

## CHAPTER IV

1924 to 1928

Strengthening of centralised control of industry, 1925 to 1926  
—Yearly economic planning—The seven-hours' day proclaimed—Growing restriction of private trade—Forced purchases of grain from *kulaks*—Extension of compulsory labour without detention under guard—To be organised locally—To be self-supporting and self-extending—Instructions to transfer prisoners to forced labour—Instructions to judges to sentence to compulsory labour—Further amendments to Correctional Labour Code—Juvenile Labour Centres.

IN the years immediately following 1924 the struggle between output and wages continued. The Sixth Trade Union Congress had sanctioned the introduction of unrestricted piece rates and had attempted to strengthen factory discipline, but efforts it had promised to make to repair or renew worn-out plant came to nothing. Discontent, therefore, showed itself among the workers, of whom greater efforts had been required. Industrial output, which had at first improved, fell back, and wages outran increased production. Standardisation of the rouble, however, increased economic stability.

In the winter of 1925-6, both Supreme Economic Council and Trade Union Congress emphasised

that wages could only increase with output. True to this policy, Comrade Stalin, Secretary-General of the Communist Party, and leader of the Majority on the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Party, supported by Tomsky, President of the Trade Union Council, in the spring of 1926 refused a plea for higher wages put forward by Trotsky, Zinoviev and Kamenev, leaders of the Opposition. Their claim was based on a recent rapid rise in the cost of living.<sup>1</sup> Later in the year Stalin strengthened the centralised direction of industry and so secured more control to the State over rates of pay. Labour exchanges, hitherto managed partly by trade unions, were at the same time brought under complete Government control.

From 1923 onwards the registers of the labour exchanges had shown considerable unemployment. This is said to have reached two millions by January 1927, but there were many unregistered unemployed besides, among seasonal workers and peasants.<sup>2</sup> As only trade unionists might register, many workers failed to benefit by the scheme of social insurance, promised to all by the Code of 1922.<sup>3</sup>

Planning of yearly output, long a feature of Soviet policy, now assumed greater importance; and a definite increase in production, both individual and

<sup>1</sup> *The Trade Union Movement in Soviet Russia*, p. 159.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 139. Mr. Kautsky says the unemployed in 1928-9 were 3 millions (page 69).

<sup>3</sup> Mr. Höfding, quoting Soviet sources, says that only about one-fourth of the unemployed trade unionists received unemployment benefit, and that it was estimated to amount to between 13 and 45 per cent. of their wages (*Slavonic Review*, Jan. 1929, pp. 356-7). Mr. Kautsky says 20 per cent. (p. 68).

collective, was planned for each year, with increase in wages keeping carefully behind. Plant was repaired and more vigorous attempts than before were made to 'rationalise' labour, and to strengthen factory discipline. By the summer of 1927 a considerable number of foreign technical experts had been engaged,<sup>1</sup> new factories were being planned, and new plant installed.

The tenth anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution on October 15th, 1927, was signalled by the announcement that a seven-hours' day would be gradually introduced, but that it must be 'in accordance with the progress in the rationalisation of industrial enterprises and the increase of the productivity of labour.' The decree marked the conversion of Comrades Stalin and Bukharin to a policy proposed a year before by Trotsky, which Bukharin had denounced. The Opposition, with more candour than discretion, stigmatised this change of front as political tactics, declaring that growing hostility to Stalin had caused him to 'complete his former policy of repression with one of irresponsible demagogy.'<sup>2</sup> It is only fair to say that the change was advocated by Comrade Rykov, another member of the Majority, as a remedy for unemployment,<sup>3</sup> which by now had become a serious problem.

At the time the reduction of hours was announced much over-time was being worked in excess of an

<sup>1</sup> *Industrial and Labour Information* (International Labour Office, League of Nations), April 30th, 1928.

<sup>2</sup> *Pravda*, November 17th, 1927, quoted by Höfding, p. 74.

<sup>3</sup> *Ekonomicheskaya Jizn* (*Economic Life*), December 22nd, 1927.

eight-hours' day.<sup>1</sup> The change-over could therefore only come slowly. Wherever established it meant greater intensity of labour if wages were not to be reduced. In many factories it led to the system of two and three shifts. This meant that women and young persons took their turn of night work in defiance of the Code.<sup>2</sup>

Difficulties now appeared from another quarter. The rapid development of private trade, which by 1925-6 represented 43·8 per cent. of the whole retail trade of the country,<sup>3</sup> was irritating Soviet rulers: Lenin's protecting influence had gone,<sup>4</sup> and restriction and crushing taxation of private trade, industry and banking, became the order of the day. In particular, as early as the end of 1925, regulations were issued which practically prohibited the transport by rail of grain sold to a private buyer.<sup>5</sup> This order, combined with the low prices artificially fixed by Government,<sup>6</sup> kept back the production of cereals, more especially as by the beginning of 1927 the Government, at least in theory, had almost complete monopoly of the purchase of peasant grain.

Great difficulty, however, was experienced by the authorities in securing the crop. The low price offered to the peasant for his grain was in striking contrast to the high prices exacted for his purchases

<sup>1</sup> Höfding, June 1928, p. 73, and Baikaloff, p. 40.

<sup>2</sup> Baikaloff, pp. 49-50, quoting *Trud*, Feb. 24th, 1928: *Industrial and Labour Information*, June 30th, 1930, and Höfding, *Slavonic Review*, Jan. 1929, p. 353. Night work had been forbidden to women by a law passed in 1885 (Sir Bernard Pares, *History of Russia*, p. 399).

<sup>3</sup> Haensel, p. 38.

<sup>4</sup> Lenin died in January 1924.

<sup>5</sup> Haensel, p. 68.

<sup>6</sup> For such prices, see note 5, p. 48.

of the products of State factories.<sup>1</sup> The official Press talked loosely of war, and the peasant in fear hoarded his supplies. Food, however, was short in the cities, export of grain had ceased, and local Soviet officials were told to get the grain at any cost. The result was a bitter struggle between the Government and the better-to-do peasants or 'kulaks'<sup>2</sup> on whose industry Russia's grain supply mainly depended. The difficulties continued throughout the winter of 1927 and the spring of 1928.

Meanwhile the yearly plan was not working out well. A conference was held in March 1928 between the Supreme Economic Council and the Trade Union Council of the U.S.S.R. to discuss the proposed reorganisation of industry and its effect on labour. It was admitted that reorganisation had not been well co-ordinated and that rationalisation was adding to unemployment. More work was required of the worker, but his wages remained static or were even reduced. Tomsky, President of the Trade Union Council, frankly told his colleagues that they

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Baikloff (p. 258) shows the drop in the purchasing power of the peasants' main crops between 1913 and 1928. Mr. Cyril Zaitsev (*Russian Agrarian Revolution, Slavonic Review*, March 1931), says State manufactures were sold to peasants at three times their value.

<sup>2</sup> The word 'kulak' means 'fist.' It was originally used to denote (a) a hard-fisted merchant in the towns, and (b) a village usurer. Of the latter there might be a few in any considerable village. Under Bolshevik theory the word included industrious peasants who owned well-equipped farms, rented extra plots of land, and could employ labour. *Serednyaki*, or 'middle' peasants, owned the necessary implements for tilling, but worked their land themselves, and *bednyaki*, or 'poor' peasants, having no implements, let their land to *kulaki*, took employment on farms, or worked in cottage industries (A. Baikloff, *Soviet Agrarian Policy, Slavonic Review*, March 1930). But the supposed wealth of the *kulaks* was often illusory. See p. 48. Few peasants tilled over 44 acres—most much less. (Haensel, p. 60.)

had played their cards badly. They either gave in too much to the factory managers or else made impossible demands which strengthened the position of 'those directors of State industry who regarded the collaboration of the trade unions as useless, or even injurious to production.'<sup>1</sup>

It was no doubt the recognised need for increased production that now brought about an extension of the Codes. Decrees dated November 2nd, 1927, and April 25th, 1928,<sup>2</sup> promulgated an Annex to the Labour Code laying down special and rather more 'elastic conditions for the seasonal workers engaged in the preparation<sup>3</sup> and floating of timber. Pregnant women, nursing mothers and young persons under sixteen, were not to be employed on felling, cutting, sawing or transportation of heavy timber, nor on the severe work of timber-floating. In lumbering or timber-floating localities which were more than 6 kilometres from inhabited places, free living accommodation was to be provided for the employees. A perusal of the Decree suggests that new timber-felling areas were to be opened up.

On March 26th, 1928, there followed a Decree of the All-Union Central Executive Committee and the Council of People's Commissars of the R.S.F.S.R.<sup>4</sup> under which the People's Commissariat of Justice was 'instructed to take urgent measures to ensure that thereafter the sentence of short-term depriva-

<sup>1</sup> *Industrial and Labour Information*, April 16th, 1928, p. 71.

<sup>2</sup> Of the Central Executive Committee of the Council of People's Commissars of the U.S.S.R. (Cmd. 3775, pp. 44-8).

<sup>3</sup> i.e. felling and lopping, and sometimes barking and piling.

<sup>4</sup> Cmd. 3775, p. 38.

tion of liberty should not be imposed as a measure of social protection.' The meaning of this somewhat cryptic utterance became apparent in May, when there followed amendments of the Correctional Labour Code of 1924, evidently 'providing for a far-reaching use of 'compulsory labour without detention under guard.' Punishment of this kind might take three forms 'according to the extent to which the sentenced person has been deprived of personal freedom; (a) compulsory labour for a term not exceeding six months, which is carried out at the domicile of the sentenced person; (b) compulsory labour for a period exceeding six months, which is carried out both at the domicile of the sentenced person or elsewhere, in provincial, district, or regional undertakings; (c) compulsory labour for persons working for hire, which is carried out at their habitual place of residence.'

For the effective organisation of compulsory labour without detention under guard, special bureaux were to be established. Where no bureau existed, compulsory labour was to be organised directly by the local Executive Committee or the local Soviet.

On these inexperienced bodies was laid the responsibility for the organisation of 'enterprises and workshops' for utilising the labour of persons sentenced for a period exceeding six months; the detailing of the labour of such persons; and the transfer of sentenced persons 'according to their domicile to other bureaux or branch bureaux of compulsory labour.' They might also send to such

enterprises and workshops persons sentenced for a shorter period than six months, if domiciled in the district where the undertaking was situated.

Persons might be sentenced to compulsory labour without detention under guard either by a Court 'or by an order of an administrative organ.'

Persons sentenced for periods not exceeding six months in places where there was a compulsory labour bureau or branch bureau were to carry out their tasks at the place of their habitual domicile, or within ten kilometres therefrom. They were to be employed on such works of public utility, i.e. repairing bridges or roads, as might be under construction by the village or local Soviet. Or they might be placed at the disposal of 'peasant committees of internal assistance, to be sent to work on Red Army or under-staffed peasant farms.' They were required to bring their own tools and implements.

Women might not, without their consent, be sent to work away from their habitual domicile, after the fifth month of pregnancy. Apart from this, the Code gave them no protection.

The system, as in the case of compulsory labour in places of detention, was carefully framed, not only to be self-supporting, but profit-earning. The expenses of the bureaux and their branches and other expenses incurred in the organisation of the labour were to be defrayed by the local executives and village Soviets by means of deduction from the pay of the sentenced persons and from the percent-

ages deducted from the turnover of the various undertakings.<sup>1</sup>

Persons sentenced to compulsory labour at their usual place of work were to receive not more than 50 per cent. of their wage while working out their sentences. The remainder of the wage was to be retained by the bureau<sup>2</sup> or to be handed over to it by the institution or farm for which the labour might be performed.<sup>3</sup> A note adds that in exceptional cases 75 per cent. of the pay might be allowed to the worker, according to circumstances and number of dependents. Pay was to be based only on the State minimum, and given only if the Court was satisfied that the sentenced person had no other means of subsistence. No pay was to be allowed to any persons except those sentenced to compulsory labour at the place where they habitually worked.<sup>4</sup>

The profit from the various undertakings established by the bureaux was to be divided at the end of the year as follows: (a) 70 per cent. to extend the operations of compulsory labour bureaux; (b) 15 per cent. to the committee for aiding those detained in, and released from, places of detention; (c) 10 per cent. to the penitentiary fund of the Supreme Administration of Places of Detention; (d) 5 per cent. to the fund of the Executive Committee for the remuneration of persons carrying out compulsory labour under the aus-

<sup>1</sup> Article 26, *ibid.*, p. 54.

<sup>2</sup> Article 33 (text as amended in November 1928), *ibid.*, p. 56.

<sup>3</sup> Article 37, *ibid.*, p. 58.

<sup>4</sup> Articles 33 and 34, *ibid.*, pp. 56 and 57.

pices of compulsory labour bureaux or branch bureaux.<sup>1</sup>

Finally the principle of the allotted task laid down in 1924 was maintained for persons working for hire (i.e. within reach of their homes). A paybook was to be provided in which the work actually done was to be recorded.

Here we have a development of 'compulsory labour without detention under guard' not handicapped by the necessity for providing 'cultural and educational work' or the general supervision inseparable from a 'place of detention'; a system, therefore, which could be conducted without outlay by the State and with the maximum of profit. The scheme, moreover, was capable of indefinite expansion through local Soviets, and was arranged to finance its own extension. In view of the power given to 'administrative organs' to pronounce sentence of compulsory labour, the scheme offered unlimited opportunities of utilising for the benefit of Russia's economic development the labour of any persons who had shown themselves to be, or might be supposed to be, ill-affected to the Government.

That Soviet rulers intended that the scheme should not remain inoperative was shown in July 1928 when the Commissar of Justice issued a circular requiring that 'distributing commissions' everywhere should immediately transfer to forced labour all prisoners sentenced to short-term deprivation of liberty not exceeding one year. This was followed in August by a letter in which the Commissariat of

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., pp. 57-8.

Justice and the Supreme Court, acting under the Decree, directed the courts to 'pass sentence of short-term deprivation of liberty' with the 'utmost circumspection,' and to substitute, 'in all cases wherever possible,' forced labour, fine, discharge from post, expulsion and other means of social protection, in accordance with the appropriate article of the Criminal Code.<sup>1</sup>

It was no doubt as a result of these measures that the number of persons sentenced to forced labour without detention increased by 116 per cent. between 1927 and 1928.<sup>2</sup> But this total was apparently regarded as disappointing. In January 1929 the number of persons sentenced to imprisonment for less than one year was discovered to be considerably greater than in the previous March. Peremptory orders were therefore sent to the courts by the Commissariat of Justice to the effect that no more such sentences were to be given. Any judge venturing to infringe this order was to be indicted for disobedience of Government orders, and was 'to learn from personal experience the meaning of forced labour.'<sup>3</sup> All persons serving short sentences of imprisonment were immediately to be transferred to forced labour for the same terms as their sentences.

No clearer indication could be given of the complete subordination of Soviet 'justice' to the Soviet Government.

Further amendments were made to the Correctional Labour Code in 1930. These detailed various

<sup>1</sup> Cmd. 3775, pp. 138-9.

<sup>2</sup> Soviet Criminal Statistics, No. 5, 1930.

<sup>3</sup> Circular of the People's Commissariat of Justice of the R.S.F.S.R., dated January 14th, 1929 (Cmd. 3775, p. 139).

types of institutions to which persons 'deprived of personal liberty' might be sent. They included places of detention, correctional labour centres, agricultural, technical, and industrial labour colonies, 'special places of isolation,' transitional correctional labour centres and juvenile labour centres. To the labour colonies only working-class offenders might go; to the 'special places of isolation' only persons 'who do not belong to the working-class, and who have committed offences prompted by the forces of class habits, considerations or interests,' or persons also of the working-class, if 'specially dangerous to the Republic' or sentenced to 'disciplinary punishment.'

In places of detention guards and administrative staff were to 'have the right' to carry arms, and to use them when it appeared to be necessary, and all other resources had been exhausted.

Juvenile labour centres were to be of two types, one reserved for offenders between the ages of fourteen and eighteen of no specified class, and the other reserved for juveniles of the ages of sixteen to twenty of the 'working and peasant class.' In these last centres 'special attention was to be directed side by side with labour discipline to the training of juveniles for being called to the colours.'

In the Correctional Labour Code, therefore, the Soviet Government had an ever-expanding instrument through which to utilise to the utmost and with the minimum of outlay, the labour of any persons who might incur its displeasure. In the first half of 1929 the persons sentenced to compulsory labour

were fully four times as many as those sentenced in the corresponding period of 1927.<sup>1</sup> The figures for 1929 as a whole were admittedly far larger than those for the earlier years, and by March 1st, 1930, there was yet another large increase.<sup>2</sup> By the summer 'forestal' exploitations' under this Code or Instruction of June 1st, 1929,<sup>3</sup> had increased to 25, agricultural colonies to 29, and industrial colonies to 30, as compared with 6, 17, and 4 respectively existing before September 1st, 1929.<sup>4</sup> Prisoners working in these colonies only received 25 per cent. of the normal wage of workers in their category. Their pay may be reduced to 15 per cent., or raised to 50 per cent., of the normal wage.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Birmingham University *Memorandum*, p. 16, quoting the Criminal Statistics.

<sup>2</sup> Report of the President of the Supreme Tribunal of the R.S.F.S.R. (In Review, *anglicé*, *Soviet Justice*, No. 16, 1930, p. 4.)

<sup>3</sup> See p. 52 *et seq.*

<sup>4</sup> Chirvint and Outevsky, *Soviet Correctional Labour Code*, 1931, quoted by Prof. Jékouline, Sept. 1931.

<sup>5</sup> Prof. Jékouline, Sept. 1931. From a recent pronouncement of Krylenko, formerly Chief Prosecutor and now Commissar of Justice of the U.S.S.R., we learn that a new penitentiary Code has recently been introduced, placed entirely under his ministry. The fact that the Code applies only to sentences of not more than three years' compulsory labour points to its being a development of the Correctional Labour Code rather than of the Penal Code described later, which is administered by the O.G.P.U. (see p. 61 *et seq.*), but if its sentences are shorter than those given under the Penal Code, the work to which it sends sentenced persons is equally severe. Compulsory labour gangs, Krylenko states, composed chiefly of non-proletarians and 'those non-labour elements whose removal from their home districts is considered expedient,' are being dispatched to remote forests and peat-bogs for a period of two to three years. (*The Times*, September 7th, 1931.) No sentence of less than two years, it is said, can be given under this Code. (Prof. Jékouline, Sept. 1931.) The increasing severity of the system of penitentiary labour is, therefore, apparent.

The development of work on peat is no doubt due to the heavy demands made by the Five Years' Plan on the coal mines. Hitherto, labour has not been easily secured for this work, owing to its arduous and unhealthy nature.