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Joseph V. Stalin. On the Industrialization of Russia.

Speech to industrial managers, February 1931.

The late 1920s brought to the Soviet Union both the consolidation of Joseph Stalin's authority as preeminent leader, and a "great break" in political and economic policy marked by forced collectivization and breakneck industrialization. In the speech below, Stalin addressed those who criticized the pace of industrialization and in so doing revealed his conception of Russian history.



It is sometimes asked whether it is not possible to slow down the tempo somewhat, to put a check on the movement. No, comrades, it is not possible! The tempo must not be reduced! On the contrary, we must increase it as much as is within our powers and possibilities. This is dictated to us by our obligations to the workers and peasants of the USSR. This is dictated to us by our obligations to the working class of the whole world.

To slacken the tempo would mean falling behind. And those who fall behind get beaten. But we do not want to be beaten. No, we refuse to be beaten! One feature of the history of old Russia was the continual beatings she suffered because of her backwardness. She was beaten by the Mongol khans. She was beaten by the Turkish beys. She was beaten by the Swedish feudal lords. She was beaten by the Polish and Lithuanian gentry. She was beaten by the British and French capitalists. She was beaten by the Japanese barons. All beat her because of her backwardness, military backwardness, cultural backwardness, political backwardness, industrial backwardness, agricultural backwardness. They beat her because to do so was profitable and could be done with impunity. Do you remember the words of the prerevolutionary poet: "You are poor and abundant, mighty and impotent, Mother Russia." Those gentlemen were quite familiar with the verses of the old poet. They beat her, saying: "You are abundant; so one can enrich oneself at your expense. They beat her, saying: "You are poor and impotent " so you can be beaten and plundered with impunity. Such is the law of the exploiters-to beat the backward and the weak. It is the jungle law of capitalism. You are backward, you are weak-therefore you are wrong; hence, you can be beaten and enslaved. You are mighty-therefore you are right; hence, we must be wary of you.

That is why we must no longer lag behind.

In the past we had no fatherland, nor could we have one. But now that we have overthrown capitalism and power is in our hands, in the hands of the people, we have a fatherland, and we will defend its independence. Do you want our socialist fatherland to be beaten and to lose its independence? If you do not want this you must put an end to its backwardness in the shortest possible time and develop genuine Bolshevik tempo in building up its socialist system of economy. There is no other way. That is why Lenin said on the eve of the October Revolution: "Either perish, or overtake and outstrip the advanced capitalist countries."

We are fifty or a hundred years behind the advanced countries. We must make good this distance in ten years. Either we do it, or we shall be crushed.

Source: J. V. Stalin, Problems of Leninism, (Moscow, Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1953) pp. 454-458.