



**Title VIII Research Scholar Program
Final Report**

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“The Soviet Working Class after Stalin.”
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Research abstract:

My dissertation analyzes the Soviet working class between Joseph Stalin’s death in 1953 and the dissolution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in 1991. In the field of modern Russian history, prevailing interpretations suggest that once the Soviet working class was fully developed in the 1930s, it promptly stagnated and remained unchanged for the duration of the Soviet era. I argue that these perspectives are a consequence of narrow understandings of class that singularly fixate on either abstract notions of class consciousness or on the role of political institutions. I adopt a broader framework and seek to determine how the working class was represented by the trade unions, interpreted by sociologists, depicted in popular culture, and understood in the workers’ lifeworld. Doing so provides a radically different perspective that reveals dynamism and change in virtually every characteristic of the working class. In pursuing this research agenda, I aim to challenge conventional understandings of Soviet socialism as an era of monotony and predictability.

Research Goals:

Originally, my goal was to continue archival research begun in archives and libraries – also under the auspices of a Title VIII Research Scholar award – this summer. First, I planned to finish my research at the State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF). Thereafter, I intended to work at three additional archives in Moscow: the Archive of the Russian Academy of Sciences (ARAN), the Russian State Archive of Literature and Art (RGALI), and the Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RGASPI). At ARAN I planned to study the documents of the central institution of sociology; at RGALI I wanted to focus on the records of Mosfil'm and the Ministry of Culture; and at RGASPI I intended to analyze the records of the Komsomol central committee and the social scientists who worked in that organization's employ.

My plans and approach changed this summer. While working at GARF in June, I discovered a more focused topic in the records of the trade union of the workers of the Soviet chemical industry. In 1967, the Council of Ministers of the USSR, the Ministry of the Chemical Industry, and the State Committee for Labor and Social Issues implemented an economic reform at a chemical combine in Shchekino, a town located approximately 200 kilometers south of Moscow in Tula oblast'. A product of the reforms spearheaded by Alexei Kosygin in 1965, the initiative was designed to rationalize the production process to bolster labor productivity and increase the rate of profit generated by the enterprise. This entailed both the elimination of labor reserves and the provision of material incentives to improve labor discipline. The "Shchekino method," as it came to be known, thus permitted industry leaders to dismiss, reassign, or retrain redundant workers while maintaining the entirety of the wage fund afforded to the factory by state planners. The resultant surplus was accrued in an incentive fund that was apportioned to workers and management in the form of bonuses and improved social services. Within five

months of the establishment of the method 800 of the 6,800 workers at the combine had been dismissed from employment, labor productivity had increased by three percent, and average wages had grown by nearly five percent.¹

Since June, the Shchekino method has been the focus of my research. My goal is to understand the history of the Shchekino method in the context of the history of the Shchekino chemical combine and the history of the Shchekino chemical combine in the context of the history of the Soviet Union. Analyzing every facet of the enterprise would be nearly impossible. My intention is, then, is to focus on the history of industrial relations in the combine. My goal during this research trip was to begin to understand the history of the combine in the context of Soviet history and to establish a clear justification for my study.

Research Activities:

Through my affiliation at International University in Moscow I obtained passes to research at GARF, RGAE, and ARAN in Moscow as well as the State Archive of the Tula Oblast' (GATO) and the Tula Oblast' Universal Scientific Library (TOUNB) in Tula. I already possessed a library pass to work at the Russian State Library (RGB, or, Lenin Library). Thanks to the flexibility of Title VIII and International University, I was able to spend significant time working in both Moscow and Tula.

I spent September 19 through October 29 in Tula. There, I continued my work at GATO. I focused on several collections including those of the Tula Regional Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) (Fond P – 177); the Primary Organization of the CPSU of the Shchekino City Committee (Fond P – 2581); the Management of the Chemical

¹ *Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii fond (f) 5446, opis' 101, delo (d). 456, listy (l). 18-19; GARF f. R-9553, op. 1a, d. 115, l. 179-180.*

Industry of the Sovnarkhoz of the Priorskii Economic Region (Fond R – 3407); and the Shchekino Chemical Combine (Fond R – 3469).

I returned to Moscow in late October. I stayed there until mid-December. In Moscow, I continued working at GARF, RGAE, and RGB. I also began researching at ARAN and the Khimki branch of the RGB. At GARF I continued to work through the documents of the Council of Ministers (Fond R – 5446); the Trade Union of the Oil and Chemical Industry Workers (Fond R – 5470); and the State Committee on Labor and Social Issues (Fond R – 9553). At RGAE I researched the records of the Ministry of the Chemical Industry (Fond 459). And at ARAN I focused on the records of the Institute of Sociology of the Russian Academy of Sciences (Fond – 1977). At RGB I read monographs, brochures, and edited volumes. And, finally, at the Khimki branch of the RGB I worked through three newspaper titles: *Kommunar*, *Molodoi kommunar*, and *Khimik*.

Important Research Findings:

My chief goal was to begin to understand the history of the combine in the context of Soviet history. First, I aimed to explain and establish the importance of the chemical industry to the Soviet economy during the late twentieth century. The industry was clearly prioritized in the 1961 Program of the CPSU.² Why? After focusing on the development of heavy industry throughout the first half of the twentieth century, by the mid-1950s, Alec Nove has shown, the Communist Party adjusted its priorities and began to emphasize growth in light industry and agriculture as well.³ The chemical industry, which produced goods used in the manufacture of

² See *Pravda*, 2 Nov. 1961, 1-10

³ Alec Nove, *An Economic History of the USSR, 1917-1991* (New York: Penguin, 1992 [1969]), 362. Emphasis on the chemical industry began in earnest in 1958. See “Ob uskorenii razvitiia khimicheskoi promyshlennosti i osobenno proizvodstva sinteticheskikh materialov i izdelii iz nikh dlia udovletvoreniia potrebnosti naseleniia i nuzhd narodnogo khoziaistva,” *Pravda* 9 May 1958, 1.

consumer durables and non-durables as well as fertilizers for the agrarian sector, was to play a decisive role in this shift. As Nikita Khrushchev remarked in 1963, “communism is Soviet power plus electrification of the entire country, plus chemicalization of agriculture.”⁴ Did the emphasis on the chemical industry in CPSU political discourse result in tangible development? My research to date answers this question in the affirmative. For example, during the seven-year-plan (1959 – 1965), the USSR invested over nine billion rubles in the development of the chemical industry, resulting in the construction of 60 enterprises, over 800 individual shops, and an increase in production by a factor of 2.5.⁵ The CPSU’s commitment to the growth of the chemical industry was significant enough that, in commenting on the status of socialist competition in the chemical industry in 1967, L.A. Kostandov, the Minister of the Chemical Industry, boasted that the “technical progress of the people’s economy is provided by the chemical industry.”⁶

To what degree were these developments reflected in the cultural sphere? On December 14, 1965 the Supreme Soviet established a new holiday, “Chemist’s Day,” to be celebrated annually on the last Sunday of May.⁷ A. Ia. Rabenko, then a deputy chairman of

⁴ Quoted in Paul R. Josephson, *An Environmental History of Russia* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 211. Khrushchev was apparently fond of such modifications of Lenin’s adage that communism meant Soviet power plus the electrification of Russia. For another example, see Aaron Todd Hale-Dorrell “Khrushchev’s Corn Crusade: The Industrial Ideal and Agricultural Practice in the Era of Post-Stalin Reform, 1953-1964” (PhD Dissertation: University of North Carolina, 2014), 1.

⁵ “Tvortsy novykh materialov,” *Pravda* 29 May 1966, 2. Also see Yakov Feygin, “Reforming the Cold War State: Economic Thought, Internationalization, and the Politics of Soviet Reform, 1955-1985 (PhD Dissertation: The University of Pennsylvania, 2017), 119. According to one author, while the boost in chemical production meant that general fixed capital in the industry tripled, this figure still represented only eight percent of the total for all of Soviet industry. See Geoffrey Hemy, *The Soviet Chemical Industry* (New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc, 1971), 105. In my view, this speaks to the relatively underdeveloped state of the Soviet chemical industry during the early twentieth century. For a history of early twentieth century chemical industry development in the Soviet Union focusing on Tula oblast’ see P.A. Sokolov, “Razvitie khimicheskoi promyshlennosti v Tul’skoi oblasti (1929-1958gg.)” (Kandidatskaia dissertatsiia: Moskovskii gorodskoi pedadogicheskii universitet, 2009).

⁶ *Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv ekonomiki* f. 459, op. 1, d. 1892, l. 181.

⁷ “Ukaz prezidiuma verkhovnogo soveta” *Pravda* 14 December 1965, 1.

Gosplan, called the first “Chemist’s Day,” May 29, 1966, a “big and joyous holiday” for the more than two million workers of the chemical and oil industry in the Soviet Union. According to Robenko, the holiday was motivated in part due to the recognition that, along with electrical energy, machine-building, and metallurgy, the Soviet chemical industry, “ensure[d] progress in all the national economy.”⁸ Alongside its central role in the future of the Soviet economy, the inauguration of a new holiday celebrating chemical production – not to mention the persistent mention of the accomplishments of “great chemistry” in Soviet publications – shows that, at least for a period in the 1960s, focus on the development of the chemical industry influenced virtually every aspect of life in the USSR.⁹

Another important result of my research concerns potential translation connections, labor productivity, and knowledge production. Soviet social science re-emerged in the post-Stalin period. After decades of relative inactivity under Stalin’s leadership, Soviet scholars and administrators borrowed heavily from their Western counterparts in reshaping these sciences during the late twentieth century. One historian of the Soviet economy has convincingly argued that, beginning in the post-Stalin period, Soviet economists and scientists played an important role in developing a postwar “transnational community” of scholars that exerted some measure of political influence.¹⁰ In 1963, Harvard Business School hosted a delegation of Soviet studies eager to study American industrial management.¹¹ And, under the influence of American thinkers such as Talcott Parsons, who, in the early-1960s, visited the USSR and assisted his

⁸ “Tvortsy novykh materialov,” *Pravda* 29 May 1966, 2.

⁹ Examples of the employment of the phrase “great chemistry” in Soviet publications are legion. For a couple of examples see V.A. Mezentsev, *Khimicheskaia industriia i ekonomika* (Moscow: Znanie, 1965) and S. Veselov, “Sbylos’!,” *Ogonek* 43 (18 Oct. 1964), 14.

¹⁰ Feygin, “Reforming the Cold War State,” viii-ix.

¹¹ Mark R. Beissinger, *Scientific Management, Socialist Discipline, and Soviet Power* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 169.

Soviet colleagues in understanding social scientific methodology, Soviet sociologists developed a sort of Soviet-style functionalism.¹²

How did all of this effect life in the enterprise? At ARAN I learned that Soviet social scientists working in enterprises throughout the USSR developed detailed analytical reports about factory culture and worker performance. Often these social scientists worked at factories in departments of Scientific Organization of Labor (NOT).¹³ The purpose of these departments was to maximize labor productivity through modifications of workspaces and the division of labor. While NOT rationalized the labor process, other social scientists studied “social problems” including, among other things, incentives, job turnover, and worker satisfaction.¹⁴ Though I have yet to uncover social scientific studies of Shchekino, according to I. Minin, the chairman of the trade union committee of the Shchekino combine, a sociological survey of workers’ ideas helped determine the specifics of the Shchekino method.¹⁵ Even without a complete sociological study of the Shchekino combine it is clear that the Shchekino method was conceived and enacted during a period of considerable transnational intellectual exchange.

What is most important about my work from this fall is that I was able to build a stronger justification for pursuing my research topic. The Shchekino method was a product of the 1965 Kosygin reforms, which aimed to empower individual enterprises to improve labor

¹² See, for example, Talcott Parsons’s article on Soviet sociology. Talcott Parsons, “An American Impression of Sociology in the Soviet Union,” *American Sociological Review* 30, 1 (Feb. 1965): 121-125. For Parsons’s influence on one prominent Soviet sociologist, Ovsey Irmovich Shkaratan, see “Retrospektiva: Interv’iu s Ovseem Irmovichem Shkaratanom,” *Sotsiologicheskie obozrenie* 3, 1 (2005): 116-122. Here, 119. This connection has been discussed elsewhere. See David C. Engerman, *Know Your Enemy: The Rise and Fall of America’s Soviet Experts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

¹³ There was nothing new about the Scientific Organization of Labor in the USSR. See Lewis H. Siegelbaum, *Stakhanovism and the Politics of Productivity in the USSR, 1935-1941* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990 [1988]), 296.

¹⁴ Bikbov, *Grammatika i poriadka*, 381. Also see Elizabeth Weinberg, *Sociology in the Soviet Union and Beyond: Social Enquiry and Social Change* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2004 [1974]), 58.

¹⁵ I. Minin, *Effektivnost’ Shchekinskogo eksperimenta* (Moscow: Profizdat, 1970), 7-8.

productivity.¹⁶ And while analyses of the implementation of the Kosygin reforms on the enterprise level is lacking in the historical literature,¹⁷ scholars focusing on intellectual life,¹⁸ consumption,¹⁹ and gender²⁰ have convincingly shown that life in the post-Stalin USSR was shaped by a variety of factors. In other words, we should not assume the primacy of the social in general or of labor in particular. So why embark upon a study of industrial relations at the Shchekino combine? There a couple of reasons, I think. First, such a study provides an opportunity to explore how intellectual changes, especially those occurring in the social sciences, helped shape social change. Second, it interrogates social conditions in the USSR during an era when the Communist Party was attempting to develop new techniques for motivating production. Finally, focus on the chemical industry is itself significant for two reasons. First, this industry was at the center of efforts to solve problems in Soviet agriculture and light industry. Second, the growth of this industry demonstrates the CPSU's desire to update and diversify the Soviet economy.

But by far the most important activity of my fall research trip was the discovery of the newspaper *Khimik*. During the summer, I noticed that Soviet authors writing about the Shchekino combine often cited this newspaper. I had hoped that *Khimik* would be available at a research library in the United States; unfortunately, it is not. The RGB branch in Khimki,

¹⁶ A. N. Kosygin, "Ob ulushenii upravleniia promyshlennost'iu, sovshehstvomaniia planirovaniia i usilenii ekonomicheskogo stimulirovaniia promyshlennogo proizvodstva," *Pravda* 28 Sept. 1965, 1-4.

¹⁷ They are not altogether absent in political science literature. See, for example, Karl W. Ryavec, *Implementation of Soviet Economic Reforms: Political, Organizational, and Social Processes* (New York: Praeger, 1975); and, on Shchekino in particular see Jeanne Delamotte, *Shchekino enterprise soviétique pilote* (Paris: Editions ouvrières, 1973); Henry Norr, "Shchekino: Another Look," *Soviet Studies* 38, 2 (Apr. 1986): 141-169; Bob Arnot, *Controlling Soviet Labour: Experimental Change from Brezhnev to Gorbachev* (London: Macmillan, 1988).

¹⁸ Stephen Bittner, *The Many Lives of Khrushchev's Thaw: Experience and Memory in Moscow's Arbat* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008).

¹⁹ Natalya Chernishova, *Soviet Consumer Culture in the Brezhnev Era* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

²⁰ Susan E. Reid, "Cold War in the Kitchen: Gender and Consumption in the Khrushchev Thaw," *Slavic Review* 61, 2 (2002): 211-252.

however, holds the entire run of this periodical. As it turns out, *Khimik* was the organ of the Communist Party committee of the Shchekino combine. It will be a foundational source base for my dissertation. First, analysis of *Khimik* will allow me to understand weekly developments at the combine. Each issue contains articles on cultural events, ongoing construction, letters from the plant's workers, or all the above. This newspaper will also help me to solve one particularly important problem. One of the document collections at GATO contains thousands of proposed inventions and innovations in production and technology developed by engineers at the factory. Thorough analysis of this collection would require an entirely separate dissertation. But, considering the fact that between 1971 and 1975 technological progress was management's priority at the combine, it is necessary for me to address this issue. As it turns out, *Khimik* frequently featured announcements and analysis of new inventions and innovations adopted by the Shchekino chemical combine. Consideration of these adopted and approved changes is entirely feasible. So, I anticipate that *Khimik* will allow me to offer a modest contribution to the historiography on technology and labor.²¹

Policy Implications and Recommendations:

Policy implications for this this research do not differ significantly from those I have previously offered. My research on the history of labor relations in the Soviet Union during the second half of the twentieth century can potentially benefit United States policy in the region because it can help to explain the roots of the ongoing crisis in Ukraine. Research on the crisis in Ukraine typically explores issues of nationalism, ethnic identity, or geopolitical boundaries. In this equation, the views of the pro-Russia population in eastern Ukraine are either ignored or

²¹ Joseph Berliner, *The Innovation Decision in Soviet Industry* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1976); Harry Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1998 [1974]).

assumed to be shaped entirely by nationalist fervor. But Russian nationalism is not the entire story. The regions of eastern Ukraine currently in dispute represent Ukraine's industrial center. I contend that a nuanced understanding of this crisis is only possible if social issues are considered alongside issues of nationality and culture. Focusing on the history of Soviet labor relations during the final decades of Communist Party rule, my study will provide an analysis of the evolution of the socioeconomic structure that continues to exert a strong influence on the former Soviet republics. In doing so, this project will provide policy analysts with information that will help them determine if a strategy that takes into account the social concerns of the insurgents would most benefit United States' interests in the region.

Another policy recommendation concerns the issue of intellectual exchange. In a recent article, Simon Miles has argued that those who have criticized Sovietologists for failing to predict the demise of the Soviet system have overlooked the fact that, in many cases, these same scholars "got it right." Focusing on the mid-to-late 1960s, Miles shows how Sovietologists in fact offered sophisticated analysis of the Soviet system that, just a few years later, helped make détente possible.²² This same period was, as I have discussed, also one of important and influential intellectual exchange between the United States and the Soviet Union. The recommendation here, then, is that constructive intellectual and cultural exchange is a contributor to, not a consequence of, improved international relations.

Co-Curricular Activity

During my summer research trip, I made several acquaintances in both Moscow and Tula. This fall, I fostered those. Most importantly, I continued to build on my relationship with

²² Simon Miles, "Envisioning Détente: The Johnson Administration and the October 1964 Khrushchev Ouster," *Diplomatic History* 40, 4 (1 September 2016): 722–749.

Sergei Filippovich Volodin, a historical sociologist at Tula State Pedagogical University. In addition to interesting conversation, Sergei Filippovich was kind enough to send to me a dissertation about the history of the Soviet chemical industry recently written by a student at TGPU. I anticipate that I will work closely with Sergei Filippovich during my next research trip to Tula.

Conclusions:

This was a successful research trip that helped me to justify my project and better understand how the Shchekino method makes sense in the broader context of the history of the USSR. It also helped me to better understand the importance of the Soviet chemical industry in general. Most importantly, I found a new (for me) and important collection of sources. Furthermore, I was able to continue my research of document collections I discovered in the summer. Finally, I continued to build on extant personal and professional relations in Russia, especially in Tula.

Plans for Future Research Agenda / Presentations and Publications:

The next step is to complete my research in Russia, which I will do between March and December of 2018. I anticipate that I will spend five months in Moscow working at GARF, RGAE, ARAN, RGB and the branch of the RGB in Moscow and four months in Tula working at GATO and TOUNB. Before leaving Russia in December I learned that Shchekino has a museum and a library. I will visit these facilities in 2018. My archive research has also made it clear to me that after returning to the United States I will need to revisit two additional journal titles – *Sotsialisticheskii trud (Socialist Labor)* and *Sotsialisticheskaiia industriia (Socialist Industry)* – before writing. Thereafter, I will begin writing my dissertation and presenting my initial findings

at conferences in the United States and in Russia. Looking ahead, my goal is to complete and defend by dissertation by the end of the academic year 2021.

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