans

ers' self-management was soon replaced by the Soviet trade unions, which became increasingly powerful (Lewin, 1985b, p. 195). In the 1930s, the unions became 'responsible for the regulation and administration of temporary social insurance benefits for workers and salaried employees', such as sickness and maternity benefits, as well as 'birth grants'<sup>12</sup> (Rimlinger, 1961, pp. 397, 401–402, quote 397). Government ministries, on the other hand, administered pensions (for disability, old age, and survivorship), as well as social security benefits, such as child allowances. While not responsible for the application and interpretation of these provisions, the unions nevertheless participated in their adjudication; union representatives were, for instance, members of the local pension committees and of the industrial medical expert committees, which settled disability claims (Rimlinger, 1961, pp. 399–401, 410).

Soviet trade unions were state-controlled organisations and had a dual function: while their primary function was to encourage 'and if necessary, drive the workers to greater production, better quality, and lower costs', as leading organisations of the working class, it was 'their function to look after the welfare and legitimate interests of workers and employees'. Thus, the unions' work was characterised frequently by these conflicting goals. Typically designed to protect the individual and his/her family against certain exigencies, the provision of social insurance benefits offered unions 'also opportunities for stimulating the incentive to work, for the promotion of labor discipline, and for attracting workers into otherwise less desirable jobs' (Rimlinger, 1961, p. 398).

As the Soviet social legislation was notoriously complex, it often gave administrators 'some discretion in the determination of a particular individual's eligibility, in the calculation of his benefit level, and especially in the promptness with which a given case [was] handled. Most countries make efforts to minimize this discretion, but the opposite seems to be the case in the Soviet Union. The Soviet leaders decreed in the 1930s that social insurance administration should aim deliberately at prefer-

ential treatment for shock workers [i.e., workers who fulfilled or exceeded production plan goals] and workers in certain essential occupations and should discipline unsatisfactory workers. Preferential treatment for favored groups was already built into the laws in the form of higher benefit rates, but the trade unions had further power to discriminate when it came to the distribution of passes to resorts and rest homes, and to pioneer camps for children' (Rimlinger, 1962, p. 58).

Besides preferential discrimination, local trade union organs were encouraged to take action against any person 'abusing' the system (i.e., not considered worthy of social welfare benefits) while examining claims for and awarding sickness and maternity benefits. The adjudication of sickness benefits gave trade unions, for example, opportunities for controlling absenteeism, as union members routinely visited the sick person: through this kind of supervision, they could deny benefits to anyone not following the doctor's orders or to so-called 'drifters', 'troublemakers', and 'idlers'. On the other hand, the unions recorded the reported rates of benefit claims in order to pursue lowering sickness and accident rates and promote health and rehabilitation (Rimlinger, 1961, pp. 409–410, 412).

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## 1.5 Government's motivation for social welfare

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In the Soviet Union, economic policy had always shaped social policy. As a result, '[s]ocial policies [were] expanded, contracted or modified to suit the goals of economic policy' (George & Manning, 1980, p. 1). For this purpose, and to strengthen the Bolsheviks' control over the population, social benefits, eligibility requirements, and administrative procedures were frequently modified to suit the government's objectives (Rimlinger, 1971, p. 245). Thus, in the Soviet Union the social welfare system 'became a lever in the state planning mechanism, a means to achieve goals only remotely related to individual and family welfare. To the conventional welfare tasks of social insurance, the Soviet leaders added the task of

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12 A 'birth grant' is a one-time payment on the occasion of childbirth.

influencing the quantity, quality, and allocation of labor resources' (Rimlinger, 1962, p. 52).

Based on the criteria of policy aims and resources, implementation, and policy effects, Manning (1992: 33) distinguished four periods of Soviet social policy according to its shifting focus:<sup>13</sup>

(1) The 'utopian' period from 1917 to 1921 featured the promulgation of social policies that – due to the lack of resources – could not possibly be implemented. 'However, [their] enactment was designed to secure the political allegiance of urban workers, at a time when the outcome of the revolution was by no means certain, and this secondary effect may have been important' (Manning, 1984, p. 78). It 'was the time of wide debate about the future of social policy', with a general agreement on core values and overall objectives (Manning, 1992a, p. 33). 'Egalitarianism' was the overarching aim of the time; however, wage differentials between skilled and unskilled workers were recognised as necessary (Lane, 1982, pp. 20–21).

(2) In the period from 1921 to 1928, 'social policy was overhauled and brought into a more realistic alignment with the resources available' by, for instance, restricting social benefits to skilled workers, as well as reintroducing rents (which had been abolished in 1921) to stimulate housing investments (Manning, 1984, p. 76). Confined to the urban areas, the practical realisation of these policies was much more successful than the immediate post-revolutionary plans. 'However, this concentration was also undertaken to retain the commitment of urban workers, still the power base of the party, and to extend the control of state administration' (Manning, 1984, p. 78). The period was characterised by increasing social change and by a 'greater debate about the nature and

existence of social issues, and therefore the kind of solutions which should be adopted' (Manning, 1992a, p. 33). Eventually, the debate shifted 'from an assumption of value consensus to a struggle over value conflict' resulting in the assumption that violence against so-called 'problem groups' was justified as a method of resolving social problems (Manning, 1992a, p. 34)

(3) The industrialisation of the Soviet Union became the main concern in the Stalinist period (1928–1956) and the 'framework within which social concerns were analysed and dealt with. Debate about the problematic nature of social conditions withered' (Manning, 1992a, p. 34). During the industrialisation drive, 'the whole tenor of social policy changed sharply [...] this time to meet the requirements for a flexible and disciplined labour supply rather than urban political loyalty' (Manning, 1984, p. 78). The 'supply and discipline of labour was a perennial concern. Anything that appeared to get in the way of this objective was liable to be seen as deviant'. This focus on industrialisation made the peasantry the main 'problem group' in the late 1920s and early 1930s (Manning, 1992a, p. 34). Egalitarianism in remuneration – once considered a socialist ideal – became 'antisocialist' in the 1930s and gave way to a movement for personal incentive based on differential rewards (Inkeles, 1950, p. 465; Lewin, 1985a, p. 35). Rules defining rights at work and social entitlement programmes were progressively tightened, and the usage of these entitlement programmes 'came to be seen as an individual failing' (Manning, 1992a, p. 34). The massively strengthened state apparatus was able to successfully implement these policies; however, needs less related to production work – such as comfortable housing and disability and old-age pensions – were neglected (Manning, 1984, p. 78).

In recent years, the traditional chronology and labelling of the post-war and post-Stalin period in Soviet history has become a topic of much academic debate (see, e.g., Fürst, 2010; Morcom, 2016; Smith, 2010) as they do not necessarily provide an adequate frame for the most recent research. Thus, it is helpful to subdivide the Stalinist period and distinguish 'Late Stalinism', covering

13 This categorisation suggests a precision that did not exist in real life. The described social and political processes were more fluid and might have started earlier, that is, in the previous time period, even though their main consequences were only (or mostly) felt in the stated time period. Nevertheless, while the 'fuzzier edges' of these time periods are acknowledged, for the purpose of this working paper these rough categorisations are still of value as they are able to attach the general trends and directions of Soviet social policies to specific time periods.

the time period from the end of World War II in 1945 to the beginning of the leadership of Nikita Khrushchev in 1956, from Stalinism of the pre-war years.

The period of 'Late Stalinism' had previously been seen as a period of reconstruction and recovery from the enormous war losses followed by the reestablishment of the repressive Stalinist system. More recent contributions show a more nuanced picture of a dynamic society in search of new identities, examining the emergence of new forms of interaction between the state and the broad population (see, e.g., Dale, 2015; Manley, 2006; Morcom, 2016). Zubkova (1998) and Varga-Harris (2006) have noted the appearance of a new discourse in the post-war years and the Khrushchev period in which Soviet citizens began to act more self-consciously due to the new source of legitimacy provided by victory in World War II, which 'recalibrated how people thought, behaved and interacted' (Dale, 2015, p. 494). Many later recalled the war 'as a period of individual freedom, responsibility and agency' (Dale, 2015, p. 494; see also Seniavskaja, 1995), during which '[v]ictimization and fatalism gave way to the celebration of activity and continuity; the traumas of collectivization, famine, and terror gave way to the triumphant war' (Weiner, 2001, p. 384).

Soviet veterans and industrial workers called for adequate compensation from the state in exchange for the efforts and sacrifices they had made during and after the war (Edele, 2006, 2009; Filtzer, 2002, 2006). They had developed a sense of entitlement to welfare benefits, insisting on their rights to food, adequate housing, and other material provisions, in many cases appealing to the state's own promises. Consequently, World War II had a major impact on the extent of the Soviet welfare system as 'major parts of the welfare apparatus were expanded. The mass housing program that has often been associated with the Khrushchev years was made possible by new construction that began in the closing stages of the war' (Smith, 2012, p. 394).<sup>14</sup>

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14 However, Khlevniuk & Gorlizki (2004) stress the logic of Stalin's personal power over post-war political developments in that time period and challenge notions of pressure from social forces.

(4) The period from 1956 to 1991 saw a distinct shift toward a dual objective to increase both welfare and productivity. Overall, social welfare programmes were massively expanded, both in terms of inclusiveness and of scope of benefits (Manning, 1984, p. 78).<sup>15</sup> From 1957 to 1964, an intense debate about the future direction of social policies took place, leading to a politicising of social issues and a revival of egalitarianism (Manning, 1992a, p. 35). With the new middle class (i.e., industrial managers, senior intellectuals, party careerists), a new 'problem group' was discovered. As a result, the initiated reforms, especially in the education sector, were to prioritise workers and their descendants at the expense of these more privileged groups (Manning, 1992a, p. 35). Between 1964 and 1991, social and political stability became paramount resulting in a relative continuity in social policies (notwithstanding some roll-backs on egalitarianism). Higher levels of social services consumption were maintained, 'but in the service of repeated attempts to bolster flagging labour productivity. In particular, access to comfortable housing and higher education [became] important elements of the structure of work incentives' (Manning, 1984, p. 79). Despite an absence of debate, a consensus about the problems facing Soviet society returned and only deviant individuals were at this point to be rooted out, instead of whole groups (Manning, 1992a, pp. 35–36).

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15 Obinger (2025) argues that the Cold War, with its system competition between two antagonistic blocs, is an important geopolitical factor helping to explain the welfare expansion in the socialist countries in Central and Eastern Europe. There was a growing pressure over time to improve the living conditions and social protection of the people in order to bolster the legitimacy and stability of the socialist regimes in comparison to the West.



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## 2 DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL WELFARE LEGISLATION IN THE SOVIET UNION

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### 2.1 Social security from 1917 to 1921

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With their takeover of government in 1917, the Bolsheviks 'had no option but to implement a comprehensive system of social insurance, for they had campaigned so long and so fervently for such provision' (George & Manning, 1980, p. 36; see also Rimlinger, 1971, pp. 257–258).

On 30 October/12 November 1917, the Bolshevik government announced a radical new social insurance programme which was to implement Lenin's 1912 principles: (1) the social insurance should cover all wage-earners without exception and all urban and rural poor; (2) it should cover all risks of income loss (sickness, injury, invalidity, old age, maternity, death of breadwinner, and unemployment); (3) all the costs should be borne by employers; (4) the unemployment and sickness benefits should be paid at a rate of 100% of previous wages; and (5) the insured should be in full control of the programme's administration (Abramson, 1929, p. 377; Duncan, 1935, pp. 181–182; Rimlinger, 1971, p. 258).

However, the Bolshevik government had practically no administrative capacity to enforce these new regulations, making an introduction of the new programme extremely difficult. Furthermore, these universal provisions were unsupported by any government finances, and soon had to be cut back (Caroli, 2003, p. 32; Rimlinger, 1971, pp. 258–259). 'The laws passed during the early years of the Bolshevik regime, therefore, had little significance, other than [that] they reflected the aims of the new government' (Rimlinger, 1971, p. 259).

Consequently, the first two social policy laws on unemployment (11 December/24 December 1917) and sickness and maternity benefits, as well as burial grants (22 December 1917/4 January 1918), provided benefits only to skilled wage-earners, regardless of the length of their previous employment. As a deviation from Lenin's original intentions, however, protection was not extended to the entire proletariat. Benefits were

equal to the average local wage, provided they did not exceed the worker's previous earnings. Given the numerical dominance of the peasantry at the time, the vast majority of the population was excluded from the scheme (Caroli, 2003, p. 32; George & Manning, 1980, pp. 36–37; Rimlinger, 1971, p. 259). Additionally, the laws failed 'to enact the promised protection against invalidity, old-age, and survivorship' (Rimlinger, 1971, p. 259).

On 31 October 1918, at the beginning of the civil war, the social insurance programmes were expanded – both in terms of risks covered and population groups included – in an attempt to secure the loyalty and support of the peasantry. Social insurance became a social security scheme 'founded upon the relief rather than the insurance principle' for the entire population (Abramson, 1935, p. 365; Caroli, 2003, p. 33; quote Duncan, 1935, p. 182). It included self-employed people and farmers (as long as they were not employing hired labour), as well as their family members. The risks covered included unemployment, sickness, maternity, invalidity and (as a form thereof) old-age, survivorship and burial costs (Abramson, 1929, p. 381; Duncan, 1935, p. 182; George & Manning, 1980, p. 37). The benefits and pensions were egalitarian and geared to the local average wage 'instead of to the previous earnings of the beneficiary' (Rimlinger, 1971, p. 260).

As financing the scheme became increasingly difficult, the Bolsheviks realised that certain ambitions could not be realised and confined the inclusiveness of social security once again to wage-earners only; the decree of 15 November 1921 abandoned artisans, shopkeepers, farmers, and temporary workers (Abramson, 1929, p. 382; Caroli, 2003, p. 34). Self-employed people were instead encouraged to join special mutual aid societies (see below) that were funded from various inadequate sources, including members' contributions. Additionally, benefit payments to wage-earners were made conditional, for instance, on their employment record, place of residence, and union membership. The scope and duration of benefits became variable according to the risk covered (Caroli, 2003, p. 34; George & Manning, 1980, p. 38).

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## 2.2 Social security from 1921 to 1928

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Adopted in November 1922, the new Labour Code clarified the rights and duties of workers, incorporating various prior decrees and revisions to them. The insured risks and benefits included (1) medical assistance; (2) temporary sickness; (3) permanent disability or invalidity; (4) death or disappearance of the breadwinner; (5) unemployment; and (6) supplementary forms of assistance, payable to nursing mothers and for burials (Duncan, 1935, p. 182; Rimlinger, 1971, p. 263). The Labour Code rendered 'all wage-earners liable to insurance, [...] irrespective of the nature and duration of their employment and the method of remuneration. Thus, in theory, the Soviet system of insurance [covered] the entire working-class' (Abramson, 1929, p. 383). However, seasonal and temporary workers were only insured against certain risks, while agricultural workers and farmers were completely excluded (Abramson, 1929, pp. 383–384).

As the state budget proved inadequate to finance it, the universal approach of the original social security scheme was 'narrowed from time to time by omitting certain groups that were making heavy inroads on relief funds, such as persons engaged in temporary or seasonal work, and by restricting the participation of some other groups' (Duncan, 1935, p. 185). The system left farmers, casual workers, and other non-privileged groups (nearly) without care; Duncan (1935, p. 187) describes the Soviet social insurance therefore as 'a class system of insurance'.

There was considerable discussion about the introduction of a separate old-age pension programme. Since 1925, workers had been eligible for a disability pension if they were at least 50 years of age, incapacitated (by old age), and had worked continuously during the preceding eight years. In 1928, the first specific old-age pension scheme in the Soviet Union was initially restricted to textile workers (in an attempt to rejuvenate the workforce), but later extended to other industrial branches. The retirement age was set at 60 years for men and 55 for women. Additionally, a 25-year 'work record' (as opposed to employment record) was required for eligibility. This

new concept of a 'work record' was used as a 'measure of an insured individual's contribution of "useful work" to society'. This represents an important shift with regard to the right to social security. 'Previous work requirements mainly were intended to assure that an individual belonged to the status group entitled to protection. Now, apparently, an individual also had to be personally deserving by having contributed to society' (Rimlinger, 1971, p. 267).

Overall, the reforms during this period 'focused mainly on supporting the Soviet Union's industrial development, rather than on introducing a welfare system intended to foster overall social cohesion' (Caroli, 2003, p. 35).

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## 2.3 Social security in the context of rapid industrialisation (1928 to 1956)

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With the commencement of the first Five-Year-Plan (FYP) in 1928, the social security system became completely subservient to the drive toward industrialisation. The egalitarianism of the early years was to be eradicated from the social security system and replaced by a privileged treatment of special groups of workers. Social welfare benefits were seen as a tool to fight labour turnover as these were subject to certain conditions, such as work discipline, employment duration, etc. (George & Manning, 1980, p. 39; Rimlinger, 1971, p. 271). Thus, the social security system had three interrelated objectives which, in turn, were to facilitate industrial growth:

(1) To increase the supply of labour. In 1930, unemployment benefits were abolished and the duty to work was strengthened; in 1938, the maternity leave duration was reduced by more than 30% (George & Manning, 1980, p. 39; Rimlinger, 1971, p. 271).

(2) To increase labour discipline. A lack of discipline could lead to the loss of benefits and privileges; thus, benefits became conditional on one's employment record. Furthermore, from 1931 on, uninterrupted employment in the same enterprise became the main determinant of the scope of

benefits one could receive (George & Manning, 1980, p. 40; Rimlinger, 1971, p. 271).

(3) To modify social security in line with industrial priorities. Privileges were granted for certain industries/groups of workers deemed important; various regulations sought to justify restrictions and discrimination in unemployment, disability, and maternity benefits on ideological grounds (Caroli, 2003, pp. 46–47; George & Manning, 1980, p. 40).

This resulted in preferential treatment of workers in certain industries that were considered particularly important for the fulfilment of the FYPs, such as the iron and steel, mining, engineering, chemical, and transportation industries, and in the elimination of the existing tendency toward egalitarian pay scales. 'It followed that trade-union members should receive higher disability benefits and favored treatment in the distribution of passes to rest homes and health resorts' (Rimlinger, 1971, p. 279). At the same time, the financing of old-age, survivor, and disability pensions, as well as healthcare and housing, were shifted from the social insurance funds to the state budget (Rimlinger, 1971, pp. 277, 279–280).

In 1937, the inclusiveness of the welfare scheme was extended, as 'old-age pensions were [now] provided for salaried workers rather than for manual workers only' (George & Manning, 1980, p. 41). However, collective farmers were still left out, having only the inadequate scheme of mutual aid societies to rely upon (George & Manning, 1980, p. 41).

Such mutual aid societies for collective farmers were established on a voluntary basis at the participating collective farms, administered independently from the farm's management. The societies were financed by contributions of the farm's management in cash and in kind (up to 2% of the farm's annual income). The benefits granted to its members in the case of sickness, old-age and invalidity were paid partly in cash and partly in kind. The societies would also allocate housing for retired collective farmers and were entrusted with the care of orphans, survivors of war victims, and war invalids (International Labour Review, 1947, p. 272). Artisans and craftsmen were organised in producers' co-operatives, which had their own

mutual social insurance schemes. Persons who were entitled to benefits from neither the state social insurance scheme nor one of the mutual aid societies would receive state-funded assistance in their old age, and in the case of invalidity they were placed in care homes (International Labour Review, 1947, p. 273).

As labour discipline was still considered a serious problem after the 1931 restrictions, from 1938 on every worker was required to carry a work-book 'that was to contain a record of jobs held, with reasons for transfers, and the details of promotions and awards'. Additionally, it was made illegal to quit a job without the permission of the management (Rimlinger, 1971, p. 272). The law of 28 December 1938 also differentiated according to the kind of work done: for dangerous and unhealthy occupations, the eligibility rules were more lenient (Rimlinger, 1971, pp. 272, 275). Furthermore, the 'introduction of the concept of unbroken service [i.e., uninterrupted employment] at the same establishment clearly was intended to combat not only labor turnover but also absenteeism. Unauthorized absenteeism was treated as an interruption of the unbroken work record' (Rimlinger, 1971, p. 274).<sup>16</sup> A decree of 8 January 1939 stipulated 'that being more than twenty minutes late for work constituted unauthorized absence from work' (Porket, 1989, p. 62). With the clear purpose to discipline the insured workers, the 1938 law made uninterrupted employment record in the same enterprise the chief determinant of the scope of social benefits one could receive. It also used negative incentives to nudge workers to join the labour unions: 'For workers who were not trade union members, the benefits were now set at one half the rate paid to union members in the same category' (Rimlinger, 1971, p. 275).

Several social programmes were brought in line with the new labour policy, which resulted in an increase in or introduction of previous uninterrupted employment requirements and stiffer pen-

16 'In principle, this refers to employment at a particular enterprise or organization, but as might be expected, there exists a complex set of conditions and legal rulings covering justifiable interruptions in service and legitimate changes in employment' (McAuley, 1979, p. 277).



alties (Rimlinger, 1971, pp. 274–276). In 1940, further penalties were introduced, including ‘corrective labor at the place of employment, which involved a loss of certain social security benefits and a 25 percent reduction of pay’ (Rimlinger, 1971, p. 272). In 1948, the previous uninterrupted employment requirement for full earnings benefits for all programmes was raised to eight years, while the requirements for lesser rates were scaled up correspondingly. However, many exceptions had been introduced over time that made the definition of ‘uninterrupted employment’ less rigorous (Rimlinger, 1971, p. 276). In 1955, priority rates for certain industries were abolished and the ‘maximum benefit was set at 90 percent of earnings, for which now 12 years of unbroken service was required in all industries’ (Rimlinger, 1971, p. 276).

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## 2.4 Major reforms after the death of Stalin: From consolidation to stagnation (1956 to 1991)

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After 1955, existing regulations for social welfare benefits were standardised and extended in both their inclusiveness and scope of benefits by, for example, revoking restrictions from the Stalin era (Stiller, 1983, p. 107). With the introduction of the State Pension Law of 1956, the Soviet Union established for the first time a comprehensive social security and welfare policy (Plaggenborg, 2019, p. 45). It marked a fundamental change in the relationship between the state and its population as the social protection of the individual became one of the most important tasks of domestic politics, resulting in new old-age pension provisions for workers and salaried employees and later, in 1964, collective farmers (Ivanova & Plaggenborg, 2015; Mücke, 2013, p. 17).

After 1964, social policy in the Soviet Union achieved on the whole a basic social security net against life’s risks; however, large social and regional disparities remained because some industrial branches were still privileged (Plaggenborg, 2019, p. 50). Additionally, the redistributive impact of these programmes was probably rather small, as most benefits were tied to earnings; thus, ‘high-income households [received] more from

the state than poor households’ (McAuley, 1979, pp. 260–261, quote 268). However much these social programmes ‘may have contributed to average living standards, there is evidence to suggest that their detailed administration [...] resulted in the perpetuation of substantial inequities’ (McAuley, 1979, p. 288).

During the 1970s and 1980s, economic growth in the Soviet Union began to decline, and the value of entitlements declined with it (in real terms). ‘Nevertheless, social policy gave post-Stalinist elites a tool that they could use to pursue political acquiescence if not support, and in turn generated relatively stable expectations about the benefits that the state would provide’ (Haggard & Kaufman, 2009, p. 67). However, the constant and increasing lack of finance for the welfare system resulted eventually in a social collapse: in 1990, around 25% of all fixed income recipients lived still below the poverty line (Plaggenborg, 2019, pp. 57–58).

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## 3 INDIVIDUAL WELFARE PROGRAMMES

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A closer look at the individual entitlement programmes provides us with insights into the level of equity and generosity of the Soviet social welfare system. The following section starts with income maintenance programmes that were related to the prior earnings of the beneficiary, such as pensions, unemployment and sickness benefits, maternity allowances, and burial grants. Then it looks at income maintenance programmes that were granted independently of prior earnings, such as child allowances and the family income supplement. Finally, the section deals with welfare benefits available to the general public, such as education, healthcare, housing, and consumer price subsidies.

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### 3.1 Income maintenance (related to prior earnings)

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In the case of income maintenance, one can distinguish between benefits available in case of a

permanent loss of working capacity (i.e., pensions) and allowances paid in the case of certain temporary incapacitations, such as sickness, unemployment, and maternity. Both group of benefits were connected to prior earnings (McAuley, 1979, pp. 269, 276).

### 3.1.1 PENSIONS

The Soviet Union provided old-age, invalidity/disability, survivor, long-service and personal pensions. However, until 1956, the Soviet pension system had the character of a caste system: the right to a pension was granted for each occupational group or social class separately through individual laws in reaction to current events. This approach rewarded their individual contribution to the economic development of the Soviet Union and/or to the socialist cause more generally, resulting in an atomised pension system (George & Manning, 1980, p. 45; Stiller, 1983, p. 95).

The first group granted a pension in the form of a long-service pension were specific groups of teachers in 1924–25 who had been involved in an alphabetisation campaign and in the rapid training of political cadres – teachers in primary and village schools as well as university teachers at the so-called ‘workers’ faculties’. In the 1930s, teachers at secondary schools were added to the scheme. In 1950, all university teachers were granted long-service pensions, before in 1960 all personnel in the educational sector were ultimately included in the pension scheme (Stiller, 1983, p. 96).

The first occupational group completely covered by a pension scheme were officers of the Red Army who received a long-service pension in 1926. The group of beneficiaries was expanded in 1940–41 to non-commissioned officers and professional soldiers; soldiers completing mandatory military service could claim invalidity and survivor pensions. The law of 1941 antedated the pension law for wage-earners and salaried employees of 1956; it was the only major pension law of the pre-World War II era (Stiller, 1983, p. 96).

In 1928, the first specific old-age pension was introduced, in the beginning only for textile workers in order to rejuvenate the labour force in this

sector. Before the introduction of old-age pensions, persons in retirement age were treated as invalids eligible for a disability pension (Rimlinger, 1971, p. 267; Stiller, 1983, p. 98). In 1930–31, the old-age pension system was extended in three stages to several key branches of the Soviet economy: heavy industry, transportation, and mining. Other industrial branches were formally included in 1932. Further groups, whose goodwill and loyalty were deemed important to be won or retained, were successively included in the 1930s: physicians and mid-level medical personnel in rural areas; artists; civilian pilots and flying personnel; and selected groups of salaried employees (Stiller, 1983, pp. 98–99). In 1937, the pension programmes were also ‘extended to cover for the first time persons who had been deprived of their electoral rights because of their social origin or previous activities’ (Rimlinger, 1971, p. 280).

However, many people could not or did not utilise their formal entitlement because they could not fulfil the many requirements due to gaps in the documentation of an uninterrupted employment record, ignorance regarding their entitlement or the low level of benefits, which meant that many preferred to continue working instead (Stiller, 1983, pp. 99–100).

After World War II, the group of beneficiaries was further extended to physicians and mid-level medical personnel in cities (rather than only in the countryside), who were granted a long-service pension in 1949, followed by scientists and university teachers in 1950 (Stiller, 1983, p. 103). In 1953, the pension system was extended to the first major group in the agricultural sector, to workers at machine and tractor stations; since 1929–30, only a small group of agricultural engineers and veterinarians had hitherto been entitled to an old-age pension (Stiller, 1983, p. 107, fn. 58).

Overall, between 1947 and 1955 alone, the Soviet government passed several hundred regulations ‘raising pension rates in various sectors, some relating to specific plants and to shops within plants’ (Rimlinger, 1961, p. 400, fn. 12). Thus, for civilian state employees and their dependents, wage-earners and salaried employees alike, the State Pension Law of 1956 meant to systematise the fragmented Soviet pension system that had

grown out of a variety of industrial schemes in the preceding decades (McAuley, 1979, p. 269; Stiller, 1983, pp. 75, 108, 110).

With the 1956 Pension Law, however, the 'contrast between social security for workers and for collective farmers had become so glaring [...] that it was a [only] matter of time before something was done' (George & Manning, 1980, p. 42). In 1964, the Pension Law for Collective Farmers was adopted, for which the State Pension Law served as the blueprint. However, 'the extension of social security to the peasantry made very little difference to the system as a whole', being rather 'seen as an alternative to other possible developments of the social welfare system' (McAuley, 1979, p. 265).

'The three main weaknesses of the Soviet pension scheme [were] that the minimum pension [was] too low when compared with the average wage; that allowances for dependents [were] too slight; and, above all, that pensions [were] not raised automatically in line with [rises] in either prices or wages' (George & Manning, 1980, p. 48). Thus, the mid-1980s saw further improvements in pension regulations which started to take into account the living standard of poorer groups of the populace and their economic difficulties. For instance, in 1988, about 14% of the Soviet population lived in poverty. Consequently, in January 1990, the minimum pensions were raised to the level of the minimum wage (70 roubles per month at the time) (Manning, 1992a, p. 50).

### 3.1.1.1 Old-Age pensions

For a long time, the number of old-age pensioners in the Soviet Union was small. According to estimates, by 1959, around half of those who had been employed in state-owned enterprises and farms over the retirement age of 60 (55 for women) were without financial support from the state. Reasons for this included administrative difficulties, missing paperwork, missed deadlines, and non-fulfilment of eligibility requirements. It was not before the mid-1960s that old-age pensions became the dominant form of pensions in the Soviet Union. By 1970, the number of people of retirement age without a pension had been reduced to 20–25% (McAuley, 1979, p. 276; Stiller, 1983,

pp. 27, 100, 104). This rise of old-age pensions over the years created an increasing financial burden on the country's budget. However, for 'political and other reasons, the Soviet Union [found] it difficult to ease the problem by raising retirement ages' (George & Manning, 1980, p. 45).

Consequently, the government instead limited the scope of benefits. 'As a percentage of earnings, pensions were as a rule lower than temporary disability benefits' (Rimlinger, 1971, p. 276). The replacement rate of earnings-related old-age pensions averaged approximately 40% of the national average wage (IMF et al., 1991a, p. 333). To compensate for the low replacement rate, Soviet citizens were officially encouraged to continue working beyond their retirement age for both social and economic reasons. A majority of them did indeed work longer than required to qualify for a pension (George & Manning, 1980, p. 45; Stiller, 1983, p. 143). While in 1979 around 12% of all old-age pensioners were still working, this share had risen to 17% by 1989. However, there were limits to the amount of money that one could earn without a reduction in old-age pension benefits (IMF et al., 1991a, p. 333, 1991b, p. 139).

### *The State Pension Law of 1956*

In 1956, the State Pension Law introduced for the first time a general and comprehensive old-age pension, while systematising existing pension schemes. The legislation introduced four main changes: (1) the coverage was extended to include most wage-earners and salaried employees, as well as their dependents (still excluding collective farmers and the self-employed); (2) the rates of benefits were substantially increased (with the exception of family allowances); (3) the benefits were made more egalitarian between the low-paid and the highly paid because the minimum pension was raised far more than the maximum pension; and (4) 'the regulations concerning the coverage of the various risks included in the scheme were streamlined to reduce anomalies' (George & Manning, 1980, p. 42; see also Plaggenborg, 2019, p. 48).

With this large piece of legislation, 'the new Soviet social security became comprehensive

both in terms of people in the industrial sector and risks. Government funds were to be used to supplement contributions from employers. The reforms were inspired by a mixture of economic, political and welfare considerations, reducing the prior dominance of economic logic to some extent (George & Manning, 1980, p. 42).<sup>17</sup>

The 1956 Pension Law adopted age and length-of-service requirements – first introduced by the old-age pension scheme for textile workers in 1928 – with 60 years for men and 55 years for women and a record of state employment of 25 years for men and 20 years for women, respectively (Duncan, 1935, p. 184; George & Manning, 1980, pp. 38, 44). However, the life expectancy had increased significantly in the meantime, by nearly 20 years (Rimlinger, 1971, p. 284; Stiller, 1983, p. 143).<sup>18</sup> Additionally, special provisions for lower age and employment requirements were made for occupations involving hard and unhealthy work, for mothers of large families (women who had born and reared five or more children to the age of eight), and for the disabled (the general age and employment requirements were reduced for these individuals by five years).<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, workers ‘employed in underground work, [at] furnaces or in work injurious to health, [were permitted to retire] at 50 if they [were] men with not less than 20 years of employment and at 45 if they [were] women with not less than 15 years of service’ (Tay, 1972, p. 686; see also Rimlinger, 1971, pp. 284–285). In 1981, further privileges for mothers raising/having raised five or more children or a child born with disability, were introduced: a pension could be granted ‘in the case of an employment record of at least [five] years and of three uninterrupted years of

work at the moment of application’ (Selezneva, 2016, p. 15).

While under the old regulations pensions were not adjusted to the rising wages and prices,<sup>20</sup> now old-age pensions were related to an individual’s previous gross earnings. ‘Those who satisfy the employment conditions [in] full [received] a pension which [was] a proportion of their average earnings over the last year of employment or the best five consecutive years among the last ten years, whichever [was] higher. By basing the amount of pension on recent earnings it [was] hoped to provide a pension which [was] closely related to the pensioner’s standard of living’ (George & Manning, 1980, pp. 46–47).

Overall, pension inequalities were lower than income inequalities during a working life: the pension level was not completely related to the level of previous earnings due to the introduction of minimum and maximum pension levels (George & Manning, 1980, p. 47). Minimum pensions were provided for those who did not fulfil the employment requirements for a full pension but had at least five years in covered work (for both sexes), and at least three immediately prior to retirement (George & Manning, 1980, p. 44; Rimlinger, 1971, p. 285). The minimum pension rate was set at 300 roubles, and the maximum rate at 1,200 roubles per month. Fifteen years later, in 1971, the minimum pension rate was raised to 45 roubles a month (i.e., 450 old roubles before the currency reform of 1961), while the maximum rate remained at 120 new roubles. This rate structure favoured lower income receivers and those who had lost the greatest degree of working ability (Madison, 1964, p. 196; McAuley, 1979, p. 270; Rimlinger, 1971, pp. 286–287).<sup>21</sup>

Once specified, individual pensions were not changed unless they fell below the new, increased minimum pension. There was no provision for an

17 ‘But even as the brutal repression of the Stalinist years eased in subsequent decades, the evolution of social policy continued to be shaped by the organizational logic of the centrally planned economy’ (Haggard & Kaufman, 2009, p. 66).

18 While in 1926–1927 the average life expectancy was 44 years (42 years for men and 47 years for women), it had reached 67 years by 1956 (Stiller, 1983, p. 143).

19 In 1968, ‘a new category of workers [was] awarded privileged old-age retirement conditions – those employed in the Far North and in similar regions’ (Rimlinger, 1971, p. 285).

20 Consequently, the majority of workers received 150 roubles per month (i.e., 15 new roubles after the currency reform of 1947), which was established as a ceiling in 1932. ‘Only specialized workers in key industries were benefiting from more advantageous pension schemes’ (Rimlinger, 1971, p. 284).

21 Furthermore, ‘special supplements may be earned on top of the basic pension’ (Rimlinger, 1971, p. 286).

automatic adjustment of pensions to the growth of average income or to increases in the cost of living. The 1956 pension provisions were also not retroactive; they did not apply to persons who reached retirement age before the introduction of the law (McAuley, 1979, pp. 271, 273; Rimlinger, 1971, p. 287). Furthermore, in the early years the full implementation of the law was hampered by imprecise rules and regulations and by a widespread lack of documentation of uninterrupted employment for many wage-earners and salaried employees (Stiller, 1983, p. 75).

### *The Pension Law for Collective Farmers of 1964*

Before the Pension Law for Collective Farmers was adopted in 1964, each farm had to make its own provisions to insure its members against old age, disability or sickness (i.e., through mutual aid societies). As a result, prosperous collective farms could make better provisions than less prosperous farms, but even they paid benefits only to the needy who had no relatives to support them. Thus, this system of income maintenance had the character of an assistance programme. The benefits were usually paid out as lump sums without any case-based differentiation (George & Manning, 1980, p. 43; Rimlinger, 1971, p. 293).

The 1964 legislation, which came into force on 1 January 1965, offered considerably improved social security protections; however, it was also inspired by economic considerations, also aiming to increase agricultural production and to stem the rural migration to towns caused by neglect or less favourable treatment of the agricultural sector (George & Manning, 1980, p. 43; Rimlinger, 1971, p. 282). Collective farmers, other than the ones employed on state farms or machine and tractor stations, were not considered part of the socialised economy and, hence, had never been covered by state social insurance (with the exception of maternity leave since 1935). 'This kind of discrimination against collective farm peasants was hardly an incentive to keep efficient workers on the land, especially after the 1956 pension reform had established the possibility of a reasonable retirement income in most other occupations' (Rimlinger, 1971, p. 292).

The 1964 law established a uniform system for comprehensive old-age, disability, sickness, survivor and maternity benefits for all collective farmers and their dependents. Originally, the age requirements for collective farmers were stiffer than the one's stipulated in the 1956 Pension Law, at 65 years for men and 60 years for women. In 1967, however, these were each reduced by five years to bring them in line with those of the wage-earners and salaried employees (George & Manning, 1980, p. 43; McAuley, 1979, pp. 269–270; Stiller, 1983, p. 76).<sup>22</sup>

Due to the pension regulations and overall wage differences between the two groups, the scope of benefits for collective farmers was narrower than it was for wage-earners. Starting in 1965, the minimum pension for collective farmers was 12 roubles per month and the maximum 102 roubles. In 1971, the minimum pension was raised to 20 roubles per month. The scheme was financed by contributions from each collective farm of 4% of its income, while the remainder came from the state budget (George & Manning, 1980, p. 43; McAuley, 1979, p. 271; Rimlinger, 1971, p. 293). Overall, the Pension Law for Collective Farmers was a major step toward securing the livelihoods of retired farmers and towards mitigating their discrimination in comparison to wage-earners in state-owned factories and farms. Its implementation was also better prepared than the 1956 State Pension Law; it was fully in force within a year (Stiller, 1983, pp. 75, 109).

#### *3.1.1.2 Invalidity/Disability pensions*

In November 1917, the Bolsheviks increased in a first step the already existing disability pensions for wage-earners. With the decree of 31 October 1918, all forms of permanent disability (including old age) were covered for all wage-earners and

22 While the required employment record was equal to that of the 1956 State Pension Law, a farmer's employment record at a collective farm would not be taken into account if the farmer had in the meantime left the farm and started work in a non-agricultural job; the former farmer would lose this time in his/her employment record. This restriction was in place until 1980 (Stiller, 1983, p. 109).



salaried employees, as well as the self-employed (i.e., artisans, shopkeepers) and the majority of farmers who did not hire the work of others. The benefits were not intended to replace wages; rather, they were supposed to secure mere subsistence, whereby all applicants were treated equally irrespective of their prior income (Mücke, 2013, pp. 61, 63).

In a first step to restrict welfare provisions, a decree of 15 November 1921 denied farmers and the self-employed eligibility for disability pensions. This was followed by a decree of 8 December 1921 that established an eight-year employment requirement for permanent disability pensions for persons 50 years of age or older, who would then receive disability pensions as an old-age provision (Caroli, 2003, p. 34; Rimlinger, 1971, p. 267).

With the new 1922 Labour Code, practically every wage-earner was entitled to a pension in the case of permanent total or partial disability. The amount of the pension depended upon the degree of invalidity and its proximate cause. It was distinguished between employed persons: (a) those 'who [had] lost their capacity to work as a result of [an] accident connected with their work or occupational disease, regardless of the length of service; and (b) those who [had] lost their capacity to work from causes outside their occupation, if they [had] worked a certain length of time' (Duncan, 1935, p. 183).<sup>23</sup> The Labour Code eliminated the employment requirement introduced the year before (in the case of old-age income maintenance). However, it established a needs test for the granting of pensions; the existence of other applicant income sources was taken into account (Rimlinger, 1971, pp. 265, 267).

The Labour Code divided invalids into six groups according to the degree to which they had lost their ability to work: (1) persons completely incapacitated and dependent upon others for care; (2) incapacitated persons not in need of care but who had lost 65% to 100% of their working capacity; (3) persons who were not able to perform regular or heavy work, but only some casual or

light work, and who had lost 45% to 65% of their working capacity; (4) persons unable to perform their previous work or only with a considerably lowered efficiency, because they had lost 30% to 45% of their working capacity, but who were able to undertake lower-paid work; (5) persons described by the former category, but who had lost only 15% to 30% of their working capacity; and (6) persons only slightly incapacitated, who had lost only up to 15% of their working capacity (Duncan, 1935, pp. 183–184).

Pensions payable to persons incapacitated by work-related accidents or disease varied between 10% and 100% of their prior wages. Pensions for invalidity due to non-work-related causes were granted 'at a rate fixed in relation to wages, the degree of invalidity, and the place of residence of the disabled person'; they had employment record requirements that varied with the age of the beneficiary (International Labour Review, 1933, pp. 545–546).

Under the unfavourable economic conditions of the early 1920s, the provisions of the Labour Code were never implemented. Consequently, 'pensions for industrial accidents were tied to previous earnings; they ranged from 50 to 100 percent of earnings for the incapacitated and from 33 to 75 percent for dependents' in 1924 (Rimlinger, 1971, p. 265). There was also considerable pressure to tighten eligibility conditions for permanent disability in order to prevent potential 'abuse'. A '1925 regulation stipulated that the disability had to occur while the insured individual was employed, or not more than a year after he left work. The following year, it was further specified that the disability had to be reported within two weeks after quitting work' (Rimlinger, 1971, p. 267).

From 1927 on, the right to disability pensions was granted only to persons who could prove an employment record of one to eight years, varying according to age and gender. This restriction excluded almost all persons 50 years of age and older, and the whole group of self-employed persons, who after the Bolshevik revolution were forced into the working class (Abramson, 1929, p. 387). In 1928, however, the employment requirement for work-related total disability pensions was eliminated, while the requirements for

23 The terms 'industrial accident' and 'occupational disease' were rather broadly defined (Duncan, 1935, p. 184).

**Table 4.** Required employment for non-work-related disability pension, 1932

| Age at Which<br>Invalidity Occurred | Employment Period (years) |                          | In Underground or Otherwise<br>Dangerous Occupations |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|
|                                     | Men                       | Women                    |                                                      |
| From 20 to 22                       | 3 (reduced to 2 in 1956)  | 2 (reduced to 1 in 1956) | 2                                                    |
| 22 to 25                            | 4                         | 3                        | 3                                                    |
| 25 to 30                            | 6                         | 4                        | 4                                                    |
| 30 to 35                            | 8                         | 5                        | 5                                                    |
| 35 to 40                            | 10                        | 7                        | 6                                                    |
| 40 to 45                            | 12                        | 9                        | 7                                                    |
| 45 to 50                            | 14                        | 11                       | 8                                                    |
| 50 to 55                            | 16                        | 13                       | 10                                                   |
| 55 to 60                            | 18                        | 14                       | 12                                                   |
| Over 60                             | 20                        | 15                       | 14                                                   |

Sources: International Labour Review, 1947, p. 268; Rimlinger, 1971, pp. 285–286.

non-work-related disability pensions remained unchanged (Rimlinger, 1971, p. 285). In 1929, new regulations further extended the employment requirements from eight to twelve years for disabled workers, sixteen for salaried employees, and ‘twenty-four for persons deprived of civil rights’ (Caroli, 2003, p. 46).

In 1932, the former six classes of invalidity were reduced to three according to the remaining capacity of the affected persons for productive work: ‘(1) Totally disabled persons requiring attendance; (2) Totally disabled persons who [were] incapacitated for work both in their former occupation and in all others; and (3) Persons incapable of working regularly in their former occupation but retaining sufficient capacity for employment in irregular work, part-time work, or less highly skilled work in other occupations’ (International Labour Review, 1933, p. 545). The new regulation eliminated the lower three classes of invalidity (classes four to six), thereby excluding persons who had – according to the former classification – lost up to 45% of their previous earning capacity. Those affected were no longer entitled to any disability pension (Duncan, 1935, pp. 183–184; International Labour Review, 1933, p. 545).

After 1932, the work-related disability pension was granted independently of the person’s employment record, being equal to 100% of wages for persons in the first invalidity class, 75% for the

second class, and 50% for the third class (International Labour Review, 1938, p. 238; International Labour Review, 1947, p. 268). Pensions for non-work-related disability, as well as the required employment record, varied according to the age and sex of the insured person and the economic branch in which the person was employed (see Table 4). It consisted of a basic sum varying between 33% and 69% of the prior wages (depending on the invalidity class), ‘plus increments depending on the number of years’ employment in excess’ of the required employment record of 10 to 18 years (International Labour Review, 1933, p. 545). While the increments could increase pensions in the third invalidity class to a maximum of 41% of previous wages, persons in the first invalidity class could increase their maximum pension to 100% of their former wages (International Labour Review, 1933, pp. 545–546).<sup>24</sup>

The decree of 31 July 1937 extended invalidity pensions to salaried employees and placed them on the same footing as wage-earners (International Labour Review, 1938, p. 237).

The 1956 State Pension Law largely confirmed the regulations of 1932; it kept the three invalidity classes (McAuley, 1979, p. 271) and required no employment record for work-related disability,

<sup>24</sup> ‘Industrial disability [was] treated more favourably than civil disability’ (George & Manning, 1980, p. 49).

**Table 5.** Range of disability pension payments (roubles per month), 1956

|                  |         | Minimum | Maximum |
|------------------|---------|---------|---------|
| Work-related     | Class 1 | 360     | 1,200   |
|                  | Class 2 | 285     | 900     |
|                  | Class 3 | 210     | 450     |
| Non-work-related | Class 1 | 300     | 900     |
|                  | Class 2 | 230     | 600     |
|                  | Class 3 | 160     | 400     |

Source: Myers, 1959, p. 735.

while the requirements for non-work-related disability remained nearly identical. The 1956 law required from men in ordinary work an employment record ranging from 2 years of service for the 20-to-22-year-olds (one year less than the 1932 law) to 20 years for workers aged 61 and older; the corresponding requirements for women ranged from 1 year (reduction by one year compared to the 1932 law) to 15 years (see Table 4). Persons in underground, unhealthy, and/or dangerous occupations were again given more lenient service requirements, whereby at least half the required length of employment had to have been within this privileged work category (Rimlinger, 1971, pp. 285–286).

George & Manning (1980, p. 48) state that the first and second invalidity classes in fact qualified for the same pension, but that additional provisions were made for the caregiver of a Class 1 pensioner. Pensions for work-related permanent disability ranged from 65% to 100% of prior wages, depending on the invalidity class, while pensions for non-work-related disability ranged from 45% to 85% of prior wages (see Table 5). Furthermore, in the case of work-related disability pensions, there was no restriction on additional earnings, while non-work-related pensions were reduced by the amount of additional income (George & Manning, 1980, p. 49).

Similar to old-age pensions, there was no retroactivity in terms of the calculation and awarding of invalidity pensions; this discriminated especially against the rural population, which was only starting in 1964 included in the pension scheme (McAuley, 1979, pp. 269, 272). Additionally, the invalidity pension scheme for collective farmers

was initially operated ‘at a lower level than that for state employees’, enabling the Soviet authorities ‘to reduce the cost to themselves of providing for the backlog of incapacitated peasants, the consequences of almost forty years of discrimination and neglect’ (McAuley, 1979, pp. 272–273).

Overall, ‘the disabled [were] treated less favourably than the elderly’ (George & Manning, 1980, p. 49). The disabled were always among the most underprivileged social groups in the Soviet society; this applied also to war invalids, even though they had a special status and enjoyed some special privileges. Only in the 1970s did the situation of the disabled improve as their pension rates were increased (Stiller, 1983, p. 128).

### 3.1.1.3 Survivor pensions

Already mentioned in the early legislation of 1917, it was the 1922 Labour Code that provided limited pensions for dependents<sup>25</sup> in the case of the death or disappearance of, or abandonment by, the breadwinner. This was exclusively for wage-earners; for collective farmers, the survivor pension was introduced only in 1964 (Duncan, 1935, p. 184; McAuley, 1979, p. 273). As survivor pensions were assessed based on the pension the deceased would have received if s/he

25 The Soviet legislation defined the family circle of persons who could be entitled to a survivor pension very broadly. Thus, it could cover ‘the children, grandchildren, or siblings under the age of sixteen (or eighteen if in full-time education), parents or a surviving spouse, if over the age of sixty (fifty-five for women), or grandparents without other sources of support’ (McAuley, 1979, p. 273; see also George & Manning, 1980, p. 50).



had been incapacitated (International Labour Review, 1938, p. 238), the amount of the pension depended on the prior earnings of the decedent, as well as on the number of surviving dependents. Payments were 'higher if death was the result of an industrial accident or occupational disease or if the deceased had been employed underground or in certain designated occupations' (McAuley, 1979, p. 273).

Generally, survivor pensions were paid 'at slightly lower rates of replacement than in the case of old-age and disability pensions' (IMF et al., 1991a, p. 333). Pension payments to the dependants of a deceased person whose death was work-related varied in urban areas, according to the number of claimants, from 33% to 75% of the previous wages of the deceased. In rural areas, on the other hand, survivor pensions were paid as lump sums, varying between 7 and 47 roubles per month. Non-work-accident-related survivor pensions in urban areas were identical to their work-related counterparts, while in rural areas, it varied between 5.50 and 28 roubles per month, according to the number of claimants (International Labour Review, 1933, p. 546). After 1932, the amount of the non-work-related survivor pensions varied between a minimum of 50% (one dependant) and a maximum of 125% (in the case of three or more surviving dependents) (International Labour Review, 1938, p. 238). It can be assumed that this regulation applied to urban areas only.

In 1927, the requirement of an employment record from one to eight years, varying according to age and gender, was introduced for survivor pensions. 'A pension [was] only granted to widows and orphans who [had been] supported by the deceased and [only] provided that they [had] no other means of subsistence. Adults must themselves [have been] invalids or have [had] to support children of under eight years of age; children [were only counted if they were] less than sixteen years of age' (Abramson, 1929, p. 387). In 1928, however, the employment requirement for work-related survivorship was eliminated, while the requirements for non-work-related survivor pensions remained unchanged (Rimlinger, 1971, p. 285). The 1956 pension law required for survivor pensions the same employment record as for disability pen-

sions (see Table 4) (George & Manning, 1980, p. 50; Rimlinger, 1971, p. 285).

As the regulations did not want to discourage work, widows/widowers were only entitled to pensions for themselves if they were looking after children under the age of eight, if they became disabled shortly after the death of their spouse, or if they had reached retirement age. The survivor pension for children of the deceased, however, was paid until the child reached the age of 16 or until the child completed full-time education at the age of 18; it was paid indefinitely in the case that the child became disabled before that age. 'The implicit assumption of the scheme [was] that widows[/widowers] should start going out to work as soon as possible', in which case they would lose their survivor benefits (George & Manning, 1980, pp. 50–51, quote 50).

#### 3.1.1.4 Long-Service pension

Certain categories of salaried workers, such as teachers, medical personnel, some airline employees, certain types of agricultural specialists, and scientific research workers, had been entitled to long-service pensions since 1924–25 (see 3.1.1 above). The various provisions for the different occupational groups were recodified in 1959. 'The 1959 regulations specified that the pension should equal 40% of previous salary within the range 30–120 rubles a month; and the pension was to be paid irrespective of whether the individual retired or continued to work, on condition that pension and salary did not [together] exceed 200 rubles a month' (McAuley, 1979, p. 274). After 1965, the scope of benefits was reduced as the pension was 'calculated on the basic salary of those with ten to twenty-five years' service or on actual earnings, which ever was [lower], and pensions were no longer payable to those who continued in employment' (McAuley, 1979, p. 274). At the end of the 1960s, long-service pensions were reorganised and incorporated into the old-age pension system (Stiller, 1983, pp. 118–119).

### 3.1.1.5 Personal pensions

Personal pensions were awarded to persons who had performed some special service to the state or the Bolshevik Revolution. They could be awarded at all three levels of government in the Soviet Union (All-Union, republican, and local) and were paid out from the budget of the respective government unit. Additionally, personal pensioners were entitled to special accommodation, as well as subsidised utilities (gas, electricity, etc.) and pharmaceuticals (McAuley, 1979, pp. 274–275).

### 3.1.2 UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS

For ideological reasons, the Soviet Union had long claimed that in socialist societies unemployment did not exist. Nevertheless, unemployment benefits had in fact existed in the Soviet Union from 1917 to 1930 (George & Manning, 1980, p. 55). Already covered in Lenin's 1912 principles, the Bolshevik government's first law on social insurance from 11 December/24 December 1917 provided unemployment benefits only to current wage-earners, provided their 'regular earnings did not exceed three times the average local earnings', regardless of the individual's previous employment record (Porket, 1989, p. 44). Financed by employers, unemployment benefits were set equal to the average local wage, as long as that amount did not exceed the prior earnings of the wage-earner (George & Manning, 1980, pp. 36–37).

A decree of 27 January/9 February 1918 introduced labour exchanges<sup>26</sup>; the unemployed

had to register with them within a short period after becoming unemployed in order to qualify for benefits. Not regarded as unemployed were persons 'who had lost their employment without losing their earnings; those who had lost their earnings as a result of a strike; those who had quit employment or failed to take up a new job without valid reasons; and those who were not in need of unemployment benefits' (Porket, 1989, p. 44). Additionally, the 'refusal to accept a job offer from the labor exchange usually disqualified a worker [from receiving] benefits, except in the case of skilled workers who could show that the job would damage their skill' (Rimlinger, 1971, p. 266).

On 31 October 1918, the programme was expanded in terms of population groups covered, now including the self-employed and farmers. However, 'social security legislation remained largely a dead letter' with little practical relevance (George & Manning, 1980, p. 37).

In the early 1920s, most benefit payments to wage-earners were made conditional. A law of 3 October 1921 made unemployment benefits only payable to persons registered with the labour exchange and with no other means of support for a period of 15 continuous weeks, or for a total of 26 weeks in a given year. Benefits for skilled workers (dismissed from state-owned enterprises) equalled the local minimum wage, while unskilled workers of the same category needed a three-year employment record to receive from one-third to one-half of the local minimum wage. Under the employment conditions of the time, such qualifications would have excluded most workers. Benefits for other categories of unemployed were left at the discretion of the local social insurance authorities (George & Manning, 1980, p. 38; Rimlinger, 1971, p. 264).

A decree of 15 November 1921 excluded farmers and the self-employed from eligibility for unemployment benefits and made the benefits conditional to the individual's place of residence, qualification grade, length of employment and union membership status (Caroli, 2003, p. 34).

The 1922 Labour Code added that workers had to have been previously employed for a minimum period, and that the benefits must in no case be less than one-sixth of the local average wage

26 The labour exchanges were abolished at the beginning of 1919, but re-established in 1921 (Porket, 1989, p. 44). With the introduction of the labour exchanges, companies were obliged to hire workers exclusively through them. This obligation 'was relaxed in the summer of 1924 and abrogated in January 1925' (Porket, 1989, p. 44). The decision to relax/abrogate the hiring exclusively through labour exchanges was opposed by the trade unions, which wanted to institutionalise preferential hiring of union members and to curb the influx of farmers into the workforce. 'Subsequently, the role of the labour exchanges in the hiring of workers increased noticeably, and the proportion of workers hired through them went up both in 1927 and in 1928' (Porket, 1989, p. 45).

(Duncan, 1935, p. 184; Rimlinger, 1971, p. 264). 'Compensation varied with the number of dependents and the duration of the unemployment. The cost of the unemployment benefits made heavy drafts on the funds, and payments were kept low' (Duncan, 1935, p. 184). Therefore, the Labour Code left the duration of unemployment benefits to be determined by the local social insurance authorities. The authorities used the worker's skill level (i.e., qualification grade) and previous employment record to determine his/her benefit period of no less than six months (Rimlinger, 1971, p. 264).

By 1923, the system of unemployment benefits not only discriminated against unregistered unemployed (persons not allowed to register at labour exchanges had always been virtually denied unemployment relief) (Duncan, 1935, p. 184); now even registered unemployed were treated unequally as preference was given to trade unionists and demobilised service members. Workers who wanted to change their jobs were systematically disadvantaged (Porket, 1989, p. 45).

In August 1924, the labour exchanges were ordered to strike from the register the following categories of persons if they were not trade unionists or newly demobilised: 'those who had never before been gainfully employed; unskilled workers with less than three years of service; and Soviet employees with less than five years' experience. All unspecified categories, including young workers fresh from factory schools and minors between 14 and 18 years of age, were to remain on the register' (Porket, 1989, p. 46).

In the mid-1920s, the Soviet authorities were of the opinion that 'unemployed workers would make less and less effort to obtain fresh employment as the amount of the benefit approached that of the full wages; therefore, the funds only paid a benefit not exceeding 50 per cent of [former] wages' (Abramson, 1929, p. 388). In 1926, the average ranged from 21% to 47% of previous monthly wages (Porket, 1989, p. 46); it 'varied from 7 to 27 roubles a month according to the degree of skill and place of residence of the insured person. A family allowance of from 15 to 35 per cent of the principal benefit was also granted' according

to the number of dependents (International Labour Review, 1933, p. 546).<sup>27</sup>

Further restrictions followed in 1927 in order to tighten labour discipline in times of a decreasing industrial labour surplus: only persons with a certain length of employment and children of wage-earners and salaried employees were now allowed to register with the labour exchanges. Additionally, the needs test also became more severe (Porket, 1989, p. 46). 'No benefit [was] paid to those who [had] other sources of income or who [were] supported by a husband or wife having an unearned income or whose wages exceed from 72 to 120 roubles a month, according to [the] district' (Abramson, 1929, p. 388). In 1929, a number of discriminatory regulations were issued suspending unemployment benefits for any worker who did not join a union and still had supposed links to the countryside (Caroli 2003: 46). In February 1930, labour exchanges were empowered to deal severely with those registered as unemployed who refused job offers or vocational training (Porket, 1989, pp. 50–51).

As the rapid industrialisation of the first FYP had reduced unemployment significantly, unemployment benefits were officially abolished completely on 9 October 1930; the remaining registered unemployed were on that date assigned any available job, regardless of their qualifications, and the labour exchanges were closed (Clarke, 1999, p. 19; Duncan, 1935, p. 184; George & Manning, 1980, p. 55; Porket, 1989, p. 51). After that day 'it [was] officially claimed that there is not and cannot be unemployment in the Soviet Union' (Porket, 1989, p. 53).

Nevertheless, in order to accommodate the needs of people who had, in fact, lost their jobs, the Soviet authorities established in 1959 and 1966 'the statutory issue of two weeks' severance

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27 Unemployed workers were classified in three groups according to their qualifications: 'The first group [received] a fixed benefit of from 12 to 27 roubles a month, according to the place of residence; the second from 9 to 20 roubles; and the third from 7 to 15.5 roubles. Those whose family [was] dependent on them [received] a supplement of 15 per cent for one dependent person, 25 per cent for two, and 35 per cent for three or more' (Abramson, 1929, p. 388).

pay and the availability of a retraining allowance. The latter, however, [was] restricted to those who [needed] to master new technology, usually in the same enterprise, or [were] unable to keep their job for medical reasons. It [was] payable at the rate of former earnings over the three-month period normally considered adequate for redeployment' (Matthews, 1986, p. 108). In 1969, the labour exchanges were re-introduced 'in an attempt to improve the efficiency of the labour market' and avoid unemployment. In 1987, the Law on State Enterprises extended severance pay from two weeks to a period of two months of the local average wage; a further month's benefit was paid to those who registered with the labour exchange within two weeks of losing their job (Clarke, 1999, pp. 19, 23, quote 19).

### 3.1.3 SICKNESS/TEMPORARY DISABILITY BENEFITS

With the decree 'On Social Insurance' of 30 October/12 November 1917, the Bolshevik government announced a radical new social insurance programme that was to cover all wage-earners without exception, as well as all city and village poor, in case of sickness and injury. All costs were to be borne by employers (Duncan, 1935, pp. 181–182; Rimlinger, 1971, p. 258).

However, the inclusiveness of sickness/temporary disability benefits was quickly reduced: According to the decree on sickness insurance of 22 December 1917/4 January 1918, only wage-earners and salaried employees<sup>28</sup> became entitled to sickness benefits equal to full wages in cases of illness or work-related injury (including occupational disease). It was paid from the first day of incapacity, independently of the prior employment record, for a maximum period of six months, until the insured person either returned to work or was declared an invalid by a medical-labour commission (Abramson, 1929, p. 381; Caroli, 2003, p. 32; International Labour Review, 1947, p. 266). The decree started out universalistic (in Article 1), before it recommended peasants,

artisans etc. to join mutual aid societies/voluntary insurances (the final assignment was left to the discretion of the insurance boards).<sup>29</sup>

However, this restriction threatened to provoke a backlash among the peasants and self-employed formerly covered by the scheme whose support was needed during the civil war. Thus, the decree was modified on 31 October 1918 to 'bring peasants and artisans back under the social security umbrella. The new decree [...] set up a five-tier sickness and accident benefit scheme [according to risk] [...] and healthcare and medical treatment in illness and childbirth' (Caroli, 2003, pp. 32–33).

A law of 14 October 1921 restricted the maximum period of benefits equal to full pay from formerly six to four months (Rimlinger, 1971, p. 264). Another major restriction followed with the decree of 15 November 1921. It confined social security benefits, including sickness benefits, to only wage-earners, while excluding again artisans, shopkeepers, servants, farmers, journeymen, and temporary workers. Additionally, all benefits were subjected to 'conditions relating not only to place of residence, but also to length of service and union membership' (Caroli, 2003, p. 34).

According to the 1922 Labour Code, temporary incapacity included illness, disability, quarantine, childbirth (see 3.1.4), and acting as caregiver for a member of the family. At the outset, every insured wage-earner was to receive benefits equal to their full wages starting from the first day of temporary disability until recovery or until the beginning of payments of a permanent disability pension (Duncan, 1935, p. 183; McAuley, 1979, p. 277; Rimlinger, 1971, p. 264). However, a separate article of the Labour Code stipulated that 'the central administration of social insurance [had] the right to reduce benefits temporarily, but not below two thirds of the relevant rate, in cases where there [was] a lack of funds. This provision strongly [reflected] the absence of the contractual

28 Excluded were persons in senior positions whose regular earnings exceeded three times the average wage of the workers of the locality.

29 Decree of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee 'On Sickness Insurance', 22 December 1917 (4 January 1918) [Декрет ВЦИК 'о страховании на случай болезни', 22 декабря 1917 г. (4 января 1918 г.)], available at: <https://www.hist.msu.ru/ER/Etext/DEKRET/17-12-22.htm>.

notion in Soviet social insurance' (Rimlinger, 1971, p. 264).

Consequently, the benefits were reduced in the following years. Compensation rates varied from 40% to 100% of the previous wage. The maximum allowance (depending on the region of the country) ranged from 120 to 180 roubles per month; due to generally low wage levels, this would have affected only around 1% of wage-earners (Abramson, 1929, p. 385; Duncan, 1935, p. 183).

In 1929, the government introduced for the first time the previous employment record as a condition of eligibility for benefits in cases of illnesses lasting less than 15 days. In order to draw full benefits, 'a worker had to have a record of, at least, three years of employment in either industry or transportation (rail or water). All others were entitled only to 75 percent of their wage during the first five days of illness, but to 100 percent thereafter' (Rimlinger, 1971, p. 274).

With a decree of 23 June 1931, sickness benefits equal to full wages were thereafter paid 'only to workers and employees who had at least two years of *unbroken employment* in the present enterprise, at least three years of total previous employment, and who were members of a trade union.<sup>30</sup> Union members with less than one year of unbroken employment at their current job were entitled to only two thirds of their earnings during the entire period of sickness. Other union members, those with more than one year who did not meet full eligibility requirements, were entitled to benefits ranging from two thirds to three fourths of earnings for the first 20 days of sickness and full benefits thereafter. Workers and employees who were not members of a union were entitled to only one half of their pay during the first 30 days and two thirds thereafter' (Rimlinger, 1971, p. 274, *italics in the original*; see also International Labour Review, 1938, p. 234).

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30 This discrimination against non-union members was valid until 1967, when differences between benefit levels for union and non-union workers in cases of work-related disability were abolished (Rimlinger, 1971, p. 291). However, this discrimination was of minor importance, since practically all workers belonged to trade unions by that time (George & Manning, 1980, p. 52).

A 1938 regulation stipulated that 'a worker dismissed for disciplinary reasons, or a worker who had quit his job voluntarily, [was] ineligible for cash sickness benefits until he [had] worked for six months at a new job' (Rimlinger, 1961, pp. 406–407). Further restrictions were introduced during and after World War II doubling the length requirement of uninterrupted employment at the same enterprise as compared to the regulations of 1931: only persons with an uninterrupted employment record of at least six years now received benefits in the amount of 100% of their previous wages (uninterrupted employment of three to six years resulted in 80%, from two to three years in 60%, and under two years in 50% of their prior wages). For persons in underground work, the period was only two years or more to receive 100%; miners employed for under two years received only 60% (International Labour Review, 1947, p. 266).

While in the post-Stalin era the maximum benefit for all other major entitlements programmes was set at 90% of earnings, the regulations for sickness benefits paid due to work-related injury (industrial accident or occupational disease) remained at 100% of prior wages (albeit with a maximum benefit of 250 roubles per month). Benefits paid out for incapacity due to other causes ranged from 50% to 90% of previous remuneration, according to the length of prior employment. However, a minimum for cash sickness benefits in the amount of the established minimum wage was introduced for the first time in 1955. Simultaneously, eligibility requirements were tightened, the number of years of uninterrupted employment was increased, the maximum benefit level now requiring 12 years of unbroken employment for all industries (George & Manning, 1980, p. 51; Lantsev, 1962, p. 457; Rimlinger, 1971, pp. 276, 290). Non-trade union members received only half the benefits of members. However, this was not an important disqualification, since practically all workers by that point belonged to trade unions (George & Manning, 1980, p. 52; McAuley, 1979, p. 277; Rimlinger, 1971, p. 290).

In 1957, the minimum sickness benefit was raised. Further improvements were not made until 1967, when service requirements were liberalised;



the strict 1955 regulations were relaxed 'by easing the definition of unbroken service' (Rimlinger, 1971, p. 290). In January 1960, regulations for sickness benefits were further liberalised. The 1938 regulation discriminating against workers dismissed for disciplinary reasons or who had quit their job voluntarily was amended; now workers leaving their job voluntarily retained their immediate eligibility if they took up new employment within a month (Rimlinger, 1961, pp. 406–407). The conditions for the payment of sickness benefits were again relaxed in 1975; persons with three or more children at that point became entitled to full earnings replacement in the case of incapacitation (George & Manning, 1980, p. 43).

However, it was not before 1970 that collective farmers became entitled to sickness benefits; the programme for state employees was at that point applied to them, albeit with some modifications and restrictions (McAuley, 1979, p. 278; George & Manning, 1980, p. 43). Thus, until the end of the Soviet Union, a special (and inferior) system for sickness benefits existed for collective farmers (IMF et al., 1991a, p. 333).

### 3.1.4 MATERNITY ALLOWANCES

The new social insurance programme of 30 October/12 November 1917 announced that all wage-earners, as well as the urban and rural poor, should be insured against all kinds of work incapacity, including pregnancy and child birth. The benefits were to be paid out at a rate equal to the affected individual's normal wages (Duncan, 1935, pp. 181–182; Rimlinger, 1971, p. 258). The decree 'On Maternity Allowance' of 14/27 November 1917 further specified the programme's details. It established an allowance of a woman's full wages for the period of the eight weeks preceding and eight weeks following childbirth, during which employers were prohibited from allowing (or, of course, forcing) women to work. The working day of breast-feeding mothers was legally limited to six hours including mandatory 30-minute breaks every three hours for feeding the babies (Field, 1932, p. 67; Gradska, 2007, p. 280; Selezneva, 2016, p. 3). However, the maternity leave of 16 weeks applied only to women doing physical

work; maternity leave for women in non-physical professions was set at the lower level of 12 weeks (Gradska, 2007, p. 279).<sup>31</sup>

Nevertheless, the Bolshevik government soon reduced the inclusiveness of these measures: A decree of 22 December 1917/4 January 1918 stipulated that only wage-earners and salaried employees were entitled to maternity benefits equal to full wages.<sup>32</sup> As this decree threatened to provoke a public backlash, it was modified on 31 October 1918 to again include peasants and artisans whose support was needed during the civil war (Abramson, 1929, p. 381; Caroli, 2003, pp. 32–33).

31 The distinction between women doing physical work and women in non-physical professions (or wage-earning women and salaried women) is rather misleading. As Field (1932, pp. 65–66) clarifies, in 1921, fully paid maternity leave of 16 weeks was granted to women in 'certain professions', e.g., doctors and nurses, masseuses, telegraph and telephone employees, village teachers, women in commerce, factory workers and manual labourers. 'All other pregnant women who earn their livings are allowed twelve weeks' vacation for confinement, with pay. There is no definite list as to just who these workers are, but roughly they seem to include stenographers, secretaries, teachers in city day schools, cooks, housekeepers, other domestic employees, and women who work on co-operative farms' (Field, 1932, p. 66). Thus, the distinction was made more according to the importance of 'certain professions' for the establishment and stabilisation of Bolshevik power (e.g., village teachers were more important than city teachers for the literacy campaign, see 3.1.1) than any ideological motive. To be less deterministic about the nature of work, it will be distinguished in the following between 'wage-earning' women and 'salaried' women instead.

32 The decree started out universalistic, referring in Article 1 to all working people 'without distinction of sex, age, religion, nationality and race, employed in all branches of labour (such as factory, mining, crafts, construction, trade and industry, transportation, agriculture, timber, fishing, domestic industry, personal services, persons of free professions, etc.)'. However, Articles 3 and 4 recommended farmers, craftsmen, etc. to mutual aid societies and voluntary insurances (left to the discretion of the insurance boards). Decree of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee 'On Sickness Insurance', 22 December 1917 (4 January 1918) [Декрет ВЦИК 'о страховании на случай болезни', 22 декабря 1917 г. (4 января 1918 г.)], available at: <https://www.hist.msu.ru/ER/Text/DEKRET/17-12-22.htm>.

In the 1920s, however, social protection was reduced in its inclusiveness once more. The decree of 15 November 1921 restricted maternity leave to wage-earners and salaried employees, excluding farmers, artisans, shopkeepers, servants, and temporary workers. Maternity benefits, payable at full wage rate for 16 weeks depending on the type of work, were additionally made conditional on an individual's place of residence, length of employment, and union membership status (Caroli, 2003, pp. 32, 34). Despite these restrictions, university students holding a scholarship were considered workers; thus, pregnant students were allowed 12 weeks of maternity leave, during which time they continued to receive their stipend. Additionally, unemployed women who had worked for some time and who, during their pregnancy, were looking for new employment received a small allowance and free healthcare during their confinement (which would have normally been provided through the workplace). The benefit amount was determined by the individual's economic conditions, but by all accounts 'barely [allowed] them to live, unless they or their husbands [were] socially insured' (Field, 1932, pp. 66–68, quote 68).<sup>33</sup>

The new Labour Code, adopted in November 1922, contained strong labour protections for women.<sup>34</sup> Otherwise, it mostly summarised prior regulations: maternity leave with full pay was granted to working women, with women 'doing physical labor [receiving] a leave of eight weeks before and eight weeks after giving birth, and other working women were entitled to a leave of six weeks before and six weeks after giving birth' (Rimlinger, 1971, p. 265). However, the new

Code also restricted some of the prior regulations, for instance stipulating half-hour work breaks for breast-feeding mothers after not more than three-and-a-half hours of work, instead of after three hours as in 1917 (Gradszkova, 2007, p. 280).

Due to misgivings about the potential 'abuse' of maternity leave, legislation in 1927 'limited the right to maternity leaves [...] to women who had six months of uninterrupted work immediately prior to the time that they became entitled to leave. [...] The law, however, never attained practical significance. It was soon discovered that its enforcement was more expensive than the savings that could be realized. In addition, it was declared to be unfair to young women who had entered the work force for the first time' (Rimlinger, 1971, p. 266).

Nevertheless, in 1931, work requirements for maternity leave were tightened and made comparable to the requirements for sickness benefits. Benefits equal to full wages were from that point paid only to women with at least two years of uninterrupted employment in the present enterprise, at least three years of total previous employment, and a trade union membership. Other union members not meeting full eligibility requirements saw their benefits reduced, while women without union membership were made even worse off (Rimlinger, 1971, pp. 274, 276).<sup>35</sup>

However, the majority of early Soviet legislation did not have great impact on the rural population. Laws regulating property, wages, and working conditions were barely enforced in the countryside. After being excluded from welfare provisions in November 1921, it was not until the start of the forced collectivisation of agriculture that maternity benefits were again extended to rural women working in collective farms (Leahy, 1986, p. 75).

On 17 February 1935, the *Kolkhoz Charter* (i.e., standard charter of collective farms) granted rural women half of each of the entitlements of urban women, that is, eight weeks' leave (four weeks before and four weeks after giving birth) and 50% of their normal pay during the leave. The costs were

33 Any working woman, who had an abortion performed (which was legal from 1920 on), had the right to three weeks' vacation with full pay (Field, 1932, p. 67).

34 The Labour Code elaborated a number of protective measures for the working conditions of women, and for pregnant women in particular. Pregnant women 'were given the right to decline business trips and job-related relocations from the 5th month of pregnancy; they [were also to be] allocated to less difficult/heavy work on the same salary as the [previous] six months. Quotas protecting women against firing in the process of rationalization were established, in particular for pregnant women and single mothers with children below the age of one' (Selezneva, 2016, p. 5).

35 During World War II, the employment requirement for eligibility for maternity leave was reduced, and in 1956 it was eliminated altogether (Rimlinger, 1971, p. 291).

borne by the individual collective farms (Denisova, 2010, pp. 165–166; Gsovski, 1949, p. 455; Manning, 1992b, pp. 216, 229, fn. 52).<sup>36</sup> ‘Nevertheless, the leaves were highly popular among collective-farm women, although some [collective farm] chairmen, short of labor at critical periods of the crop cycle, denied women such leaves, especially initially, in 1935 and 1936’ (Manning, 1992b, p. 216). However, huge regional differences remained even after that point; in remote villages in the Moscow region, for instance, women gave birth without any maternity leave until the early 1950s (Ransel, 2000, p. 147).

The distinction between wage-earning women and salaried women in terms of permitted length of maternity leave was removed in June 1936; all women in urban areas were thereafter entitled to a leave of eight weeks before and eight weeks after confinement.<sup>37</sup> However, in 1938, the length of maternity leave was reduced for all urban women from sixteen weeks to nine weeks – five weeks before and four weeks after giving birth (George & Manning, 1980, p. 39; Gradskova, 2007, p. 280; International Labour Review, 1938, p. 235).

In 1944/1945,<sup>38</sup> maternity leave was increased again to five weeks before and six weeks

after birth (or eight weeks in cases of complications or multiple birth); however, the total duration still remained shorter than it had been before 1938 (Berman, 1946, pp. 54–55; Gradskova, 2007, p. 280; Selezneva, 2016, p. 9). During the maternity leave, pay was scaled according to the woman’s length of employment, similar to sickness benefits. Only persons with an uninterrupted employment record of at least six years received benefits in the amount of 100% of their usual wages (uninterrupted employment of three to six years resulted in 80%, two to three years in 60%, and under two years in 50% wage replacement) (International Labour Review, 1947, pp. 266–267).

In February 1955, the decree ‘In Protection of Motherhood and Children’ restored pre-1938 benefit levels; it granted pregnant women maternity leave of 16 weeks, eight weeks before and eight weeks after birth (ten weeks in the case of a difficult or multiple birth) (Selezneva, 2016, p. 11; Tay, 1972, p. 687). Full salary replacement was paid for the entire leave period to women with two or more years of uninterrupted employment at the same enterprise, and with at least three years of total employment. Women with less than one year of unbroken service received two-thirds of their most recent pay (Gradskova, 2007, p. 280; Rimlinger, 1971, p. 291). Simultaneously, other measures were reduced: for instance, temporary incapacity benefits for sick-nursing a child, granted by the 1922 Labour Code, were cut from seven to three days (Duncan, 1935, p. 183; Selezneva, 2016, p. 11).

Starting on 1 January 1965, the length of maternity leave of collective farmers was finally set equal to that of wage-earners, regardless of their employment record (Denisova, 2018, p. 152; Ransel, 2000, p. 78; Selezneva, 2016, p. 11). This equalisation, however, did not apply to the replacement rate of the maternity allowance.

From 1968, mothers could be granted an additional unpaid leave of three months (until the child’s first birthday) after their regular maternity leave (Gradskova, 2007, p. 280). The government extended this opportunity to take unpaid leave after childbirth to one year in 1970; during

36 Kolkhoz Statute, 17 February 1935. Confirmed by the Council of People’s Commissariats of the U.S.S.R. and by the Central Committee of the Party. Originally published in: *Izvestiia*, 18 February 1935. Available at: <https://soviethistory.msu.edu/1936-2/second-kolkhoz-charter/second-kolkhoz-charter-texts/kolkhoz-statute/>.

37 Simultaneously, in line with the new, conservative family policy, abortions, which had been legal since 1920, were again prohibited except ‘in those cases where the continuation of pregnancy endangers life or threatens serious injury to the health of the pregnant woman and likewise when a serious disease of the parents may be inherited, and then only under hospital or maternity-home conditions’ (Tay, 1972, p. 675). At the same time, the material aid to women in childbirth was improved, state assistance for parents of large families was established, the network of maternity homes, crèches and kindergartens was extended, the criminal punishment for the non-payment of support was tightened, and the divorce legislation was modified. In November 1955, abortion was again decriminalised if undertaken during the first twelve weeks of pregnancy (Selezneva, 2016, pp. 7, 11; Tay, 1972, pp. 674–675).

38 With the decree of 8 July 1944, incorporated into the

Family Code on 16 April 1945.



that time, the woman's job was protected. While unpaid, the leave counted towards the overall uninterrupted employment record, which was crucial for future benefits and pensions (Malkova, 2018, p. 692; Ponomareva, 2016, p. 5). However, the state 'did not provide financial support for women who wanted to stay home with a child for a longer period of time' (Malkova, 2018, p. 692).

Income insecurity as a result of childbirth, was reduced in the Soviet Union in 1973 as a result of the relaxation of regulations on the payment of maternity benefits (George & Manning, 1980, p. 52). All women, irrespective of their employment record and union membership, from that point on received a maternity leave of a total of 16 weeks (extended by two weeks in the case of multiple birth or complications) equal to 100% of her normal earnings 'without distinction by category of employment' (Lapidus, 1978, p. 304, fn. 39). The regulation applied also to collective farmers, who with this policy change for the first time became eligible for the same replacement rate as wage-earners. Additionally, the length of the paid child sick-nursing leave was increased back to seven days from three (George & Manning, 1980, pp. 43, 52–53; Selezneva, 2016, p. 13).

In early 1981, the government announced a new maternity leave policy to improve living conditions for young (and large) families. It comprised three components: First, birth grants (see 3.2.1) were significantly increased and, for the first time, already the birth of the first child entitled all mothers to a grant – not only single mothers. Second, working mothers with an employment record above one year and women in training schemes received a one-year partially paid maternity leave. The monthly payment amounted to 50 roubles per month in the Extreme North and Far East regions and to 35 roubles per month in other regions; these amounts were both equal to about 30% of the average regional female salary<sup>39</sup>. Third, the unpaid childcare leave was extend-

ed to 18 months, while still being included in the employment record (Gradskova, 2007, p. 280; Malkova, 2018, p. 693; Ponomareva, 2016, p. 6; Selezneva, 2016, p. 14).

Additional benefits for working mothers with two or more children under the age of 12 were introduced in 1981: three additional days brought the paid annual leave up to a total of 28 work days, while unpaid childcare leave was granted for up to two weeks (from 1986 on, mothers received benefits in the amount of 50% of their normal wages during this two-week period). Additionally, 'all students of the higher, secondary and vocational training institutions, who had children and demonstrated a good academic record, were paid a scholarship' (Selezneva, 2016, p. 15).

Unlike previous programmes for low-income or large families, 85% of all working women (who had worked for at least a year) as well as students regardless of work experience were eligible for these benefits (Malkova, 2018, pp. 691, 693). The new policy was rolled out in three stages, hierarchised according to fertility rates: On 1 November 1981, benefits were introduced in 32 low-fertility regions of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR), while the rest of the RSFSR, as well as Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova and the Baltic republics followed a year later, on 1 November 1982. Other Soviet republics, such as Kazakhstan and the Caucasian republics, saw maternity leave expansions introduced in 1983 (Malkova, 2018, p. 691; Ponomareva, 2016, p. 6).

On 1 December 1990, maternity leave with full pay was further increased to ten weeks before and eight weeks after birth (or ten weeks in the case of complications or multiple births). 'Another novelty introduced allowed parents without an

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in the USSR, these differences in male and female employment [meant] that women overall [took] home less money than men, even when they might [have been] more highly qualified. The peculiar development of the Soviet command economy, with its emphasis on heavy industrial expansion, [...] led to work in these basic economic sectors being rewarded more highly than [work] in others. Some of these heavy and dangerous jobs [were] closed to women who [were], in any case, concentrated in light industry and services' (Peers, 1985, pp. 121–122, quote 122).

39 Historically, women in the Soviet Union had shifted away from agricultural towards industrial employment, and from manual to white-collar work. This trend led to a concentration of women in services and light industry. 'While there [was] equal pay for equal work

employment record as well as those who had less than one year of employment to be eligible for the allowance at 50 percent of the minimum wage' (Selezneva, 2016, p. 19). Partially paid and unpaid child nursing leaves were expanded to 18 months and 33 months after birth, respectively; besides mothers, fathers and other close relatives also became eligible (Selezneva, 2016, p. 19). It also included the right to reclaim the same position in the enterprise upon return to work, and 'the amount of pay during the "partial pay period" was linked to the minimum wage' (Gerber & Perelli-Harris, 2012, p. 1299; see also Selezneva, 2016, p. 19).

As of January 1991, maternity leave could also be taken by the father, or by another person taking care of the child. The introduction of parental (as distinct from maternity) leave was a mostly symbolic measure; with their average wage being only two-thirds of the man's, women were usually still the ones taking parental leave (Posadskaya, 1993, pp. 169, 171).

### 3.1.5 BURIAL GRANTS

In December 1917, burial grants were introduced by law, later affirmed by the 1922 Labour Code. The grant was provided to wage-earners only (with the exception of those who earned more than three times the average local wage), regardless of length of previous employment. Financed by employers, grants were equal to the average cost of a civil funeral, as long as this did not exceed one month's average earnings (Labour Code of the RSFSR, 1922 edition, Article 184<sup>40</sup>; George & Manning, 1980, pp. 36–37; Rimlinger, 1971, p. 259).

In 1927, burial grants at a fixed rate of 21 to 45 roubles (or 50% thereof in case of the death of a child less than ten years old) according to the place of residence of the deceased were awarded (Abramson, 1929, p. 385). Starting in 1932, this grant was fixed at 40 roubles in towns and 20 roubles in rural districts (International Labour Review, 1933, p. 545). After 1955, depending on

age and place of residence, the benefits ranged from 5 to 20 roubles. In 1970, burial grants were made available to collective farmers for the first time, at a rural rate (McAuley, 1979, p. 280).

## 3.2 Other income maintenance transfers

Other income maintenance transfers that were paid irrespective of the place of employment and prior wages encompassed child allowances and, from 1974, a family income supplement (McAuley, 1979, p. 281).

### 3.2.1 CHILD ALLOWANCES

In 1917, a nursing grant of 25–50% of normal wages was introduced for breast-feeding mothers for the first nine months after delivery to cover for extra expenses incurred due to childbirth (Deacon, 1983, p. 153; Selezneva, 2016, p. 3). In 1921, a birth grant, a one-time lump sum of half of normal monthly wages, was introduced, while the nursing grant was reduced to one-eighth of the monthly salary (Caroli, 2003, p. 34).

The 1922 Labour Code regulated child benefits for 'insured working women as well as the wives of insured workers' (Rimlinger, 1971, p. 265) who were entitled to a layette grant (for essentials, such as blankets, diapers, and toiletries) and a nursing grant. The one-time layette grant amounted to one month's local average wage, i.e., between 16 and 30 roubles according to the woman's place of residence. The nursing grant was paid out for a period of nine months at a rate of 25% of the local wage, thus amounting to 4–8 roubles a month (Abramson, 1929, p. 385; Duncan, 1935, p. 184; International Labour Review, 1933, pp. 544–545; Rimlinger, 1971, p. 265).

In 1927, the government introduced legislation that intended to limit birth grants to women with at least six months of uninterrupted employment immediately prior to the time they gave birth. However, the law was never implemented. Instead, until 1937, an income restriction of 300 roubles per month was imposed on programme eligibility. However, as this income limit was well above the average wage, the great majority of work-

40 Reprinted by: International Labour Office, Legislative Series, 1922.

Table 6. Child allowances, 1944 (in old roubles)

|                                           | Grant at Birth | Monthly Allowance<br>(for the ages 1–5 years) |
|-------------------------------------------|----------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| For the first and second child            | –              | –                                             |
| For the third child                       | 400            | –                                             |
| For the fourth child                      | 1,300          | 80                                            |
| For the fifth child                       | 1,700          | 120                                           |
| For the sixth child                       | 2,000          | 140                                           |
| For the seventh and eighth child          | 2,500          | 200                                           |
| For the ninth and tenth child             | 3,500          | 250                                           |
| For the eleventh and any subsequent child | 5,000          | 300                                           |

Sources: International Labour Review 1947: 271; Selezneva 2016: 9, fn. 14.

ing-class women remained eligible (International Labour Review, 1938, p. 236; Rimlinger, 1971, pp. 265–266).

Starting in 1932, layette grants were fixed at 32 roubles irrespective of the woman's place of residence, while the nine-month nursing grant was fixed at 5 roubles per month (International Labour Review, 1933, pp. 544–545).<sup>41</sup> To promote motherhood, the first child allowance scheme was introduced in June 1936 as a subsidy for very large families, i.e., for mothers with seven or more children. An annual allowance of 2,000 roubles was paid for the seventh and any subsequent child for five years from the day of its birth. Mothers of ten children received a bonus of 5,000 roubles on the birth of each subsequent child during the first year and an annual allowance of 3,000 roubles for the next four years (Tay, 1972, p. 675). Additionally, the layette grant was increased from 32 to 45 roubles; the scheme also increased the nine-month nursing grant from 5 to 10 roubles (International Labour Review, 1938, p. 236; Gradskaia, 2007, p. 280; Tay, 1972, p. 675).<sup>42</sup> 'It was a compli-

cated scheme attempting to encourage the birth rate and to reduce any possibilities of discouraging women from working' (George & Manning, 1980, p. 42).

In 1944, the child allowance scheme was substantially extended to families of moderate size to promote motherhood; it consisted of a birth grant and a monthly allowance 'of very modest amounts heavily weighted in favour of large families' (George & Manning, 1980, p. 41, quote 53). It provided lump-sum payments to (married or widowed) mothers for their third and any subsequent child (rather than the seventh child as before), with an increasing amount with each child. Additionally, monthly allowances for the fourth and any subsequent child, beginning with the child's second birthday and continuing until he/she reached the age of five, were introduced, which increased with each subsequent child (see Table 6). Part of the cost of the child allowance scheme was funded via an income tax on single men and women and on citizens with less than three children (Berman, 1946, p. 55; Coser, 1951, p. 425; Selezneva, 2016, p. 9).

Additionally, working mothers or fathers were paid a 180-roubles nursing grant and a 210-roubles layette grant (International Labour Review, 1947, p. 272). Furthermore, fees at kindergartens and nurseries were reduced by 50% for parents with three children and monthly earnings of up to 400 roubles, with four children and monthly earn-

41 The International Labour Review (1933, p. 545) indicates an amount of 45 roubles for the nursing grant. However, an increase from 4–8 to 45 roubles seems too steep and also would disturb the relationship between the amount of the layette and the nursing grant; thus, it is assumed that a typing error had occurred. As other sources indicate an increase in the nursing grant from 5 to 10 roubles in 1936, a nursing grant in the amount of 5 roubles is assumed in 1932.

42 'The Decree also called for a network of maternity homes, nurseries and kindergartens to be extended throughout the country, funded, except for beds in col-

lective farm maternity homes, entirely by the State' (Tay, 1972, pp. 675–676).

**Table 7.** Child allowances, 1947 to 1981 (in new roubles)

|                                           | Grant at Birth,<br>1947 | Grant at Birth,<br>1981 | Monthly Allowance<br>(for the ages 1–5 years) |
|-------------------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| For the first child                       | –                       | 50                      | –                                             |
| For the second child                      | –                       | 100                     | –                                             |
| For the third child                       | 20                      | 100                     | –                                             |
| For the fourth child                      | 65                      | 65                      | 4                                             |
| For the fifth child                       | 85                      | 85                      | 6                                             |
| For the sixth child                       | 100                     | 100                     | 7                                             |
| For the seventh and eighth child          | 125                     | 125                     | 10                                            |
| For the ninth and tenth child             | 175                     | 175                     | 12.5                                          |
| For the eleventh and any subsequent child | 250                     | 250                     | 15                                            |

Sources: George & Manning, 1980, p. 53; McAuley, 1979, pp. 281–282; Peers, 1985, p. 136.

ings of up to 600 roubles, and with five or more children regardless of their earnings (Berman, 1946, p. 55, fn. 181).

On a more generous basis, single (unmarried) mothers were paid the allowance from the first child onward, combined with a lump-sum grant on the birth of the third child and any subsequent children; such assistance would continue even if the woman subsequently married (for the children she had before marriage) (George & Manning, 1980, pp. 42, 54; Stiller, 1983, pp. 79, 169, fn. 186; Tay, 1972, p. 677). The monthly allowance in such cases amounted to 100 roubles for one child, 150 roubles for two children and 200 roubles for the third and any subsequent child (Selezneva, 2016, p. 9). ‘State assistance to unmarried mothers, however, ceased when the child reached 12 years of age, while in the case of married mothers, it continued until the child reached 16’ (Tay, 1972, p. 677).

Starting in 1947, single mothers were entitled to a monthly allowance of 5 new roubles for her first child, 7.50 new roubles for her second, and 10 new roubles for the third and any subsequent child. ‘The allowance [continued] until the child reached its twelfth birthday, [was] placed in a home, or [was] adopted. It [was] retained by the mother if she subsequently [married], unless her husband legally [adopted] the child or children for whom the allowance [was] paid. Allowances [were] not paid for children whose paternity [had] been acknowledged, or for whom the mother [received] alimony payments or a pension’ (McAuley, 1979, p. 282;

see also George & Manning, 1980, p. 54). Overall, the changes to child allowances in 1947 reduced the payout amounts by half compared to 1944 (considering the rouble re-denomination).

Child allowances and birth grants were paid ‘irrespective of the material position of the family’ (Lantsev, 1962, p. 456). However, most Soviet families were not entitled to monthly allowances because they had less than three children, i.e., consisted of married women with one or two children. For the few mothers who did receive it, the allowance was too small and stopped too early in the child’s life (George & Manning, 1980, p. 54). Between 1947 and 1981, there were no increase in the allowance which reinforced the necessity of women to work (Deacon, 1983, p. 152; McAuley, 1979, p. 281). Only in 1981 did married women become entitled to payments for the first and second child; the grant for the third child was also raised at that time (see Table 7) (Peers, 1985, p. 136). However, the scheme did not change payment amounts for the fourth and any subsequent child (Smith, 1983, p. 137; Weber & Goodman, 1981, pp. 276, 291). Thus, Smith (1983, p. 137) assumes that ‘the overall intention [was] to promote the two and three child family’.

Intended as material assistance to low-income families, from 1955, child allowances became conditional. Layette and nursing grants ‘were payable on the birth of a child if the average monthly earnings of either parent (in the last three months preceding the birth) were less than 50 roubles, provided that the parent applying for the grant had

been employed for at least three months' (McAuley, 1979, p. 279). In case of eligibility, a layette grant of 12 roubles and a one-time nursing grant, payable when the child reached the age of five months, of 18 roubles were paid to women with an unbroken employment record of more than three months. Only the layette grant was payable to collective farmers (McAuley, 1979, p. 279; Selezneva, 2016, p. 11).

To further improve social protection for the most vulnerable families in the military, in 1963 allowances for children of non-commissioned military service personnel were introduced. Those living permanently in urban areas were entitled to a monthly allowance of 15 roubles for one child and of 22 roubles for two or more children; those living in rural areas were entitled to a monthly allowance of 7.50 roubles for one child and of 12 roubles for two or more children (McAuley, 1979, p. 282). This was complemented in 1964 with a monthly allowance of 35 roubles per child for a family in which the father was in obligatory military service, payable for the whole duration of his service (Selezneva, 2016, p. 11).

By the late 1960s, it had become evident that the child allowance programme was inadequate (McAuley, 1979, p. 282). However, it took until the early 1980s before the Soviet government increased its payments. In 1981, the government established a one-time birth grant of 50 roubles for working women and women in training schemes on the birth of their first child, and 100 roubles for their second. This amounted to 38% and 76% of the average national monthly salary at the time, respectively. The programme left the other means-tested benefits unchanged, with the exception of the birth grant for a third child, which increased from 20 to 100 roubles (Malkova, 2018, p. 693; Ponomareva, 2016, p. 6). Non-working mothers were also eligible for a small lump-sum benefit of 30 roubles for their first, second, and third child, equalling about 20% of the average national female monthly wage; 'the benefit also was paid when the father of the child was in work' or studied (Selezneva, 2016, p. 14).

Additionally, to improve the living conditions of single mothers, in December 1981 a monthly allowance of 20 roubles was introduced for single

mothers with children younger than 16 years of age (or 18 in the case they were studying without a scholarship) and 'an allowance to unmarried mothers with children whose fathers evaded alimony payment was established' (Selezneva, 2016, p. 15). In 1986, these benefits for single mothers were 'extended to widows with children that were not receiving a pension for the loss of a breadwinner' (Selezneva, 2016, p. 15).

The long-outdated 1947 child allowance scheme was eventually abolished on 1 December 1990; instead of flat rate benefits, birth grants were at that point set at three times the official minimum monthly wage (i.e., 210 roubles) per child, and thereby indexed for inflation. Additionally, families with an average per capita family income below two times the minimum monthly (individual) wage were entitled to a monthly allowance amounting to half the minimum wage for every child between the age of one-and-a-half years, the point at which the paid maternity leave period would end, and six years of age. Regional coefficients adjusted the allowance to the living standards of the respective place of residence. The monthly allowance to single mothers (until the child's 16th birthday, or his/her 18th birthday if the child was studying without a scholarship) was also increased to half the official minimum wage. Children of soldiers serving in the armed forces now received a monthly allowance equal to the minimum wage over the period of the father's service (Posadskaya, 1993, p. 170; Selezneva, 2016, p. 19).

Starting in January 1991, parents with an employment record of one year or less prior to the child's birth became entitled to an allowance of half the official minimum wage until the child was 18 months old. If a parent was a student, s/he received a grant as a lump sum after the child's birth. However, the 'negligible amount payable and the complicated application procedure of this allowance made it an ineffective one' (Posadskaya, 1993, p. 170).

### 3.2.2. FAMILY INCOME SUPPLEMENT

As the child allowance programmes had become inadequate by the late 1960s, 'a significant por-

tion of the children were poor and a substantial number of the poor were children' (McAuley, 1979, p. 282). To combat this, in 1974, the family income supplement was introduced to support poor families with children. Under this new income maintenance programme, all families with a per capita income of less than 50 roubles per month (or 75 roubles in the Extreme North and Far East regions) were considered poor and entitled to a supplement of monthly 12 roubles per child under the age of eight.<sup>43</sup> It applied to families of wage-earners, salaried employees, and farmers alike (George & Manning, 1980, p. 54; McAuley, 1979, pp. 282–283; Selezneva, 2016, p. 13; Stiller, 1983, p. 168). However, many families were not eligible because with a worker's average wage of about 190 roubles per month, families with two working parents were generally ineligible even if raising five children (Malkova, 2018, p. 692; Selezneva, 2016, p. 13).

Nevertheless, the family income supplement became an important factor in Soviet social policy (Selezneva, 2016, p. 13; Stiller, 1983, p. 81); it was, together with the successive increases of the minimum pension and wage levels, designed to deal with poverty (George & Manning, 1980, p. 43). 'These [...] changes [were] indicators that the Soviet authorities [had] realised that a strict insurance scheme [could not] abolish the problem of poverty' (George & Manning, 1980, p. 43). In order to further enhance the support measures for poor and large families, the age of entitlement of children receiving the monthly family income supplement was increased from eight to twelve in 1985 (Selezneva, 2016, p. 16).

### 3.3 General welfare benefits

The Soviet welfare system provided a variety of social services free of charge or at subsidised prices. Chief among these were education, healthcare, and subsidised housing. This group of benefits

was not connected with earnings at all (McAuley, 1979, pp. 269, 286).

#### 3.3.1 EDUCATION

In industrial societies, education systems have four main aims: 'to develop all the abilities and interests of children and young people; to promote the economic growth of the country; to influence the distribution of life chances; and to encourage the transmission of those values, attitudes and beliefs that form the dominant ideology of the country'. However, the emphasis placed on each of these four main aims differs across different countries and across time (George & Manning, 1980, p. 64).

The Marxist-Leninist ideology permeated the whole Soviet educational system (Judge, 1975, p. 134), which was designed to indoctrinate the younger generation with the new ideology and foster the notion that 'children owed allegiance first and foremost to the state' (George & Manning, 1980, pp. 68, 71–72, quote 72). The principles of Soviet educational policy that a socialist education 'should be universal, secular, polytechnical, participatory and environmentalist' thereby stressed the value of vocational education (George & Manning, 1980, p. 65). These principles remained remarkably stable over time; they were identified before the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution and were pursued through the 1980s (Tomiak, 1986, p. 2).

Already before 1920, first steps towards an ideological indoctrination were made through so-called 'socially useful labour', which was considered crucial for the socialisation of young communists and led to the introduction of vocational training into the curriculum. Young people were to be equipped, according to this approach, with the 'politically desirable' attitude to labour, that is, the career aspirations of young school leavers should be adjusted to the demands of the Soviet economy. The compulsory polytechnical training of secondary school pupils aimed to guarantee that early school leavers were employable as workers (Porket, 1989, p. 147; Reiter, 2006, p. 11; see also O'Dell/Lane, 1976).

43 In 1974, about 5% of the Soviet population was considered poor, defined at that time as living on less than 50 roubles per month (Selezneva, 2016, p. 13).



For the purpose of indoctrination, the schools in the Soviet Union were closely associated with the communist youth organisations, 'Komsomol' for those aged 16 and older, the 'Young Pioneers' for those aged 10–16, and the 'Little Octoberists' for ages 8–11. In turn, the youth organisations were 'linked to the Communist party so that schools, directly and indirectly, explicitly and implicitly, came under the control and the daily influence of the party' (George & Manning, 1980, p. 72).

Starting shortly after the Bolshevik Revolution, a series of decrees transformed the legal basis and goals of the Soviet education system. While wide variations existed throughout the country, most of these reforms were implemented in the long run. The first objective was universalism. Between August and October 1918, primary, secondary and higher education became free and accessible to all: 'Primary education was compulsory while the other two forms of education were simply made free for all' (George & Manning, 1980, p. 69). All private schools were abolished.

Soon after, in 1919, the government introduced a policy of 'positive discrimination' with the establishment of 'workers' faculties' to prepare semi-literate workers for university (university enrolment now being accessible without an entrance examination). Simultaneously, applicants from the former 'upper-classes' 'were denied entry to universities in an effort to change substantially and rapidly the class origin and the political ideology of the intelligentsia'. In the same year, a massive literacy campaign was started, beginning in Russia and gradually spreading to other parts under Bolshevik control. 'In spite of the vigour and the enthusiasm behind the literacy campaigns it was not until the late 1930s that the Soviet Union could show with statistics that illiteracy had been eradicated' (George & Manning, 1980, pp. 69–70, quotes 70).

The 1920s was a period of experimentation; thus, the actual 'achievements lagged far behind official pronouncement', for example, regarding compulsory primary education. Reasons were a lack of adequate facilities and a lack of teachers, which led to the employment of untrained teachers. As a result, the number of both schools and pupils actually dropped in the early 1920s. How-

ever, the number of pupils increased again in the late 1920s, even though pupils had to use schools in shifts (due to the still limited number of facilities), a practice that continued well into the 1930s. Nevertheless, the central government was unable 'to apply uniformly its policies for democratisation, polytechnical education and party domination of schools', especially in the countryside (George & Manning, 1980, p. 72).

With the start of the first FYP in 1928, the Soviet government made some important changes in educational policy by more explicitly boosting polytechnical education in order to meet the demands of the economy (George & Manning, 1980, p. 72). Economic planning became 'the backbone of educational policy' (Blumenthal & Benson, 1978, p. 17) and elements of centralist control were strengthened both on the level of state administration as well as within schools. This aspiration for control created a 'pattern of *austere utilitarianism* in education stressing social discipline and utility for the world of work' (Lauglo, 1988, p. 296; *italic in the original*); this aspiration was relaxed only with the educational reforms of the 1980s (Reiter, 2006, p. 11). In the Soviet Union, education was geared to the needs of the state: 'The entire educational system could be envisaged as a vast network of manpower training and, more specifically, labour socialisation' (Zajda, 1979, p. 288).

This shift to polytechnical education came at the expense of teaching basic skills and led to increasing administrative problems for both schools and industries; the system of polytechnical education was plagued by discipline problems, and the inadequacies and incongruities of the whole education system became obvious. Consequently, universalism and political socialisation as educational objectives were strengthened and polytechnical education was side-lined in primary and secondary schools in favour of 'general knowledge' and a good command of basic sciences. The government also put more emphasis on discipline, standardisation and uniformity, as the new FYP required the education of scientists, engineers, and other scientifically educated workers (George & Manning, 1980, pp. 73–74).



Fostered by an improvement of the country's economic situation, the government could in 1930 advance universal education by introducing compulsory school attendance for children from the age of eight to twelve in rural areas and from the age of eight to fourteen in all urban and industrial areas. In the early 1930s, however, the 'open-door policy to higher education was firmly shut to the academically unqualified' (George & Manning, 1980, pp. 73–74, quote 74). A decree in 1933 replaced previous teaching methods and prescribed specific textbooks as the basis for teaching; in 1935 followed the introduction of a uniform system for the assessment of pupils. Consequently, only pupils graduating from secondary school with the highest grades could enter higher education without further entrance examination. Polytechnical education was finally abolished in 1937. 'This, however, did not mean a turn away from scientific knowledge. Rather, emphasis was placed on teaching science at school in a conventional manner' (George & Manning, 1980, p. 75).

While the right to free education for all citizens was enshrined in the 1936 constitution, the Soviet government in practice took a step back from universalism: in 1940, it introduced modest tuition fees for the last three years of secondary schools and for higher-educational establishments. 'Children whose fathers were in the armed forces, war orphans, children of sick and disabled parents and, above all, children with excellent school achievement, were exempted from these fees' (George & Manning, 1980, p. 76). This measure solidified the existing social structure by excluding mostly children of working-class parents. While the 'official reason for the introduction of fees was that most parents could afford to contribute towards the education of their children', it can be assumed that the government wanted to nudge more pupils to enter vocational training and trade schools (George & Manning, 1980, p. 77).

In 1943, the government lowered the compulsory school age from eight to seven years (George & Manning, 1980, p. 74). Between 1945 and 1953, no further major reforms were initiated but '[e]xpenditure on education increased, school attendance rose and higher education expanded'

(George & Manning, 1980, p. 77). Furthermore, the government started a gradual transition to extend compulsory schooling to a total of seven years in 1949 (Stiller, 1983, p. 19, fn. 5).

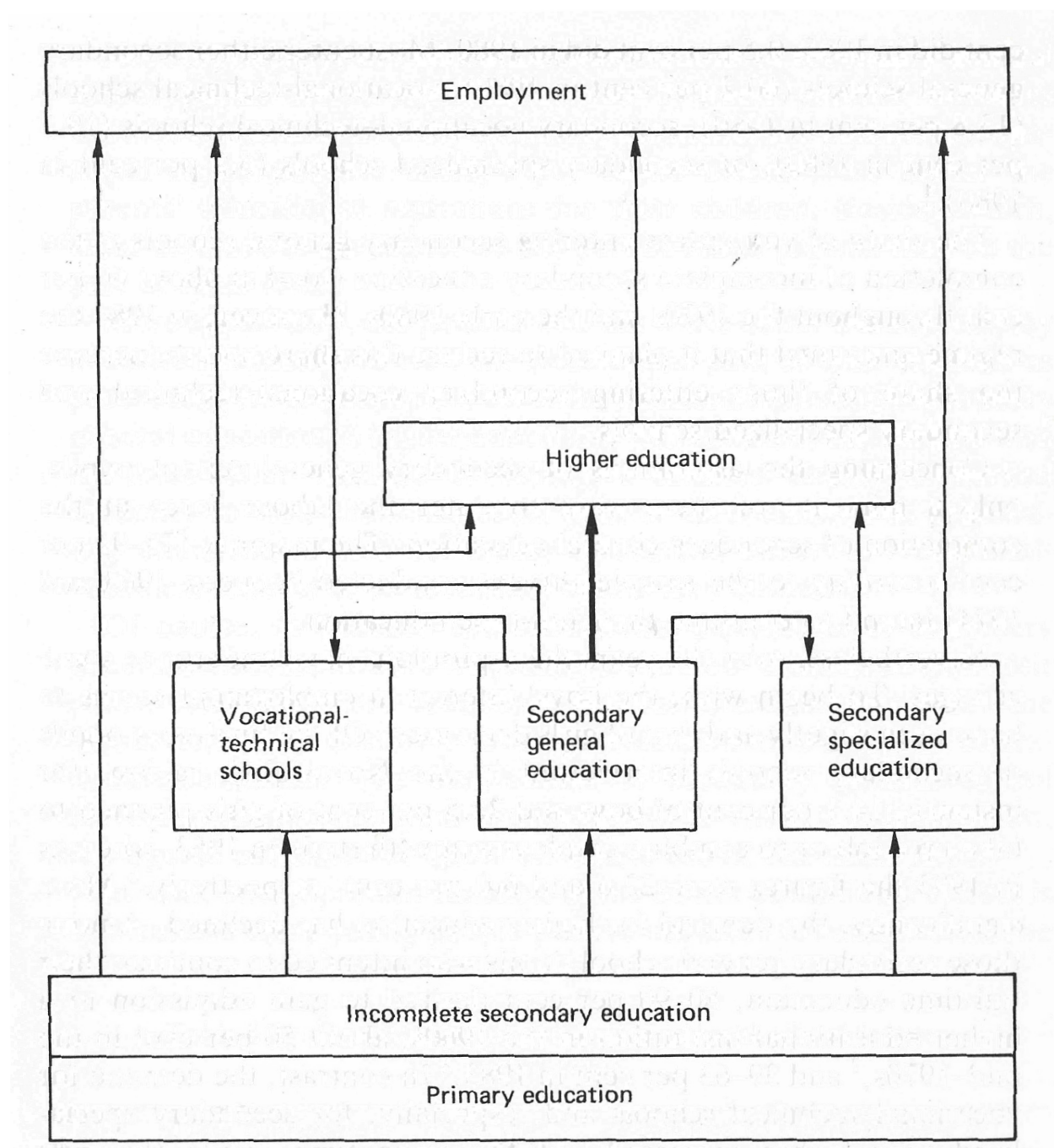
Criticism of the perceived overtly academic nature of education and the lapse of polytechnical education was raised in 1952 as the expansion of secondary education created strains for higher education: too many secondary graduates were competing for too few places in higher education, which resulted in 'frustration and bribery' (George & Manning, 1980, p. 77). Additionally, it was becoming clear that the educational policy had failed in its egalitarian aim, as 'a working-class and particularly a peasant-family background was highly detrimental to a young person's chances of reaching full-time higher education, particularly entrance to the prestigious universities of Moscow and Leningrad' (George & Manning, 1980, p. 77).<sup>44</sup>

In 1955, in order to counteract the lack of egalitarianism 'entrance regulations to full-time higher education were changed to the benefit of people at work. Applicants who had worked for at least two years had a quota of places allocated to them, thus freeing them from direct competition with applicants [coming] straight from school'. Furthermore, the whole educational system was made free again in 1956 as the fees for the upper grades of secondary school, introduced in 1940, were abolished. Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev even proposed to replace full-time secondary and higher education with part-time study in combination with work (George & Manning, 1980, pp. 77–79, quote 77).

However, the major educational reform in 1958 proved less drastic than Khrushchev's proposal. The reform extended compulsory education by one year to a total of seven years (a process that had started gradually in 1949), and it offered three different tracks of upper secondary education beyond the age of 15. Typically, young people would enter further general secondary educa-

44 On the issue of education and social mobility, the Soviet education system did produce and reproduce social inequalities. See, e.g., Dobson, 1977; Dobson & Swafford, 1980; Gerber & Hout, 1995; Titma & Saar, 1995; Yanowitch, 1981; Zajda, 1980.

Figure 1: Simplified Schema of the Soviet Educational System from the late 1950s



Source: Porket, 1989, p. 145.

tion, vocational secondary education, or specialised secondary education (George & Manning, 1980, p. 79).

Despite diluting Khrushchev's proposal, the 1958 legislation did reduce full-time higher education in favour of part-time education; both the

proportion of part-time students in higher education and the proportion of students accepted for higher education with prior work experience increased. 'The reform, however, did not reduce the influence of family background on [acceptance to] full-time higher education' (George & Man-

ning, 1980, p. 79). Nevertheless, the reform created a Soviet educational system that remained largely unchanged until 1991. It contained four main components: pre-school education, primary schools, secondary schools, and higher education (George & Manning, 1980, p. 81).

### 3.3.1.1 Pre-school childcare/education

During the 1920s, despite the enthusiasm of the early Soviet leadership for pre-school education, little was done to increase the number of pre-school facilities. It was the accelerated urbanisation and industrialisation – and the accompanying need to mobilise the female workforce – that forced the government to expand pre-school facilities. However, demand exceeded supply by far. Thus, the lack of available places was considered one of the reasons for the declining birth rate beginning in the 1960s (George & Manning, 1980, p. 82; Stiller, 1983, p. 78).

Pre-school institutions – crèches/nurseries for children of two to three months to three years and kindergartens for children aged three to seven years – were provided either by the state or by enterprises or collective farms (George & Manning, 1980, p. 82; Tudge, 1991, p. 122). In 1959, a joint institution, the crèche/nursery-kindergarten, was introduced for children from two months to seven years of age; by 1968, this had become the dominant type of pre-school institution, while the number of stand-alone nurseries and kindergartens had decreased (Kreusler, 1970, p. 431; Stiller, 1983, p. 77).

While nurseries were supervised by the Ministry of Health and provided mainly play facilities for children, kindergartens and nursery-kindergartens were supervised by the Ministry of Education. They aimed to prepare the children for primary school and to provide some basic educational skills, as well as social training along socialist principles. However, the workload of the employees was in practice so high that little time was left for education and social training (George & Manning, 1980, p. 83; Madison, 1972, p. 832).<sup>45</sup>

45 Note: Under which supervision an institution falls, indicates where in the statistics to find the respective figures.

Overall, pre-school education in the Soviet Union was 'neither free nor compulsory' (George & Manning, 1980, p. 82). The state covered only around 75–80% of the costs for pre-school childcare; the actual fees depended upon parental earnings. However, the wage scale upon which reduced fees were calculated, which had been introduced in 1948, was never modified, thus resulting in the overwhelming majority of parents paying the maximum fee (McAuley, 1979, p. 291; Lantsev, 1962, p. 456). Consequently, poor families received little help. This changed only in 1990, when families 'with a per capita family income lower than 60 [roubles] were exempted from the monthly fee for childcare institutions; families with four children or more received a 50 percent deduction of the fee payments' (Selezneva, 2016, pp. 19–20).

### 3.3.1.2 Compulsory education: Primary and lower secondary schools

For all Soviet children aged 7–15 years education was compulsory, free and universal. While the first three years constituted primary education, the remaining five years comprised lower secondary education. This division was for administrative and teaching purposes only, and did not involve any selection process at the end of primary schooling. At the age of 15, all children had to sit final examinations; at this stage, pupils could either leave school and take up employment, or they could continue their education at one of several types of secondary school until the age of 18 (George & Manning, 1980, pp. 84, 86).

From 1975, the option of immediately entering work after eight years of schooling was explicitly discouraged in favour of continuing secondary education until the age of 18; most pupils already did so, but with wide variations between urban and rural areas. By 1978, 98% of fifteen-year-olds continued their secondary education; in the 1980s, upper secondary education was even made compulsory (George & Manning, 1980, p. 84; Reiter, 2006, p. 13; Zajda, 1979, p. 287).

Each track of upper secondary education (i.e., general secondary education, vocational secondary education and specialised secondary educa-

tion) was associated with clearly defined future roles of its graduates; decisions taken at this point in the educational pipeline were largely irreversible. Despite a high degree of systematisation and government's ideological aspiration for equality, a pupil's transition into one of these three tracks was characterised by profound regional differences in terms of the implementation of the Soviet educational model, the regional demand for specific workers, and the regional availability of certain school types (see, e.g., Titma & Saar, 1995). This applied especially to the two more advanced tracks, while the selection process for vocational schools was guided by similar rules across regions. The selection process was often executed by powerful individuals in key positions or by mediating institutions like the *Komsomol*, leading to arbitrary decisions (Titma & Saar, 1995, p. 40; Titma et al., 2003; Reiter, 2006, pp. 13, 17).

As 'the exigencies of the Soviet economy [imposed] limits on educational opportunity', Soviet planners urged schools to produce skilled workers and specialists (Dobson & Swafford, 1980, p. 252). The graduates' personal aspirations were of little consequence for his/her career choices, which were strongly influenced by economic expedience; this lack of a real choice contributed to the low prestige of manual work (Zajda, 1980). Overall, pupils in the Soviet Union over time increasingly sought higher education, contrary to the societal need for trained workers (Marnie, 1986, pp. 216–219). According to surveys among lower secondary school pupils conducted between 1963 and 1974, the majority of pupils declared an intent to continue their full-time education after completing lower secondary school instead of directly entering the labour force (Porket, 1989, p. 146; Matthews, 1982, pp. 57–58).<sup>46</sup> 'The main problem in education stemmed from the simple point that in the Soviet Union the main access

to more desirable jobs and social status was the higher education system, yet the main work available was in blue-collar production. There was thus an inevitable conflict between the aspirations of the majority of pupils and the reality of working life for most of them' (Manning, 1992a, p. 41).

However, over time the demand for higher education did decline, even though there were differences between Moscow and the regions and between the sexes. 'Among those secondary general school pupils who intended to continue their full-time education, 80–90 per cent desired to gain admission to a higher-educational institution in the 1960s, about 50 per cent in the mid-1970s, and 39–63 per cent in 1983. In contrast, the demand for vocational-technical and, especially, for secondary specialized schools [...] increased'. One reason for this declining demand for higher education was dissatisfaction with the remuneration of higher-education graduates (Porket, 1989, p. 146).

Social background still played an important role at each stage of educational attainment. Decisions about their futures often corresponded to the graduates' family backgrounds; 'children born into the upper socioeconomic strata [were] more likely than others to attain high levels of education' (Dobson & Swafford, 1980, p. 267, quote 253). Higher-income families seem to have had higher aspirations for their children's education; the aspirations among urban parents were also higher than among rural parents (Porket, 1989, p. 147).

### 3.3.1.3 Secondary general education

Beginning in the mid-1960s, the majority of pupils aged 15 continued for three years full-time at the secondary general school (of which one year was reserved for vocational training), which prepared them for higher education and the university entrance examination at the age of 18 (George & Manning, 1980, p. 86; Porket, 1989, p. 145). However, 'along the way, many students dropped out of this most popular form of education or completed it and went to work without acquiring utilisable qualifications. Repeated attempts to incorporate elements of vocational training into the curricula [...] contributed little to the mismatch of labour

46 While more than 40% of young people started work directly after lower secondary education in the year 1965, this share had fallen to less than one percent by 1980. At that time, around 60% of lower secondary graduates continued in upper secondary general education, around 33% entered vocational-technical schools, and some 6% secondary specialised schools (Porket, 1989, pp. 145–146; see also Marnie, 1986).

supply and actual labour demand' (Reiter, 2006, p. 14; see also Matthews, 1982, pp. 97–152). In 1964, as a consequence, the three-year secondary general education 'was reduced to two years, leaving out the year designed for practical work. For the other forms of secondary education, practical training and work [requirements] were substantially reduced' (George & Manning, 1980, p. 80).

#### 3.3.1.4 Secondary specialised education

The secondary specialised schools provided students with a full-time education in specialised 'technicums'. The courses at these institutions would prepare students for specific professions (i.e., semi-professionals for non-manual jobs, such as electricians, nurses, librarians, primary school teachers), whereby emphasis was given to both theoretical and practical work. 'Courses [lasted] for four years for those coming straight from the eight-year school, while for those coming from the tenth grade of the secondary [general] school, courses [lasted] only two years. At the completion of the course students [received] both a professional qualification and a certificate of secondary education which [entitled] them to apply for admission to universities' (George & Manning, 1980, p. 86). However, while in principle the passage to higher education (usually after a few years of work) was possible, access was in practice highly restricted (Reiter, 2006, p. 15).

A 'feature [technicums] had in common with vocational schools was the insufficient preparation of the students for the work they would have to perform in their specialisation. A large part of what would be called 'vocational training' outside school [...] took the form of training on-the-job within enterprises' (Reiter, 2006, p. 15; see also Kahan, 1960; Matthews, 1982, pp. 178–182; Sowtis, 1991).

#### 3.3.1.5 Vocational-Technical education

The vocational-technical schools 'recruited less gifted students or dropouts from other tracks and prepared manual workers and future farmers; for them, continuation in higher education was effec-

tively impossible', as upper secondary education had to be completed at evening schools (Reiter, 2006, p. 14). Vocational-technical schools offered full-time courses lasting from six months to three years and provided training for workers in manual skills (George & Manning, 1980, p. 86).

At the end of the 1960s, secondary vocational-technical schools were introduced as an alternative, with programmes lasting three to four years and combining education in production skills with general education. Secondary vocational-technical education became increasingly popular in the 1970s because they qualified an individual for higher education and provided an alternative to secondary general education. Nevertheless, most graduates of this school type started work directly after graduation (IMF et al., 1991b, p. 167; Reiter, 2006, p. 14).

#### 3.3.1.6 Higher education

Higher education in the Soviet Union consisted mainly of university, polytechnics and monotech-nic institutes and was 'closely tied to the needs of the labour market', as one of its main goals was to ensure the availability of highly trained specialists for the centrally planned economy (George & Manning, 1980, p. 87). The system of higher education was well embedded within the primary concern about labour force planning (Grant, 1970; Lauglo, 1988; Kaser, 1986); 'education for labour', as Zajda (1979) terms it.

Qualified applicants had to sit an entrance examination. Soviet higher education was free and students received grants, usually from the government, but occasionally from enterprises or collective farms. However, these grants were lower than the minimum wage. 'On graduation, students [were] assigned to a job in their special field in any part of the Soviet Union for a period of two or three years. After that they [were] free to look for a job elsewhere if they so [wished]' (George & Manning, 1980, p. 87, quote 88).

While egalitarian universalism was the ideal, 'social inequalities [prevailed] in university education as well' (George & Manning, 1980, p. 93). In 1960, 'preparatory departments' were attached to universities which provided special



**Table 8.** Number of persons attending Soviet educational establishments (in millions)

|                                   | 1940 | 1970 | 1976  |
|-----------------------------------|------|------|-------|
| Kindergartens and Nurseries       | 1.95 | 9.28 | 11.85 |
| General Education Schools         | 35.6 | 49.4 | 46.5  |
| Specialised Secondary Schools     | 1.0  | 4.4  | 4.6   |
| Higher-Educational Establishments | 0.8  | 4.6  | 5.0   |
| Vocational Training Schools       | 0.7  | 2.6  | 3.5   |
| Skill-Upgrading Courses           | 9.5  | 18.8 | 33.5  |

Source: George & Manning, 1980, p. 81.

classes for young people with working-class and peasant background wishing to enter universities. Those who did well in these classes could enter a university without taking the usual entrance examinations. After a straight quota system for university admission for applicants with work experience had been abandoned in 1967, the government introduced a new scheme whereby a fixed proportion of desired applicants with and without work experience was admitted from the general applicant pool. Despite the shortcomings of both of these measures of positive discrimination, they did provide support for working-class applicants (George & Manning, 1980, p. 95). However, the tertiary education sector was not able to cope with the expansion of general education (see Table 8) and, as a result, had to further restrict the access to higher education making the process more and more competitive over time.

### 3.3.1.7 Dismantling of the reform after the demotion of Khrushchev

After Khrushchev's demotion, the education reform of 1958 was dismantled. One important element of this dismantling was the substantial reduction of practical training and work in secondary education. In 1964, the three-year secondary general education curriculum was reduced to two years by cutting out the year of practical work. The other forms of secondary education followed this example. Additionally, the privileges for applicants with work experience at higher-education institutions were reduced in 1967 (George & Manning, 1980, p. 80).

Despite these changes, 'official policy still [remained] committed to polytechnical education,

though the emphasis now [was] on scientific education within schools rather than work experience outside the schools' (George & Manning, 1980, p. 80). In order to minimise inequality in higher education, higher-educational establishments provided 8–10 months' preparatory courses for demobilised soldiers and children of farmers and workers, instead of giving preferential treatment to applicants with substantial work experience. In practice, however, the social background of the applicants for these preparatory courses did not play much of a role; children of white-collar workers and intellectuals were accepted as well (George & Manning, 1980, p. 80).

In the late 1960s, so-called 'vocational guidance' was introduced at schools in order to align the pupils' interests more closely with locally needed and available jobs (Matthews, 1982, p. 60). Besides re-adjusting ambitions, work training, which was also used to reform problematic pupils, was integrated into all levels of education (Reiter, 2006, p. 12). In the following years, only minor educational reforms were enacted. In 1971, the successive transition to compulsory exams after ten years of schooling began (Stiller, 1983, p. 19, FN 5). Polytechnical education/work training received renewed support with the Law on Education of 1977 (Zajda, 1979, p. 287).

In 1984, the mandatory entrance age into primary school was lowered from seven to six years, thereby adding one year to primary education. As a result, most children were to ultimately receive eleven years of schooling, though in practice compulsory education was not standardised across all Soviet republics. The 1984 reform also attempted to reduce the proportion of each cohort entering secondary general education from 60% to 29%;

however, as a 'political safety valve, the 60 per cent who were now to go through vocational school would be given the right to apply for higher education and take the relevant entrance exams' (Manning, 1992a, p. 52). Additionally, the reform again stressed the vocational element in general education through vocational qualification in an attempt to bring secondary education in line with the requirements of the labour market. However, the reform was never fully implemented (IMF et al., 1991b, p. 166; Manning, 1992a, pp. 52–53; Reiter, 2006, pp. 12–13).

While over the years the level of formal education in the Soviet Union increased steadily (due to both the expansion of educational opportunities and growing educational aspirations), in practice, young people did not always succeed in realising their personal aspirations. However, even if they did succeed, there was no guarantee that they would be able to make use of their qualifications after the completion of their study or training. Educational qualifications of employed persons were often underutilised, and thus wasted (Porket, 1989, p. 162).

### 3.3.2 HEALTH

The development and introduction of a socialist healthcare system, the so-called Semashko model, started soon after the establishment of a Bolshevik government in 1917 (Heinrich, 2022). Though originally short on details, the Bolshevik government sought a fundamental social revolution: as opposed to the medical systems of the capitalist West, the new social medicine would primarily respond to the needs of the working class. This included a comprehensive social insurance in the hands of the proletariat (Deacon, 1983, p. 59; Solomon & Hutchinson, 1990, p. x; Weissman, 1990, pp. 98–99; Williams, 2006, p. 206).

It was the general belief among Bolshevik leaders that 'socialist medical care would embody a transformation in the social relations of medical practice' (Deacon, 1983, p. 63); the socialist revolution would ultimately lead to the elimination of disease and ill health caused by the capitalist economic system (George & Manning, 1980, p. 104). 'From the first days of the October Rev-

olution, the Bolsheviks declared that theirs would be a social medicine, a medicine that rejected the individualistic, patient-centered practices of the capitalist West and responded instead to the medical needs of a class – the proletariat' (Ewing, 1990, p. 69).

Nikolai A. Semashko, man who gave his name to the eponymous healthcare model, began to outline the new socialist health policy in June 1918. He envisioned the socialist healthcare system as providing comprehensive, qualified medical care to everyone, at their earliest need, free of charge and organised as a single, unified service provided by the state. Semashko especially emphasised the importance of preventive care in creating a healthy population and full workers' participation in the health service. These principles were influenced by international health initiatives: the distinct class character was inspired by the German health insurance (i.e., different insurance schemes for different professions), while the emphasis on prophylactic measures was borrowed from British health protection approach. Domestically, the idea of a free and universally accessible medicine was inspired by the Russian *zemstvo* (local government) medical service (George & Manning, 1980, pp. 105–106).

Since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, one important pillar of socialist welfare provision has been its self-administration through workers' councils. However, shortly after the revolution, the Bolsheviks quickly withdrew their support for workers' self-administration as proclaimed by Semashko. Genuine mass involvement was replaced with central control and financing through the national budget (Deacon, 1983, pp. 15–19, 74; Ewing, 1990, pp. 70, 78). This shift, which also applied to self-administration and mass involvement in other administrative branches, was justified by the statement that 'the Soviet state had been transformed into a workers' state, and the goal of self-administration was technically fulfilled'; any autonomy from this workers' state became suspicious (Ewing, 1990, p. 70).

In building a new socialist society, public health became one of the top priorities for the Bolsheviks (Krementsov, 2017, p. 1693); in July 1918, they established the People's Commissariat



of Public Health (*Narkomzdrav*).<sup>47</sup> Semashko, a trained physician, headed this unified and centralised health administration. Bolshevik medical administrators elaborated new, 'rational' principles of healthcare through which the pitfalls of capitalism, such as the dangers of market fluctuations and volatile funding, could be avoided by ensuring a centralised government administration, control, and distribution of healthcare (Solomon & Hutchinson, 1990, p. xi; Schechter, 1992, p. 207; Weissman, 1990, pp. 97–98, 110).

With the beginning of the civil war in the second half of 1918, an extreme centralisation move incorporated all local organs into the state apparatus (Ewing, 1990, p. 74). While the education, training, and licensing of the physician was the responsibility of *Narkomzdrav*, 'physicians were integrated into a state-controlled union which brought together all medical workers, and the duties of the physicians to the state were vastly increased and spelled out in minute detail' (Solomon, 1994, p. 184).<sup>48</sup> However, opposition against a genuinely socialist healthcare system, and especially the move towards centralisation, came from the Pirogov Society, an organisation of community physicians, and others; these forces urged for a decentralisation of the health sector instead (George & Manning, 1980, p. 107; Weissman, 1990, p. 101).

Furthermore, friction arose within the Bolshevik administration between the health authorities and the social insurance directors over the question of eligibility, whether the state's responsibilities lay first and foremost with the insured persons or with all citizens, irrespective of their insurance status. Semashko fought for a unified and universal healthcare for all citizens; however, his plan was temporarily frustrated by supporters of the membership-based insurance medicine system (Ewing,

1990, pp. 75–76). Based on a pre-revolutionary workers' insurance movement, the People's Commissariat of Labour wanted to provide primarily the working class with adequate healthcare through the establishment of a comprehensive state-run insurance system. Thus, trade unions and social insurance agencies favoured a separate system for the insured population under their control (Davis, 1983, p. 349; Ewing, 1990, p. 70).

As a result of this internal struggle, two healthcare systems existed in parallel. Nevertheless, *Narkomzdrav* was able to defend the basic principles of Soviet medicine through the civil war era (Weissman, 1990, p. 108). In February 1919, the Department for Insurance Medicine was integrated into *Narkomzdrav* thereby bringing all medical facilities of the insurance medicine system under its control (Ewing, 1990, p. 76).

However, already in the 1920s, almost all of Semashko's principles were altered. The upheavals of World War I and of the following civil war led to severe destruction and disruption, internal displacements, famines, and epidemics. Under these conditions, there was an overall lack of government resources for healthcare, which was at this point of low priority. The healthcare budget was subordinated first to the war effort and later to the demands of the economy, carrying the healthcare service further away from its original ideals (George & Manning, 1980, p. 109). Relatively weak and inexperienced, the health administration in *Narkomzdrav* 'was sometimes forced to adopt measures and programs that ran counter to its desires' (Davis, 1990, p. 148).

The inexperienced government and health officials found it extremely hard to prioritise, resulting in policy and decision-making that was rather ad hoc and reactive in character (Williams, 2006, p. 209). In addition to this inexperience, 'medical affairs at the grass roots proved difficult to control'. Under the conditions prevailing during the civil war, the development of a unified health plan according to 'rational' principles and the centralisation of healthcare proved difficult to implement, not least due to the sheer size of the country: 'In many instances reforms trumpeted at the center never penetrated the periphery' (Solomon & Hutchinson, 1990, p. xii; see also Weissman, 1990, p. 110;

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47 *Narkomzdrav's* activities included the 'protection of maternity and infancy, development of a primary health care system, mass production of vaccines and sera, detailed studies of labor and living conditions and occupational hazards, extensive health propaganda, and training necessary cadres of health specialists' (Krementsov, 2017, p. 1693).

48 For more on nurses and mid-level medical workers, see Grant (2017, 2022).

Williams, 2006, p. 211). Additionally, there were too few physicians in the countryside to fulfil the government's goals; *Narkomzdrav's* heavy emphasis on technical expertise led to a fight against *feldshers*<sup>49</sup> which, in turn, further reduced the already inadequate available medical services in rural areas (Weissman, 1990, p. 116).

Furthermore, the successful implementation of the Semashko system was additionally impeded by a shift in budgetary responsibilities resulting in further financial constraints for the *Narkomzdrav* and for the underfunded healthcare system in general (Williams, 2006, p. 212). In May 1922, in order to balance the strained national budget, the central authorities abruptly shifted financing of most medical facilities from central to local government; only the sanitary epidemiological (public health) centres remained on the national budget (Davis, 1983, p. 344; Weissman, 1990, pp. 108, 110). This move resulted in a drastic contraction of hospitals and clinics, especially in the countryside, and also (re-)legalised the establishment of private health facilities (Weissman, 1990, pp. 108, 113). 'The decentralization of finance in 1922 meant that [*Narkomzdrav*] was heavily dependent on the generosity of local soviets [councils]. This was particularly so at the end of the decade as a result of a decline in the other major sources of income – namely, contributions from the social insurance fund' (Weissman, 1990, p. 111).

Authority over the budget can be a means of control. With this shift in budgetary responsibilities, local governments increased their control over health and welfare (Williams, 2006, p. 208). Overall, *Narkomzdrav's* 'difficulty in bringing its authority to bear in the provinces extended beyond budgetary matters', also including planning matters (Weissman, 1990, p. 112).

Consequently, one of the Soviet healthcare system's principal shortcomings was its factually non-egalitarian character. The principle of universal access to healthcare based on need (and not on 'class' or ability to pay) was never strictly observed, creating significant inequalities. From the mid-1920s onwards, a campaign to strength-

en insurance medicine at the expense of unified Soviet medicine began to define access to health and welfare benefits in ideological terms; social need was politically determined, and class affiliation became an important criterion for access (Ewing, 1990, pp. 80–82). Additionally, economic and fiscal constraints caused a shortage of personnel, medicines, and equipment (Williams, 2006, pp. 212). This resulted in 'closed, occupationally-related health sub-systems [that] were consciously established to ration out scarce medical services, and inherited regional inequalities were tolerated' (Davis, 1983, p. 345). Especially wage-earners from favoured industries were granted preferential medical treatment, while health services in the countryside remained rudimentary. Trade unions and social insurance agencies still favoured a separate system for the insured population under their control (Davis, 1983, p. 349; George & Manning, 1980, p. 112; Twigg, 1998, p. 585; Weissman, 1990, p. 113; Williams, 2006, pp. 211–212).

Additionally, despite the rhetoric to the contrary, fees in the healthcare sector still existed, and rationing of services prevailed. The quality of these services improved, however, as *Narkomzdrav's* physician-dominated apparatus was able to advance toward its goal of science-based healthcare provided by qualified professionals (Weissman, 1990, p. 109; Williams, 2006, p. 216). Weissman (1990, p. 102) argues that these mostly war-related challenges did not 'force the abandonment of the basic principles of the new health system'; *Narkomzdrav's* leadership remained committed to those principles, which also continued to drive official policy. By the end of the 1920s, however, this commitment was tested.

In 1928, due to the rapid industrialisation, forced collectivisation of agriculture, and the introduction of the first FYP, 'health services were now quite explicitly directed towards industrial effort' (George & Manning, 1980, p. 110). As in the economic sphere, the *Narkomzdrav* was supposed to become the vehicle for consistent application of nationwide planning, universally obligatory norms, and technical specialisation (Weissman, 1990, p. 116). The FYP integrated the healthcare sector into the overall national economic plan

49 A *feldsher* is a medical/ surgical practitioner without full professional qualifications.

'to improve health conditions, increase the food supply, raise labour productivity, stress health and welfare in industrial centres, cut the level of industrial accidents, increase health awareness (sanitary culture) and maintain a unified dispensary system' (Williams, 2006, p. 213). Contrary to the intentions of *Narkomzdrav*, during the industrialisation the health sector became increasingly an integral part of the command economy, subordinated to the economic requirements of the state and (relatedly) primarily for the benefit of industrial workers (Kornai & Eggleston, 2001, pp. 135–136).

This integration in the overall national FYP had an adverse effect on health conditions in the country, worsened by the unrealistic health and welfare targets set by it. Consequently, medical care deteriorated even in Moscow and other privileged industrial regions (Davis, 1990, p. 149; George & Manning, 1980, p. 109; Williams, 2006, pp. 213–214). In this situation, and encouraged by complaints of the social insurance authorities, the Bolshevik leadership decided that 'special measures would have to be implemented to protect the medical care of the industrial proletariat from adverse consequences of economic disruptions' (Davis, 1990, p. 150).

As a result, in 1929, *Narkomzdrav* had to formulate its first FYP for health and 'make explicit goals, policies and resource implications of medical programmes. It would determine future quantitative, qualitative and distributive developments in the provision of medical services' (Davis, 1983, p. 354). The most contentious issue in the planning process was again the extent to which insured workers should be given preferential medical treatment. *Narkomzdrav's* first proposal for an FYP in 1929 was rejected for its 'failure to incorporate a "proletarian class line" in distributional plans' (Davis, 1990, p. 154). Critics of the proposal 'called for the rapid growth of a medical system oriented to providing care at the place of work, with preference given to patients in those socioeconomic groups deemed most important by political authorities', instead of distributing medical care primarily on the basis of need (Davis, 1990, p. 147). These critics, supported by trade unions and the social insurance funds, argued for an official non-egalitarian health policy, thereby

contradicting Semashko's principles. To break any inherent resistance toward class politics and to end the dispute with insurance medicine, the *Narkomzdrav* was purged in 1930 and a more ambitious, class-oriented FYP for health was adopted (Davis, 1983, p. 356, 1990, pp. 147, 156).

Thus, many features of insurance medicine were incorporated into the Soviet medical system. Beginning in 1930, a growing system of factory-based ambulances and polyclinics began to replace regional hospitals (see, e.g., Filtzer, 2017); the administration of their services was entrusted to factory-based insurance organs, enshrining the privileged and specialised medical treatment of industrial workers. In 1933, the administration of social insurance was transferred to the trade unions shifting the focus strongly towards expenditure control: 'In the domain of insurance medicine, healing was not enough. Control over expenditures was equally important' (Ewing, 1990, pp. 83, 85, 91, quote 86).

Nevertheless, by the 1930s, the Semashko healthcare system was largely established; in 1936, a right to free healthcare was enshrined in the new Soviet constitution, while charges for drugs remained allowed (George & Manning, 1980, p. 111). The entire Soviet health service was uniformly organised across the national, regional, city and district administrative tiers with four levels of healthcare facilities: hospitals, polyclinics, primary healthcare facilities, and sanitary epidemiological (public health) centres. As these facilities were often funded from separate budgets, this led to the duplication of functional responsibilities. While originally introduced as a two-way planning and decision-making process, 'the allocation process in the central Health Ministry in Moscow [determined] health care resources and funding at all levels' (Rowland & Telyukov, 1991, p. 77). However, the plan targets for healthcare created unintended incentives: while tertiary institutions (hospitals) were funded according to the numbers of beds occupied, secondary institutions (polyclinics) were funded according to the number of patient visits (Twigg, 1998, p. 584), incentivising under-treatment in polyclinics and over-treatment in hospitals. Primary care and public health services, for their part, were largely neglected.

Overall, the Semashko system was able to improve basic healthcare provision for the large majority of people (especially in the postwar periods), largely due to reductions in infant mortality and improved control of communicable diseases. However, the isolationist foreign policy of the Soviet Union starting in the 1930s, which continued through the 'Cold War', though it harmed all aspects of Soviet society, hit the healthcare sector especially hard. Welfare modernisation continued to be of low priority, resources were spread too thinly, and the isolationism kept medical innovations out. Nevertheless, the Soviet desire to surpass the capitalist West wherever possible extended also to the quality of the healthcare sector. As for the Soviet government, quality was synonymous with quantity; it placed strong emphasis on quantitative targets based on input, leading to some of the highest per capita numbers of physicians and hospital beds in the world (Rowland & Telyukov, 1991; Stiller, 1983, p. 173; Williams, 2006, p. 216). At the same time, chronic underfunding of the health system resulted in, for instance, a general lack of pharmaceuticals: 'In the race for quantity in the number of doctors, nurses, hospitals, and beds, the quality of these assets was not a primary concern' (Schechter, 1992, p. 209).

The increasing centralisation of healthcare services led to a rising influence of the hospital: in 1947, polyclinics came under hospital control followed in 1956 by sanitary-epidemiological (public health) stations. Apart from this, the health policy was not changed much up to the 1980s (George & Manning, 1980, p. 111).<sup>50</sup>

However, by this time the inbuilt weaknesses of the Semashko system were already becoming visible. Since the mid-1960s, health conditions in the Soviet Union had been deteriorating with stagnating life expectancy and high mortality rates (as well as striking disparities among the fifteen Soviet republics). These problems were caused by chronic underfunding, antiquated and deteriorating health facilities, dramatic shortages of pharmaceuticals and equipment, and an exodus of skilled health

personnel due to low salaries (Rowland & Telyukov, 1991, pp. 71–72; Stiller, 1983, pp. 172, 177; Williams, 2006, p. 217). Overall, the Semashko system had only been able 'to satisfy the early demands for better health care by staving off infections, epidemics, famines, and terribly unsanitary conditions' (Schechter, 1992, p. 210). It was much less effective in the areas of non-communicable diseases, thus failing to advance the population's health and improve health services beyond this basic level (Rowland & Telyukov, 1991, p. 76). The Soviet Union's isolationism 'made it difficult to keep up with the great advances in noninfectious disease epidemiology and prevention in the United States and Great Britain' (Terris, 1988, p. 539).

Thus, in the mid-1980s, the Soviet leadership came to realise that the Semashko model needed some fundamental changes. The incorporation of quasi-market elements in the form of a mandatory health insurance scheme (first tested in several regional pilot projects) was supposed to improve the financial situation of the healthcare sector in the late 1980s (Twigg, 1998, p. 585). 'The essence of the plan [was] to move away from the centrally controlled and fully public system to a system of mixed financing with more responsibility given to republics and communities. In response to the government's previous inability to finance medical care at sufficient levels out of the government budget, the new plan would seek revenues from a variety of sources, drawing on contributions from the enterprises in their role as employers and limited out-of-pocket payments by individuals' (Rowland & Telyukov, 1991, p. 84). Even though considered successful, the reform projects came too late: the break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991 prevented a fundamental change of the Semashko healthcare system (Twigg, 1998, pp. 585–586).

### 3.3.3 HOUSING

While the tsarist legacy in housing was dismal, the Bolsheviks had no predetermined housing concept when they came to power. Among their first steps were to immediately redistribute luxury dwellings to members of the proletariat, to outlaw private renting, and to nationalise/municipalise non-owner-occupied privately owned urban real

50 In July 1970, a Healthcare Code for the Soviet Union was enacted summarising all prior healthcare legislation (Stiller, 1983, p. 110).

estate on 20 August 1918. In the urban housing stock, this affected all stone buildings and wooden buildings larger than 115 square metres of overall floor space (Alexeev et al., 1991, p. 18; George & Manning, 1980, pp. 130–131; Kalyukin & Kohl, 2020, p. 1775; Kholodilin & Meerovich, 2018, p. 937).<sup>51</sup>

From 1918 to the early 1920s, against a background of economic collapse and hunger in the cities, the Soviet government used housing confiscated from private owners to keep qualified labour in the cities and to attract new employees from the countryside. Housing was provided conditional on employment by the state; it was regulated by the official working contract, and thus the employee's death, transfer, or dismissal led to the immediate loss of housing. 'In the absence of other incentives, the allocation of the state housing stock (only to those who took employment in the state sector [...]) turned into perhaps the most, if not the only, effective means of managing labor resources' (Kholodilin & Meerovich, 2018, pp. 937–938, quote 938).

While the nationalisation of urban housing was a top priority, complete nationalisation of the Soviet housing stock was never achieved in practice. According to some estimates, across the Soviet Union the percentage of privately held housing fell from 52% in 1926 to 37% in 1940. However, the degree of nationalisation varied considerably, as only larger cities, with more overcrowding and larger housing stock in good condition, radically nationalised their building stocks in the 1920s. By 1926, the two largest cities, Moscow and Leningrad, had reduced their private housing stock to 6% and 1%, respectively, while nationalisation in other smaller, more peripheral cities was much slower (Kalyukin & Kohl, 2020, pp. 1775–1776; Kholodilin & Meerovich, 2018, p. 937).

Smith (2008, p. 285) considers this 'the result of a practical compromise, for the agencies of the revolutionary state lacked the means to manage the entire housing [stock], and were obliged to

leave a significant amount as citizens' personal property'. Thus, until the 1960s 'personal property consistently made up a third of the total urban housing stock' in the Soviet Union. It is important to note that 'personal property was explicitly not private property: that it derived from a citizen's own labour, and as it was only for personal use [...] by definition it could not actively exploit another citizen' (Smith, 2008, p. 285).

In 1920, early ideals for housing in a socialist society were developed: (1) each family should have a separate apartment of at least 50 square metres total floor space (more typically expressed as nine square metres of living space per resident); (2) accommodation should be available to everyone; (3) all housing should be state-owned<sup>52</sup>; (4) accommodation and utilities should be free; and (5) the provision of housing should be determined by need, and by raising the cultural and economic development of the countryside (George & Manning, 1980, pp. 133–134). Overall, socialist housing was viewed in a broader context: Besides being a social service to its citizens, 'housing was an essential and integral part of the basic public infrastructural complex' (Salukvadze & Sichinava, 2019, p. 72), combining both social and technical components: schools and kindergartens, playgrounds, grocery shops, roads, and parks were to be developed alongside, and in an integrated manner with, electricity, heating, sewage, water and gas networks (Tuvikene et al., 2019, p. 6).

While the government was unable to achieve its ultimate goal of providing free housing for all, it froze rents in July 1919 and provided rent subsidies for those who could not afford them. Members of the Red Army in military service and their families were completely exempt from rent payments. State enterprises provided living quarters as an in-kind payment for their workers. On 1 January 1921, all rents were abolished for all workers and public servants living in nationalised and municipalised housing. Not included in the abolishment of housing rent were the so-called 'class

51 While the municipalised housing stock was owned and operated by the local councils, the nationalised stock was owned and managed by economic agencies and public institutions, such as ministries and state-owned enterprises (Andrusz, 1992, p. 140).

52 Additionally, 'all related processes – construction, exploitation, disposal, and so on – should be the prerogative of the state' (Kholodilin & Meerovich, 2018, p. 938).



enemies' (Alexeev et al., 1991, p. 19; Kholodilin & Meerovich, 2018, pp. 939–940).

This abolition was, however, short-lived: the year 1921 marked a clear shift in housing policy, as the deterioration of existing housing and lack of new construction required the government to rethink its approach. In order to cover the costs of housing production and management, the government had to reintroduce rents, at first locally determined in 1922 and later, in 1926, nationally determined with a means test (Alexeev et al., 1991, p. 19; Deacon, 1983, p. 195; George & Manning, 1980, p. 137).

Rents were steeply graduated according to floor space (but not to the quality, location, or age of the accommodation), the income of the tenant, and his/her employment status (George & Manning, 1980, p. 137; Pickvance, 2002, p. 189). Over the course of the 1920s, yearly rents were gradually increased from 2.8% of the average individual income in 1922 to 10.4% in 1929 (while rents before the revolution had amounted to 20–25% of the average individual income). By the late 1930s, rents had fallen back to a level of less than 5% of average individual income, a level at which they remained through the rest of the Soviet era (Deacon, 1983, p. 195; George & Manning, 1980, pp. 138, 142). Nevertheless, the government repeatedly declared its intention to eventually abolish rents again (Deacon, 1983, p. 195).

However, these artificially low rents in the Soviet Union did not correlate with the actual costs of the necessary investment, maintenance, and utilities (Plaggenborg, 2019, p. 54). Rental income covered approximately only one-third of the costs of maintaining and operating the existing housing stock, which led to a persistent underinvestment in new construction. The government had to cover the large part of housing investment. However, there was fierce competition for capital investment between housing, city planning, and industrialisation. As a result, financing was scarce, and the Soviet housing stock remained grossly inadequate (Alexeev et al., 1991, p. 19; George & Manning, 1980, pp. 133, 137; Kholodilin & Meerovich, 2018, p. 939; McAuley, 1979, p. 289).

### 3.3.3.1 Under-Urbanisation

Housing conditions worsened in the 1930s because the Soviet leadership, even as it invested heavily in industrialisation, failed 'to house the millions who left the farms to work in factories. A Soviet citizen invariably lived in communal squalor and the crowding of many families into one flat was universal. In 1950 the estimated living space per person was less than five square metres' (Morton, 1980, p. 235). Housing and 'infrastructure remained auxiliary to industrialization rather than a value in itself. Electric plants, roads and railways served industrial needs and urban transport networks connected housing estates to mines and factories, providing access to workers, while social and consumer service infrastructures were often the last to be provided, with rural areas remaining underserved in all aspects' (Tuvikene et al., 2019, p. 10; see also Gentile & Sjöberg, 2006; Pickvance, 2002).

Konrad & Szelenyi (1974) identify 'under-urbanisation' as a characteristic pattern of socialist societies in which the level of urbanisation was lower than that typical for Western societies at the same level of economic development.<sup>53</sup> Ofer (1977) sees in these patterns an implicit state policy of 'economising on urbanisation' in order to maximise investment in industry by restricting expenditure on housing and urban infrastructure, lowering the number of non-productive urban residents (e.g., by encouraging high rates of female labour participation), and restricting rural migration to urban areas.

Pickvance (2002, p. 186) identifies three social effects of under-urbanisation: First, despite the concentration of housebuilding in the cities at the expense of the rural areas, the urban housing stock was still insufficient to house all urban residents leading to overcrowding and subletting. Second, this caused the growth of commuting from rural areas. And third, to prevent rural residents from moving to urban areas, citizens were required to carry

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53 A pattern of under-urbanisation existed already in pre-socialist Eastern Europe, a trend which was further entrenched by socialist policies (Pickvance, 2002, p. 186).

an 'internal passport', which gave them a right of residence in only one particular place.

After 1945, the housing crisis – intensified by the wartime destruction – was amongst the most serious problems facing the Soviet government as housing 'had always been an important arena in which the relationship between individuals and the state was negotiated' (Dale 2015: 496). Thus, new construction began in the closing stages of World War II and continued through the late Stalinist period (McCutcheon, 1989, pp. 48–49; Smith, 2012, p. 394). Nevertheless, despite a remarkable surge in construction, the construction of new housing still ranked low among the government's priorities. During the fourth FYP (1946–1950), investment in housing construction 'amounted to 12.6% of total economic investment', only slightly higher than during the first FYP (McCutcheon, 1989, p. 49), and progress of 'urban reconstruction was more uneven and more protracted than aggregate reconstruction figures might indicate' (Dale, 2015, p. 496).

After 1953, the government decided to eliminate the housing shortage once and for all with an ambitious Seven-Year Plan (1959–1965), which envisioned doubling the amount of urban housing. Through industrialised construction and prefabrication,<sup>54</sup> a record number of housing units were produced. Since 1957, the Soviet Union had been building 2.2 million units yearly in multi-storey apartment blocks (*khreshchevki*) which became the Soviet building standard (Alexeev et al., 1991, p. 21; Kalyukin & Kohl, 2020, p. 1777; Morton, 1980, p. 235; see also DiMaio, 1974). The housing boom increased the average living space per person to approximately six square metres in 1959; by the mid-1960s, it had further risen

to approximately nine square metres per capita (George & Manning, 1980, pp. 143–144, 149).

Through Khrushchev's massive construction campaign, millions of Soviet families received their own separate apartments in new, standardised residential neighbourhood housing districts, so-called 'micro-rayons',<sup>55</sup> that radically transformed cityscapes across the Soviet Union (see, e.g., Varga-Harris, 2015). In all larger Soviet cities from the late 1950s onward, the micro-rayon became 'the essential urban unit for the delivery of welfare'. It 'typically contained between five and twenty thousand residents, who lived in blocks of flats separated by yards. Architects aimed to provide playgrounds and green areas. Within a short walk were schools, kindergartens and polyclinics – or there should have been, according to the plan' (Smith, 2015, p. 605; see also Smith, 2010, pp. 116–121).

However, housing construction was not able to keep pace with the population's rising demands and expectations (Morton, 1980, p. 235). Many Soviet families still lived communally (around 60% of all families in 1960); in 1974 'an estimated 30% of urban households in urban areas still shared flats, with an additional 5% (mostly single people) living in factory hostels. [...] The waiting period for a new flat may be as long as ten years, and only those with living space of less than [five] square metres [per resident] are considered' (Morton, 1980, p. 236). Despite Khrushchev's Seven-Year Plan, however, the severe housing shortage continued through the 1970s due to the continued and conscious underinvestment in housing and other urban services (Deacon, 1983, pp. 188–189; Morton, 1980, p. 237).

### 3.3.3.2 Allocation and equality

The provision of accessible and decent living conditions to everyone had always been one of the great socialist ideals. Starting with the first FYP in 1928, workers were officially entitled to housing; in 1977, the right to housing was enshrined in the Soviet constitution (Caroli, 2003, p. 45; Salukvadze

54 Already by 1943, the Soviet Union had decided to introduce new products and techniques (i.e., prefabricated building processes) into planned reconstruction in order to industrialise all future building operations. 'From about 1947 architects and engineers from the Soviet Union frequently visited factories producing prefabricated buildings in France, Sweden, Denmark, England and other countries. They absorbed various elements of design and borrowed freely through collaboration with engineers and architects from Western Europe. Several factories were bought, shipped to the USSR and made operational' (McCutcheon, 1989, p. 48).

55 On the micro-rayon, see e.g., Herman, 1971; Hess, 2018.



& Sichinava, 2019, p. 74). In practice, however, being a scarce resource, housing was part of a 'bureaucratically controlled allocation process', making it 'an intrinsic part of the reward-system of Soviet society' (Morton, 1980, p. 253). Overall, Soviet housing was neither universally accessible nor of equal quality (Alexeev, 1988).

Soviet housing was characterised by four types of tenure that had emerged by 1924: housing owned as 'socialist property' by local councils, as 'departmental property' owned by enterprises and organisations, housing owned by co-operatives,<sup>56</sup> and housing owned as 'personal property' by individual citizens. As 'personal property', Soviet citizens could thus own a house for personal use, if it was small enough (i.e., for the use of one family) and if they were prepared to maintain it; this property could also legally be sold, gifted, rented out, or bequeathed (Smith, 2008, pp. 284–285).<sup>57</sup> This owner-occupation was the dominant rural tenure (Manning, 1992a, pp. 40–41).

During the reconstruction after World War II, the state encouraged housing construction by individual citizens on personal property through state loans and allocation of plots of land, particularly in smaller cities. Thus, personal property actually became more prevalent in the urban housing economy of late Stalinism (Kalyukin & Kohl, 2020, p. 1775; Smith, 2008, p. 286; see also Andrusz, 1984; Smith, 2010). With Khrushchev's housing programme, the focus shifted to collective multi-dwelling construction; consequently, the share of personal property in the Soviet housing stock declined to its all-time low of 20% only in

the late 1980s (Kalyukin & Kohl, 2020, p. 1775; Smith, 2008, p. 296).

In the Soviet Union, industrial enterprises became the main builders of public housing. By the beginning of World War II, enterprise housing (i.e., 'departmental property') amounted to one-third of the total public housing stock; after the war, state enterprises and institutions continued to be the main builders (George & Manning, 1980, pp. 140, 143). By 1980, around three-quarters of all public urban housing was owned by enterprises, administrations, and other workplaces, while around a quarter (nearly the entire remainder) was administered by local councils (Pickvance, 2002, p. 193; see also Andrusz, 1984).

As a social service, urban housing was in principle allocated on the basis of legitimate need; however, certain exceptions developed. While local councils were more likely to allocate housing according to need, enterprise housing was allocated preferentially to enterprise employees (George & Manning, 1980, p. 142; Pickvance, 2002, p. 190). In the context of systemic housing shortages, an additional criterion for allocation in the form of 'social merit' was applied, i.e., intentionally better housing for priority groups (Szelenyi, 1983). As a result, 'from 1930 privileged people, important for industrialisation, could be both advanced along the waiting list and receive additional space' (George & Manning, 1980, p. 142; see also Salukvadze & Sichinava, 2019, pp. 72–73). In addition to this intentional discrimination, there 'was also a noticeable level of corruption' (George & Manning, 1980, p. 142) in the form of a 'second economy' and informal networks effecting considerable 'housing manipulations', enabling certain well-off or well-placed tenants to bypass the years-long waiting lists (Salukvadze & Sichinava, 2019, pp. 75, 79; see also Gentile & Sjöberg, 2006, 2010; Morton, 1980; Roth, 2019; Sharipova, 2015).

Despite the aim to provide housing, utilities, public open spaces, social facilities and other infrastructure in a similar and standard-based fashion, 'certain disparities [were] observed from district to district in terms of better/worse geographic location of housing units and residential estates, quality and quantity of living spaces, design and

56 In August 1924, 'two quite distinct forms of co-operative association were established: the house-leasing cooperative association (ZhAKT) and the housebuilding co-operative association (ZhSKT). The former was charged with managing the socialised housing transferred to it and the latter with new house building' (Andrusz, 1992, p. 141).

57 However, Kholodilin & Meerovich (2018, p. 939) are not so lenient; they claim that 'the state completely deprived the owner [of housing in personal property] of almost all property rights, leaving only the responsibility to take care of maintenance'. In practice, Soviet citizens did not enjoy individual legal guarantees; none of their stipulated 'rights' were recognised as justiciable individual claims (see 1.2).

arrangement of public spaces and, sometimes, provision of basic utilities and communal services' (Salukvadze & Sichinava, 2019, pp. 74–75; see also Gentile & Sjöberg, 2010). For example, residential blocks and micro-rayons commissioned by 'less-prioritised' enterprises were worse-equipped in terms of communal infrastructure. In contrast, enterprises of prioritised industrial sectors, like the military defence sector, or powerful state establishments, such as law enforcement, 'were able to secure quality housing through their formally assigned power resources'. The inequality was reflected not only in the location of the housing and the state of facilities on the neighbourhood level, but also by the quality of amenities within the apartments themselves (Salukvadze & Sichinava, 2019, pp. 79–80, quote 75; see also Gentile & Sjöberg, 2006; Smith, 1996; Szelenyi, 1987).

Overall, due to its scarcity, housing in the Soviet Union was used as a means of social control to encourage good labour discipline and to combat other forms of dissent and opposition to the authorities. While eviction (without rehousing) occurred only in 'extreme cases such as systematic property destruction or lengthy absence' (George & Manning, 1980, p. 153; see also Smith, 2008, p. 301), in enterprise housing tenure was less secure than in other forms of housing as tenure was directly tied to the tenant's employment at that enterprise. According to a 1937 law, a tenant had to vacate his/her apartment upon voluntarily leaving the enterprise job or dismissal for violation of labour discipline or for committing a crime (Deacon, 1983, pp. 191–192; George & Manning, 1980, pp. 153, 159; Kholodilin & Meerovich, 2018, pp. 938–939; see also Meerovich, 2005, 2008).<sup>58</sup>

58 Despite the fact that private property had officially been abolished, this rarity of evictions (without rehousing) is for Smith (2008, 2010) the main reason to argue for a more nuanced picture of property relations in the Soviet Union 'in which identifiable forms of individual ownership persisted' (Smith, 2008, p. 284). As ownership consists of several elements (i.e., the rights of possession, use, management, etc.), 'a type of individual ownership of urban housing was possible in the Soviet Union when enough of these elements were enjoyed by the occupier of a dwelling'. Thus, all socialist tenures contained some 'elements of individual ownership,

### 3.3.3.3 Socialist housing ideals

The Soviet ideal of a separate apartment for every family – promoted by official propaganda – had become by the late Soviet period the cornerstone of the perceived 'normal life' for Soviet citizens; it had 'laid the groundwork for a post-Stalin social contract, which aimed to achieve social quiescence without recourse to terror'. However, by 1991, only half of urban adults had managed to live in separate apartments (Zavitsa, 2012, pp. 23, 41, quote 23).

Thus, the Soviet Union was neither able to fulfil its aim to provide each family with a separate apartment with a total floor space of around 50 square metres, nor to provide them with free accommodations and utilities (though admittedly, rents and the price of utilities remained very low). Additionally, Soviet housing policy reproduced general inequality on two dimensions: favouring urban dwellers over rural inhabitants, and manag-

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manifested, for example, in difficulty of eviction, and the established notion of an inviolable home' (Smith, 2008, p. 285). By the mid-1960s, these ambiguous elements of individual ownership had become more stable and sustainable; as tenants of state-owned dwellings enjoyed many of the rights of owners, the security of occupancy had become the defining characteristic (Smith, 2008, pp. 283, 286). While state agencies held the legal title to state apartments and tenants had no formal right to sell, gift or bequeath the housing space, 'tenants did have some limited rights of transfer, including exchange and even a kind of inheritance. The occupants of one apartment could exchange their dwelling with the occupants of another, in a process that could ultimately involve a chain, and apartments in different cities' (Smith, 2008, p. 301). The combination of these rights made Soviet citizens 'certainly not private property owners, but between 1944 and 1964, and in all the tenures of urban housing, they held fluctuating but significant elements of ownership' (Smith, 2008, p. 304).

Some caveats might be in order: 'ownership' seems to be too strong a term, as Smith (2008) himself defines it as a bundle of specific rights which a Soviet citizen could never acquire in total; thus, 'user rights' might be more appropriate (that is, strengthening the rights of tenants, especially the right of occupancy), as the *de jure* right of ownership for all housing remained with the state and its agencies. Soviet tenants' rights were thus comparable to those in today's Western Europe and, in terms of protections against eviction, might have been even stronger.

ers and skilled workers over unskilled workers and farmers (George & Manning, 1980, pp. 155–157; Salukvadze & Sichinava, 2019, p. 82). ‘But housing, particularly at the low rents charged for state-owned stock, [was] presented as an important manifestation of government goodwill towards the people, and hence [helped] to legitimate the post-Stalin era’ (George & Manning, 1980, p. 159).

Even though the Soviet welfare system was a ‘deficit model’ (Collier & Way, 2004), ‘it generally ensured more or less de-commodified access to social services and housing-related infrastructures. The provision of shelter, regardless of its quality, and relatively uninterrupted connections with hot water, gas, and electricity’ created a safety network and relative stability for most of the population (Salukvadze & Sichinava, 2019, p. 80).

### 3.3.4 HIDDEN SOCIAL WELFARE BENEFITS: CONSUMER PRICE SUBSIDIES

Starting in 1947, the Soviet Union began to subsidise consumer goods.<sup>59</sup> As ideological goals deeply influenced Soviet social policy, one goal was ‘to *substitute monetary benefits by services and material aid* in order to diminish traits of market societies preserved on the stage of socialism’ (Beyme, 1981, p. 75, italics in the original). This resulted in generally low wages/other monetary transfers, aiming at a ‘decommodification of labour’ over the course of which the money wage would gradually disappear; this was compensated by subsidised prices and extensive subsidised or free services (Standing, 1996, pp. 227–228).<sup>60</sup>

59 ‘In an economy where practically all commodity and factor prices are administered, [...] there are serious difficulties in measuring the resulting distortions’ from price subsidies. Explicit consumer subsidies through money transfers ‘provide a poor approximation of total price support in the economy. And the measurement even of explicit subsidies is incomplete as it is limited to those financed from the state budget and from certain extra-budgetary operations, excluding cross subsidies among enterprises through the centralized funds controlled by branch ministries’ (IMF et al., 1991a, pp. 267–268).

60 ‘Thus, the ratio of social benefits to money wages rose steadily and the level of the money wage was low for almost everybody, with occupational wage differen-

‘Furthermore, where both wages and benefits [were] centrally planned, the planning authorities [could] treat them to some extent as substitute forms of remuneration’ (Rimlinger, 1962, p. 53).

However, in 1961, the Communist Party decided to raise the living standard of the working population through a comprehensive reduction of consumer prices, in combination with pay raises and increased state-funded welfare benefits and services (Prybyla, 1962, p. 47; Schurman, 1964, p. 324). As social policy was understood in the Soviet Union in a much broader sense than in capitalist societies, it attempted to make the basic means of subsistence affordable for all through price controls for food items, clothing, housing, public transport, utilities, etc. (Chandra, 1996, p. 7; Plaggenborg, 2019, pp. 50–51, 54). Through a systematic policy of consumer price subsidies, the Soviet government was able to hold down the cost of living ‘to an extraordinary degree’, thereby also legitimising the existing social structure and, thus, increasing regime stability (Standing, 1996, p. 227).<sup>61</sup> This policy ‘was carried to an excess and over the decades, which shook the very foundations of the planned economy, leading to its ultimate collapse’ (Chandra, 1996, p. 7).

Subsidies ‘took an explosive character’ starting in the late 1970s (Chandra, 1996, p. 15). While expenditures on social welfare and healthcare expanded basically in line with total state expenditures, consumer subsidies ‘rose steadily, increasing their share of GNP [gross national product] by 3.4 percentage points from 1985 to 1989’ (see Table 9) (Åslund, 1991, pp. 192–193). In 1990, total subsidies (including consumer price subsidies) accounted for 25% of the total state budget, while the recorded expenditures on defence, justice, and internal security combined represented only about 17% of the total. Around 80% of these

tials being modest, although not insignificant. The minimum wage was very close to the average wage, and neither were sufficient to provide an income that could provide adequate savings to cover a temporary period of interruption of earning power’ (Standing, 1996, p. 227).

61 For example, according to Cazes & Le Cacheux (1991, p. 176) direct consumer subsidies in the Soviet Union amounted to around 50% of what was spent on all social welfare combined in 1988.

**Table 9.** Soviet state budget expenditures as a share of GNP (in %)

|                                 | 1985 | 1986 | 1987 | 1988 | 1989 |
|---------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Total State Expenditure         | 49.7 | 52.2 | 52.5 | 52.5 | 52.2 |
| Investment                      | 9.0  | 10.0 | 9.7  | 7.9  | 6.9  |
| Consumer Subsidies              | 7.5  | 8.2  | 8.5  | 10.3 | 10.9 |
| Social Insurance and Healthcare | 10.7 | 11.2 | 11.5 | 11.7 | 11.4 |

Source: Åslund, 1991, p. 193.

subsidies went to agriculture; nearly 66% of these agricultural subsidies were used to support basic food prices (IMF et al., 1991a, pp. 265, 268).

### 3.3.4.1 Food subsidies

In the 1980s, food subsidies made up the largest share of all consumer subsidies. As a ratio of GNP, they rose from 4.2% in 1982, to 7.2% in 1985 and further to 9.4% in 1989 (Chandra, 1996, p. 14). Milk and meat products were especially highly subsidised. While in 1988 the average subsidy rate for food items (measured in reference to the retail price) was estimated at around 65%, a contemporary source reported that ‘meat was subsidized by at least 230 percent, butter 240 percent, and milk 170 percent, and since then subsidy rates have risen’ (IMF et al., 1991a, p. 268).

Rapid urbanisation had burdened state food supplies as – among other issues – large parts of the rural population abandoned their collective farms; the Soviet leadership was well aware that food shortages and high prices could spark unrest. Khrushchev sought to pre-empt such events, which might endanger the existing order, by stimulating farm output and enriching food supplies. He was convinced that industrial farming and the mass-planting of maize (i.e., corn), considered a cheap source of livestock feed to increase meat and dairy output, was the solution to the Soviet Union’s problems (Hale-Dorrell, 2019, pp. 29–30).

While economic growth improved diets during the 1950s, progress lagged behind the government’s promises of abundance and rising popular expectations by the early 1960s. Citizens grew dissatisfied, prompting local disturbances (Hornsbey, 2013; Kozlov, 2002). The best-known clashes occurred on 2 June 1962, when several thousand

workers in Novocherkassk protested falling real wages and the hikes in dairy and meat product prices that had been announced two days earlier. The authorities dispersed the protesters with violence, killing 24 people and wounding 79 (Baron, 2001).

Starting in the 1960s, in a reaction the Novocherkassk events, the Soviet consumer had thus enjoyed an extraordinary stability of food prices. Retail prices for bread had not been raised since the 1950s; the last retail price hike for meat was the aforementioned hike of 1962. This price stability created consumer expectations of a steadily rising standard of living. At the same time, the production costs at collective and state farms for most food products increased sharply. The gap between subsidised consumer prices and increasing productions costs was filled with ever-increasing subsidies for the agricultural sector (Chandra, 1996, pp. 13–14; Cook, 1992, pp. 194, 197).<sup>62</sup> ‘The combination of attempting to maintain stable retail prices for food, while simultaneously encouraging inefficient production in agriculture, contributed heavily to the growing budget deficit during the 1980s’ (Cook, 1992, p. 203).

Simultaneously, these food subsidies encouraged an abnormally high level of consumption (and waste) (Chandra, 1996, p. 15): there was found to be a ‘fairly strong relationship between income growth and increased demand for food’ in the Soviet Union (Cook, 1992, p. 209). The very low prices resulted in consumption levels for meat and milk products ‘well above world aver-

62 Additional substantial investments in agriculture did not, however, increase production; they were simply to maintain existing production levels. Except for eggs, livestock productivity ‘exhibited very little improvement between the late 1960s and the early 1980s’ (Cook, 1992, pp. 193, 197, quote 199).

ages' in the 1980s (Cook, 1992, p. 196; see also Chandra, 1996, p. 13).

### 3.3.4.2 Housing subsidies

In comparison to food subsidies, consumer price subsidies for services, mainly housing and culture, remained relatively small (IMF et al., 1991a, p. 268). Again, price stability was pivotal: 'House rent in the USSR had remained unchanged since 1928 at about 0.13 roubles/m<sup>2</sup>; the state was spending of late more than three times as much in repair and maintenance' (Chandra, 1996, p. 17). Overall, it can be assumed that from the late 1930s on, an average family spent around a combined 5% of its total expenditure on rent, fuel, and power (Chandra, 1996, pp. 17–18; Deacon, 1983, p. 195; George & Manning, 1980, p. 142).

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## 4 CONCLUSION

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While the Bolshevik government introduced welfare legislation (mostly for the first time) immediately after the October Revolution of 1917, these *de jure* entitlements were at first limited to a select few; it took most social programmes decades to include the majority of intended beneficiaries. Thus, this major expansion of social policy in terms of inclusiveness and scope of benefits existed for many years only on paper.

As a work-based social welfare model, economic policy and objectives always shaped – to varying degrees – social policies in the Soviet Union. Four distinct phases can be distinguished:

(1) In the utopian period from 1917 to 1921, the Bolshevik government introduced a near universal social security system, intended to include the entire working class and the urban and rural poor. However, already in this utopian period first restrictions (on inclusiveness in the case of unemployment, sickness, and maternity benefits) were introduced; for financial, but also for ideological reasons, the peasantry and the self-employed were excluded. Due to the exigencies of the civil war, these restrictions had to be abolished again

in October 1918 to ensure the loyalty and support of the large part of the population (i.e., peasants).

(2) In the period from 1921 to 1928, a time of rapid social change and increasing ideological conflict, the need to solve social problems was used by the authorities to justify violence against 'problem groups'. Ideological rigor, in combination with fiscal constraints, led to the repeated exclusion of peasants and other alien classes after the civil war was won. Furthermore, eligibility requirements were tightened or new ones introduced (e.g., needs tests) for financial reasons and as a means of enforcing labour discipline (see unemployment benefits, disability pensions).

Especially the early years of the Soviet Union were characterised by many shifts in modes of welfare policy, with rapid alternation between expansion of programmes and restriction of benefits or eligibility, which gave the Soviet welfare system a rather erratic nature. Thus, the scope of benefits developed rather unevenly: benefits that aimed to increase birth rates (i.e., grants on account of childbirth) and to take care of the victims of the rapid industrialisation (i.e., pensions for disabled workers and for the families of deceased workers) increased somewhat, while entitlements for which prevalent 'abuse' was assumed (such as sickness and unemployment benefits) were reduced by restricting eligibility (Duncan, 1935, p. 186).

(3) During Stalinism (1928–1956), all social concerns were analysed through the prism of rapid industrialisation of the Soviet Union. To foster economic growth and increase labour discipline, the rules which defined social entitlement programmes were all progressively tightened during the 1930s in an effort to fight 'deviation' and 'abuse'. The government justified these cost-saving measures with ideological rigor, but ideology was in truth 'reinterpreted according to the needs of the day' (Lewin, 1985a, p. 28).

In these times of shortage, the surprising expansions and relaxations of old-age provisions in 1928, 1930–31 and 1937 were economically inspired, e.g., with the aim of rejuvenating the workforce in the textile industry, or ideologically inspired, aiming to reward selected groups of professionals. As work accidents were rather common during the rapid industrialisation, the govern-



ment provided industrial workers with better social protection against work-related disabilities. In 1937, the inclusiveness of old-age and disability pensions was greatly increased by extending the programmes to salaried employees.

However, the late 1930s were mostly a period of restrictions used as a means to enforce labour discipline, to grow the workforce, and for financial reasons. Thus, the expansions and relaxations regarding maternity benefits and child allowances – programmes intended to increase the reproduction rate – were restricted in 1938 in order to provide more labour for the rearmament efforts. At the end of World War II, these restrictions were again (partially) relaxed. In 1947, in an effort to account for the consequences of the war (i.e., war invalids and population loss), disability pension restrictions were relaxed and child allowances expanded. Nevertheless, in 1948, employment requirements were raised for all welfare programmes to mitigate the post-war inflow into the welfare system. Additionally, late Stalinism saw the beginning of welfare programmes that later became firmly associated with the following Khrushchev period (e.g., the housing programme).

(4) Post-Stalinism was characterised by the objective to increase both welfare and productivity. From 1957 to 1964, in a period of economic growth and expanding state coffers, a revival of 'egalitarianism' occurred; workers and their descendants, who were considered underrepresented especially in higher education, were to be prioritised at the expense of more privileged groups (i.e., the new middle class). The Khrushchev period saw numerous relaxations of eligibility requirements and expansions of the welfare system, starting with the abolition of restrictions from the Stalinist era, e.g., restoration of maternity leave to pre-1938 levels. This was followed by two major pieces of social legislation: the State Pension Law of 1956 for wage-earners and salaried employees, merging prior pension legislation in a more inclusive and comprehensive way, and the complementary 1964 Pension Law for Collective Farmers.

By systematising the fragmented and byzantine Soviet pension system that had grown out of a variety of industrial schemes over the preceding

decades, the 1956 State Pension Law covered nearly all wage-earners and salaried employees. This meant a major increase in inclusiveness; the contrast with the meagre social security provisions for collective farmers thereby became so glaring that in 1964 the Pension Law for Collective Farmers had to follow in order to stem the increasing rural exodus (George & Manning, 1980, p. 42).

The two pension laws also improved the scope of benefits greatly. Under the old provisions, pensions were not adjusted for rising wages and prices; they remained static from the day the law was adopted. Now, old-age pensions were related to previous gross earnings of the retirees in the hope of providing a pension closely related to the pensioner's previous standard of living. However, pension levels were still static: Once the individual's monthly pension was specified, it was not changed unless it fell below the minimum pension (at which point it was to equal that amount). There was no provision for an automatic adjustment of pensions for the growth of national income or increases in cost of living. The 1956 pension provisions also did not apply to persons who had reached retirement age before the introduction of the law.

Between 1964 and 1991, regime stability became paramount for Soviet leaders, resulting in a relative continuity in social policies. These decades were characterised by further expansions and relaxations of social programmes; however, this was mostly restricted to the area of maternity benefits and child allowances to reduce the risk of poverty through child-bearing. Even though the Soviet welfare provision became less subservient to the economy over time, its incentive-oriented benefit structure remained.

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Overall, the two major social programmes of the Khrushchev era – the State Pension Law of 1956 and the 1964 Pension Law for Collective Farmers – actually created the Soviet welfare model which most of the literature refers to today (Plaggenborg, 2019, p. 53). In the end, they made the Soviet welfare system very comprehensive as far as coverage of risks was concerned, and more inclusive in terms of covered occupational groups.

Nevertheless, the Soviet welfare system still left a variety of groups either only partially included or not included at all. For these groups, for which no public assistance scheme existed, family members (such as spouses, parents, children and grandchildren) were legally required to support their relatives in financial need (George & Manning, 1980, p. 54).

Besides class-related inequalities, some preferred industrial branches (such as mining and heavy industry) still enjoyed privileges throughout the Soviet era, resulting in large occupational and regional disparities in benefit structure (Plaggenborg, 2019, p. 50). Additionally, the social programmes perpetuated substantial existing social inequities as most benefits were tied to previous earnings; thus, the redistributive impact of these programmes was probably rather small. Furthermore, the provided benefits, initially representing a high proportion of wages, were not adjusted for inflation, which diminished them over time into mere gifts (McAuley, 1979, pp. 260–261, 288).

For most of the existence of the Soviet Union, these shortcomings were mainly caused by the fact that the Soviet welfare model was shaped by the demands of the Soviet economy. It was created as an ideology-inspired system of incentives and rewards that was at least as much concerned with providing services and benefits according to the perceived worthiness of a group or individual and their importance to the socialist cause (i.e., establishment of socialism, industrialisation, etc.) as with controlling and disciplining the workforce/society. Thus, in combination with insufficient financial means, the universal and egalitarian ambitions of the original social programme of 1917 could not be fulfilled, nor the system's overall inclusiveness expanded.



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