"The workers themselves must learn to be leaders . . . and not put their trust in outsiders."1 Spoken to the aspiring worker-intellectual Semen Kanatchikov by an older mentor decades before the October Revolution, these words expressed sentiments that persisted into the Soviet period. Indeed, one could argue that Kanatchikov's autobiography, so beautifully translated and elucidated by Reginald Zelnik, can be read in part as a document of the First Five-Year Plan. With volume one appearing in 1929 and the two-volume work in 1932, Kanatchikov's account of his early life addresses many themes central to cultural work produced during the industrialization and collectivization drives—the acquisition of socialist consciousness, the use of agitation to sway others to the cause, and the tense relationships between workers and the educated elite.2

The First Five-Year Plan inspired visions that social relations, nature, and society's economic base could be transformed at a feverish pace. Radical proponents of the plan believed that cultural expression had to be directly linked to social and economic change and encouraged a wide variety of experimental ventures.3 This article examines one experiment of the time, mobile propaganda theaters called agitprop brigades that toured the country to drum up support for the industrialization drive.4 An extreme variation on the themes addressed in Kanatchikov's memoirs, they aimed to transform their audiences

2. Ibid., xi. See also Kanatchikov's description of prerevolutionary intellectuals as "fellow travellers," 205.
4. These groups were also called khudozhestvenne brigady or agitbrigady. I have chosen what appears to be the most common appellation.
into enthusiastic supporters of socialism in a hurry, with minimal interference from professional artists.

Composed of young enthusiasts from trade unions, clubs, and factories, *agitprop* brigades prepared agitational skits and short plays from the raw material at hand—newspapers, public speeches, and production statistics. They were distrustful of professional theater workers and playwrights, who allegedly had no knowledge of daily struggle at the work place. Instead, brigade members tried to rely on their own experiences as laborers and political activists. This was utilitarian art of the most extreme kind, with success measured in improved industrial output and political participation. Through their performances, the amateur actors and writers in brigades tried to inspire their viewers and goad them on to ever higher feats of production.

The industrial shock work movement was a major inspiration for *agitprop* brigades. Begun in embryo in the waning years of NEP, shock work became a widespread phenomenon during the First Five-Year Plan. Young workers banded together to shake up old patterns of production in factories, attacking the privileges and established labor methods of older skilled workers. Operating at first without support of the factory management or union leadership, shock workers quickly succeeded in sponsoring efforts to raise production quotas. By 1929 the trade union leadership had embraced shock work as a method to raise production and endorsed its implementation throughout Soviet industry.5

As shock work gained visibility and acceptance in Soviet factories, *agitprop* brigades began to make their appearance in significant numbers. Participants in *agitprop* brigades compared themselves to shock workers in the most literal sense, calling their activities "a method of artistic shock work."6 In the fall of 1929, the Leningrad city trade union organization was the first to embrace *agitprop* brigades as a method to put art to the service of the Five-Year Plan. "Instead of apolitical, imitative, amateur groups, we should embrace artistic *agitprop* brigades as the basic form of union work," read the final reso-

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