

In Soviet Russia

A Ukrainian Village

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A Village School.

I visited a village school. Unfortunately for me, the children were having their summer holidays. But I met the teachers. The building was before the revolution, the house of the Lord of the Manor. There are 120 children under the system of free and compulsory education from the age of 7 to 14. About 10 are exempted from attendance as they ~~live~~ live in hamlets 2 or 3 miles away and the road is almost impassable in winter. The children are divided into 3 standards each about 40 strong. The maximum number of children in each class allowed by the law is 45, which is a great achievement when we remember that in England the Labour Party is still agitating for such a maximum. I found the school equipped with a piano and a very good library, thanks to a donation from the Cooperative Society.

The Teachers.

The staff consisted of a headmaster and two women assistants. For a village elementary school, they are exceptionally qualified. The headmaster ^{master} ~~had been~~ through the University, while the assistants had finished high school education and had gone through six months course in pedagogy. Being intellectual workers, they worked a ~~at~~ six hour day and were paid 45 roubles and 42 roubles per month, respectively, besides free lodgings, light, water and fuel. Their wages had been rising a little every year. In 1921, they had received only 17 roubles.

The same teachers conduct a night school for the illiterate adults of the village. They are paid 15 roubles per month extra for this two hours job. As a result of these classes they are hardly any illiterate men in the village and only 60 such women. In 2 years there won't be any left.

The Peasants & the Soviets.

I visited the homes of several peasants - prosperous and poor and was very cordially received. I had to partake to a meal at ~~x~~ each place in order not to offend my hosts ! The prosperous peasant looks with benevolent indifference at the Soviet Government. He will back it - so long as it protects his interest in the land ! Pressed to suggest any grievance of his, he says he wants more credit in order to develop his holding. At present he gets something like 180 roubles from the Cooperative Society, but ~~it~~ is not enough. Yes, he knows the Soviets cannot help it. Still, that is his complaint. Was he a Communist? ~~E~~ No, he wasn't politically minded. But his son was a pioneer (Communist Boy Scout) and came home from school talking about the private property being theft. He rather envied his son. He had no school to go to in his days.

The poorer peasants owed more to the Soviets. They had got ~~some~~ ^{their} lands at the time of the revolution. One of them - his was the poorest cottage I was to visit and yet it was clean and comfortable - had a holding not big enough ~~x~~ to support his family. It was true, the Soviets had offered him a farm three times as large in a neighbouring village, but he would rather stick to his ancestral patch, where his forefathers had been serfs!

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Industrial & Political Situation

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I have so far omitted all mention of the various factories we visited in Russia - the Red Triangle Rubber Factory in Leningrad employs 15,000 workers, the Red Candy & Chocolate Works with 2,700 workers and the Three Mounts Textile Factory with 7,000 workers in Moscow and the Steel Works with 17,000 workers near Nijni-Novogod. I am not qualified to speak about the technical side of what I saw, but everywhere there was admittedly a crying need for more up-to-date machinery, lack of which was hampering production.

So far as the efficiency of the workers is concerned, the reduction in working hours from 9, 10, and in many cases 12, to a maximum of eight hours has not adversely affected individual or collective production. The total industrial population of the Soviet Union, we learn from the recent issue of "Economics", had in 1926, attained the pre-war level.

The foreman in the Moscow Textile Factory told me that his job was made much easier by the Revolution. Cases of slackness were rarer, and the general tone of the workers under him was one of effort, indifference. The will to work and, with it, the amount of production it undoubtedly improved. The fly in the ointment was the use of anti machinery. "But to be able to import new machinery we require credit from your people."

The factories are generally managed by two Directors. The "Red Director" whom the Technical Director advises, is appointed by the Executive with the approval of the Factory Committee of the Workers. He must in addition be a worker who has risen from the ranks.

Trade Unionism 99%.

We were told that about 99% of the workers in these factories belonged to the appropriate Trade Unions. The International Labour Office at Geneva has just published a report on the Trade Unions in the Soviet Union. In 1917, there were only 100,000 unionists. During the period of "Military Communism," the membership figures of course, leapt up. But in 1922, with the introduction of the New Economic Policy, the number of Unions was made strictly voluntary and thus resulted in a fall from 6,740,000 to 4,550,000. Since then, the obvious advantage of a Trade Union card have led to a gradual increase until today. The I.L.O. reports the membership of 9,200,000. As the positions of the Unions, the I.L.O. which can hardly be said to sympathise with the Communists, says they possess "far greater prerogatives than those received by Trade Unions in any other country . . . and play

a predominant part in social affairs." It adds that "it should not be thought that management of the Unions by the Communists is absolute."

The Childrens Paradise.

What struck us most was the social work at the factories. Clubs and schools were attached to every one of them, but the creches were such as to justify the Soviet Union's claim to be called, "The Children's Paradise." To us, "mere men," creches seemed to be the acme of perfection and the women-members of our party, themselves active social workers, agreed that no creche in Great Britain could beat these from any aspect whatsoever.

The eight hour day with factory workers is universal in Russia. Besides this, the law enforces a weekly period of uninterrupted rest of not less than 42 hours, 2 weeks holiday a year and 14 public holidays with full wages. For intellectual workers, like teachers, clerks and journalists, the maximum hours of work are 6, so also for miners working underground. Persons between 14 and 16 years of age, if allowed to work at all after medical examination, can work only 4 hours a day. A leaf which India might, for its conscience' sake, take out of the Soviet statute book is that which prohibits the labour of women underground or at night.

Wages.

Piece-work seems to be the rule in Russian factories, we suggested that it was a system of exploitation denounced by British and American Trade Unionists. "Yes, but the profits of exploitation - if there are any - come back to the workers in the form of services from the State." Besides, piece-work were not fixed so as to give only the best workers a living wage. In Candy Factory, for instance the average wage was about double the minimum.

For ordinary workers, wages ranged from 45 roubles to 150 roubles a month. The bulk of the men got about 70 roubles (Rs.93/-). Women generally earned about 85% of this. Compared with British wages, it works out at a weekly wage of 35 s. as against 42 s. to 45 s. Add to this the cash value of such social services as free theatre tickets, free holidays in rest homes, and the most complete system of social insurance in the world - and you get the fruits of the workers of the Dictatorship of the Industrial Proletariat. Money wages, back to pre-war levels; real wages, higher than ever before; and the most important of all, wages rising steadily year by year as compared with the constant post-war

reductions in the wages of British, French, German and Italian workers. If that were the only result of 10 years of the Soviet regime, it would suffice in the eyes of the Russian workers.

But this applied only to about 10 million workers and their families. They formed only 18% of the population. How about the other 82%? The average income "per mensuem" was 15 roubles in 1922-23, 30 roubles in 1923-24, 39 roubles in 1924-25 and 48 roubles in 1925-26. Thus, the average income today is about Rs.66/- a month. I remember Prof. K.T. Shah's estimate of the average monthly income in India as Rs.6/-.

The Peasant Problem.

One consequence of this difference in the earnings of industrial workers and peasants is the jealousy of the latter towards better paid townsmen. The Russian peasant owes his land to the Revolution, and will he for long be contented with the position of the step-son of the State? Suppose he refused to part with his surplus corn except at one exorbitant price! What then? This then constitutes the Peasant Problem - one, making the peasants part with his surplus as cheaply as possible for the consumption of the town-workers and secondly, superseding the present 'de facto' peasant proprietorship by effective State ownership and management. The second item is, it is frankly admitted, impossible of achievement at the moment. The present composition of the country population is 40% poor peasant (without cattle), 4% "kulaks" or big farm farmers, and the remaining 56% middle class peasants. The policy of the Soviet Union to frown upon and isolate the "kulak" to encourage and organise the rural 'proletariat' and to leave the middle majority well alone. The Soviet Programme, on which their very existence depends, demands high agricultural production, so that the town work may get his food cheap. The Soviet therefore, refrain from kindling the class war in the villages. So far as the ultimate object is concerned, they rely almost exclusively on education. As mentioned before, all children turned out of village schools are Communists and it is expected that that generation will be far more tractable than the present when the State asserts to the full its right of ownership in the land.
