Soviet Russia was swept into revolution during the period of the First Five Year Plan. The atmosphere of the country resembled that of a state under siege and brought to mind images of the era of civil war and War Communism. Rapid industrialization and wholesale collectivization were heralded as major offensives. The front line was everywhere—in the factories, in the collective farms, in the universities. It was a time of dizzying tempos and unbounded optimism. Hundreds of thousands of dedicated urban cadres were mobilized to struggle on the fronts of industrialization and collectivization. An army of shock troops within the Communist Party, the komsomol, and the industrial working class was electrified by the challenge of a new revolutionary struggle. The atmosphere was charged with militancy and sustained by visions of the millenium.

Mainstream Western scholars have depicted this revolution as a "revolution from above," with little or no support from below.1 Soviet society, during this period, has been described as a passive force, acted upon and manipulated from above. Traditional Western scholarship has placed its primary emphasis on actions and decisions emanating from the center. Political factors have been stressed, resulting in a neglect of social factors. Consequently, little is known about the shock troops of Stalin’s revolution—the rank-and-file communists, komsomols, and factory workers who implemented the radical policies of the First Five Year Plan.

In recent years, the standard Western interpretation has been challenged by a handful of scholars who have examined the issue of "revolution from below." Addressing the question of societal support for Stalin’s revolution, the revisionist argument has indicated that strong pressure existed within the party, the komsomol, and the industrial working class for radical change. Revisionist scholars have studied the role which social forces played in the cultural revo-

olution of 1928-31, as well as presenting an explanation of the motives which impelled these social forces toward revolution. The revisionist argument is intended to have implications beyond the cultural sphere for the relations of state and society during the Soviet First Five Year Plan.2

This article will approach the issue of societal support for Stalin’s revolution through an examination of a specific detachment of rank-and-file shock troops of the revolution. The study will explore the case of the dvadtsatipitvysiachniki (the “25,000ers”): factory workers recruited for participation in the collectivization of Soviet agriculture. The study will focus on the motives behind this decision, the organization and implementation of the recruitment campaign, and the worker-volunteers’ response to it in the period from mid-November, 1929 to mid-January, 1930. This article is intended both to contribute to the ongoing historiographical debate on the revolution of the First Five Year Plan and to present research findings on a subject, which, up to now, has not been explored in the West.

I

Cadre formation was one of the most urgent tasks of the Soviet government during the collectivization drive of the First Five Year Plan. Throughout the 1920s, party and government presence in the countryside was extremely weak. In 1929, there was one sel’sovet (village level organ of government) for every 8.31 population points in the country; as late as 1 January 1930, there were only 339,000 communists in the countryside.3 Rural party and government personnel were often poorly educated (if not illiterate) and unprepared for administrative duties. Cases of drunkenness and corruption among village officials were not uncommon. In 1929, turnover rates for chairmen and secretaries of sel’sovets reached alarming proportions in many areas. The Soviet countryside was in the grip of the so-called “people famine.”4

The cadre problem in the countryside was further complicated by the strong presence in rural administrative organs of elements which the state considered “class-alien.” The agricultural specialists, employed by the People’s Commis-