



Source 6

Summarised translation of a journal article about wages and standards of living, 1938
(Catalogue ref: FO 371/22292, from S Schwartz in 'Sotsialisticheski Vestnik', 25 January 1938)

Questions

1. What trends does the table show?
2. Does the source suggest that wages and living conditions had improved for all workers in the USSR?
3. Did it matter if Soviet workers benefited equally from changes? Explain your answer.
4. What conclusions about the success of the Five Year Plans can you draw from this source?
5. This source is a British summary of an article written for a European journal associated with Russians in exile from the USSR. What are the advantages and disadvantages for a historian using this source?



HEROES & VILLAINS

Stalin & industrialisation > Was this a success?

Source 6

WAGES AND STANDARD OF LIVING.

The celebrations of the twentieth anniversary of the Revolution were accompanied by constant references to the increased well-being of workers. Workers themselves heartily testified to this, and there is no doubt that for a whole section, or layer, of them, there has been a definite improvement in wages and living conditions. Is this section the advance guard, heralding improving conditions for all Soviet workers, or is it an upper crust which will seek to hold on to new-found privileges and will become increasingly separated from the working masses ?

The following figures of average annual wages in 1936 and 1937, culled from official Soviet sources, are of interest:—

	1936.		1937.		
	Actual wages Rbls.	Plan Rbls.	Actual wages Rbls.	% of Plan.	% of 1936.
Heavy Industry	3,271	3,482	3,367	96.7	102.9
Light Industry	2,345	2,484	2,357	94.9	100.5
Food Industry	2,396	2,505	2,411	96.2	100.6
Timber Industry	2,407	2,485	2,375	95.6	98.7

The table shows that, in the four industrial groups cited, average wages in 1937 were lower than the planned wages. The planned increases were quite modest, 6.5% for heavy industry, 5.9% for light industry, 4.5% for food industry and 3.2% for the timber industry. The table also shows that actual increases of average wages over those paid in 1936 were insignificant in the first three groups, and in the fourth group there was a decrease.

At the same time, the wages of the upper layer of workers rose considerably, and the thickness of that layer was also greater. Three or four years ago the proportion of workers earning sufficient to live relatively comfortably was very low, but to-day it is probably 10—15%, and even 20% in some industries.

With average wages for industry as a whole approximating 242 roubles a month, the vast majority of workers were receiving considerably less than 200 roubles. With the present value of the rouble, that means that millions of Soviet workers and employees were barely on a subsistence level. Soviet newspapers prefer to talk about the high wages of Stakhanovites, but occasionally references to beggarly rates of pay slip in.