

CHAPTER XII

Conscripting a People

Application of conscription to other industries—'Mass attraction' of women—Further decrees—Conscription of invalided men and Asiatic women.

THE first of these new developments was embodied in a decree of the People's Commissars of the R.S.F.S.R. of December 8th,¹ which announced that it was essential to develop extensively the employment of women even in those industries in which they had hitherto not worked at all. Lists were therefore to be drawn up by the People's Commissariat of Labour of the R.S.F.S.R. of occupations in metallurgical, electrico-technical, chemical, mining, paper, leather, sewing and textile industries, and lists of posts in State and co-operative administrations, in which women were to be chiefly or exclusively employed.

Within a month plans were to be worked out by the Supreme Council of National Economy and other bodies for the 'attraction' of women into industrial and communal undertakings, and also into co-operative and commercial organisations. Rules were to be made for the replacement by women of men on jobs not requiring the exclusive

¹ Cmd. 3775, pp. 174-6.

employment of men, and for the distribution of the men thus released among the various branches of industry.

In order to facilitate the 'mass attraction' of women into industry, Article 4 of the Decree required immediate plans to be worked out for a system of children's playgrounds and crèches for the year 1931.

The Decree, therefore, widely extended the types of employment to which conscription was to be applied, and by mobilising more women would free many men for the heavy industries on the development of which the success of the Plan so largely depended.

A week later followed a Joint Decree of the Central Executive Committee and Council of People's Commissars of the U.S.S.R. supplementing the Decision of the Commissar of Labour.¹ The Decree joyfully proclaimed that the 'immense success' in socialistic industrialisation had completely 'liquidated' unemployment. The existing labour forces must therefore be utilised more 'fully and rationally.' It was re-affirmed that labour organisations were responsible for ensuring the 'planned distribution of labour,' and all workers were to be engaged through them, except certain classes mentioned in the Decree. These included:

(a) Responsible administrative technical workers and specialists;

(b) Workers leaving one undertaking for another with consent of the management;

¹ Cmd. 3775, pp. 176-80. The Decree was dated December 15th, 1930.

(c) Apprentices to handicraft workers or to craftsmen working on their own or employing not more than two hired workers;

(d) Poor peasants, male or female, in one-man peasant farms, and shepherds in peasant farms;

(e) Domestic servants;

(f) Other workers, by special agreement with the labour organisations.

The Decree so far appears to make a concession. But probably managers insisted on making their own selection of the first-mentioned category. In the case of (b) the intervention of the labour directorate was unnecessary. The other categories were presumably small and likely to grow smaller as conscription for State industry extended.

Article 7 gave power to 'redistribute' any skilled workers and specialists not employed on the work for which they were specially qualified, and Article 8 authorised the transfer of any skilled worker or specialist to transport or the heavy industries. In such cases guarantees had to be given 'as regards the reservation of their living quarters in their former and the provision of living quarters in their new, place of residence, provision for the acceptance of their children in schools, children's homes and playgrounds, and the payment of their travelling expenses, in addition to other pecuniary inducements.'

This Article throws an interesting light on the scarcity of skilled workers, of housing provision, and of school accommodation. It also marks an extension of the power of compulsory transfer.

Workers and 'engineer-technical workmen' who had organised shock brigades, or taken part in Socialist competitions, were confirmed in the privileges promised them in the Communist Party's Order of October 20th.

Malicious disorganisers of output, who left State work without leave or good reason, were not to be employed in national industry or transport for six months.

Before the end of the year yet another Decree was published.¹

This, like its predecessors, 'widened the circle of persons registered by the reorganised labour exchanges.'

Article 1 reads :

'All members of trade unions may be registered at the reorganised labour exchanges.

'Of the number of persons who are not members of Trade Unions such of the following as have the right to vote at the elections for the Soviets may be registered:

(1) Children of wage-earning and salaried employees, persons in military service; those under training in educational centres (although they may not have previously been employed for remuneration and have not received any special instruction);

(2) Wives, divorced wives and widows of wage-earning and salaried employees, of those in military service, and of students, although they

¹ Decree of the People's Commissariat of Labour of the U.S.S.R., December 23rd, 1930. Cmd. 3775, pp. 180-4.

may not have previously been employed for remuneration or received any special training;

(3) Other members of families of wage-earners and persons in military service whose work for remuneration has been interrupted, irrespective of the length of such interruptions;

(4) The members of families of wage-earning and salaried employees, who are dependent on those called up for service in the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army.

(5) Members of families dependent on wage-earning and salaried employees who are sent to work on collective State farms; and members of urban Soviets who are selected for agricultural work;

(6) Wage-earning and salaried employees, whose work for remuneration has been interrupted irrespective of the length of such interruptions;

(7) Persons discharged from the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army, if they have applied to the reorganised labour exchanges not later than one year from the time of their discharge from the Red Army;

(8) Those who have been discharged from service with the militarised auxiliary forces and the militarised fire brigades;

(9) Former Red Guards and Red Partisans;

(10) Persons who have received an Order of the Soviet Union;

(11) War and labour invalids who have been classified as such by a committee or medical board in accordance with their medical condi-

tion and their vocational calling, and are recognised as fit for labour (having regard to their disability), and also, the wives, divorced wives, widows and children of labour and war invalids;

(12) Former members of *artels* which are incorporated into the system of industrial co-operatives, in cases where such members have worked in co-operative workshops and undertakings during the three years prior to their leaving the *artels*, and have applied to the reorganised labour exchanges not later than six months after their leaving;

(13) Children of members of industrial co-operative organisations and of individual handicraft workers;

(14) Inventors who are the holders of patents or certificates from organisations which assist inventors;

(15) Farm labourers, poor peasants who work their land themselves, members of collective farms and their children;

(16) Mothers living alone and women living alone, who are registered with Public Health or Social Insurance organisations;

(17) Women who belong to the aboriginal population of the East;

(18) Persons who have undergone any form of sentence (deprivation of liberty, compulsory labour, etc.), if, before proceedings were instituted against them, they belonged to one of the categories enumerated above, and had applied to the

reorganised labour exchanges not later than six months after they had undergone their sentence.'

Article 2 reads: 'Reorganised labour exchanges must also register persons who are not working at their own occupation, should they desire to transfer to another job in their own trade or profession, if there is a shortage in that trade or profession. Such persons must not be removed from their work by the reorganised labour exchanges until they can be given work in accordance with their qualifications. This article does not apply to persons who are employed in transport, in constructional work or any seasonal work.'

Article 3 laid down that 'The persons enumerated in Article 1 are only to be registered at the reorganised labour exchanges nearest to their permanent place of residence.'

Article 4 provided that registration with the reorganised labour exchanges was not to give the right to 'any form of privilege,' an obvious reference to the system of social insurance.

Article 5 required all registered persons to be sent to work not later than three days from the date of registration. Those discharged from the Red Army were to be sent on the day of registration.

Under Article 6 special attention was to be directed to seeing that to industry (especially the new factories) and to transport were sent persons whose social position 'approached that of the working class.'

'Malicious, disorganisers of production, or per-

sons who, of their own free will, leave their work in socialised undertakings' were not to be sent to work in industry or transport for six months, as decreed on December 15th.

Another Article removed from the register for a like period persons refusing, without good reason, to work in their own trade or profession (even if in another part of the country), or refusing to undergo training in another trade or profession if their own were slack. If such persons applied for work within the six months they could only be 'utilised' in 'mass physical labour,' explained as meaning 'forestry, timber preparation work, peat-cutting, loading and unloading operations, snow-clearing, etc.'

A refusal, however, might be based on illness: '(a) if supported by a medical board attached to the administration of the labour cadres; (b) or on the non-receipt of living accommodation on transfer to a new locality; (c) or a wife might refuse work which would entail her departure from the place of her husband's residence.'

• Though the wording of Article 1 of this Decree, if taken by itself, might be read as implying that registration was optional, when read with the Orders or Decrees of the previous two months, it is quite clear that the registration was to be compulsory, and that the Decree so greatly extended the categories of persons liable to registration that it had swept into them the whole population, man, woman and child, not excepting even women of the Eastern or Asiatic republics. Only those already in State

service were exempted, and those unhappy persons who had been deprived of electoral rights. These could be made to give their labour more easily and more cheaply in 'correctional' or 'penal' camps.