PLEBS

The Organ of the Labour Colleges

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SPECIAL RUSSIAN NUMBER

Articles on :

SOVIET INDUSTRY

THE RUSSIAN VILLAGE

WHAT THE RUSSIAN WORKER HAS GAINED

THE REVOLUTION IN ART AND LITERATURE

THE NATIONAL QUESTION IN THE SOVIET UNION

&c.

J.F.H.

HE CALLS HIMSELF A PLEB !!

OH, yes—he's been associated with the I.W.C.E. movement for years—is quite keen about it, in fact.

But he's never bought, let alone read, half the books the PLEBS has published.

He's convinced—theoretically—of the value of workers' education. But somehow or other it never struck him that the least he could do to help forward the movement was to buy, as they were issued, each one of its publications. Or perhaps he always *meant* to get them all, but kept on putting off sending in his order.

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The Pleb Point of View

FOREWORD

OUR educational movement does not only concern itself with the history of the past, nor only with economics in theory. It concerns itself, and must concern itself to an increasing extent, with contemporary history, with history in the making, with economic developments that are actually taking place. That is why on the Tenth Anniversary of the Russian Revolution—the tenth birthday of Workers' Russia—we make this a special Russian Number. What happened in Russia ten years ago and the developments that have been taking place over the last ten years not only represent the most important event in modern history ; they are of intimate concern to every worker in this country. During this month, therefore, every worker-student should be studying from this great historical event and learning its lessons ; and it has been our endeavour in this number to give some material to start on. Moreover—and this is important—every worker who reads this issue, in view of its especial importance, should *get his mate to spare fourpence and study it too.*

In 32 pages we clearly cannot do more than touch on one or two points of such a vast subject. But we have carefully chosen the articles and the writers of them, so as to give a fairly representative picture of each of the principal aspects of Soviet Russia's growth. ZED attempts to sketch the importance of the Revolution to the workers' movement of other countries and its effect on recent history. Emile Burns describes the organisation of industry and the progress of production in Russia over the last ten years, and H. C. Stevens from his own first-hand experience describes the Russian Village of to-day. Freda Utley, who has just returned from a visit to Russia, describes how the Revolution has affected the material and spiritual status of the worker ; Ralph Fox discusses the highly-important problem of nationalities—a subject about which we have hitherto known little ; and Maurice Dobb analyses the ideological reflex of the Revolution in the realm of literature and art.

Straws in the Wind

THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION AND OURSELVES

PROBABLY no event of modern history, not even the storming of the Bastille, has had such an influence on the course of history as the seizure of power by the workers in Russia ten years ago. Its influence on the internal economy of Russia is considerable enough : the beginning of a technical and cultural revolution in the old mediaeval village, the socialisation of 80 per cent. of industry and the rebuilding of it beyond the pre-war level, fundamental changes in the status and psychology of the workers, the opening of a new era in art and literature—these changes are described in other articles in this issue. But perhaps even more significant still, and likely to have greater significance in the future, is the external influence of the Russian Revolution.

The influence which Lenin's policy towards the national question has had on the colonial nationalist movements of the world, particularly in Asia, is described below in the article by Ralph Fox. The mere fact that one of the Great Powers of Europe has stood forth boldly as an enemy of Imperialism was sufficient alone to lend inspiration and courage to the struggling nationalist movements in China and India, the Near East and the East Indies, which to-day are shaking the pillars of Imperialism and may in the future bring them crashing down.

The Russian Revolution has also had a powerful influence on the workers' movement in Western Europe. Combining with the objective circumstances created by the war and economic decline, this resulted in a wave of revolt among the workers in Germany and Austria, Italy, France and even in England, showing itself in strikes, mutinies and actual revolutionary outbreaks. The October events in Russia were important precisely because they raised the issue of *power,* revealed what was involved in the struggle for power—that it was not merely a matter of votes and Parliamentary "lobbying"—and showed this issue as the prerequisite of any plans and schemes of Socialism. The Revolution, therefore, had the direct practical effect of rallying the revolutionary elements among the European workers to a new banner : these latter made the struggle for power the dominating objective of strategy and tactic, and so ranged themselves against the old pre-war leadership which made the attainment of limited reforms by means of class-collaboration their guiding aim. At the same time it had an important effect on the ideology and

thought of the workers' movement. It introduced a whole system of new ideas to which the name of Leninism has usually been given —ideas which we in this country are no more than beginning to understand.

Pre-war Marxism, living in an age of capitalist prosperity and relatively slow development of working-class consciousness, generally concentrated on that part of Marx's doctrine which dealt with the objective background of historical events. This applied to Revisionist and anti-Revisionist alike. Attention was concentrated on the economic factors which were preparing the way for the "inevitable" triumph of Socialism : Marxism became primarily a study of economics. Politics were usually identified with Parliamentarism ; and the problem of power, if it was thought of at all, was treated as a matter of the distant future, which could be left to some "spontaneity" of the moment that the aforementioned economic development would "inevitably" arouse. The result was a certain passivity, and on the one hand a degree of academic detachment of Marxist thought and education from the practical struggle, on the other hand, an "economist" obsession with purely internal organisational problems of industry.

What the Russian Revolution showed was the dependence of the triumph of the workers on the active political lead of Lenin and the Communist Party. It showed the importance of conscious, organised activity in shaping historical events. In raising the issue of power, it showed the vital importance of studying the circumstances and the tactics of the struggle for power. It made a study of politics the essential second part of Marxism, without which Marxism lost most of its essential quality, and at any rate lost most of its practical message for the workers. This second part of Marxism, already sketched in outline in the writings of Marx and Engels, but only completely drawn in the works of Lenin, is what we in this country particularly lack. Our educational movement still remains too cramped by the weight of pre-war tradition, and much of its ideology, because it is confined to the one half of Marxism alone, tends to be misleading and barren.

It is because of the immense influence of the mere existence of Workers' Russia on the revolutionary movements which are shaking capitalist imperialism, both in the West and in the East, that the capitalist Powers are willing to make great sacrifices in order to bring about its downfall. In the early days when the strength of the Soviet power was still untested, every effort was made to overthrow the new régime by direct military intervention. No lies manufactured

in Northcliffe's propaganda factory were too dishonourable to hide from the British workers what was really going on; no brigand general was too villainous to bribe and subvention to harry the "Reds"; no methods of espionage, sabotage and terrorism were too dastardly for the agents of Western Imperialism to use. But, finding that the Russian workers were prevented by no Tolstoian scruples from defending themselves, and from defending themselves proudly and victoriously, the capitalist Powers tried slower and less direct means. It was thought inconceivable that the Bolsheviks could reconstruct their shattered country by their own efforts: they would be forced to seek loans and financial accommodation from the capitalist West, if they were to avoid the wrath of their starving rank and file. This aid could then be made conditional on the acceptance of such "controls" and "safeguards" as would virtually mean the putting of Bolshevism in irons and the conversion of Russia into a dependent colony of Western finance. At the same time Western capital would have the advantage of the reopening of Russian markets and of Russian raw material supplies.

But this second, subtler scheme has come to ruin like the first. Faced by the united front of the capitalist Powers at the Genoa and Hague Conferences, the Russian delegates did not capitulate, but returned to arouse the Russian workers to redoubled efforts to repair the ravages of war and famine by their own resources. And to-day after ten years Soviet Russia stands forth proudly as a witness to the workers of the world; her industrial production restored beyond its pre-war level, and showing promise of an advance in future years several times more rapid than that in the capitalist countries of the West.

Warned by this second failure, the capitalist Powers might have been expected for a season to bide their time—a thing which certain of them, notably U.S.A. and Germany, seem at present inclined to do. But in face of the severe blow she has received in China, of her sensitiveness to any breath of revolt in India, and of her urgent need (because of her worsened economic position) to "knock the Bolshevism out of the British working class," British Imperialism cannot afford to stand passive. If peaceful methods have failed to expunge the demon, Bolshevism, from the comity of Europe, military methods, however costly, must be tried again. In the preparatory stages of this new campaign the Arcos raid and the breach with Russia was the first move. The campaign in Paris for the expulsion of Rakovsky was the second. Renewed military activity in the border countries (Esthonia, Poland, Roumania, etc.), British naval activity in the Baltic, a fresh wave of espionage and terrorist

activity inside Russia, reminiscent of 1918—all this is smoke which shows where the fires are being rekindled. As in 1918-19, when Churchill was preparing his invasion of Russia from Murmansk, Government spokesmen are hot with protestation that nothing is being planned. As in 1914, there are complacent sceptics who pooh-pooh the need for fears. Moreover, if and when a fresh attack on Russia comes, it will be, as in 1914, the Reformist leadership of the Labour movement, nurtured in class-collaboration, who will beat the drum and preach the righteousness of the cause. It is not without significance that the T.U.C. Conference should break off relations with the Russian unions a few months after the British Government's diplomatic break : it is a "straw in the wind." The General Council's resolution of pretended support to Russia is likely to be as much a "scrap of paper" as the pacifist resolutions of the Second International before 1914. MacDonald has already begun to fulminate in *Forward* against "Russian Imperialism" ; and if a new Red Letter is needed in the future, who better to give it endorsement again than he? It is highly improbable that, in the event of a war with Russia, the tradition of betrayal, handed down from Black Friday to May, 1926, and from May, 1926, to Edinburgh, will be broken.

The need for a new ideology in our movement, fitted to the changed conditions of capitalism in decline—that is a primary lesson which the Tenth Anniversary of the Russian Revolution holds for us as an educational movement. But it cannot be separated from the second lesson—the need for a new leadership ; since to make the separation is to render our study of Marxism academic and barren. Edinburgh and Blackpool have shown the highest water-mark yet reached of surrender of the Labour leadership to capitalism and its abandonment of the class struggle. Well may the capitalist Press applaud ! But this surrender does not represent the rank and file : it shows the separation of the leadership from the rank and file. Among the masses in mine and factory the spirit of opposition is there : the opposition was clearly voiced and as clearly defined even at Edinburgh and Blackpool. If in the future we are to defend Workers' Russia against the foes which wait to devour her, that opposition must be made effective ; for men like MacDonald and Thomas cannot be trusted with her defence ; and in a matter so grave as this no scruples about personalities must hold us back, no muddled nonsense about "pulling together" when the coxswain of the boat is all the time steering us over the weir. Our movement needs a new ideology and a new leadership : two things as inseparable as a Siamese twin.

ZED.

WHAT THE RUSSIAN WORKER HAS GAINED

CAPITALIST propagandists and even some Labour leaders often make futile comparisons between conditions in Russia and conditions in this country which leave out of account the fundamental difference between the stage of economic development reached in the two countries. England is more than a hundred years ahead of Russia in industrial development, and she is therefore very much richer. The latter's main problem results from the fact that her heritage from the capitalists was so meagre; the Soviet Government's main task is the creation of capital, which can only be effected by refraining from raising wages to a level at which all the profit of his labour comes to the worker, or by charging high prices for manufactured goods (thereby "exploiting" the peasantry). In England capital has been created for generations by the forced saving of the workers, entailing terrible suffering in the days of the Industrial Revolution, but the capital so created belongs not to them but to their exploiters, the capitalists, who forced them to save. In Russia the "saving" is for the benefit of those who do it; the whole people owns, and will own, the capital being created. Furthermore, in spite of the economic necessity of "saving," in spite of the rapid industrialisation of the country which is proceeding, the workers in Russia are undoubtedly very much better off than before the Revolution.

In the first place, hours have been reduced to a maximum of eight and to six for men employed on specially arduous, dangerous or tiring labour, such as coal-mining, working in blast furnaces, 'bus driving, and heavy labour in the oil industry. Before the Revolution hours were anything from nine to eleven and a half, the latter figure being very usual. Before the Revolution no holidays with pay were given. Now every worker gets two weeks' leave with full pay every year. Those employed on the heaviest labour, as specified above, get four weeks instead of two. A large number are further accommodated free of charge during their holiday in rest houses. Those who are ill or in poor health are sent for six weeks to a sanatorium, also free of charge, plus wages. These rest houses and sanatoria are to be found all over Russia, but the largest number are in the Caucasus and along the shores of the Black Sea, where the palaces and summer residences of the old nobility and middle class have all been confiscated and utilised for this purpose. I was told by the head doctor of one of them that 200,000 people pass through the sanatoria in these two districts every summer.

I spent two weeks myself in such a sanatorium at Kislovodsk in the Northern Caucasus. The conditions were excellent: beautifully clean rooms, good food, wonderful mountain air and bathing in the water from the famous Narzan springs. Kislovodsk was once the most fashionable watering-place in Russia; the beautiful park and gardens are now thronged with workers dressed in their holiday best or in hospital garb. In the Kursaal in the evening for a few pence one can go and hear the "People's Orchestra," once the "Imperial Orchestra"; the musicians who used to play for the Tsar and for "society" now give delight to thousands of factory and office workers. Next to me at meals was an old Lesgbian* oil worker from Baku. He said that before the war he had worked nine hours a day but that he had been one of the lucky ones, as nearly everyone had to work eleven. As regards holidays, he never had any unless he left work altogether and went back to try and get his living in his mountain home.

When a man or women is ill, but not ill enough to leave work, he or she can go to a "night sanatorium." I visited one of these at Moscow in the evening just after the patients had arrived. They came in straight from their work, took off their own clothes, and after a bath put on the white linen clothing provided by the sanatorium. They all had their own diet and treatment prescribed, and after supper went to bed in cool whitewashed rooms with open windows. I was impressed both here and at Kislovodsk with the great hygienic and "cultural" education the patients must receive. To live for some six weeks in beautiful surroundings and to enjoy the comfort of perfect cleanliness and fresh air must radically improve the habits of many peasants and workers who in their childhood and youth before the Revolution never had occasion to know anything about this aspect of civilisation and certainly never had an opportunity to acquire cleanly habits.

Special provisions have been made since the Revolution for women and children. All mothers employed in industry are given two months' leave with full pay before the birth of their child and two months afterwards. In addition they receive a sum for the layette and 25 per cent. extra on their wages for nine months while feeding the child. When she returns to work the mother must be allowed time off at least every $3\frac{1}{2}$ hours to feed her child, and this period counts as working time. In all the factories one sees crêches where women can leave their babies in competent hands while they go to work. Not all babies can yet be accommodated—lack of funds precludes the complete realisation of many an ideal in Russia—but the babies are chosen first from the mothers specially burdened.

* A Mohomedan tribe of the Caucasus.

There is also often a kindergarten on the factory premises, and frequently one finds the former owner's house turned into a school.

Space precludes an account of the enormous educational work being done in Russia, but if one tries to reckon the various benefits which the Revolution has brought to the worker and his family one must not omit the important fact that nearly all workers can now have their children educated and can see them go on to the University if they are specially gifted. Besides these workers' children who proceed to the University there are those workers themselves who are chosen by their Trade Union to enter a "Rabfac," where they receive four years' education to prepare them for the University. Whilst at the University they receive a subsistence allowance as well as free instruction. In this way the Soviet State is training its own working-class "specialists" to take the place of the old bourgeois ones.

The social insurance funds which provide the sanatoria and other services, such as maternity benefits, are derived from payments made by the factories over and above the wages paid to the workers. Each factory also pays 1 per cent. to 2 per cent. on the wages bill to the Trade Union funds, and also pays for the maintenance of clubrooms and bathhouses on the factory premises, for some cultural work and even sometimes for the upkeep of a technical school.

The Trade Unions supply many of the amenities of life free to their members. Each union has clubs in the town or in the factories themselves, and in the big towns they also own gardens or camping grounds outside the town. Here their members can go in the evening to talk, to have cheap meals (8d. buys a good dinner), to listen to concerts, plays and lectures given by the various "circles" —or to read and study. They can play games of various kinds, bathe or row, and this in a country where before the Revolution "sport" was unknown to the workers, who had neither time nor opportunity for it. The club where I used to go for meals at Leningrad had formerly belonged to a wealthy banker ; it was right on the water, and the union owned many rowing boats and two yachts for the use of their members. All along the Neva one saw beautiful houses and palaces converted into clubs, rest houses, children's homes and sanatoria. The most attractive clubs I visited were the gardens in various parts of Tiflis. The workers' children can now spend the summer months in camps in the country, where they play games, drill to music, study, learn farming and become wonderfully healthy and strong. I visited several of these "Pioneer" camps, where lovely healthy children were learning to make the Communist society of the future, and one could not help contrasting them with the many pale, thin children of our towns, to whom no such opportunities of health are given.

A visit to Russia leaves one in no doubt that Communism means "the exaltation of the common man." The workers do realise that *they* now have power, and apart from material improvements and all the social services provided there is the paramount fact that *they* are the rulers of the country, that they have the right to make themselves heard concerning the management of the factory where they are employed, to have abuses remedied, to appeal to a tribunal of fellow-workers if they feel they have been unjustly penalised or dismissed. In each factory the workers themselves are held responsible for the amount produced, and they suggest changes in methods of production and working arrangements through their elected Factory Committee. This committee (elected every six months by all the workers in the enterprise) has many functions. It participates with the management in drawing up the internal regulations for the factory, in making estimates and plans of output. It adjudges fines for faulty work and it even proposes the candidates for the control and management of the factory—the "Red" director, etc. It is the local representative of the Trade Union and it holds a sort of watching brief over the management to ensure the due observance of the Labour laws, Trade Union wage agreements, social insurance administration and so forth. Everything is done to make the workers realise that the factories are their factories and that the future of the country is in their hands. To appreciate fully the tremendous importance of the new management of industry one must recall the brutal tyranny of the capitalists who owned the factories before the Revolution. In addition to low wages and long hours, the workers had to submit to being treated and spoken to as coolie workers are treated by their white employers to-day. The workers in Russia to-day know that their future is a bright one, know that the available wealth of the country is being fairly distributed, and know that the existing machinery is being worked to its fullest capacity.

If some of the wages quoted sound low it must be remembered that food is much cheaper than here, that housing is either free or paid for by a very low rent, and that the social services of various kinds received by all workers are equivalent to something like 20 per cent. to 30 per cent. on to their wages.

One leaves Russia feeling that it is really true that the economic structure of Socialist society is being built up by the conscious efforts of workers and peasants, and one leaves it with the impression that it is a country where progress has already been so rapid that everyone hopes and believes in the future.

FREDA UTLEY, M.A.

SOVIET ORGANISATION OF INDUSTRY

IN spite of the many changes which have taken place in the administrative organs, the essential features of Soviet industrial organisation have remained unchanged since the banks, railways, shipping and the large industrial enterprises came into the hands of the Soviet Government in 1917 and 1918. Those essential features are public ownership and planned production. The various administrative changes have been simply the working out of these essential principles in the light of experience and changes in general conditions, especially the change from civil war to peace which made possible the "New Economic Policy" of 1921. In the sphere of industrial organisation, N.E.P. involved decentralisation in administration coupled with concentration of the separate industries, and these are the characteristics of the present organisation. Combining these with the essential features mentioned above, we find public ownership, planned production, concentration along industrial lines, and decentralised management.

The coal industry, for instance, is entirely owned by the State, "private enterprise" being represented by a little out-cropping by peasants for their own use. The industry is concentrated, that is, it is separated from other industries, and is organised in "trusts" operating in different coalfields, the most important of which is the Donetz basin, operated by "Don-ugol." This trust is independent, in the sense that it is a separate financial unit, administered by a Board of Directors; but this does not mean that the directors are independent, or that the products of the industry do not come within the general economic plan. The directors are appointed by the Supreme Economic Council, which is virtually a People's Commissariat charged with the administration of Soviet industry. The Supreme Economic Council, formed of representatives of various other Commissariats and of the Trade Unions, has a separate section for each industry; but the functions of the section are limited to general supervision, and it has no authority to interfere with the work of the trusts except in so far as it controls appointments of directors and receives reports on their work, and lays down the *general* lines of production for each trust. The actual plan of production for each industry, in the sense of total quantity required of each product, is laid down by the State Planning Commission (Gosplan), on the basis of estimated resources and needs as advised by all industries; and the sections of the Supreme Economic Council allocate various proportions of the total to the separate trusts in the industry concerned. When the trusts have their instructions as to output, the

actual management is in their own hands; with the material and financial resources held by the trust, the directors work out the amounts to be produced by the separate collieries (groups of pits), and the managers of the collieries arrange output for the separate pits.

The capital of the trusts consists in the buildings and plant given into their control by the State, together with a certain amount of stocks and an original grant of money, together with profits accumulated from year to year. At all times they can secure further working capital from the State banks—but on strictly business lines—and if a sudden increase in output is required, the trusts may get a long-term loan from Budget sources.

The directors have complete initiative in questions of methods of production, development (within their financial resources) prices (except for general directions), and labour arrangements (subject to the Labour Code and the consent of the Miners' Union). The directors appoint colliery and pit managers (subject to consent of the Miners' Union) and other staff. In other words, the management of the trusts is very similar, structurally, to the management of large companies in a capitalist combine; the directors of the subsidiary company have to make it pay and have a free hand in management, subject to a general control from the parent concern. The Soviet Trusts in fact embody the most advanced ideas of organisation in capitalism, just as they try to use the latest mechanical appliances. The only difference—and it is a big difference—is that the trusts are working for Soviet Russia instead of for capitalists.

And the use of up-to-date organisation unhampered by capitalist encumbrances is actually delivering the goods. In the coal industry, for example, output has risen steadily during the last five years from 11.9 million tons to 31.6 million; oil output has risen from 5.1 to 10.1 million tons; pig iron, from 300,000 tons to 2,900,000; cotton cloth, from 582 million yards to 2,407 million. Already industrial production has reached the pre-war level—no mean achievement, when the virtual collapse of 1916 to 1921 is remembered. We are sometimes inclined to forget that production in Britain is considerably below the pre-war level in all basic industries.

Nor can it be supposed that Russian output, having reached the pre-war level, is going to stop at that. Each year sees a *planned* increase in production, made possible by a *planned* allocation to capital expenditure. In the current year, for example, about £180 millions have been set aside for capital expenditure, in order to make possible a further industrial expansion next year of about 15 per cent. This process is continuous, and it is rapidly bringing Soviet Russia up to the economic level of the capitalist countries. This shows itself in the wages paid, the average being already about

30s. a week, apart from the social insurance and other benefits provided by the industrial concerns.

It is sometimes said (though probably seldom believed, even by the speakers themselves) that the economic progress made by Soviet Russia has been due to a return to capitalism. This is not merely a misleading statement; it is simply untrue. In 1926, for example, the gross value of industrial production (at pre-war prices) was approximately £650 millions; of this, State enterprises produced £537 millions, or 83 per cent.; the Co-operatives produced £25 millions, or 4 per cent.; private capitalists (including foreign concessionaires) produced £40 millions, or 6 per cent.; and the remaining 7 per cent. was produced by peasants and small handicraft workers. If the figures for large industry (enterprises employing over twenty workers) alone are taken, we find that in 1924 State production was 90.7 per cent. of the total, Co-operative 4.1 per cent., and private 5.2 per cent. In 1926-27 State production had increased to 91.8 per cent., and private had fallen to 4.1 per cent., the same as Co-operative. The sphere of private capital in industrial production is therefore not only insignificant, but is declining.

In the sphere of distribution private capital plays a more important part, but is also declining at a very rapid rate, while State and Co-operative trade is steadily increasing. Analysis of total trade (wholesale and retail combined) shows :—

	1923-24.	1926-27.
State	31.0%	34%
Co-operative	28.2%	44%
Private	40.8%	22%

It is therefore perfectly clear that the economic achievements of the last five years have been carried out in the main by Soviet industry, which is slowly but quite decisively pushing private enterprise out of the way; even in the distribution of the products the State and Co-operative organisations together have left less than a quarter of the field to private enterprise.

Moreover, the State monopoly of foreign trade ensures that private enterprise does not get any chance to upset the plan of production and distribution on which economic security and progress must depend. Private capital therefore may still make a few rich Nepmen, but it cannot produce the chaos which is the essential mark of a capitalist system. In fact, the whole basis for the toleration of private enterprise is that it takes its place in the general economic plan—it carries out certain operations which the State machine is not yet strong enough to deal with, but it cannot go beyond that, and each year the State and State-assisted Co-operative organisations are taking on new sections of work from private enterprise. The "inevitability of gradualness" becomes a real

proposition *after* the State power is in the hands of the workers, the banks are nationalised, and 90 per cent. of large industry is in the hands of the State.

While therefore the further limitation and ultimate elimination of private capitalist enterprise is a permanent feature of Soviet economic policy, the rapid development of production is a far more important aim. Soviet Russia is a backward country because Tsarist Russia was backward, and the whole scheme of Soviet economic development is summed up in the word "industrialisation." The first stage—the restoration of the pre-war level of industrial production—has been reached, and in order to reach it buildings and plant have had to be renewed, railway rolling-stock replaced, and industrial equipment of all kinds overhauled. But the second stage is to make Soviet Russia a modern country, to extend the means of production so that the workers and peasants can raise their standard of living up to the level which modern industry would make possible for workers in Western countries but for the encumbrances of capitalism. The first step in that direction has already been taken in the construction of several great power stations (with equipment mainly made by British workers), these being the first sections in the plan of electrical development put forward by Lenin at a time when the capitalist Powers were still expecting the Soviet Government to collapse. The plans in other industries are less spectacular but no less real. The engineering plant is rapidly being extended—in some cases only to introduce equipment which is a necessary part of any British firm's plant, but in other cases to bring in some of the newest ideas from Germany or America. The rapidity of the process is, of course, limited by the rate of accumulation in Soviet Russia, as foreign loans play a very small part; but the fact remains that in many branches of engineering Soviet Russia is now producing many types of products for which Tsarist Russia used to depend on imports.

The fact that Soviet production is planned production is the key to the progress already made and to the future progress. A severe drought may delay the development, but the centralisation of plan will enable adjustments to be made which will prevent any overwhelming shock to industry. The withholding of foreign credits also delays development, but it cannot stop it. Year by year the planning of production becomes more accurate, and the subordinate organisations carry out their job more intelligently. Changes in personnel, in administrative forms, in production methods, are all rubbing off the rough corners and making the whole machine more efficient. The tenth year of the Revolution has been only the fifth year of economic development; another five years will bring amazing results.

EMILE BURNS.

THE RUSSIAN VILLAGE: YESTERDAY AND TO-DAY

The writer of this article was engaged in 1922-23 on relief work in the Russian famine area, and has visited Russia again during last year. His vivid description of peasant conditions is, therefore, based on his own first-hand knowledge and experience.

THE uplifting of the peasants out of the slough of ignorance, superstition and naïve obscurantism which have been their characteristics for centuries, even the improvement of their material conditions which has been rendered possible by the Revolution, is not the work of a day or a decade. It demands the longest of views, both backward and forward, and progress has to be measured not merely by actualities but by potentialities also. The conditions prevailing among the peasantry before 1914 were notoriously bad. Most of them serfs until 1861, in that year they were emancipated legally, but not economically or politically, their actual material conditions being in most cases worsened as the result of the replacement of patriarchal by semi-capitalist slavery. With all the vast expanses of Siberia lying fallow in 1900 the Russian peasant had an average holding of 7½ acres, not all of which was arable land, the acre producing about fifteen hundredweight of grain. Forced to work as much for his landlord as for himself, enslaved to his *Mir* (Commune), at the mercy of financial and other economic sharkery, he was driven to revolt after revolt, culminating in the great peasant risings of 1905.

On the eve of the war the Russian peasant remained at approximately the same level as his forefathers had been sixty or a hundred and sixty years before. Newspapers, books, social amusements were almost completely unknown, the mental horizon was bounded by the weather, the state of crops, the priest and the church, by the humiliating, cringing knee-shuffle and cuff-slobbering to the landlord or local governmental official, by the *Kabak* or drinking-shop with its one means of oblivion—vodka—and by the neighbouring small town with its market. The general methods of cultivation were such as had been in fashion almost since the days of the half-legendary Rurik ; hand-sowing in the picturesque but uneconomic Biblical fashion, ploughing with primitive ploughs often drawn by oxen, strip cultivation on the *Mir* system (each family having sometimes ten to twenty narrow strips, some of which might lie ten miles away from the village), and a general reparcelling of the land every three years, resulting in a three-field system. Annual expenditure continually exceeding income, debts to usurers and to banks, financial and economic obligations to landlords, taxes, a

mortality rate the highest in Europe, sanitary conditions indescribable, a merely skeleton medical service, the priest often in the pay of the Government as a secret agent, usually hardly more than semi-literate, with an education consisting of old Slavonic and Church ritual. And sometimes side by side with the Greek orthodox religion existed other, still darker rituals : devil-worship, household gods, beliefs in witches and black magic, all the superstitions and customs which rendered it inevitable that when certain peasant women first saw tractors in 1921 some fled away in terror while others prostrated themselves before the incomprehensible monsters. Agrarian Russia was wrapped in a fog—a fog of enforced ignorance.

The war did somewhat to dispel the fog. Men who had never been farther than their local town some twenty miles away now for the first time heard of Germans, Austrians, even English. They travelled thousands of miles, mixed with men from distant towns, learnt things they had never dreamed of, handled instruments they had been accustomed to regard as the exclusive property of the State officials and gendarmerie, were massacred more heedlessly than the vermin which thrived on their hungry, war-weary bodies, became a prey to that most insidious and dangerous of all propagandist agencies—collective suffering. Meanwhile they knew their scanty fields were going out of cultivation ; while at home the women, freed from the domination of their young husbands, gathered together, talked and talked, kicked the meddlesome old men up into the somnolent warmth above the stove, and began, in their own fashion, to think. Thus the ground was prepared both at home and at the front for receiving the revolutionary ideas of 1917 so far as they affected the country.

The actual changes effected in the country districts by the Revolution were often almost incredibly simple. In many cases it was merely a matter of driving away the landowner, and the peasants continued to till the same land as before, only it was now their own. In large districts, especially around the central industrial region, where overcrowding is greatest and the soil is the poorest, the actual acreage of land added to the peasant holdings was very small, for frequently the owners were absentee landlords who lived by renting almost all their land to the peasantry. Until 1920 the greater part of the peasantry were living continually under the shadow of present civil war, their lands prospective battlefields at any moment, the villages themselves divided into two warring camps of richer and poorer, of pro- and anti-revolutionary. As in the towns, so in the country, the decline in material conditions continued unbrokenly until 1920—and in the famine areas to 1921 and beyond.

Six years have passed since the famine and the introduction of NEP, and during those six years the gradual recovery of the village

has been increasingly apparent. As in industry, so in agriculture, the first few years were marked by a process of restoration rather than reconstruction, by a recovery to normal conditions. The significant fact of the recovery is that while acreage and gross production has risen to approximately that of pre-war days, the surplus available for export is still much smaller than that of pre-war. This is mainly due to the increased consumption among the peasantry, which in turn is rendered possible by their comparative relief from the burdens of rent, interest and taxation which before the war forced them to half-starve themselves in order to meet their liabilities. This one fact of itself establishes beyond question the average material level of the peasantry in 1926 as higher than that of pre-war, and thus a basic prerequisite for further development under the Soviet system is assured.

Apart from this outstanding indication, it takes a trained eye to note the almost imperceptible signs of improvement and progress in the village. The houses are still thatched as of old, the walls still mainly composed of beaten mud, the huts still straggle disorderly down the main street, that main street is still the favourite dumping ground for refuse, and no drainage system ameliorates the evil effects, the yard at the back of the hut is knee-deep in mingled snow and ordure, and one still stumbles over chickens, children and calves as one enters the hermetically sealed, fetid kitchen in winter. To a visitor the Russian village, unchanging, stagnant, a monument of static immobility, seems hardly troubled by the Revolution.

A deeper investigation reveals great changes at work. The very face of the landscape is changing, as the three-field system, with its highly ornamental but highly inefficient strips of variegated carpet, yield to a seven-field, open system. Year by year the number of villages which have abandoned the old *Mir* system of parcelling out the land increases, and the change is not to be sentimentally regretted, for the *Mir* system was really the expression not of Agrarian Communism, but of an extreme anarchistic and rigid individualism. It is to the development of *artels* or working co-operatives of various kinds that we need to look for real progress beyond the present individualistic methods, and the number of associations of peasants working in these ways grows steadily.

Symptoms of change and progress are also found in the crops sown. The extensive cultivation of millet and maize, two high-yielding, good dry-farm crops is observable everywhere in the southern black earth areas. Like the great extension of vegetable gardens, they are the first fruits of intensive educational campaigns against drought and crop failure. The increase of technical cultures reveals an orientation towards the market and a recognition of industrial values. The mechanisation of agriculture goes on slowly but

surely, chiefly as year by year the number of tractors increases. Tractors lead to further co-operative development, for very favourable terms of purchase are granted to peasants' co-operatives.

In hundreds of ways the peasant reveals his realisation of emancipation—by his sturdy independence of everybody, his refusal to cringe and fawn, his bland objection to doing anything on a saint's day except sit on his doorstep and chew sunflower seeds. His much more extensive knowledge of the world, his participation and interest in the village and district committees, and other signs indicate an awakening intelligence at work. He still frequently has a deep distrust of education as represented by a school. But in many ways his education is being carried on indirectly, by reading rooms, demonstration points, and notably by the extension of wireless receiving sets into village after village, so providing in the "People's House" a concert, a lecture on farming, or advice to mothers.

The difficulties remaining are enormous. With an area roughly three-quarters that of the British Empire, and a population of 145 millions, Soviet Russia possesses only just over double the mileage of railways in the United Kingdom. Even in European Russia there are villages fifty to sixty miles away from a railway station, and in Siberia they may lie hundreds of miles off the track. Metal roads are extremely few—one or two high roads connecting the dozen or so chief towns—all other roads being merely the beaten earth track made by horses, carts and the peasants' feet, roads that for weeks in spring and autumn are quagmires which leave the villages almost entirely cut off from the outside world. Until ways and communications are greatly extended and improved, progress must necessarily be slow, for on them the extensive development of agriculture depends.

Other difficulties there are, inherent in the nature of the land, in the danger of production cost rising as peasant existential demand rises, in the psychology of the peasant, in his stratification into classes and the rise of a new *kulak* element with the social dangers that these involve. So far the peasant as such remains unorganised, but the crucial moment for the Soviet régime will come when his education has developed in him a corporate sense, a much wider realisation of social relationships than he possesses at present. The danger of his developing a conception of village solidarity in contradistinction to that of the town workers is obvious, and its avoidance depends on whether agriculture is developed swiftly on lines of large-scale industrial production, or is left to the economic and competitive struggle of individual peasant farmers. And on the choice of these two roads, involving the question of leadership of the peasant masses, the fate of Soviet Russia largely depends.

H. C. STEVENS.

THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION IN LITERATURE AND ART

SINCE art is an expression, an emotional systematisation, of feeling and experience, it was natural that the Russian Revolution should have a profound influence in this sphere. The emotions aroused by a social conflict as deep as that of 1917 are generally richer and more profound than the emotions of individual experience ; and the pains and the heroism, the uprooting of old relationships and affections of this period, were bound to enrich artistic experience, and the sudden revolutionary break with the past to loose a flood-tide of creative energy.

In the hectic days of hunger and civil war there was little pause for finished artistic creation. Emotional energy was fully absorbed in the rhythm of machine-guns or of the hammers in the railway shops : it had no room for the rhythm of the sonnet. The artist was employed to rush out posters overnight, to splash illuminated slogans on pavement and hoarding, to compose political lampoons or to sing of the Revolution in ballad and verse. The staccato pattern of his art, like a drum, served to whip tired emotions into activity, to add strength and pungency to mass appeals. In the realm of the theatre there sprang into being the revolutionary satire of the workers' theatres, the creations of the Proletcult theatre, and later the "Living Newspaper" of the "Blue Blouses"—half-cabaret shows, half-*Chauve Souris,* given by troupes of actors who toured the factories and workers' clubs, illuminating and explaining the topics of the day in verse and song and ballet. Art was used for direct and immediate ends ; and what this early work (which was often crude and hasty) lacked in form and finish, it gained in vitality, in originality and in riot of colour and rhythm. Moreover, it was close to the masses and was a direct product of their own mass experiences.

Later, men who had passed through the fire and thunder of the heroic days had respite to frame in concrete images the torrent of experience which they had undergone. They had not merely shouldered a gun like mercenaries : they had taken part in the building of a new world ; and the experience to which they had to give expression was in consequence exceptionally rich. These writers had not self-consciously to "create an atmosphere" like the bourgeois *literateur* : the deep emotional imprint of that experience, compelling expression, forged a form and style for itself from its own inner rhythm. Moreover, these experiences were social experiences, in which the individual had been subordinated to the

mass, and individual conflicts and emotions had been absorbed and merged in mass struggles and emotions; and the new art which resulted was, consequently, both more complex and powerful and of more universal mass appeal. Of works of this kind we have only a few in English. There is Libedinsky's *A Week,* the tale of a week of Soviet rule and counter-revolutionary rising in a remote village, possessing all the quiet beauty of the classic Russian work, combined with a simplicity of form and a new vigour of "atmosphere," which serves to drag one into the sweep of a great movement, transcending individuals and temporal events, carrying one forward with it beyond the final page of the book into a new future. There are also the sketches included in the collection, *Flying Osip,* telling of incidents of the revolution, which seem to have the burr and beat of machinery about them, while others echo the hum of hurried voices mingled with the click of a hundred typewriters—energy, creation, organisation. There is the cold horror of the "photographic" method of Semenov's "Hunger"; the feeling of clumsy, primitive forces being slowly shaped and moulded in Zozulya's "A Mere Trifle"; the charm and freshness of liberated youth in Seifulina's "Lawbreakers." We should soon have also in England Gladkov's *Cement,* which epitomises the giant creative forces of the revolution, building out of the ruins of civil war a new Russia.

Meanwhile, Russia's old *intelligentsia,* with its writers and artists, divided and went different ways. Some emigrated to Paris and Berlin or Prague. Others stayed in Russia, but shrank into themselves away from the new forces which they abhorred and could not understand. Some of them, on the other hand, like Count Alexei Tolstoy, Maxim Gorki,* and Alexander Blok, were willing to accept the new order, and tried to understand it and interpret it in their art. The two former groups soon tended to become barren, for the reason that they had lost their social roots: great art can seldom gain inspiration for long from contemplation of one's own shadow or admiration of one's own reflection. These persons turned their attention inwards, sought to escape from reality by introversion, and became neurotically ultra-individualist and mystical.

Many of the third group, however, while retaining the old forms and often casting their work in an individualist mould, managed to give a very interesting interpretation of the new forces and the new ideas. Because of their previous training, they were able to reach a higher perfection in form than newer writers among the workers,

* Gorki's latest book *Decadence,* recently published in England by Cassell (7/6), is interesting as a picture of the rise and decline of the Russian bourgeoisie over three generations.

and their energies were less absorbed in political and economic tasks. As Trotsky says in his *Literature and Revolution* :—

> "It is untrue that revolutionary art can be created only by workers. . . . It is not surprising that the contemplative intelligentsia is able to give, and does give, a better artistic reproduction of the Revolution than the proletariat, even though the re-creations of the intelligentsia are somewhat off the line."

Some of them, indeed, who had shared the workers' experience in the days of civil war were able to interpret the emotions of those days with power as well as perfection of form. For instance, in Veressaev's *The Deadlock* (which is in an English translation) one feels the primitive force and creativeness of the Revolution grappling cumbrously with the old order, brushing aside like flies the impotent theories and ideals of well-meaning *intelligentsia*. The conflict is here less impersonal than in Libedinsky, and is shown as reflected in individual feeling and conflicts ; but the spirit of the Revolution is there, unadorned, gargantuan and real.

Some of this group, however, particularly the younger among them, reacting violently against the circumstances of their birth and the traditions which had formerly held them in thrall, sought in an ecstasy of release to out-revolutionise the revolution. They were anarchists in the cultural sphere : old forms, old traditions must be scrapped and the classics must be banished to museums. Some of the new forms and rhythms which these "Leftist" experiments produced had particular interest. The ecstasy of breaking all ties with the past produced several works of high artistic value, such as those of the peasant poet Yessenin and the futurist Mayakovsky. But as Trotsky says of the futurists :—

> "Futurism carried the features of its social origin, bourgeois Bohemia, into the new stage of its development. . . . A Bohemian nihilism exists in the Futurist rejection of the past, but not a proletarian revolutionism. We Marxists live in tradition, and we have not stopped being revolutionists on account of it. . . The working class does not have to, and cannot, break with literary tradition, because the working class is not in the grip of such tradition. The working class does not know the old literature, it still has to commune with it, to master Pushkin, to absorb him and overcome him."

Present-day art in Russia is, therefore, transitional : like Russia's economics it is at present a mixture of various streams. As the confusion of a transition period passes into the completer, more homogeneous society of the future, these various currents are likely to merge to form a Socialist art.

Meanwhile Communist criticism exercises a selective judgment among this transitional variety. This it does by taking, not merely the usual criterion as to perfection of form, but also a judgment as to value as a constituent of a new art adapted to the new order. To judge art by this criterion is a recognition of the fact—a recognition possible only to the Marxist—that art is a product of social conditions. Art is the formulation of complex emotions in symbols, and

it is successful to the extent that those symbols (be they sounds, colour, lines or words) have sufficient generality and similarity of appeal to awake a similar complex of emotions in the minds of others. (I. A. Richards in his *Theory of Literary Criticism* says that it evokes in the nervous system a complex of "attitudes" or incipient impulses to action.) The deeper the layer (so to speak) of emotions which these symbols touch, and the fuller the gamut of emotions stimulated or released by the symbol, the more powerful the art. Art will have value in so far as it "systematises" emotions and gives them more harmonious and effective expression than they would otherwise have had. Since emotions are the result of experience, and the richest of them the product of social experience, a new society, with new experiences and relationships, will require a new art. Since the new art, to fulfil its social function and to have value and permanence, must, therefore, be adapted to the new society, one can judge a work of art from this point of view; and in this sense one can speak of a Socialist art and consciously help in its creation.

We in this country are still too circumscribed by circumstance to present an alternative as yet to bourgeois art. Our efforts in this sphere are necessarily confined to political satire through the workers' theatre movement, to songs and verses and cartoons. Isolated attempts of writers, close to the proletariat, there may be to anticipate the future, and express the class struggle in art, such as Toller's plays and Martinet's *Night*. Some may try to interpret the new Russia through the eyes of an observer, like Ralph Fox in *The People of the Steppes,* in which there lives the spirit of the East and of Bolshevism as a new leaven at work slowly transforming Asiatic Russia into something orderly and new, or Maurice Hindus' *Broken Earth,* which mirrors the working of the new forces against the old in the Russian village. But not all which have a Socialist theme are necessarily either literature or proletarian; and much of what is thrown up by our movement at present is bound to lack form and quality, while some of it may be defeatist in spirit and not revolutionary, or a mere copy of bourgeois forms, with the hero reversed. For the renaissance which will replace the decadence of bourgeois art—its introvert preciosity and tendency to mysticism, or its sheer commercial philistinism as seen in the cinema and the stage—we must wait till the bursting of the shackles of bourgeois society has unloosed here as in Russia new creative spirit and new creative experience.

MAURICE DOBB.

THE NATIONAL QUESTION IN THE SOVIET UNION

THE national question within the old Russian Empire was of acute importance. Nowhere, save in the British Empire, did so many nations, peoples and tribes of varying stages of economic and cultural development live under one flag. In some cases national revolutionary movements had existed for generations, complicated by acute religious and economic issues. The revolution of 1917 immediately heightened these contradictions and a tendency to break up into independent bourgeois republics at once manifested itself.

The Kerensky Government did nothing towards the solution of the national question, being tied up to the war-chariot of Allied Imperialism. The Bolsheviks, however, made it one of their first acts to recognise the independence of those parts of the old Empire which had seceded : Finland, Poland, the Baltic States (Esthonia, Latvia and Lithuania), the Ukraine, Turkestan, Bokhara, Georgia and Armenia, etc. Most of these became independent, bourgeois republics, except Turkestan and Finland, which became Soviet Republics. Here the Bolsheviks allowed all cultural and racial minorities full autonomy, including the Tatars, the Kirghiz, the various Mongol peoples in Siberia, the Germans of the Volga, and numerous other minorities. The Constitution of 1918 declared :—

> "The Soviets of regions with special usages and national characteristics of their own may unite in autonomous regional unions. . . . . These autonomous regional unions enter into the Russian Socialist Federal Soviet Republic on a federal basis."

Immediately after this there followed the long turmoil of civil war and intervention. The Baltic States and Finland were overrun by German troops and the bourgeoisie returned to power. Poland became an independent bourgeois republic, and German troops overran the Ukraine. In the same way the Caucasian Republics were overrun in turn by Turkish, German and British armies, all intriguing with puppet Social-Democratic Governments which were allowed to exist by the grace of the Generals and the Great Powers. Finally Central Asia was invaded by the British and a Cossack force, and a push was made for Tashkent. The fight against intervention became a fight for national freedom, and this struggle in turn took on the character of the class struggle, the peasants and workers taking up arms against the foreign invaders and their allies, the land lords. In the Caucasus, when the British had withdrawn, the puppet governments of Armenia and Georgia collapsed, and the workers and peasants called in the Red Armies to protect them

against any possible return of the British. The result was the formation of the Soviet Republics of Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia.

Central Asia was in a peculiar position. Turkestan and Transcaspia were former Russian provinces, containing a variety of peoples of Turkish and Iranian race, some nomads (Kirghiz and Turcomans), other agriculturalists and townsmen (Uzbeks and Tadjiks). In addition, there were the semi-independent feudal States of Bokhara and Khiva. From the days of the Young Turk Revolution in Constantinople there had been growing up a Pan-Turanian idea which aimed at uniting all the peoples of Turkish stock from the Bosphorus to the Altai mountains in Siberia. This gained some ground among those feudal elements who were discontented with the old Russian régime, and a number of "Beks" (big landowners), in alliance with the Mullahs or Muhammadan clergy, toyed with the idea of a Turanian empire organised on the theocratic basis of the Shariat, the Muhammadan code of law. During the war they were encouraged by German imperialism, and after the war by agents of British imperialism. British officers organised and armed bands of partisans in the mountains along the Afghan frontier, and these bands (Basmachi) grew to be a considerable threat to the young Republic of Turkestan. A British officer, Colonel Baker, remained in Bokhara in disguise for many months, attempting to organise the Central Asian counter-revolution. But he failed, and after he left the Emirs of Khiva and Bokhara were overthrown by bourgeois revolutions, which in turn peacefully developed into Soviet revolutions, and the Soviet republics of Bokhara and Khiva. In 1922 the Pan-Turanians made their last effort under Enver Pasha, the former Young Turk leader, and failed, though it was not till 1923 that the last of the Basmach bands was destroyed.

The way was now clear for the final solution of the national problem on Marxist Socialist lines. It is obvious to Socialists that national problems can never be solved on purely *national* lines. Race and language are important, but not finally decisive, factors. Cultural and economic considerations are of even greater importance. There is no economic and little cultural basis for a reunion of Turkish peoples any more than for a reunion of Anglo-Saxon peoples. But even within the Turkish peoples of the Soviet Republics great differentiation can be found. The Kirghiz, for example, are nomads, with a nomadic culture, and have nothing in common with the Uzbeks. For centuries the two nations have been hostile to one another, just as within the Republic of Turkestan could be found age-old minorities, often due to the simplest economic causes, such as disputed water supplies for irrigation. Consequently, in 1923 a

reorganisation of national frontiers was attempted which aimed at solving on a Socialist basis a most complicated series of racial, cultural and economic problems, which had been the cause of centuries of bloodshed. The territory of the Kirghiz Kazaks was enormously extended to include the province of Semirechiye and the foothills of Altai, stretching from Orenburg in Europe to the Chinese frontier, and was re-christened Kazakstan. Ferghana, a territory made absolutely desolate by the British-armed Basmachi, became the Kirghiz Republic, the home of the Black Kirghiz, a race of hardy mountaineers quite different from the Kirghiz Kazaks of the plains. From Tashkent to Bokhara now stretched the agricultural, cotton-growing Republic of Uzbekistan, while Samarkand became the capital of the Iranian Tadjiks, whose autonomous Republic of Tadjikstan ran over the Pamirs to the Hindu Kush. The old Transcaspian province, Bokhara, and Khiva, all gave up territory to the Turkomans, the western nomads renowned for their fierce valour and horsemanship, while Khiva itself became restricted to the wide territory about the delta of the Oxus and was re-christened the Karakalpak Republic.

By this new solution two ancient feudal entities, the Emirates of Khiva and Bokhara, disappeared entirely, as did the old province of Turkestan which formerly gave its popular name to the whole vast region. The experiment has proved an unqualified success. For the first time the shepherds and peasants of these remote regions have been given the opportunity to develop, and they have seized it with both hands. The two paralysing influences of Tsarist imperialism and Muhammadan feudal religion have been broken for ever, and the free development of these peoples has begun. The effects are already to be seen in the absence of disputes and racial friction (due to the economic-national solution), the growing freedom of the oppressed Eastern women, the beginnings of scientific agriculture, the growth of the cotton industry, the first attempts of scientific stockbreeding which will turn a race of nomad shepherds into a people of modern ranchers, and immense activity in railway and electrical construction. Schools, Universities, and Technical Institutes are being fast established, the alphabet has been romanised to help the fight against illiteracy, and scores of thousands of books in the native languages are being published. All this free cultural activity was severely repressed in Tsarist days, while the control of water supplies by big landlords and the ownership of the cotton fields by Russian capitalists made life a miserable slavery for the mass of the peasantry. In the same way the nomads had to suffer the ruthless encroachments of the Cossacks on their best grazing grounds.

It might be added, to silence any doubters, that the independence of all these Republics is so real that native militias and regular

regiments, with native officers, form the first-line defence. Here, as elsewhere, the Bolsheviks have carried out their principle of arming the workers and peasants and disarming the bourgeoisie. The proletarian dictatorship is as secure in the Caucasus, Central Asia and the Ukraine as in Moscow, and rests on the same broad foundation of the democratic organisations of the working masses, unified, led and inspired by the Communist Party.

In the new Constitution of 1923 the word Russian now drops out of the picture and in its place we have the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics, all working-class, all equal. The changes in the constitution of the republics were embodied in the new forms of organisation of the U.S.S.R. The supreme organ of authority remains the Annual Congress of Soviets, and between the Congresses is the Central Executive Committee, consisting of the Council of the Union and the Council of Nationalities. The Union Council is elected in proportion to population, but the Council of Nationalities has five delegates from each Allied and Autonomous Republic, and one from each Autonomous region, and bills can only become law *when accepted by both Councils*. The nomad Kirghiz has the same say on the Council of Nationalities as the Moscow factory worker or official.

Such is the Bolshevik working-class solution of one of the most difficult and complicated problems in history, one which Imperialism and its lackey Social Democracy have attempted to solve only by bloodshed and repression. In the words of the preamble to the new Constitution :—

"Since the time of the formation of the Soviet Republics the States of the world have divided into two camps : the camp of Capitalism and the camp of Socialism.

"There—in the camp of Capitalism—are national enmity and inequality, colonial slavery and Chauvinism, national oppression and pogroms, imperialist brutalities and wars.

"Here—in the camp of Socialism—are mutual confidence and peace, national freedom and equality, a dwelling together in peace and the brotherly collaboration of peoples."

RALPH FOX.

The N.C.L.C. at Work

(Reports for this page should be sent to J. P. M. Millar, General Secretary, N.C.L.C., 62 Hanover Street, Edinburgh).

NEW LOCAL AFFILIATIONS: The following is a list of the new affiliations obtained in September by the local Colleges:—Liverpool, 4; Rhondda, 4; Edinburgh, 3; South-East Lancs., 3; North Lancs., 3; Division 3, 2; Glasgow, 2; Aberdeen, 1; Ayrshire, 1; Belfast, 1; Lanarkshire, 1; Leicester, 1; Otley, 1.

IS THE NAME OF YOUR COLLEGE HERE? IF NOT, WHY NOT!

THE JOKE OF THE MONTH. "We (the W.E.A.) are now quite definitely *the* organised educational expression of the working class." (A writer in "The Highway," October, 1927).

ECONOMICS TEXT-BOOK: As the Plebs Economics Text-Book is out of print, the Executive are recommending that classes use Mark Starr's "A Worker Looks At Economics," paper covers 1/-. Copies should be ordered from the Plebs Office.

"THE PLEBS": Every class should have copies of THE PLEBS on sale. We shall be glad to have particulars of any class where the magazine is not available.

AMALGAMATED UNION OF UPHOLSTERERS: We have pleasure in welcoming this union which has now joined the N.C.L.C. by arranging the usual Educational Scheme, providing free access to classes, free correspondence courses, etc.

NELSON WEAVERS' ASSOCIATION: This union has enlarged its Scheme to include free correspondence courses.

LOCAL COLLEGE FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS: Attention is drawn to the fact that the National Executive have come to the following decisions:—

1. That Divisional Organisers have power to inspect the books in the proper sense of that term, namely, audit.
2. That Colleges be required, like Head Office and Divisional Organisers, to have a quarterly audit.
3. That Colleges must conform to the the N.C.L.C. Financial Year which ends on the 31st of March.
4. That Colleges must keep their books in accordance with the printed headings of the Cash Book.
5. That a copy of the quarterly audited statement be supplied to the Divisional Organiser each quarter.
6. That if Colleges cannot find competent auditors they may obtain the assistance of the Divisional Organisers or the N.C.L.C. Head Office in auditing the books.
7. That Colleges, the incomes of which exceed £20, shall have bank accounts operated on by two signatures.

Committee members and officials are asked to see that these rules are carried out.

TUTORS: The N.C.L.C. requires the services of a considerable number of additional voluntary tutors. Will readers of THE PLEBS who feel they might assist either with elementary or advanced classes kindly send their names and addresses to the local Divisional Organiser or to the N.C.L.C. Head Office? Although tutoring work does not offer any limelight, it is of the utmost importance to the Labour movement and we hope that this paragraph will result in a number of volunteers.

WHAT THE DIVISIONS ARE DOING.

Division 1: Fifty winter classes have so far been arranged in this Division. It is hoped to increase this number. Three classes have been initiated by the London N.U.C. which is affiliating for the whole of its London membership on the 2d. per member basis. The Shop Assistants, too, have formed a number of classes. The London South A.U.B.T.W. Branch has arranged for a ten-lecture course on Modern Problems. Chiswick A.E.U. is having a course on the Engineering Industry. The Newdigate week-end school was a great success. A large number of applications had to be refused. J. Jones, residential lecturer at the Labour College, London, gave three excellent lectures on Sociology and everyone present wished that the school had lasted longer. The Women's Committee has fixed up a number of women's classes. A tutors' class for women is being held weekly on Trade Union History—lecturer, Mrs. L. Thomas.

Division 2: No report.

Division 3: Norwich classes have changed over from Hardie Hall to the fine premises of the Boot and Shoe Operatives. Two classes are run there on Sunday mornings. St. Albans reports a good attendance. By the time this is being read we hope that Ellen Wilkinson's visits to Cambridge and March will have given a fillip to the classes there. An encouraging side of the classes at Norwich and Ipswich is the number of young men—and maidens—taking part. At Felixstowe the Club has provided a room free for the Economics class. Attempts are being made to interest the junior members of the A.U.B.T.W. New ground is being broken at Billericay and Staines, with the help of Miss Thompson and Leonora Thomas. Our total classes number 24.

Division 4: Hengoed L.C. reports a successful Day School with the co-operation of Ness Edwards and the Divisional Organiser. Four classes are being organised for the first winter session, with Comrades Chivers, Roberts and Edwards as tutors. With the co-operation of J. F. Horrabin successful Day Schools were held at Slydach and Ystalyfera. Comrades Roberts, Casey, and the Organiser have opened an educational campaign in the Maesteg district. After some enthusiastic meetings three of the biggest Lodges and th Maesteg Women's Section affirmed re-affiliation. Further, Councillor John Evans, one of our old College students, has consented to take a class for us. Congratulations to F. C. Howetts, of the Cardiff Branch of the Shop Assistants, on his splendid effort to enlist support. With the co-operation of Comrade Tyre and the Divisional Organiser, some successful meetings were held, under the auspices of the Cardiff A.E.U. Voluntary tutorial assistance is urgently required in the area of Neath, Glynneath, Aberdare and Aberavon. Will those willing to help communicate with the Organiser?

Division 5: During the month four classes have been established in the Bristol area. Two of these, one at Staple Hill and one at Bedminster, have begun well. Newton Abbot has begun work, with Comrade Gameson as secretary and Comrade Kershaw as lecturer. The session begins with a short course on "The Economic Theories of the Leisured Class"; to be followed with a course on Marxian Economics. Meetings of the local Labour Parties, Women Sections and Guilds, have been addressed by the Organiser, and the Staple Hill Ward of the Labour Party has decided to affiliate to the Bristol College. Following upon a very successful Day School, under the auspices of the Bath Labour Party, a good class has been formed at Bath. Cheltenham is making arrangements for a class to be conducted by the Organiser.

Division 6: The classes in the Walsall College are showing signs of beating all previous records. A very successful Conference was held and Comrade Barr spoke on the work of the N.C.L.C. Birmingham classes are also shaping well and the local College is now having the use of the A.E.U. Institute. Nuneaton College has started the new session and developments are expected in this area. Wolverhampton is taking up the study of Economic History. Stoke-on-Trent has now got going and the Organiser is booked to address the Trades Council.

Division 7: Two new colleges and one new class group mark the opening of the Division's winter work. Beverley Secretary, G. Glendon, 172 Holme Church Lane. Class, Tuesdays, from November 1st, Co-op. Buildings. Skipton, Secretary, B. Stowe, 23 Devonshire Street. Class, Mondays. Modern Capitalism; tutor, Roland Hill, Bingley, Friendly Societies' Club. The Hull College has arranged for five classes instead of the usual two. The new Secretary is Sam Kingdom, 10 Cambridge Grove, Hull. Leeds College has ten classes arranged. Huddersfield started off their class with a public demonstration with Wm. Paul, Editor *Sunday Worker*, as speaker. Halifax commenced their winter session with an "At Home." A large number of past students turned up. Among them was their past President, Alfred Waight, who now takes a class in the Manchester district. Hector Highley welcomed the visitors. At the Leeds Conference for the appointment of rank and file visitors to the celebration of the tenth anniversary of the Russian Revolution, two of the Divisional tutors, Frank Dixon and Felix Walsh, were selected. This will entail readjustments in tutors until their return.

Division 8: J. Hamilton has been appointed Treasurer of the Liverpool Trades Council and Labour Party. Despite counter-attractions, the Day School, held at "Beechcroft," was fairly well attended. The lectures on "Americanism" and the "Far Eastern Question," given by W. T. Colyer, were highly appreciated. The series of meetings addressed by S. O. Davies (S.W.M.F.) in Liverpool, Earlestown, and Wigan created a big impression. Unfortunately, weather conditions were at their worst, but nevertheless a good crowd attended the outdoor meeting in Wigan. Classes have been arranged, in addition to others, under the auspices of the Liverpool Trades Council and Labour Party, Birkenhead North End Women's Section Labour Party (thirty-one present at opening lecture), N. Seacombe Women's Co-op. Guild, St. Helens Branch N.U.D.A.W., Earlestown Trades Council and Newton Labour Club. A number of lantern lectures are to be given to various Co-operative organisations and a short course on "Local Government" to the Birkenhead South End Men's Co-op. Guild.

N. Lancs.: George Hicks and J. F. Horrabin addressed a demonstration in Blackburn. Though the attendance was not as large as was expected, the meeting was of great advertising value. Fourteen classes have now commenced, and a speakers' class is being held on Fridays in the I.L.P. Institute, Blackburn. All Blackburn comrades are invited to attend. Arrangements have been made for a series of lantern lectures to be given to the Preston I.L.P., A. L. Williams to be the lecturer. P. L. Taylor has also arranged a number of lantern lectures. All interested should apply for information to Mrs. C. S. Taylor, 17 Rose Terrace, Ashton, Preston.

S.E. Lancs.: Twenty classes have started the winter session. Heywood Trades Council, after hearing an address by the Area Organiser, decided to establish an N.C.L.C. Class in the district. Heywood is a W.E.A. stronghold. An Esperanto Conference was held in Manchester (Councillor George Hall in the chair) and Mark Starr addressed over fifty delegates. A successful tutors' training class in the Science of Understanding has just finished in Manchester. S. Knight was the tutor. All our tutors' training classes are conducted with not more than six students in each class. Branches of Unions with N.C.L.C. Schemes are especially requested to ask for branch lectures.

Division 9: The North-Eastern College has been divided into six areas. It is anticipated that through the reorganisation of the College greater class contact will be established and that the finances of the College will be improved. The classes are nearly all taking long courses this session. The Darlington College is starting off better this year. A Conference is being held with Comrades Horrabin and Wilkinson as speakers. Mrs. Berriff has taken over the duties of College Secretary. Many of the more active spirits of the Durham College have had to leave the area owing to the position in the coalfield. Comrade Williams has left and is now in the North-East. Durham has therefore lost his excellent services. The altered hours of the miners are making things difficult this year. Most of the classes are to run on Sundays. The Shop Assistants are showing some interest and names are being taken for a class under the Newcastle branch.

Division 10 (*Scotland*): Last month it was stated that A. McCluskie has been appointed the full-time tutor for Ayrshire. This should have read J. M. Williams. A week-end school was held at Inverness with S. Walker as lecturer. Edinburgh has twenty-four classes running, Glasgow twenty-five, Lanarkshire twenty-seven and Fife twenty-five. The other Colleges have still to send in their figures. Fife College is having a public meeting with Ellen Wilkinson, M.P., as the speaker. Lanarkshire College reports that it is getting better results from the Unions with National Schemes. Will Lawther and D. J. Williams were the speakers at their Conference and Day School.

Division 11 (*Ireland*): The Annual Conference of the Belfast N.C.L.C. was very successful One hundred and ten delegates were appointed to attend, representing every section of the organised workers in Northern Ireland. The Building Trades and Engineering Unions were well represented by 37 and 26 delegates respectively. Resolutions pledging support for I.W.C.E. and condemning the Anti-Trade Union Legislation were carried unanimously. George Hicks and George Waddell addressed the Conference and Councillor Harry Midgley presided. As first results of the conference we are having very large attendances at all classes. An additional class has been formed in East Belfast on English and Article Writing with C. McCrystal as tutor. George McBride is conducting classes in Lisburn and Comber on "Economic Geography and Modern Problems." The Organiser continues the Newry Class on "Irish History." Esperanto classes are being conducted in Belfast by Mr. McElgunn and in Newry by Councillor Mackin.

Division 12: Maurice Dobb's visit to Lincoln was the most successful effort that has been made in the Cathedral City so far. Comrade Mace, on the eve of the commencement of the class sessions in Nottingham, through no fault of his, found our usual rooms were not available. Real enthusiasm for a cause overcomes many difficulties, and though only three days remained, the opening class night found us comfortably housed. Congratulations! Branches of the Shop Assistants in Mansfield and Nottingham are very keen to take advantage of the Union's Scheme. Over thirty classes will be running in the Division by the time these notes appear.

OUR BEST THANKS.

We have received from a comrade who does not sign his name, the sum of £2 along with the following note:—

Re October PLEBS remarks, herewith £2 help in appreciation of your work, especially that of J.F.H. From a worker.

The PLEBS Bookshelf

I HAVE been reading two books this month, of very different style and quality, on foreign countries: *Modern Mexico*, by J. W. Brown (Labour Publishing Co., 2/6) and *Mother India*, by Katherine Mayo (Jonathan Cape, paper, 7/6). The capitalist press has had very little to say about the former, but quite a lot—for reasons which we shall consider later—about the latter. You will agree that the space devoted to a book by the capitalist press is usually in inverse ratio to its value for worker-students.

* * *

Mexico to-day, by reason of its direct challenge to the financial overlordship of the United States, is of particular interest to Socialists the world over—second in interest, perhaps, only to Russia and China. J. W. Brown's book is a really able summary of the present position in Mexico and Central America generally, and of the political and economic problems which Mexico is facing—a much better balanced account than the one by Dr. J. H. Retinger which also came from the Labour Publishing Co. some months ago. The chapters on "The Oil Problem" and "Latin America and the U.S." contain material of value to all students of present-day Imperialism. Those on "The Mexican Labour Movement," "Recent Progressive Legislation," and "The Clerical Agitation" should be studied by every Socialist for the light they throw on the problems of the political path to power.

(It is a pity, by the way, that in the very interesting Foreword by George Hicks the author—by a simple transposition of initials—is confused with another well-known Labour man.)

* * *

Brown's book is a piece of really useful work. Miss Katherine Mayo's book, on the other hand, is a "stunt." Miss Mayo is an American; and *Mother India* has been boomed in the press of this country as the testimony of an "unbiassed" observer to the unfitness of the people of India for self-government. Miss Mayo assures us that she had no ulterior motive in writing the book, other than a quite disinterested anxiety to get at the real facts about India. She mentions, however, on an early page that one of her first visits was to the India Office in London, to obtain "introductions"; and it certainly does not appear that—shall we say?—any obstacle was placed in the way of her seeing "facts" as the British Government would like an intelligent foreigner to see them. Of course, it is only in Soviet Russia that visitors are personally conducted by the Government, and shewn only such things as that Government wishes them to see. Still. . . !

* * *

Now I have no special knowledge about India, or about Indian religious or social customs. I am not, therefore, in a position to assess the value of Miss Mayo's startling statements about child marriage, sexual degeneration, and similar subjects, the "frank" discussion of which has ensured the book's wide circulation. But I felt a growing distrust of her reliability as I read on. Her all-too-glib generalisations on matters of which, as a Socialist, one had at least some slight knowledge, aroused one's suspicions. When, for example, Bengal was referred to (p. 118) as "the producer of India's main crop of anarchists, bomb-throwers and assassins," I had a feeling that I had met Miss Mayo's sort before. People who write in this loose and easy way about "crops" or "anarchists and bomb-throwers" do not exactly predispose one in favour either of their lack of bias on their accuracy of observation. A little later came some pages about the Prince of Wales' visit to India which gave her away as a gushing snob, *genus Americana*, of the first water. Also, a little imitation-Kipling passage about the North-West Frontier:—

> And behind Afghanistan, nay, in Kabul itself, lurks 'the Man that walks like a Bear,' fingering gold. .

Hist! The Reds are upon us. Etc. Lastly, there is an amazing chapter,

portentously entitled "Psychological Glimpses through the Economic Lens," but containing nothing except the kind of spiteful and brainless twaddle which doubtless passes for political conversation in the drawing-rooms and clubs of Simla and Cheltenham (or wherever the Anglo-Indians retire to). *E.g.*, India is poor because "every peasant in the land secretly buries silver in the earth"; instead, of course, of putting it in a bank, so helping to "develop" industry and get himself transformed from a mere ryot into a prosperous wage-slave. ("My dear! If you put a bathroom in their houses, they use the bath to keep coal in"—you know the kind of thing.)

That there must be evils associated with such an institution as child-marriage is obvious. That these and similar matters should be openly discussed is also clear. But Miss Mayo is emphatically not the person to initiate intelligent discussion. Every comment she makes proves her to be a member of that stiff-necked, self-righteous Imperialist ruling-class which recently gloated over the deaths of Sacco and Vanzetti—"anarchists and bomb-throwers," please note.

* * *

But her book is being very carefully used as propaganda. Seven-and-sixpenny paper-covered copies of it (it was published only a month or two ago at 10/6) are being distributed free to persons in public positions—Members of Parliament, etc. And no hint is given as to where the presentation copy comes from. It would be *very* interesting to know who is finding the money. Is it a pretty little piece of peace-time Government propaganda? In two years from now, you remember, the question of Indian government, and of India's status within the Empire, comes up for settlement. Somebody is evidently anxious to "educate public opinion" in good time.

* * *

I mentioned last month a *Manchester Guardian* reference to R. H. Mottram's novel, *Our Mr. Dormer*. Since then I have read the book itself, and am more than a little disappointed. It seems to me that in this history of a bank in an East Anglian country town through four generations, Mr. Mottram has missed a fine opportunity of combining human interest with a real study of social and economic forces and their reaction on his characters. He paints for us the bank of a hundred years ago, with its Quaker partner, and its sturdy chief clerk, journeying down in the London coach with a box of gold between his knees. He shews us how, little by little, the bank gets its grip on the industry and property of the town, and how its actual proprietors withdrew to country-seats or Parliament. We see its astute manager steering it, on the crest of the big industrial wave of the 'seventies and 'eighties, to bigger success. And then. . . Well, all he has to say about the bank of the twentieth century is that it employs girl-clerks and duplicating machines.

Surely the climax of his history should have shewn us the bank's employees, no longer as individuals with some sort of personal interest in the fortunes of the business and personal contact with its directors, but as mere cogs—Robots—in a huge machine whose grip is now no longer on a single little town, but over a continent. He might have given us a big book—like *Oil*. He hasn't done so.

J.F.H.

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