

0. DO THE WORK!! - Story Preface

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This image depicts forced laborers working at Belbaltlag, a GULAG camp for building the White Sea-Baltic Sea Canal. It is a still from the 1932 documentary film, "Baltic to White Sea Water Way." Courtesy of the Central Russian Film and Photo Archive, and online via GULAG History.org.

After the Bolsheviks took power, in 1917, a midnight knock on the door often meant someone was going to prison (or worse) for opposing the new regime. Writers - such as the famous poet, Anna Akhmatova - were effectively silenced ... for years. (Untold numbers, of other individuals, were silenced forever.)

When Joseph Stalin replaced Vladimir Lenin as head of the government, a steady stream of prisoners performing slave labor turned into an overflowing river.

Stalin believed the Soviet Union could not be transformed into an industrialized power without millions of people, in forced labor camps, working 14 - 16 hours a day. It was all about the work - from building canals, roads, factories (on the industrial side) to collectivizing farms (on the agricultural side).

Trying to convince people that work was everyone's primary objective in life, the Soviet government created thousands of propaganda posters. Although many of those posters have been destroyed, some survive. Thanks to Russian-language web sites, we can examine representative samples.

- In 1953, the message to industrial workers was "Unconditionally cultivate the initiative of working people. Disseminate the experience of innovators!" (That was a curious directive since, at the time, innovation was the province of the Communist party.)
- That same year, the kolkhoz (collective farmers) were told to "be fluent in sciences, be masters of great harvests!" (That mandate had interesting results. Farmers consistently produced better yields from their small plots of private land than they ever could coax from large tracts of government-owned and managed collective farms.)
- "Harshly punish those who take money without work." (A different directive obviously applied in the labor camps where the government demanded work without pay.)
- "I want to be with you, Mama!" was the government's way of saying that too many children unnecessarily lived in orphanages. (At the time of this poster, however, the Soviet state itself ran slave labor camps where mothers and their children endured unspeakable conditions.)
- Felix Dzerzhinsky, head of the secret police and creator of the first Soviet labor camps, had a message for children: "For the young, who think about life. Be a bright light for others. To shine a light is the greatest happiness a man can achieve." (One wonders if he had children of the Gulag in mind when he said this.)
- A young worker muses: "I am happy because I'm part of something significant." (It is fair to ask whether that was by choice or by force.)

- Young people, however, needed to remember that work came first: "After work, to the playground!" (One wonders if age limits applied.)
- "There is nothing more superior than the term working man!" (As Rudyard Kipling once observed: "Words are, of course, the most powerful drug used by mankind.")
- "Work like Stakhanov" - a coal miner who broke all kinds of records and was held in high esteem by the government - was a workers' motto in the Soviet Union. (Aleksei Stakhanov even made the December 16, 1935 cover of *Time* magazine! Later it was revealed that his team had worked through the night to achieve his unbelievable results.)
- Stalin, holding an open copy of *Pravda* (the Communist Party newspaper which, translated into English, means *The Truth*) says, in 1952: "Peace to the nations! Peace will be preserved and fortified if the nations will take the matter of peacekeeping into their own hands and will insist on it to the end." (Perhaps he should have allowed the nations he occupied - like Bulgaria - to follow his own advice.)

After Stalin died, in 1953, many prisoners were allowed to leave the labor camps. His successors knew what the former dictator had missed: The Gulag system of forced labor, with all of its attendant misery and death, could never produce the lofty results he had intended.

It took nearly four more decades, however, before occupied countries were free of Soviet domination. From one of those countries - Bulgaria - an allegorical boy named David began his walk North to Freedom, in 1952.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/DO-THE-WORK-I-Am-David>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/DO-THE-WORK-I-Am-David>

Media Stream



Soviet Poster - Message to the Workers

Soviet-era poster online, courtesy Russian-language website.

PD

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Soviet-Poster-Message-to-the-Workers>



Soviet Poster - Message to Farmers

Soviet-era poster online, courtesy Russian-language website.

PD

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Soviet-Poster-Message-to-Farmers>



Soviet Poster - Harsh Punishment

Soviet-era poster online, courtesy Russian-language website.

PD

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Soviet-Poster-Harsh-Punishment>



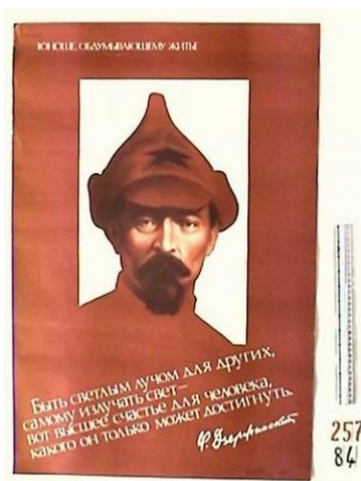
Soviet Poster - Too Many Children in Orphanages

Soviet-era poster online, courtesy Russian-language website.

PD

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Soviet-Poster-Too-Many-Children-in-Orphanages>



Message to Children - Soviet-era Poster

Soviet-era poster online, courtesy Russian-language website.

PD

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Message-to-Children-Soviet-era-Poster>



Soviet-era Poster - A Young Worker

Soviet-era poster online, courtesy Russian-language website.

PD

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Soviet-era-Poster-A-Young-Worker>



Poster - Play After Work

Soviet-era poster online, courtesy Russian-language website.

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View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Poster-Play-After-Work>



Poster - Working Man in the Soviet Union

Soviet-era poster online, courtesy Russian-language website.

PD

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Poster-Working-Man-in-the-Soviet-Union>



Soviet Poster - Work Like Stakhanov

Soviet-era poster online, courtesy Russian-language website.

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<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Soviet-Poster-Work-Like-Stakhanov>



Aleksei Stakhanov - Soviet Worker-Hero

Image of painting, described above, online courtesy [Soviet History.org](http://www.soviet-history.org) (a repository of Soviet-era primary sources).

PD

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Aleksei-Stakhanov-Soviet-Worker-Hero>



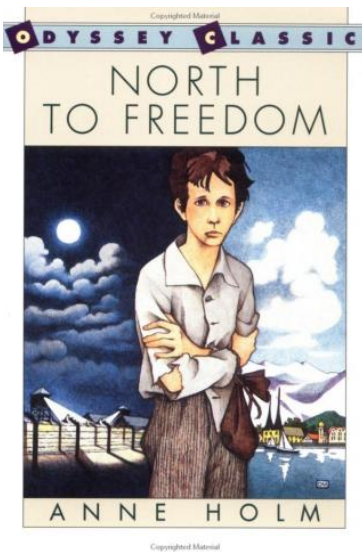
Soviet-era Poster - Peace to the Nations!

Soviet-era poster online, courtesy Russian-language website.

PD

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Soviet-era-Poster-Peace-to-the-Nations->



North to Freedom - by Anne Holm

Book-cover image online, courtesy Amazon.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/North-to-Freedom-by-Anne-Holm>



DO THE WORK!!

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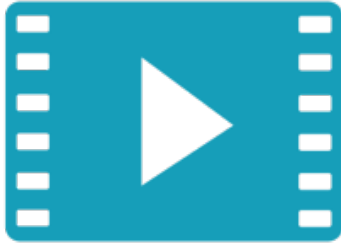
Stalin, Joseph - Leader of the Soviet Union, Part 1

Clip from *Joseph Stalin: Red Terror* - narrated by Jack Perkins. Interviewees include Mikhail Gorbachev, Janusz Bardach, Valentin Berezhkov, Yevgeny Dzhugashvili and Condi Rice.

Produced for the A&E Biography series, originally airing on March 7, 1996. Clip online, courtesy [Biography Channel](http://www.biography.com). Copyright, A&E, all rights reserved. Clip provided here as fair use for educational purposes and to acquaint new viewers with the documentary.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Stalin-Joseph-Leader-of-the-Soviet-Union-Part-1>



Stalin, Joseph - Soviet Leader, Part 2

Clip from Joseph Stalin: Red Terror - narrated by Jack Perkins. Interviewees include Mikhail Gorbachev, Janusz Bardach, Valentin Berezhkov, Yevgeny Dzhugashvili and Condi Rice.

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Lenin, Vladimir - Bolshevik Revolution

From *Lenin: Revolutionary*.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Lenin-Vladimir-Bolshevik-Revolution>



Lenin - Rare Recording of His Voice

Historical footage, public domain (PD).

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Lenin-Rare-Recording-of-His-Voice>