

CHAPTER X

The Industrial Worker in the Spring of 1930

Some slight improvements—'Comrades' courts'—The working of the seven-hours' day—Limitation of deductions from wages—Introduction of compulsory transference—Serious labour 'fluidity'—Deliberations of the Communist Party—Defeat of Rykov, Bukharin and Tomsky—'The Five Years' Plan in Four Years.'

THOUGH the early months of 1930 brought conscription to rural workers and unemployed, they seemed to offer hope of some slight improvement in the position of the industrial worker. The working of the continuous week, for instance, had proved as unpopular as Ouglanov, Commissar of Labour, had anticipated, and it was found necessary in March to issue an order to ensure that every worker would have his weekly rest on a fixed day of the week throughout the year, and to allow managers of factories to arrange that the rest days of families employed in different undertakings should coincide.¹ Their first consideration, however, was to be the interests of the enterprise, and it had been emphasised in an order issued at the end of January, that the transfer of undertakings to the continuous working week must 'without fail' bring

¹ *Industrial and Labour Information*, April 21st, 1930, p. 94, quoting *Izvestia*, March 17th, 1930.

a reduction in costs of production, an improvement in quality, and increase of individual output. Only after 'exhausting all measures of rationalisation' were extra workers to be engaged.¹ The aim of reducing unemployment had, therefore, been speedily abandoned.

Another concession made to the workers was in regard to discipline. By a decree of the All-Russia Central Executive Council and the Council of People's Commissars, published on December 30th, 1929,² 'comrades' courts' were to be set up in factories and in State and public institutions and undertakings, to consist of a chairman, assessors, and deputies, elected for six months by a general meeting of the workers and employees. These tribunals were to deal with cases of slander or insult arising among workers or employees, 'assaults without injury,' minor thefts, debts, and 'small matters reflecting the meaner side of life (minor cases of devilry, drunkenness, breaking of the rules of messes, the inculcation by adults of alcoholic habits in children, etc.)'. The 'courts' were instructed to give an accused person full hearing, but it is significant that in no cases might they hear cases relating to 'occupational misconduct.' These it was said, 'are legally dealt with by the disciplinary organisation of the undertaking,' in other words, the manager.³

These tribunals, therefore, left the powers of

¹ Ibid., quoting *Izvestie*, January 31st, 1930.

² Cmd. 3775, pp. 111-14.

³ *Industrial and Labour Information*, April 21st, pp. 97-98, quoting *Sobranie Uzakoneni (Collection of Laws)*, R.S.F.S.R., 1930, No. 4, chap. 52.

managers in relation to the enforcement of output undisturbed, while offering to the workers a possibility of greater laxity in matters of personal conduct. That to inculcate alcoholic habits in children should be regarded as a 'small matter' is illuminating.

As to penalties, they were empowered to exact reparation for damage up to 25 roubles, and to impose fines up to 10 roubles 'for the benefit of some public organisation (e.g. The Union of Societies of Friends of the Defence and of Aviation and Chemical Development of the U.S.S.R., the Children's Friend, etc.).'¹

A third concession was the attempt made to hasten the introduction of the seven-hours' day which had been gradually coming into force from October 1927. An order to this effect was issued by the Supreme Economic Council of the R.S.F.S.R. on March 7th.² At a Conference held shortly afterwards under the auspices of the Central Council of Trade Unions, it was stated by the Commissar of Labour that the number of industrial workers on the seven-hours' day on January 1st, was 650,000. It was proposed that by October 1st the number should be increased to 954,000, or 43 per cent. of those employed in large-scale industry. With the workers in 'other branches of the economic system, such as transport,' 1,100,000 workers would then benefit by the shorter day.

¹ Cmd. 3775, p. 113. These are respectively referred to in *Industrial and Labour Information*, April 21st, p. 99, as 'The Association for Aviation and Chemical Warfare,' and 'the Child Welfare Fund.'

² *Ibid.*, May 5th, 1930, quoting *Za Industrializatsiju*, March 20th, 1930.

Reports as to the working of the system, however, were conflicting. 'In many cases the change had been made hastily without sufficient preparation.' In other cases managers of State factories had delayed introducing the shorter day 'in the hope of obtaining supplementary credits to meet the cost of the change,' and sometimes an eight-hours' day had been extended to ten to enable the production programme to be carried out within the limits of budgets. In some instances workers had been deprived of their rest days for this purpose. Ouglanov, however, had issued an Order on February 27th pointing out that overtime must not be permitted, except as laid down in the Labour Code.¹

Workers had also hope of some protection from orders published by the Central Council of Trade Unions on March 18th, April 8th and April 23rd, respectively, limiting the amount and determining the method of collection of deductions from wages and salaries.² These orders showed that the Russian worker was liable to deductions not only for trade union dues, contributions to mutual aid funds, and subscriptions to co-operative societies, but for subscriptions to State loans, to various societies, to schemes furthered by the Communist Party, and to other objects 'cultural and social.' It is said that one of the societies concerned was the Association for Aviation and Chemical Warfare, to which fines imposed by 'comrades' courts' were to be paid.³

¹ Ibid., May 26th, 1930, p. 255, note, quoting *Pravda*, February 28th, 1930.

² Ibid., May 26th, 1930, pp. 255-6.

³ It was reported to the Communist Party Congress in July 1930, that this society included 5,100,000 members (Colton, p. 67). It exists for the

and that another was the International Class War Prisoners' Aid Society, known as 'MOPR.'

The majority of these payments were alleged to be 'practically compulsory,' and workers had sometimes found it necessary to work overtime or to sacrifice their rest days in order to meet them.

The orders now issued limited the subscriptions to co-operative and 'various societies' and the 'other contributions towards cultural and social objects' to 3 per cent. of the total wage. Subscriptions to State loans, 'if the subscription is a collective one, resulting from a decision of a general meeting of workers'¹ (i.e. a subscription enforced by the will of a majority), were not to exceed 4 per cent.² Trade union dues and contributions to mutual aid funds were to be restricted to 2 per cent. Thus even with these limitations the worker was to be liable to deductions amounting to 9 per cent., of which only a small proportion was for purposes offering him personal benefit. No limit was placed on contributions demanded for schemes of the Communist Party.

Some attempt had been made through the measures described above to alleviate the position of the worker, but the tide soon flowed once more in the opposite direction. Hitherto, as we have seen, the Labour Code had protected him against trans-

development of military training, air and chemical defence, aviation, propaganda and research, and aims at giving some kind of military training to 4,500,000 men during the Five Years' Plan. Of these 2,000,000 are to be trained as marksmen. *Izvestia*, of June 7th, 1931, states that it has so far collected 11 million roubles for building twenty-one airships.

¹ A meeting, of course, with open voting, see note above, p. 93.

² This limit has not been adhered to. See p. 171-2.

fer from one undertaking or locality to another without his consent. An Order issued by the Commissar of Labour on April 10th now enabled him to be transferred to another permanent task of the same nature as his previous one, even with 'another machine or instrument or in another workshop.' If he refused he could be dismissed without notice or compensation,¹ though a skilled worker transferred as a result of 'rationalisation' could claim twelve days' pay. If the new pay were less than the old, the difference was to be given for twelve days only.

Dismissal would presumably mean little likelihood of further industrial employment, anyhow for a time, inasmuch as factory and labour exchanges alike were Government institutions.

The Order, therefore, marked a formidable encroachment on ever-diminishing liberties.

Further encroachment, however, was foreshadowed at a plenary meeting of the Central Council of the Trade Unions held in May,² when the serious nature of the problem of labour fluidity was emphasised by Comrade Weinberg, of the secretariat of the Central Council. He admitted that it was indirectly affecting production. Among the reasons given were the difference in wages in the different branches of an industry, and bad housing conditions, especially in the Donets basin.³

¹ Zagorsky, p. 41, quoting *Izvestia*, N.K.T., 1930, No. 13.

² *Industrial and Labour Information*, June 30th, 1930, pp. 487-90.

³ During the months October 1929 to April 1930 in the industry at large, 247,723 miners were engaged and 231,567 were 'dismissed' (presumably gave up their work). 50,170 hewers were engaged, and 18,241 'dismissed' (*Industrial and Labour Information*, December 8th, 1930, p. 384).

Managers were to blame for not taking steps to 'attach' a good worker to the factory, yet much might have been done in this direction.

Resolutions were passed by the Council endorsing this and other recommendations made, and declaring that at all costs the programme of production must be carried out during the forthcoming summer months. To ensure a more vigorous policy on the part of the unions there was once more a drastic reorganisation of the secretariat of the Executive.

The Sixteenth Congress of the Communist Party held at the end of June¹ carried matters a step further. The Secretary-General reported that State industry had more than doubled in volume since 1926-7. The share of industry, as opposed to agriculture, in national output had increased from 42·1 per cent. in pre-war days to 48·7 in 1928-9, and was expected to reach 53 per cent. in 1929-30. Of this increased figure, tools and means of production, it was hoped, would account for 32·7 per cent. in 1929-30 as compared with 27·2 in 1927-28, while the production of articles of mass consumption was growing proportionately less. In oil, peat, and general machine construction, the Five Years' Plan had already been carried out, and it was claimed that in gross output of grain the Plan would be overtaken in three years instead of five. The area under cotton had been more than doubled, and

¹ *Industrial and Labour Information*, August 18th, 1930, pp. 218-21, quoting *Pravda*, June 29th to July 12th, 1930.

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that under sugar greatly increased, as compared with 1913.¹

The Congress decided that instead of an output of 10 million tons of pig-iron by 1932-3, for which the Five Years' Plan provided, the figure aimed at should be 17 million tons. This would give the Soviet Union the second place in the world's output of pig-iron. She would rank next after the United States. The chemical industry, however, was developing less rapidly, and various speakers pointed out that this was 'dangerous not only for agriculture, but also for national defence.' It was agreed that the shortage existing in raw materials, such as cotton, flax and tobacco, must be met by an extension of State and collective farms. The production of tractors, agricultural machinery, motor cars, and chemical products, was to be greatly developed, and the mineral wealth of the Urals and Siberia must therefore be opened up.

In consequence of poor reports in regard to quality of output, it was decided that in future quality should be a compulsory feature of Socialist competitions, and that those responsible for the execution of the Five Years' Plan should be obliged to pay as much attention to this as to quantity. Special supervising bodies, acting independently of the factory administration, must be set up to ensure this.

As the results of unity of command in the factory had been disappointing, the Congress requested that a number of managerial posts should be given

¹ J. Stalin, *Political Report to the Sixteenth Party Congress*, pp. 38 et seq.

to 'specialised workers devoted to the Communist Party,¹ young engineers and technical workers, and more especially to workers who had been active in shock brigades.

Finally, the Congress signalled the victory of the Stalinist section over 'Right opportunists,' led by Bukharin, Rykov and Tomsky, who had opposed the rapid *tempo* of the collectivising and industrialising policy and the liquidation of the *kulaks*.²

An attack on Tomsky by Comrade Svernik was especially violent. By describing in one of his books 'how the Belgian trade unions took care of their members by helping them in every way from their very birth,' he had shown how little he understood 'how the trade unions should protect the interests of the workers under the dictatorship of the proletariat. The methods of the Belgian trade unions could not be taken as an example for the Russian trade unions. The tasks of the latter were entirely different. They had to concentrate their efforts on the reorganisation of the work of co-operation, and on the development of State industry. Such methods would lead to an increase in wages and an improvement in the situation of the workers.'

These arguments apparently proved convincing. The Congress agreed that the trade unions should give the strongest support to the Communist Party in its industrial and agricultural policy; that the 'numerous trade union leaders who still displayed

¹ The result of this is said to be that many managers are devoid of the knowledge necessary for their work (Birmingham University *Memo.*, p. 8). Even in 1928 89 per cent. were Communists (Baikaloff, p. 205).

² Commissar Ouglanov was also accused of having been lukewarm.

a lack of comprehension of the new policy of the Communist Party should be replaced with the shortest possible delay; and . . . that the trade unions, without neglecting the immediate interests of the workers,' should 'refrain from any action prejudicial to production or incompatible with the national economy in general.'

Bukharin, Rykov, and Tomsky, thus vigorously attacked, bowed to *force majeure*. They withdrew their opposition to a 'forced industrialisation' and offered apologies to the Party chiefs and the Congress. Stalin—the 'Master'¹—was re-elected Secretary-General, and the Congress, congratulating itself that it had been possible to proceed from 'limiting and squeezing out' the *kulaks* to the policy of liquidating them as a class, adopted the 'slogan' of the completion of the Five Years' Plan in four years.

¹ The name by which the Dictator is commonly known.