

This PDF is a selection from an out-of-print volume from the National Bureau of Economic Research

Volume Title: Soviet Statistics of Physical Output of Industrial Commodities: Their Compilation and Quality

Volume Author/Editor: Gregory Grossman

Volume Publisher: Princeton University Press

Volume ISBN: 0313-32462-8

Volume URL: <http://www.nber.org/books/gros60-1>

Publication Date: 1960

Chapter Title: Brief History of the Statistical Apparatus

Chapter Author: Gregory Grossman

Chapter URL: <http://www.nber.org/chapters/c2452>

Chapter pages in book: (p. 13 - 21)

CHAPTER 1

Brief History of the Statistical Apparatus¹

AS MIGHT be inferred from the nature of the regime and its immediate problems, measures for the centralization and development of statistical work were taken very soon after the revolution, building on the substantial statistical tradition and personnel inherited from the past. Lenin himself had the highest regard for *uchet*. The Central Statistical Administration (*Tsentral'noe statisticheskoe upravlenie*, abbreviated as *TsSU*) was established early in 1918, and on July 25 of that year the Council of People's Commissars published a "Decree on State Statistics of the RSFSR," which charged *TsSU* with general guidance and control over the statistical work of various departments and local governments, as well as with collecting and compiling statistics on its own. *TsSU* received the status of a People's Commissariat, and its administrator became a member of the Council of People's Commissars (*Sovet narodnykh komissarov*, abbreviated as *SNK*), at first in a consultative capacity only, but from 1926 on as a full-fledged voting member.

After the publication of the July 1918 decree, *TsSU* took over *in toto* the Division of Census and Statistics of the Supreme Council of the Economy (*Vysshiĭ sovet narodnogo khoziaistva*, abbreviated as *VSNKh*), which at that time was preparing a census of industry. This task was carried out in 1918, but due to the difficulties of the period, coverage was restricted to large-scale industry only, thereby, incidentally, reviving a prerevolutionary statistical category that was to play an important role in subsequent years.

TsSU was destined for a turbulent history. On the one hand, thanks to the intimate but complex connection between statistics and

¹ This chapter is based primarily on the following sources: *Bol'shaia sovetskaia entsiklopediia* [The Great Soviet Encyclopedia], 1st ed., Moscow, 1926-1947, vol. 60, pp. 771ff.; A. I. Ezhov, *Promyshlennaia statistika* [Industrial Statistics], Moscow, 1954, pp. 370ff.; M. Stashevskii, "Organization and Activities of the Soviet Statistical Services" (unpublished manuscript for the Research Program on the USSR, n.d.); A. I. Gozulov, *Ekonomicheskaiia statistika* [Economic Statistics], Moscow, 1953, pp. 29ff.; D. B. Savinskii, *Kurs promyshlennoi statistiki* [A Course in Industrial Statistics], 4th ed., Moscow, 1954, pp. 10ff.; R. Kh. L'vova, "Razvitiie metodologii ischisleniia ob'emnykh pokazatelei promyshlennoi produktsii SSSR" [Development of the Methodology of Calculating Indicators of the Volume of Industrial Output in the USSR] in *Ocherki po istorii statistiki SSSR* [Essays on the History of Statistics in the USSR], Moscow, 1955, pp. 220-240; and A. I. Gozulov, *Istoriia otechestvennoi statistiki* [History of Statistics in Our Land], Moscow, 1957.

planning (on which more below), its status in relation to the State Planning Commission (*Gosplan*) changed several times, varying from complete independence to organic integration. On the other hand, its function as the main fact-gathering agency of the state, as well as one of the government's arms of control over the economy, made it extremely sensitive to internal political winds. In its early days, *TsSU* was also under criticism because of the alleged "bourgeois" background of its professional staff.

Politically, the most difficult times for *TsSU* and its successors were the middle twenties, when its grain statistics placed it in the midst of the intraparty factional strife over agriculture; the early thirties, during the sweeping purge of planning and statistical personnel in the country; 1934, when its livestock statistics following the collectivization of agriculture were questioned; and 1937, after the ill-fated population census of that year. These periods were marked by public criticism and purges of the personnel. Whether similar crises occurred in later years is not known, for they may have been effectively veiled by mounting secrecy from public view. It is quite possible that the separation of *TsSU* from the *Gosplan* in the summer of 1948, which coincided with or shortly preceded a putative shift in the Kremlin's internal power balance, was also associated with heightened political pressure and a turnover in personnel. (On this event more will be said below.) It is worth noting for present purposes that none of the above-mentioned crises in the history of *TsSU* seems to have been directly linked to its work in industrial statistics, which is perhaps not surprising, since such statistics are primarily processed by *TsSU*, and not originated by it to the same degree as are agricultural and demographic statistics.

Until 1926, *TsSU* concentrated its efforts with regard to industry on periodic censuses (taken in 1918, 1920, 1923, and 1925) and their processing, rather than on continuous current statistics. The latter were handled primarily by *VSNKh*, which was in administrative charge of the more important branches of industry, while *TsSU* collected current data only on the number of workers, value of output, and the physical output of a small number of commodities. In the reorganization of 1926/27 the two separate divisions of *TsSU* dealing with industrial statistics (census and current reporting) were merged into a single Division of Industrial Statistics, and emphasis was shifted to current data. However, not until 1930 was a uniform system of yearly reporting on the basis of a standard form introduced in industry, and even then for large-scale establishments

only. Small-scale industry was not—and has not been since, except for unsuccessful attempts with questionnaires in 1931 and 1932—covered by periodic reporting, but has been subject to surveys and censuses instead.²

The growing importance of planning in the later twenties tended to put pressure on statistical work from that direction. In 1927, a Planning Committee (*Planovaiia komissia*, abbreviated as *Statplan*)³ was established within *TsSU* to plan statistical work and to coordinate it with the activities of the *Gosplan*. However, difficulties of coordinating statistics with planning continued, resulting in January 1930 in the abolition of *TsSU* and its absorption by the *Gosplan* as a separate "sector." A subsequent resolution of *SNK*, dated May 9, 1931 and entitled "On the Organization of Work in Record-Keeping and Statistics,"⁴ contained the following major points: (1) central "guidance" and supervision of all work in record-keeping and statistics is to rest with the *Gosplan*; (2) such work is to be reorganized to meet the needs of planning and of the reforms in management being introduced; (3) the *Gosplan* is to concentrate on summarizing data, the basic work of data-gathering being concentrated in the statistical divisions of the various departments.

The years 1930 and 1931 witnessed purges of personnel and the merger of statistical and planning staffs on all levels. However, the integration of the two services was soon deemed to have gone too far, and by virtue of a resolution of *SNK*, dated December 17, 1931, the Sector of Economic Record-Keeping was raised to the status of "Central Administration of Economic Record-Keeping Attached to the *Gosplan* of the USSR" (*Tsentral'noe upravlenie narodnokhoziaistvennogo ucheta pri Gosplane SSSR*, abbreviated as *TsUNKhU*).⁵

² Such censuses were taken in 1925, 1929/30, biannually from 1934 to 1938 (covering the preceding year), annually from 1939 to 1954 (with the exception of 1948), and were intended to be taken twice every five years after 1954. See Ezhov, 1954, *op.cit.*, pp. 377f.

³ Note that the Russian word *komissia* roughly corresponds in usage to the English word "committee," and *komitet* to "commission."

⁴ *Izvestia*, May 10, 1931; also *B.F.Kh.Z.*, 1931, No. 15, p. 70.

⁵ *Izvestia*, Dec. 19, 1931; also *B.F.Kh.Z.*, 1931, No. 36, pp. 1f. The structure, aims, and functions of *TsUNKhU* and lower statistical agencies were defined by two subsequent resolutions of *SNK*, both dated March 10, 1932 (*B.F.Kh.Z.*, 1932, No. 21, pp. 1-5).

The change in the title from "statistics" to "economic record-keeping" (*narodnokhoziaistvennyi uchet*) was in line with the then prevailing dogma that statistics, being the study of unorganized and atomistic mass phenomena, was not applicable to a planned socialist economy, and was therefore supplanted by mere record-keeping, i.e. *uchet*. Cf. J. Miller, "A Political Economy

The aims and functions were to remain substantially the same as in the resolution of May 9, 1931, but now a unified hierarchial structure of statistical offices was established for the first time. *TsUNKhU* itself formed the apex of the pyramid. "Administrations of economic record-keeping" (*upravleniia narodnokhoziaistvennogo ucheta*) were set up at the republic, *krai*, and *oblast'* levels, attached to the respective planning offices. At the district (*raion*) level, where no separate planning offices existed, "inspectorates of economic record-keeping" were established and attached to the local soviets. Control over the whole system was centralized in *TsUNKhU*.

The first major census of industry undertaken by the new organization was that of small-scale industry for 1933. However, its chief difficulties soon proved to lie elsewhere: in labor statistics and the census of livestock. The former suffered from the labor fluidity of those years, as well as from inadequate statistical procedure, while the census of privately owned livestock, which had to be conducted annually on January 1 beginning with 1933,⁶ at once was a matter of great political significance, and was met with concealment of animals by the peasants because of the taxation of livestock.

It was this census in particular, and the poor state of rural statistics in general, that prompted the establishment of a still lower stratum in the hierarchy of statistical agencies, that of the subdistrict inspectors (*uchastkovye inspektory*) in the middle of 1934. These functionaries were also intended to duplicate the collection of data in those respects (such as wages and employment, and prices) where the information transmitted by the departments was considered to be unreliable.⁷

By 1938, there were nearly 10,000 subdistrict inspectors, nearly 7,000 district inspectors, and over one thousand persons in city statistical administrations and inspectorates,⁸ not to mention the personnel in higher echelons.

The two major undertakings of *TsUNKhU* in the later thirties were the population censuses of January 1937 and January 1939. As

of Socialism in the Making," *Soviet Studies*, April 1953, p. 408. *TsUNKhU* is frequently translated as "Central Administration of National Economic Accounting," but the word "national" is redundant in English (though not in Russian), and "accounting" is inexact. The phrase "attached to" signified a certain amount of autonomy and a distinct country-wide organization.

⁶ *B.F.Kh.Z.*, 1932, No. 27-28, pp. 30f.

⁷ *Plan*, 1934, No. 7, p. 36.

⁸ *P.Kh.*, 1938, No. 4, p. 179.

is now well known, the results of the former were suppressed, presumably because its findings on the size and composition of the population severely disappointed the regime's expectations. A sweeping purge of the personnel of *TsUNKhU*, as well as of the rest of the *Gosplan*, began soon after, and was apparently related to the census. Among those purged were the head of *TsUNKhU* (Kraval'), the chief of the population division (Kvitkin), and the chief of the census division (Kurman).⁹

One of the charges against the alleged "wreckers" was that they had made the structure of *TsUNKhU* overly complex and had laid it out along "narrowly functional" lines. Accordingly, a reorganization was carried out in 1938.¹⁰ Substantively, the major defects "brought about by the wreckers" were said to be inordinate inflation of the volume of reporting (as we shall see, a chronic ailment), bad organization of primary record-keeping in enterprises, and, most significantly, incomplete coordination between statistics and planning.¹¹ It must have been primarily the last point that prompted the next change in the status of *TsUNKhU*—from affiliation with the *Gosplan* to complete absorption by it (February 1939). The title was correspondingly amended from ". . . attached to the *Gosplan*" to ". . . of the *Gosplan*," but the separate hierarchy of statistical agencies under *TsUNKhU* was apparently retained intact.

In 1941, the name reverted to "Central Statistical Administration" (*TsSU*), although the position of the statistical apparatus within the *Gosplan* apparently was not immediately affected thereby. The return to the title of the twenties was probably connected with the revision

⁹ B. Martschenko, "Soviet Population Trends, 1926-1939" (mimeographed in Russian), Research Program on the USSR, 1953, p. 26. Other discussions of the two censuses by informed émigré writers may be found in P. Galin, *Kak proizvodilis' perepisi naseleniia v SSSR* [How Population Censuses Were Conducted in the USSR], Munich, 1953; and in Stashevskii, *op.cit.* Examination of *Plan*, the house organ of the *Gosplan* at the time, suggests that the purge in that organization began in March 1937. In listing the population censuses since the revolution, a postwar Soviet source even fails to mention the 1937 census (Gozulov, 1953, *op.cit.*, p. 31), although more recent sources have mentioned it.

Martschenko (*op.cit.*, p. 6) reports that in 1933 the (local?) divisions of population statistics in the Ukraine were placed under the control of the *NKVD* and operated secretly from the rest of the statistical apparatus, although remaining fiscally and physically part of it. Presumably the same change took place in all of the USSR at the time. It is known that in 1938 *TsUNKhU* contained a "secret department" (*sekretnaia chast'*); see the source reference in next footnote.

¹⁰ Its results can be seen in *P.Kh.*, 1938, No. 8, p. 148.

¹¹ See *P.Kh.*, 1938, No. 8, pp. 10-19, and 1940, No. 1, pp. 19-24.

of the theory of socialist economics under way at the time.¹² By now the nature of the "economic laws" operating in a socialist society was apparently deemed such as to not only permit but even require the use of the term "statistics" rather than "record-keeping"—a doctrinal position that survives to the present.

Organizationally, the next significant reform came toward the end of 1943, when the statistical agencies on the *oblast'*, *krai*, and republic levels were merged with the corresponding planning offices, thus carrying further the closer integration between planning and statistical authorities begun in the late thirties.¹³ The merger on the intermediate levels seems to have lasted until August 1948, that is, until the removal of TsSU from the *Gosplan* and its attachment, as a separate entity, to the USSR Council of Ministers.¹⁴

Unlike similar reorganizations in the thirties, the removal of TsSU from the *Gosplan* in 1948 was little publicized and even less explained. The earliest explanation I have seen appeared in a footnote in a pamphlet published only in 1955,¹⁵ and even the fullest explanation that I have come across is brief and cryptic. It may be worth reproducing it in full:¹⁶

¹² This process (at least on the surface) reached a high point with the publication of the well-known article on "Some Questions on the Teaching of Political Economy" (*Pod znamenem marksizma*, 1943, No. 7-8; English translation in *American Economic Review*, September 1944, pp. 501-530, with comments in subsequent issues. Further comments in Miller, *op.cit.*, pp. 416ff.). As early as 1936 the eminent economist and statistician Strumilin was maintaining that statistics as a science was applicable to the conditions of the Soviet economy (S. G. Strumilin, *K perestroike sovetskogo ucheta* [Toward a Reform of Soviet Record-Keeping], 4th ed., Moscow, 1936).

¹³ *Slovar'-spravochnik po sotsial'no-ekonomicheskoi statistike* [Dictionary and Manual on Social and Economic Statistics], Moscow, 1944, p. 4.

¹⁴ Cf. *Slovar'-spravochnik po sotsial'no-ekonomicheskoi statistike* [Dictionary and Manual on Social and Economic Statistics], Moscow, 1948, p. 22, which was published a few months earlier. The separation of TsSU from the *Gosplan* was decreed by a resolution of the USSR Council of Ministers, dated Aug. 10, 1948, No. 3018 (G. V. Teplov, *Planirovanie na mashinostroitel'nykh zavodakh* [Planning in Machine-Building Plants], Moscow, 1949, p. 37).

¹⁵ S. K. Tatur, *Organizatsiia narodnokhoziaistvennogo ucheta v sotsialisticheskoi obshchestve* [The Organization of Economic Record-Keeping in a Socialist Society], Moscow, 1955, pp. 16f.

¹⁶ A. I. Ezhov, "Sovetskaia statistika za 40 let" [Soviet Statistics Over 40 Years], *V.E.*, 1957, No. 11, pp. 73f.; translation and italics mine. The reference to statistics of supply and "new technology" (*novaia tekhnika*—perhaps better translated as "new, or newly introduced, equipment") undoubtedly is related to the establishment less than a year earlier of two new high-level governmental bodies, the State Commission for the Supply of the Economy at the USSR Council of Ministers (*Gossnab SSSR*) and the State Commission for the Introduction of New Technology in the Economy at the USSR Council

"As the resolution of the government indicated, the basic reason for this [1948] reorganization of TsSU was that the organization of statistics for the use of the state did not meet the requirements of the administration and planning of the economy by the state, and also suffered from other substantial defects. The statistics of supply and of technical-economic norms were unsatisfactorily organized; statistics of new technology and of natural resources were entirely lacking; there were defects in the direction of the statistical work of ministries and departments on the part of TsSU; *the checking of departmental statistics for reliability was not adequately organized*; and the mechanization of statistical work as well as the employment of up-to-date tabulating machinery were faltering. A considerable portion of the statistical material that was being collected by the statistical agencies and by the departments was not being properly processed or analyzed, and therefore could not be utilized by the government. These defects had to be eliminated and statistical work had to be greatly improved."

It is not clear how the separation of TsSU from the *Gosplan* was to contribute to the elimination of the various defects and gaps listed, unless the planning authorities had been thwarting measures that might have enhanced the reliability of the materials and the efficiency of operation of the statistical apparatus—a situation that is not inconceivable.

However, certain contemporaneous events invite further speculation. The action on TsSU followed by a few weeks the apparent shift in power within the Kremlin from the "Zhdanovites" to Malenkov.¹⁷ Zhdanov's death followed in a couple of months. Voznesenskii, until then the chairman of the *Gosplan* and reputedly a "Zhdanovite," disappeared shortly thereafter, to be replaced in this post by Saburov, reputedly an associate of Malenkov. Were the *Gosplan* and TsSU factors, or pawns, in the power shift within the Kremlin?¹⁸

of Ministers (*Gostekhnika SSSR*). (Resolution of the Party Central Committee; partial text in *Direktivy KPSS i Sovetskogo pravitel'stva po khoziaistvennym voprosam* [Directives of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and of the Soviet Government on Economic Subjects], Moscow, Vol. III, 1958, p. 261.)

¹⁷ On the probable timing of the power shift, see Boris Nicolaevsky in *Sotsialisticheskii vestnik* [The Socialist Courier], New York, November 1955, p. 211.

¹⁸ It may be noted in this connection that 1948 was the only year between 1939 and 1954 when TsSU failed to conduct a census of small-scale industry,

The reorganization of industrial administration in the middle of 1957 does not seem to have affected the organizational structure of TsSU much, although it did substantially affect its work.

To recapitulate, at present the structure of the Soviet statistical apparatus is somewhat as follows.¹⁹ The Central Statistical Administration (attached to the USSR Council of Ministers) is the "directing agency for all state statistics." Subordinated to it are the statistical administrations of the union republics. Immediately below these are the statistical administrations of the autonomous republics, territories (*krai*), *oblasti*, the cities of Moscow and Leningrad, and the capital cities of the other union republics. Below these are the district (*raion*) and city inspectorates of TsSU SSSR.²⁰ The whole structure is said to be "strictly centralized," the regional and local agencies being "independent of local [government] organizations and accountable only to TsSU SSSR. This assures the necessary objectivity and accuracy of statistical data."²¹

At the time that TsSU was separated from the Gosplan, the government issued a statute (*polozhenie*) defining its assignment. The text of the statute is not available, but a recent source lists the tasks of TsSU as follows:²²

1. Improvement and perfection of record-keeping and of statistics.
2. Development and perfection of methods of record-keeping and statistics on the basis of Marxist-Leninist science.
3. Systematic recording of the fulfillment of state economic plans.
4. Keeping systematic records of material resources, electric power, raw and semifinished materials in production and construction,

though it is not clear whether the omitted census was that of 1948 for the operating year 1947, or that of 1949 for 1948. Cf. Ezhov, 1954, *op.cit.*, p. 378.

¹⁹ Cf. A. I. Petrov, *Kurs ekonomicheskoi statistiki* [A Course in Economic Statistics], 2nd ed., Moscow, 1954, p. 13; B. I. Braginskii and N. S. Koval', *Organizatsiia planirovaniia narodnogo khoziaistva SSSR* [Organization of Economic Planning in the USSR], Moscow, 1954, pp. 105f.; article on TsSU in *Bol'shaya sovetskaia entsiklopediia*, 2nd ed.; and A. I. Ezhov, *Organizatsiia gosudarstvennoi statistiki v SSSR* [The Statistical System of the Soviet State], Moscow, 1957, p. 30.

²⁰ The subdistrict inspectors were apparently abolished some time after the war. They were still mentioned in *Posobie po statistike dlia raionnykh i uchastkovykh inspektorov TsSU Gosplana SSSR* [Manual on Statistics for District and Subdistrict Inspectors of TsSU of the USSR Gosplan], Moscow, 1945.

²¹ Braginskii, *op.cit.*, p. 106.

²² Petrov, *op.cit.*, p. 13. The 1957 reorganization of industrial administration has rendered some of the wording obsolete, but the general picture is no doubt still valid.

availability of above-norm inventories of fuel, raw and semi-finished materials.

5. Recording the fulfillment of the state plan for the articulated [*kompleksnoe*] supply for the most important objects under construction and about to be commissioned [*puskovye*].
6. Taking of censuses.
7. Compilation of the balance of the economy.
8. Procurement and processing of data of the budgets of workers, employees, and collective farmers.
9. Collection and processing of statistical data on the people's democracies.
10. Collection and processing of statistical data on capitalist countries.
11. Regular and timely supplying of statistical materials to the government of the USSR.
12. Regular and timely submission to the USSR *Gosplan*, and to the State Commission of the Council of Ministers of the USSR on Construction, of data from existing reporting, data derived from the analysis of annual reports and one-time censuses and surveys, as well as other statistical materials that are necessary for their work and are required for the compilation and supervision of state economic plans.
13. Direction and supervision of statistical work in ministries, other departments [*vedomstva*], institutions [*uchrezhdeniia*], and enterprises, and the checking of their reports for accuracy.
14. Reduction and rationalization of reporting, prevention of illicit reporting, etc.

After the reorganization of industry in 1957, the USSR Council of Ministers was to prepare and enact a new statute on the functions of *TsSU*, "which would reflect the fundamental changes in the organization of statistical work [brought about by the reorganization of industry—G.G.] and the questions relating to the expansion of the rights of local statistical agencies."²³ The new statute has not been published at this writing.

²³ Ezhov, in *V.E.*, p. 77.