



DOI: 10.22363/2313-2272-2026-26-3-816-829

EDN: UMEJZF

Fordism in Russia in the early 20th century: Three sketches in the urban-rural rhythms*

A.M. Nikulin

Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration,
Vernadskogo Prosp., 82, Moscow, 119571, Russia

(e-mail: harmina@yandex.ru)

Abstract. The article considers some of the artistic and scientific ideas of the remarkable social philosopher Valerian Nikolaevich Muraviev about labor and production organization in Henry Ford's rural development projects in connection with the projects for modernization of social life in the USSR. In his writings on diverse issues of history, war, revolution and construction of socialism, Muraviev quite accurately and profoundly noted the enormous significance and role of the peasantry in Russian history and Russian revolution. The author focuses on the images and ideas of Muraviev's unfinished satirical work "The story of how Yaichkin became Ford" and then considers some Ford's technocratic projects related to experiments in overcoming inequality between the city and the countryside, including positive and negative estimates of Soviet and foreign authors of Ford's agricultural technologies, agrotowns, and rural cultural initiatives. The article provides a brief overview of the USSR's automobile projects proposed by the prominent Soviet Bolshevik Valerian Valerianovich Obolensky (party pseudonym — Nikolai Osinsky) as related to Ford's American projects, emphasizing that in the real conditions of capitalism and socialism both American and Soviet motorization projects led to the intensification and deepening of social and environmental contradictions in social life. In the final part of the article, Ford's agrarian ideas are considered from the perspective of the philosophy of the common cause of Nikolai Fedorovich Fedorov and his follower Valerian Nikolaevich Muraviev.

Key words: V.N. Muraviev; H. Ford; V.V. Obolensky; N.F. Fedorov; rural-urban development; modernization projects; technocratic projects; capitalism; socialism; philosophy of the common cause

For citation: Nikulin A.M. Fordism in Russia in the early 20th century: Three sketches in the urban-rural rhythms. *RUDN Journal of Sociology*. 2026; 26 (3): 816–829. <https://doi.org/10.22363/2313-2272-2026-26-3-816-829> EDN: UMEJZF

Valerian Nikolaevich Muraviev belonged to an ancient noble family, whose members left a significant mark on Russian history. By the early 20th century, he had received a brilliant and comprehensive education in Saint Petersburg and

*© A.M. Nikulin, 2026

The article was submitted on 10.06.2026. The article was accepted on 25.08.2026.

Paris and proved to be a remarkable Russian diplomat in the most important diplomatic missions of the Russian Empire in Western Europe. During the World War I, he served as vice-director of the diplomatic chancery at the Headquarters of the Supreme Commander-in-Chief, and with the victory of the February Revolution, he became head of the political cabinet of the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Muraviev was also a talented writer, philosopher and publicist in a variety of genres — from the political-legal essay “A small unit of self-government in Russian legislation” (1912) to the vividly journalistic article “The roar of flame” (1918) published in the collection *From the Depths* — a worthy sequel to the famous collection *Milestones*. For many years, until his arrest in 1929, Muraviev worked for the desk drawer on his philosophical mystery play *Sophia and Kitovras*, while his main work involved compiling analytical reviews on the scientific organization of labor in the 1920s, among which his remarkable social-philosophical work *Mastering Time*, also unpublished in his lifetime, holds a central place. He was close to the circles of Russian religious philosophy, maintained personal relationships with Nikolai Alexandrovich Berdyaev, Alexei Fedorovich Losev, and Pavel Alexandrovich Florensky, and in the 1920s became one of the most prominent followers and continuers of Nikolai Fedorovich Fedorov’s cosmist philosophy.

Muraviev’s relationship with the Soviet regime was difficult. A Slavophile and Christian socialist by conviction, he initially reacted strongly negatively to the Bolshevik coup. The Bolsheviks nearly executed him in 1920, accusing him of participating in the White Guard conspiracy known as the Tactical Center. At the same time, the new government recognized him as a truly valuable expert in international relations. It was Leon Davidovich Trotsky who saved Muraviev from execution and imprisonment in the early 1920s by inviting him to work at the People’s Commissariat of Foreign Affairs. For a time, corresponded with both Trotsky and Nikolai Ivanovich Bukharin not only on foreign policy but on general issues of developing a new culture and worldview for Soviet Russia based on the ideas of Fedorov. In the mid-1920s, he worked actively and productively at Aleksei Kapitonovich Gastev’s famous Central Institute of Labor. However, with the intensification of political purges in the late 1920s, he was blamed for everything: count’s title, philosophical idealism, anti-Bolshevik journalism and participation in a counterrevolutionary conspiracy. In 1929, Muraviev was arrested, exiled to Naryn, a notorious concentration camp for political prisoners, and died there of typhus.

The mid-1920s marked the peak of Henry Ford’s popularity worldwide and in the USSR not only as an outstanding entrepreneur and organizer of production but also as a unique social thinker with his own philosophy of the meaning of human and social life. Muraviev, who was working at the Central Institute of Labor at the time, followed international scientific literature on organization of production, occasionally publishing translations and reviews

in this subject field. He certainly had a good understanding of Ford's ideas, which is evidenced not only by several references to Ford's ideas in Muraviev's writings but also by his translation of a book about Ford [1] and his review "Ford and agriculture" [13]. It should be noted that Muraviev refers to Ford's ideas and projects neutrally, without judgment, only occasionally mentioning other authors' critical opinions of them. The reason for this seems to be certain self-censorship: Ford, albeit a capitalist but an outstanding and progressive organizer of world-class production, was in general one of the ideological icons of Soviet industrialization. In the 1920s, the Bolsheviks were willing to respectfully study Fordism so that, having learned its lessons, in the 1930s could strive to catch up and surpass America. Thus, in the USSR of that time Ford could be criticized either openly ideologically in party literature (as an unconventional capitalist exploiter) or veiledly-ironically in fiction (as an eccentric technocratic visionary), an example of which is ironic literary criticism of Ford in Andrei Platonovich Platonov's satirical work "Antisexus" [23]. Muraviev followed Platonov's path in one of his unfinished fiction works, the protagonist of which proclaims himself Henry Ford [14]. However, even these works were not published during the lifetimes of both authors for censorship reasons.

The plot of Muraviev's work "The story of how Yaichkin became Ford" can be outlined in several amusing scenes. The protagonist of this story is a timid, old-regime intellectual Yaichkin (Eggy), who humbly and selflessly works in the departmental library of the Supreme Council of the National Economy. Periodically, the self-assured new Soviet man Nakhrapov (Pushy) comes to the library and chummy moscks the old-fashioned clumsy Yaichkin. The librarian Yaichkin falls in love with a young reader, an engineer by profession Mizinchik (Little finger). The librarian carefully selects a series of books on work organization for the object of his affection, but this charming lady pays him no attention. One day, the authorities demanded that Yaichkin deliver a rare book to the high bureaucracy. Horrified Yaichkin discovered that the book was overdue precisely by the engineer Mizinchik. When she eventually showed up, frightened and upset, she told Yaichkin that almost the entire book had been chewed up by a cow, while she was playing lawn tennis nearby. Fearing the harsh Soviet repressive measures against violators of the library law, Mizinchik falls into hysterics and then begins to lose consciousness. Confused Yaichkin tries unsuccessfully to bring her to senses and is caught in this act by his superiors, who suspect him of violence against a defenseless woman. Mizinchik, having regained consciousness, explains that the librarian, on the contrary, was trying to somehow help in her inconsolable grief. The authorities, having recognized in Mizinchik a familiar face from the ruling Soviet circles, informs her in a friendly way that there would be no punishment — Mizinchik only has to pay the price of the lost book. After this incident, the arrogant reader Mizinchik began to soften to her timid savior, who continued to supply her with library literature, and Yaichkin once confessed his love to her [14. P. 531].

The manuscript had two versions of the story's ending. In the first, Yaichkin has a nightmare in which, finding himself in a hall of machines, he becomes the workshop manager, director of this factory and transforms into Ford, conquering the world. Finally, the former librarian masters the art of turning workers into machines: "Yachkin begins to fear the machines. He wants to run, but he is surrounded by an assembly line, on which the iron hands of machine-men perform operations. He wants to run, but machines block his path, catching him with their iron hands. He feels that he turns into a machine — a milling machine, then a machine-assembly machine. And the empty hall shines transparently, full of machines, operating by themselves, without workers" [14. P. 532]. Yaichkin awakens from this dream, goes to the library, lovingly examines books and realizes that he has been cured of his obsession with Fordism and of love for the female engineer. In another version of the story's ending, Yaichkin falls into a dream in which he declares himself Ford, enters a meeting room and announces that he has invented an assembly line for educating people. Which at first delights people around him, but then they realize he is a madman. Yaichkin, continuing to claim that he is Henry Ford, collapses before them, losing consciousness.

Muraviev's youth and young adulthood coincided with the era of symbolism in Russian art. His story about Yaichkin and Ford is filled with easily recognizable symbolic characters, stylized primarily in the style of Nikolai Vasilyevich Gogol: timid Yaichkin resembles the meek Akaky Akakievich, idiotically cheerful Nakhrapov — a new Soviet Nozdryov, Mizinchik — a composite image of most of Gogol's young ladies — charming and calculating, striving to follow the latest fashion (of the first half of the 20th century) and become an engineer, whom Ford admires. Certainly, this story has more symbolic layers: crazy Yaichkin, contrasted with the automobile king and billionaire, resembles Alexander Sergeevich Pushkin's mad Evgeny confronting the Bronze Horseman — the Emperor; workers, phantasmagorically transformed into machines, remind of officials mystically transformed into playing cards in one of Vladimir Fyodorovich Odoevsky's fairy tales [21].

Muraviev prophetically anticipates scenes from the brilliant movie "Modern Times" (1936) in which Charlie Chaplin's young hero is driven mad just as poor Yaichkin by the assembly-line multitude of Ford machines [3. P. 64]. And it is no coincidence that the powerful technocrat-entrepreneur is confronted by the librarian: Muraviev worked as a librarian for a time, and his source of inspiration, Nikolai Fedorovich Fedorov, also spent a significant part of his life as a librarian. The librarian, the symbolic guardian of universal historical knowledge, is confronted by the engineer, the representative of modern, technocratically specialized knowledge. Finally, the cow is deeply symbolic in this story. This charming domestic animal with profound cultural and historical symbolism serves as a paradoxical *deus ex machina*: the cow chewed a book on labor organization, by which pushed both heroes toward a dramatic resolution of the whole story, but

the more important fact is that and the cow destroyed the book right next to a tennis court. In Russia a hundred years ago, signs of rural life were everywhere, both in the suburbs and in the cities. Russia was still a peasant country with cows wandering everywhere. Let us emphasize once again that it is the cow — the symbol of rural life — that harms the bourgeois city dweller with Fordist-engineering ideals, while strangely aiding the protagonist with the rural surname Yaichkin, reminding of *ab ovo* (“from the egg” in Latin).

From literary rural-urban symbols let us turn to the scientific analysis by Muraviev and his contemporaries of *Henry Ford*’s ambitious projects in the field of rural-urban transformations. In his article “Application of Ford’s methods to the organization of agriculture”, Muraviev defines the topic of his research as follows: “Henry Ford is known throughout the world as one of the most original and outstanding organizers of modern industrial production. But Ford, by his origins, as a farmer’s son, was no stranger to agriculture, which explains his interest in agricultural issues” [13. P. 91]. Ford even got a farm of several thousand hectares, where he tirelessly experimented with agricultural mechanization already in the 1920s — his tractors plowed land as deeply and quickly as possible [1. P. 79–83].

Muraviev, based on his translation of the book *The New Ford* by the ardent Ford supporter Allan Benson, summarizes Ford’s radical views on the coming transformation of agriculture as follows: rural labor should be fully mechanized using automobiles, tractors, combines, and electrical energy; as a result of this manifold increase in agricultural productivity, farmers will have a lot of free time, which they can use in the countryside for industrial work, — compact but highly mechanized factories and plants should be built here and the urban industry of large cities should be dispersed among small rural settlements. In this way, two strategic goals can be achieved: first, to prevent the huge and unpredictably dangerous accumulation of population in huge cities; second, to bring city dwellers (former farmers) back to the countryside, where they would combine the best features of both urban and rural lifestyles [13. P. 91–93]. These abstract ideas of Ford seem to almost completely coincide with the Soviet communist doctrines of harmoniously overcoming differences between the city and the village. However, in the next two decades of his long career, Ford encountered many negative and unpredictable consequences of such revolutionary agrarian reforms, just as happened with the Soviets that made monstrous mistakes on the path of forced collectivization and industrialization [16]. But in 1925, in the review of Fordist rural reforms, Muraviev refers to the experience of German engineers and agronomists to make critical remarks about Ford’s excessive agrarian optimism: while agreeing with the German experience, Muraviev argues that the proposed highly mechanized, total plowing of land could quickly lead to soil degradation and loss of fertility [13. P. 92], which did happen in America — the mass plowing of prairies with tractors determined an increase in the great dust storms in the Midwest, which blew away the remnants of fertile soil [12; 17]; a quarter of a century later, the steppes of Southern Siberia

and Northern Kazakhstan during the Soviet industrial campaign to develop virgin lands met the same fate.

Furthermore, Ford approached the issues of interaction between the livestock and agricultural sectors too frivolously and overly ambitious: according to his German critics, there were many regional and cultural nuances that Ford failed to take into account, but they would manifest in the most unpredictable ways [2. P. 39]. In his review of Fordist agrarian reforms, Muraviev emphasized that agricultural mechanization was still in its infancy, but its significant results should be expected in the very near future. Muraviev died in 1930, on the eve of the complete implementation of Fordist and Soviet agrarian-industrial projects.

In the interview to Ilya Ilf and Yevgeny Petrov during their visit to the United States, Ford said that he got the idea for compact agro-industrial enterprises about twenty years earlier, and by the mid-1930s, about twenty such agro-industrial factories had already opened. Such enterprises did not have a huge concentration of machines and workers, yet their labor productivity was higher than at the large factory. Moreover, their workers combined cheap and healthy rural life with the city salary. Ford believed that such rural factory towns could avoid social-economic problems of the big city (psychological stress and social upheavals), and a network of compact agro-industrial production facilities would harmonize rural-urban relations. Ford emphasized that his agro-industrial project of compact factory-settlements was directed against the oligarchy of finance capital, which sought to achieve speculative-financial concentration by stimulating industrial-urban concentration.

Ford dreamed of a future country of such small factories in rural areas, completely free from the control of merchants and financiers. Soviet writers noted that Ford hated Wall Street bankers as parasitic intermediaries between him and farmers, and with his project of farm-industrial factories, he sought to create a new capitalist harmony. Ilf and Petrov characterized it as the latest bourgeois utopia: “Even if the suspiciously softened capitalists succeeded in putting the entire American proletariat on land, exploitation would not only not disappear but would certainly intensify, taking on a more subtle form” [9. P. 41]. Ilf and Petrov were extremely impressed with Ford as both a person and a genius of assembly-line standardization: in fact, he was creating what young Soviet Marxist agrarians had mostly only dreamed of — agro-industrial complexes that would compactly synthesize urban and rural lifestyles into a single complex [5].

Ford's automobile-agricultural settlements did not survive or take root in America. The aftermath of the Great Depression and capitalist automotive and financial competition made Ford's carefully crafted rural-urban harmony projects unprofitable. While fighting for his rural-urban dream in North America, Ford tried to organize something similar even in South America from 1926 to the early 1930s — an incredibly ambitious project to create a rural-urban utopia Fordlandia in the wilds of the Brazilian Amazon for mass cultivation of rubber trees for the

production of car tires. In 1930, Brazilian workers in Fordlandia revolted against this city of the American dream, destroying public spaces, cutting telephone and telegraph lines, and driving the city's elite into the jungle for several days. The rebellion was suppressed by Brazilian army units, and a peace treaty was signed between the city administration and the rebels, but residents began to leave this tropical Ford paradise. Having spent millions of dollars, having made various changes to its management, having overcome worker protests, Ford was eventually forced to abandon his Brazilian venture [8].

In his numerous agricultural projects, Ford made repeated and extensive attempts to introduce the diverse technical and cultural achievements of urban industry and science into rural life. Ford was a remarkable optimist and cheerfully predicted that the farmer of the future would come from the city and would quickly adapt to the countryside, and farming would become the most enjoyable of all occupations [1. P. 84]. Since Ford's time, a truly enormous number of scientific and technological advances and benefits of civilization have extended to rural life. Nevertheless, just as they did a hundred years ago, social-economic and cultural-ecological contradictions between the city and the countryside persist and even deepen in many regions and countries of the world.

Let us return to the Soviet Union. Automobiliation is perhaps the most common and widespread modernization phenomenon of the 20th century, and in the 1920s in the USSR, the key expert in the development of motor transport was *Valerian Valerianovich Obolensky*, better known by his party nickname *Nikolai Osinsky*. A revolutionary and comrade of Lenin, he was one of the colorful figures of intellectual Bolshevism. Like Bukharin, until the late 1920s, he occasionally expressed his personal point of view, which could diverge from the opinion of the majority in the Central Committee and Stalin. Osinsky successfully combined theoretical academic work at leading institutions of the Academy of Sciences and the State Planning Committee with practical activism in public organizations: in the late 1920s, he headed Avtodor — the Society for the Promotion of Automobile Development and Improvement of Roads in the USSR — and became editor-in-chief of the new Soviet magazine *Za Rulem* (Behind the Wheel).

Osinsky's article "The American automobile or the Russian cart", published in the August 1927 issue of the newspaper *Pravda*, caused a real sensation in the Soviet Union. At the beginning of the article, Osinsky shared his impressions of European and American cities, mentioning that even Warsaw had undergone an automotive revolution by 1927, while Moscow streets differed from European due to their backwardness. Osinsky argued that European cities were living in a different era of transportation and technology: while horse-drawn cabs still drove around Moscow, on American or European city streets one would encounter a horse no more often than a cow. Compared to Berlin, Paris or Stockholm, Moscow still looked like a large village [22. P. 5]. Moreover, Osinsky complemented his phenomenological impressions of Western automobiliation with statistical data

like that by the beginning of 1927, there were 12,000 cars in the entire USSR ranked 40th in the world by this indicator; the United States held first place with 23,431,000 vehicles, accounting for 85% of the planet's total; Europe had 3,103,000 vehicles, or 11% of the world's total. The Soviet Union produced annually 600–700 cars, essentially in a semi-artisanal manner, while Peugeot — 25,000, Citroën — 100,000, and the American giants Chevrolet and Ford — about 1–1.5 million cars [22. P. 7].

Osinsky emphasized that while the electrical engineering and some other strategic industrial sectors had managed to develop in Tsarist Russia and were given even greater attention in the Soviet era, the automobile industry was less fortunate. Before the World War I, Russia had made promising experiments in producing a small number of domestically designed automobiles, but it primarily imported automobiles from abroad and mainly expensive and powerful vehicles for the upper classes, army and navy. During the World War I, due to the acute transport shortage at the front and in the rear, several automobile plants were urgently launched. However, due to the Revolution and the Civil War, automobiles were produced only at the Moscow plant and, until 1924, only the first Soviet trucks based on the technical expertise of the Italian company Fiat.

Osinsky sounded the alarm about the continuing underestimation of motorization in socialist planning, referring to the United States, where among the ten most important branches of American industry, the automobile industry was the most important, while the Soviet State Planning Committee did not even have a separate table for the automobile industry. It was largely thanks to Osinsky that the automobile, metaphorically speaking, managed to jump on the last train of the accelerating echelon of the first five-year plan. Following the Soviet public's sympathetic response to Osinsky's article about the cart and the automobile, the country's party leadership became seriously concerned about the prospects of the automobile industry and heeded many Osinsky's recommendations: to adopt a long-term 15-year plan for the mass motorization of the country; in the first five-year plan, to begin construction of an automobile plant producing at least 100,000 simple and inexpensive passenger cars annually and two more plants producing tens of thousands of trucks; to expand international automotive cooperation in every possible way, primarily with the world's leading automobile power, the United States; to stimulate public enthusiasm for automobiles by creating a voluntary society to promote the development of the automobile industry [22. P. 40].

During the first and subsequent pre-war five-year plans, the USSR built (or reconstructed) the Nizhny Novgorod automobile giant GAZ, designed jointly with Ford the Yaroslavl truck plant YaGAZ and the Moscow factories KIM and ZIS. By the late 1930s, the USSR had become the first truck producer in Europe and second in the world. By 1941, as Osinsky had proposed, more than a million Soviet vehicles had been produced. However, achieving a quantity and quality of vehicles worthy of an industrial power in Osinsky's project was not so much

the goal as the means to create a new man and a new society. Like Henry Ford, who sincerely believed that his automobile served to ennoble capitalism, Osinsky considered the development of the automobile industry in the USSR a path to the creation of the socialist society and the new socialist man, overcoming the backwardness and prejudices of the old world. In discussions with his numerous readers, Osinsky identified the typical everyday Soviet prejudices that were holding back motorization, for instance, the idea that the car was a “bourgeois vehicle” that, given Soviet labor productivity and prices, would remain a luxury available only to the elite, not a means of transportation for ordinary citizens. Osinsky argued that the USSR was capable of mass, assembly-line production of inexpensive automobiles accessible to ordinary Soviet citizens and criticized the Soviet People’s Commissariats’ purchase of expensive limousines for their high-ranking members, suggesting that Soviet officials learn to drive, thereby saving significant state resources by reducing the number of personal chauffeurs.

At the same time, Osinsky opposed the barracks-like egalitarianism that was so popular in the early USSR. He sympathetically cited the example of a letter from a car enthusiast who, through great effort, had acquired and repaired an old car but was constantly called a bourgeois by those around him, explaining that Soviet people do not drive cars. Osinsky also criticized the utopian sentiments of Soviet people who proposed priority development of mass aircraft production, thus countering the lack of automobiles and the lack of roads. Some Soviet citizens even noted that automobiles require good roads, but good roads would allow imperialist countries to move deeper into the USSR in the event of war; by maintaining poor roads the USSR creates natural barriers to the invasion of enemy motorized armies. Osinsky argued that mass automobile production would entail the construction of high-quality roads and motorized troops of the Red Army, whose homeland, i.e., roads, would be of greater assistance than to the enemy.

Moreover, the automobile would be especially useful for the development of rural Russia, and for peasant cooperatives, Osinsky suggested special credit incentives for the purchase of automobiles. He concluded his article about the Russian cart and the American automobile with the slogan: “Not only automobiles for the proletariat, but also and especially automobiles for the peasantry”. In 1928, naive Osinsky even published a short utopian story “Letter written on November 6, 1937” about his imaginary journey by car from Moscow to Voronezh on the eve of the twentieth anniversary of the October Revolution, describing this utopian land’s excellent roads, gas stations with nearby comfortable cafes and hotels, many cars and trucks taking workers and peasants to attend to their collective, cooperative and personal business, and even so many foreigners travelling around the USSR to study the successes of humanistic socialism that Soviet gas station workers begin to communicate quite well in foreign languages [22. P. 98].

Stalin’s motorization of the 1930s, hierarchical and autarkic, turned out to be a dystopia directed against Osinsky’s dreams. His idea of “automobiles for

the peasantry” was significantly at odds with Stalin’s plans, although Stalin and the Central Committee took Osinsky’s concerns into account when discussing the first five-year plan and appointed him the chief ideologist and mouthpiece of socialist motorization. But by the end of the first five-year plan, Osinsky was significantly burdened with other, no less important planning and statistical work and replaced by new ideological and technical supervisors of the Soviet automobile industry. Stalinist motorization was carried out cautiously and selectively: Soviet automobiles were primarily intended for official use by Soviet officials and within a specific hierarchical order. Under Stalin, workers, intellectuals and especially peasants had almost no chance of having a personal car, with the exception of particularly distinguished figures in science and culture and Stakhanovites. In response to Osinsky’s calls to catch up with capitalism through the most democratic use of automobiles (primarily for the development of rural Russia), in 1929 Stalin proclaimed in his article “A year of great change” that the country was moving full steam ahead along the path of industrialization toward socialism, leaving behind our centuries-old Russian backwardness, and that when the USSR would get on the automobile (obviously intended for Soviet officials and worker-drivers) and the peasant would get on the tractor (obviously state-owned, belonging to a state farm or MTS — machine-tractor station), capitalists, boasting of their ‘civilization’, would need to catch up with the Soviet Union [24. P. 134].

In his reflections on Soviet automobiles, Osinsky paid particular attention to the development of light trucks and vans as particularly useful for rural cooperatives. Certainly, he acknowledged the importance of heavy trucks for the development of the national economy, but the share of medium-sized and heavy trucks (with an insignificant number of light trucks and a shortage of passenger cars) in Stalin’s auto industry turned out to be unprecedentedly high compared to the economies of other countries. However, the production of light armored vehicles based on heavy trucks for the Red Army flourished. Osinsky strove to integrate the Soviet automobile industry into the international automotive industry by producing modern, competitive vehicles, but in the mid-1930s, the USSR had largely wound down international automobile projects, condemning its auto industry to an autarkic existence, which predetermined its chronic lagging behind the West. Moreover, Osinsky did not accept hierarchy of the society of prestigious consumption [22. P. 117] and proposed buying cheap foreign cars for all Soviet citizens, while the Stalinist USSR of the 1930s primarily purchased expensive and prestigious American limousines for the party and business leaders, among whom their own ‘bourgeois’, quasi-American style of prestigious consumption had already developed. Thus, Osinsky was accused of sabotage and espionage and executed in 1938.

The reasons for the failure of Soviet motorization and socially oriented Fordist projects with their desire for a total transformation of rural-urban reality can be considered through the views of *Nikolai Fedorovich Fedorov* on the relationship

between the city and the village, which is one of the central issues in his philosophy of the common cause. In many of his works, Fedorov repeatedly argues that it was precisely in urban society that the alienation of the earth from the sky occurred, leading to intensified movement from villages to cities, from the outskirts to the center, accompanied by the depletion of nature. To prevent this destruction, people need to return to the earth (ashes of our fathers) and to the sky hidden by the city. Fedorov also mentioned the task of returning city dwellers with their accumulated scientific knowledge to rural life, thus calling for an alliance of urban intelligentsia and rural residents in the common cause of transforming and reviving the whole world [4].

It might seem that Ford, in his approach to the rural-urban question, is almost a spontaneous cosmist in the spirit of Fedorov: Ford left his father's farm with all hardships of rural labor, achieved knowledge and skill, wealth and respect in the city, and now, not wanting to be a prodigal son forgetting his kin, returns to the village with all his technical, scientific and financial resources to radically transform rural life and make it even superior to city life. Ford promised to put an end to back-breaking physical labor, make rural life comfortable as in the city, preserve and revive the former rural communal life and culture by developing both modern, compact, optimal agro-industrial production and a network of schools and museums. But Ford's plans were often distorted beyond recognition and failed.

One possible, yet partial and superficial, social-economic explanation is that Ford, an eccentric technocratic capitalist, was the odd one in the global capitalist world of big cities and finance, which is why he repeatedly rebelled against Wall Street, mercilessly criticizing it, and Wall Street, in turn, dealt Ford's work some very sensitive blows, repeatedly bringing the charismatic leader and his initiatives to the brink of dangerous bankruptcy. To more deeply understand the drama of the failures of Ford's rural-urban projects, we should, as Fedorov did, consider how issues of wealth and poverty conceal the fundamental question of the society's life and death. From the perspective of Fedorov's ideals of universal resurrection, Ford's rural-urban transformations seem almost a Faustian project — with the help of automobiles and tractors to expand and improve the dams of progressive comfort, supposedly protecting the old and young generations of rural-urban households from the mounting waves of social and environmental crises. However, the mechanized waves of new generations of increasingly productive and powerful tractors and automobiles significantly deepen the abyss of new environmental and technocratic risks and disasters both in the city and in the countryside. Moreover, the question is whether the cheerful, high-tech Ford farmer, returning from the city to the countryside, truly strives for the revival, resurrection and transformation of the lost eternal life or simply wants to open a provincial branch of the city with no roots and sense of history.

Like many Faustian geniuses, Ford was a paradoxically contradictory figure: on the one hand, a childishly enthusiastic, passionate and good-natured inventor;

on the other hand, a predatory and calculating businessman [11. P. 12], and this fateful duality of Ford's vision also fundamentally differs from the holistic Fedorov's outlook. On the one hand, Ford strongly emphasized that a person should strive to achieve profit in the most direct capitalist sense of the word. On the other hand, Ford argued that profit is by no means an end in itself: a person should use profit to improve himself and the world around him. This statement reveals a familiar dilemma about primary (food and profit) and secondary (questions and improvements) human actions: with such a semantic emphasis, most people focus on maximizing food and profit, never engaging in inquisitive questioning and comprehensive self-improvement [10].

Another significant difference between Ford and Fedorov is their attitudes toward people around them. While democratic in American style and pragmatic, Ford was deeply convinced that not all people are interested in creative, cognitive work — most people are quite satisfied with routine, monotonous work as long as they are paid enough for it, and for this majority's good Ford invented his assembly line [6. P. 133–148]. Fedorov vehemently disagreed with this view, believing that all people possess the capacity and right to inquisitive, creative knowledge and action. Perhaps, that is why Ford's assembly lines and agro-industrial towns never managed to overcome social contradictions between those in power and those ruled. In the ideal settlements of the future envisioned by Fedorov and his followers, there is no such division between a knowledgeable, creative minority and an order-following majority [7]. Certainly, Fedorov would have responded with gratitude and respect to Ford's scientific-technological inventions contributing to the regulation of natural and social life along the paths of the common cause of the immortal transformation of the world but would harshly criticize Ford's assembly line for distributing rural-urban goods as a result of everyone's pursuit of profit.

Funding

The article was written on the basis of the RANEPА state assignment research program.

References

1. Benson A. *The New Henry Ford*. Moscow; 1927. (In Russ.).
2. Chayanov A.V. *Optimal Size of Agricultural Enterprises*. Moscow; 1928. (In Russ.).
3. Ermakova A.V. *The Individual and the Organization of Labor under Contemporary Capitalism*. Moscow; 1988. (In Russ.).
4. Fedorov N.F. Supramoralism, or universal synthesis. *Collected Works*: in 4 vols. Vol. 1. Moscow; 1995. (In Russ.).
5. Fitzgerald D.K. *Every Farm a Factory: The Industrial Ideal in American Agriculture*. Yale University Press; 2003.
6. Ford H. *My Life and Work*. Minsk; 2014. (In Russ.).
7. Gacheva A.G. Urban planning as world-building: The image of the ideal city in V.N. Muraviev's mystery play "Sophia and Kitovras". *Antsiferov's Collection II*. Moscow; Berlin; 2021.
8. Galey J. Industrialist in the wilderness: Henry Ford's Amazon venture. *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs*. 1979; 21 (2).
9. Ilf I., Petrov E. *One-Story America. Letters from America*. Moscow; 2014. (In Russ.).

10. Lipietz A. *Mirages and Miracles. The Crises of Global Fordism*. London; 1987. (In Russ.).
11. Lochner L.P. *America's Don Quixote: Henry Ford's Attempt to Save Europe*. Leningrad; 1925.
12. Moon D. *The American Steppes: The Unexpected Russian Roots of Great Plains Agriculture, 1870s–1930s*. Cambridge University Press; 2020.
13. Muraviev V.N. Application of Ford's methods in the organization of Agriculture. *Economy and Management*. 1925; 3. (In Russ.).
14. Muraviev V.N. The story of how Yaichkin became Ford. *Works*: in 2 vols. Vol. 2. Moscow; 2011. (In Russ.).
15. Muraviev V.N. Rhythm and culture. *Works*: in 2 vols. Vol. 2. Moscow; 2011. (In Russ.).
16. Nikulin A.M. *Agrarians and Power: From the Past to the Present*. Moscow; 2014.
17. Nikulin A.M. Appalachia as a laboratory for contemporary rural-urban development. *RUDN Journal of Sociology*. 2025; 25 (2).
18. Nikulin A.M., Trotsuk I.V. Historical-futurological projects: Utopian models of V.F. Odoevsky and A.V. Chayanov. *RUDN Journal of Sociology*. 2026; 26 (2).
19. Nikulin A.M., Trotsuk I.V. Two and a half undeservedly forgotten conceptual foundations of rural sociology. *RUDN Journal of Sociology*. 2023; 23 (3).
20. Nikulin A.M., Trotsuk I.V. Utopias of Alexander Bogdanov and Alexander Chayanov: The choice of rural-urban development and its consequences for rural human capital and social differentiation. *Russian Peasant Studies*. 2023; 8 (4).
21. Odoevsky V.F. A tale of how collegiate councilor Ivan Bogdanovich Otnoshenye failed to wish his superiors a Happy Easter. Odoevsky V.F. *Motley Tales*. Saint Petersburg; 1996. (In Russ.).
22. Osinsky N. (Obolensky V.V.). *The American Automobile or the Russian Cart: Articles*. Moscow–Leningrad; 1930. (In Russ.).
23. Platonov A.P. Anti-Sexus. *Collected Works*: in 5 vols. Vol. 1. Moscow; 1998. (In Russ.).
24. Stalin I.V. A year of great change: On the 12th anniversary of the October Revolution. *Works*. Vol. 12. Moscow; 1949. (In Russ.).
25. Trotsuk I.V. Rural human capital in the conceptual optics: Continuum and/or post-ism? *RUDN Journal of Sociology*. 2023; 23 (2).

DOI: 10.22363/2313-2272-2026-26-3-816-829

EDN: UMEJZF

Идеи фордизма в России в начале XX века: три зарисовки в ритмах города и деревни*

А.М. Никулин

Российская академия народного хозяйства и государственной службы при Президенте РФ,
просп. Вернадского, 82, Москва, 119571, Россия

(e-mail: harmina@yandex.ru)

Аннотация. В статье рассмотрены некоторые художественные и научные идеи замечательного социального философа Валериана Николаевича Муравьева, посвященные вопросам организации труда и производства в проектах сельского развития Генри Форда в связи

*© Никулин А.М., 2026

Статья поступила в редакцию 10.06.2026. Статья принята к публикации 25.08.2026.

с проектами модернизации социальной жизни в СССР. В.Н. Муравьев, в своих сочинениях затрагивавший многообразные вопросы истории, войны, революции и строительства социализма, достаточно точно и глубоко отмечал огромное значение и роль крестьянства в русской истории и русской революции. Особое внимание в статье уделяется образам и идеям незавершенного муравьевского сатирического произведения «Повесть о том, как Яичкин сделался Фордом». Далее следует описание ряда фордистских технократических проектов, направленных на преодоление неравенства между городом и деревней: приводятся положительные и отрицательные отзывы советских и зарубежных авторов о сельскохозяйственных технологиях, агрогородах, сельских культурных инициативах Г. Форда. В связи с американскими проектами Форда рассматриваются и проекты автомобилизации СССР, разработанные видным советским большевиком Валерианом Валериановичем Оболенским (партийный псевдоним — Николай Осинский): как американский, так и советский проекты автомобилизации приводили в реальных условиях капитализма и социализма к развитию и углублению социальных и экологических противоречий общественной жизни. В заключительной части статьи аграрные идеи Форда рассматриваются с точки зрения философии общего дела Николая Федоровича Федорова и его последователя В.Н. Муравьева.

Ключевые слова: В.Н. Муравьев; Г. Форд; В.В. Оболенский; Н.Ф. Федоров; развитие сельских и городских территорий; проекты модернизации; технократические проекты; капитализм; социализм; философия «Общего дела»

Для цитирования: Никулин А.М. Идеи фордизма в России в начале XX века: три зарисовки в ритмах города и деревни // Вестник Российского университета дружбы народов. Серия: Социология. 2026. Т. 26. № 3. С. 816–829. <https://doi.org/10.22363/2313-2272-2026-26-3-816-829> EDN: UMEJZF

Информация о финансировании

Статья подготовлена в рамках выполнения научно-исследовательской работы государственного задания РАНХиГС